GEOGRAPHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DIFFERENCE

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ABSTRACT There is growing evidence of 'horizontal hostilities' among women: many women are affirming their identities along axes of class, race, sexuality, age and/or relationship to colonialism. Within recent feminist writing, geography--space, place and location--has been used as a vehicle for rethinking a feminist affinity that does not erase or undermine 'difference'. We review contemporary, uses of geographical metaphors and caution against an excessive emphasis on displacement as a metaphor for a critical feminist stance. We argue that geographies of placement must be held in tension with an ideal of displacement. We develop this point through a case study of women and work in contemporary Worcester, Massachusetts. Women in Worcester are very much rooted in place and this is a vehicle for the construction of differences across women. We argue that studies of the construction of feminine identities in particular places counteract the current tendency within feminism to rigidify differences among women and are an important means of rebuilding affinities among women.

During International Women's Week in spring 1991, some female undergraduate students in one of our departments took the initiative of producing a large poster on geography and the (in)visibility of women therein. The display was purposefully left unfinished and those who passed by were invited to add their comments and their examples of sexism in geography. At one point a female graduate student pinned on a more optimistic statement, describing the range of departmental research focused on gender relations. This was soon covered by graffiti, presumably written by other women, stating that a gender-relational approach is complicit with and serves men. By the end of the week, radical feminists had repositioned the affirmative, gender-relational statement at the margin of the poster, about knee height; the centre of the poster was filled by obscenities that seemed to have been written by men.

This personal experience points to the intensity of feminist debate about differences among women--a debate that revolves around not only theoretical orientation but basic conceptual categories and the possibilities of feminist identity and politics. For some women, differences across class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, and/or relations to colonial domination fundamentally disrupt a common gender identity. While this recognition of the differences that divide women marks an important and generally positive theoretical and political reorientation, the dangers of the recognition of these differences for feminist scholarship and politics seem obvious: our International Women's Week poster--with factions of feminists defining themselves in opposition to each other, some actively marginalising the perspective of other women, so that, in the end, misogynist graffiti were left as the
boldest, most dominant and central message—is emblematic of these dangers.

Recognising these dangers, feminists are attempting to think about a new basis for feminist affinity that acknowledges diversity among women without acrimony or fragmentation. This requires conceiving of community and subjectivity in new ways. De Lauretis (1990) situates the discovery of differences among women within what she terms post-colonial feminism. Two characteristics of this mode of feminism are that subjectivity is conceived as constructed around multiple axes of identification and difference (e.g. race and class and not simply gender), and that there is a "redefinition of marginality as location, of identity as dis-identification" (i.e. a resistance to locating oneself at the centre, and to identification of any sort).

In her description of post-colonial feminism, de Lauretis juxtaposes new notions of subjectivity with spatial metaphors (e.g. marginality as location). She is by no means alone in doing this. A striking characteristic of many recent feminist attempts to rethink subjectivity, difference and political community is their reliance upon place and geography, both as metaphor and material context, as vehicles for doing so.

As geographers, we are fascinated by this recent popularity of geographical thinking and want to use this opportunity to: first, think through and assess contemporary feminist uses of geography for thinking about difference and feminist affinity; second, outline the ways in which we see geography contributing to the construction of differences; and, third, explore how space and place enter into the construction of difference through an empirical case study of women and work in Worcester Massachusetts.

In our view, the main danger of the valorisation of differences among women for feminist studies and politics lies in the potential for rigidifying these differences, in conceiving of differences (defined by race, sexual alliance, class, religion, theoretical perspective, etc.) in static terms. There is a very real danger that old systems of closure may simply be shifted on to a new set of categories. For example, racial categories may harden around a simple inversion of moral superiority. One way of working against this rigidification is to explore the processes through which differences are created; to show the ways in which gendered, racialised and classed identities are fluid and constituted in place—and therefore in different ways in different places. For example, there is ample historical evidence that racial identity means different things in different places and times. In our view, geography is at the heart of this process; identities get hardened and rigidified in part because social life takes place in and through space. We also argue that seeing geography as central to the construction of difference opens avenues for building feminist affinities.

**Feminist Geographies of Community and Difference**

Feminists have used geography as a vehicle for rethinking subjectivity and the potential for feminist affinity in at least three ways. The first is through examining forms of community that encompass pluralism; the city, for example, is used as a model of living with diversity. The second involves a play on the term situatedness. The third builds on the second and revolves around the notion of displacement.

As one way of rethinking the basis for feminist community in a world that embraces difference, a number of feminists juxtapose the anonymity and freedom of the modern city to the oppression of traditional, homogeneous community. Young, for example, imagines a new type of community built on cultural diversity or, what she terms, unassimilated 'otherness'. She builds this vision of what she calls "the good society" from her positive experience of city life: "Our political ideal is the unoppressive city" (Young, 1990, p. 317). Her idealised city captures the essence of the politics of difference because it is a place where strangers enjoy each other at a distance, respecting and taking pleasure in their difference, without the pretence of empathy or any real mutual understanding:
They witness one another's cultures and functions in such public interaction, without adopting them as their own. The appreciation of ethnic foods or professional musicians, for example, consists in the recognition that these transcend the familiar everyday of my life. (Young, 1990, p. 319)

We would be missing Young's point if we objected to the naivety of this portrayal of city life. She is well aware of structured inequality and the difference between the real and ideal. She is using a moment in the city to attempt to speak, to represent, a type of association between individuals that does not require identification and a type of identification that does not rest on exclusion. Still, public spaces in the modern city stand as a complicated ideal for a feminist politics of difference--especially given many women's real fear of them (Woolf, 1985; Barrett, 1989; Valentine, 1989) [1]. Focusing on real cities rather than the ideal points to the limitations of Young's politics of diversity. In real cities, different groups and inequalities are structured relationally; a celebration of alterity (especially one premised on the denial that different groups can or even should understand each other) would seem to draw attention away from the relations of power and domination that structure difference and the very real connections that exist between groups. Young's analysis invites us (undoubtedly quite unintentionally) to conceive of differences as static and of cultural boundaries as impermeable. Finally, from our perspective, it is a problem that she portrays the city as a theatre upon which social life is staged; the ways that space and place enter into the construction of difference are left unexplored.

A second use of geography to think through ways of rebuilding feminist affinity is rooted in a relational reading of the construction of differences and does begin to explore the spatiality of social life. In what is largely an autobiographical genre, feminists attempt to situate themselves at the intersection of various power and social relations by a very careful reading of their own social location. In a widely-cited essay, 'Identity: skin blood heart', Pratt (1984) narrates her subjectivity as in process. In coming to understand herself, Pratt explores the multiple and overlapping exclusions upon which her identity has, at various points in her life, been built: being a white woman in the southern USA rested on being not black (racism), not Jewish (anti-semitism), not lesbian (heterosexism). In situating herself, Pratt begins to understand the fragility of her female white lesbian identity and the extent to which each part of her identity is constructed relationally, in opposition to and through the oppression of other groups. Because she sees herself as situated within relations of and sometimes on the side of domination, she feels a responsibility for remapping boundaries and renegotiating connections. In a similar gesture, and an equally influential one, Rich (1986) locates herself as a privileged white, Jewish, lesbian American, whose race was written into her identity at birth, when she was born into the white ward of a segregated hospital. Her essay involves a close watching of herself, and an attempt to displace herself and her feminism from a location of centrality. Within this genre, critical self-examination and personal responsibility are consistent themes. Trinh speaks of "the transformation (without master) of other selves through one's self" (1990, p. 332). Lorde cautions: "We must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change" (1990, p. 286).

Many feminists attempt to situate themselves at the intersection of multiple axes of difference in an effort to dislodge a unitary feminism. They do this by reading situation not only in social but also spatial terms. Pratt (1984), for example, has a rich, implicit understanding of the spatiality of social life, of the ways that places can veil or heighten awareness of differences and varying axes of difference. In Pratt's essay, geography, place and architecture provide concrete vantage points from which she sees or fails to see certain aspects of her identity. She describes what every social geographer knows: that the spatial arrangement of social groups in cities and towns often separates one from the other, screening differences and inequality, and thereby diffusing conflict. Pratt chronicles, in compelling detail, how she "was shaped by [her] relation to those buildings and to the people in the buildings ... by what [she] didn't see, or didn't notice, on those streets" (p. 17). Space, then, is linked to the constitution of identity,
and to the visibility and invisibility of social difference. Residential segregation is part of the 'othering' of 'the other'; it is part of the construction of difference while simultaneously shielding that difference.

Pratt demonstrates how different concrete vantage points shape, conceal and later unmask her self-identity. We wish to underline that places are more than vantage points that veil or disclose one's social location; they partially constitute social location. At the end of Pratt's essay, we are left with some hope that feminists can rebuild affinity if individuals take responsibility for unlearning the exclusions on which their identities are based. A particularly fascinating aspect of this endpoint in Pratt's essay is that the process of unlearning is also concretised in space. At the end of the narrative, Pratt is living as a solitary white woman in a black neighbourhood in Washington, DC--very much an outsider--choosing this location, in part, as a vehicle for continually destabilising her sense of identity. In failing to problematise this material location, however, a limitation of Pratt's focus on self-identity is evident; for example, she neglects to consider the effects of her presence in this neighbourhood--as potential first-wave gentrifier. Pratt's location as outsider points to a third way that feminists have used their geographical imagination to rethink feminist affinity; her inattention to her potential effect on the neighbourhood and the groups that live there (her fundamental and, to some extent, uncontrollable interconnectedness) signals a potential limitation of this third perspective.

Many feminists recognise that systems of difference are constructed in place and different systems are constructed in different places. Because systems of difference vary from place to place, displacement, in a concrete and not just metaphorical sense, often plays a critical role in feminist journeys towards self-awareness. Pratt, for example, describes how particular places heighten her awareness of distinctive axes of difference. It was while living within the violently sexist culture of a town in South Carolina, "in a town where 'R&'R' stood for 'Rape and Recreation' ", that she came to see herself as a woman: "For the first time" she writes, "I felt myself to be, not theoretically, but physically and permanently, in the class of people labeled woman: and felt that group to be relatively powerless and at the mercy of another class, men" (p. 22). De Lauretis (1988, p. 128) tells of the importance of immigrating to the USA for her awareness of ethnic difference: "[My] first (geographical) displacement [from Italy to the United States]", she writes, "served as a point of identification for my first experience of cultural difference (differences not as a simple distinction, but as hierarchized)". Johnetta Cole, an Afro-American academic, recalls that she only began to understand herself in gendered and not just racialised terms during a trip to Cuba: "There I was", she says, "seeing for the first time the possibility that the race thing was not forever and ever; and then the other-ism was right up there saying, what about me?" (Bateson, 1990, p. 45).

Because of their effect of sharpening perceptions of multiple differences, exile, marginality, and nomadism are granted privileged status in some feminist writing; we have seen that de Lauretis lists 'marginality as location' as one of the key characteristics of post-colonial feminism. For hooks (1990), marginality is a site of resistance, a position from which to resist colonisation by the dominant (white) culture, one that allows a space to imagine alternative ways of existing and the opportunity to create counter-hegemonic cultures. Other feminists who have been more influenced by post-structural theory urge a continual conceptual displacement of the boundaries between centre and margins, suggesting a never-ending strategy of displacing controlling reference points. Trinh (1990, p. 334) describes the post-colonial feminist as "a permanent sojourner walking bare-footed on multiply de/re-territorialized land". Drawing, in part, on Zen teachings, she writes: "If you see Buddha, kill the Buddha! Rooted and roofless ... walking on masterless and ownerless land is living always anew the exile's condition" (p. 335). There is a tension, then, in some contemporary feminist writing, between situating oneself in order to recognise and take responsibility for one's identity and actions, and a quest for an unsituated (or continuously resituated) consciousness.

Choosing exile or nomadism as a location runs the risk of reproducing a type of elitism and
individualism within feminist theory and may inadvertently harden boundaries between feminists (and between feminist theorists and other women). It certainly does not describe the experience of a good number of women, a point that we will return to below. Just as importantly, a stress on marginality can also sustain an arrogance or blindness towards one's own location as well as towards existing webs of interconnections, hence Trinh's concern to continually displace the borders between centre and margin. Spivak (1989, p. 210) tells the story of walking up to an upper-class African gay male friend ("in fact a mulatto") at a party, asking him to tell a group of listeners his name. "He gave us the string of his names, the sixth name, as he said, was the name of his ancestor. Undoubtedly somewhat troubled by the burden of hyperbolic admiration because of the colour of his skin, the other side of racism, he added quietly, 'A slave trader'. Collaboration with the enemy does not depend on the colour of your skin or on your gender" ... and we all collaborate with some enemy. Understanding this point, that we all collaborate with some enemy--as home-owners, as North Americans, as university teachers and students--at the very least, allows us to see connections as well as differences. Recognising our bonds as oppressors breeds some humility; of course, not all connections are complicitous and marginalised groups have the potential to develop solidarity at the points of interconnection. A careful positioning in place would seem to be a prerequisite for the task of disentangling our shared complicities and struggles as well as our differences. An overvaluation of fluidity as a subject position may lead away from a careful consideration of the processes through which identities are created and fixed in place.

It should be clear that space and place are implicated in the constitution, rigidification, and unravelling of differences among women in much feminist writing. To summarise: space, place and difference are intertwined in at least three ways. First, the city has been taken as a prototype of communities based on affinity rather than identity. Second, the constitution of difference is not only a social but also a spatial process and varying systems of difference operate in different places; this forces the recognition that differences are constructed. Third, the physical act of displacement can open up a moment of awareness of difference from others; it can prompt a reversal of 'centre' and 'margins'. Some contemporary feminists take displacement as an ideal location and as a necessary starting point for rebuilding feminist affinities. Within this literature, identity, difference, and place tend to be linked in opposite and equally extreme ways. In the case of Young, both identity and place seem to be static, although individuals can sample different cultures by moving freely through the city. Those who attempt to situate and displace identity tend to emphasise the fluidity of identity and the virtues of movement. In neither case is the construction of identity and difference through place and placement explored very fully. We take this type of exploration as absolutely central to an interpretation of difference as social process rather than as a static sign.

Our focus on work may lead us to this position. Our grounding in work, both at home and in paid employment, complements and offers an essential counterpoint to discussions of difference that emerge out of cultural studies or, in the case of Young, philosophical traditions. We have seen that Young represents new types of affinity in terms of eating across cultures and musical entertainment. Commenting on recent (non-feminist) work on popular culture, Morris (1988, p. 12) notes a tendency to suppress or ignore the experience of work, a tendency "towards displacing the 'working class' with the 'new leisure class' (of tourists) as a privileged site for analysing modernity". In Smith's (1988) judgement, much of the key contemporary debate about questions of subjectivity (both within and without feminism) has been carried out in relation to three cultural practices: film, television and literature. Again, the elision of work is striking.

Our intent is not to force an arbitrary wedge between cultural and labour studies; clearly work is a cultural process. But an exclusive focus on non-work aspects of life has some serious interpretive consequences. First, the exclusion of work both emanates from and feeds a view that paid employment is separate from the rest of daily life, a position that feminists have repeatedly criticised. Second, it is
likely that one's perspective on placement and displacement, and on the construction of difference will vary depending on the aspects of life to which one attends. A focus on tourism, mass-mediated culture, cuisine, and even the activities of international capitalists may give rise to a vision of movement, displacement, of 'time-space collapse'. A focus on individuals' lives of work, granting the importance of international labour migration, lends a different perspective on placement and the construction of differences in place. In Worcester, the horizons of many women's worlds lie very close to home. The social and economic geography of the city seals these local worlds, both reflecting and contributing to the rigidity of boundaries that divide women. We stress, however, that this is a reading that deserves to be disrupted by other ones. Identities are by no means unitary. We develop a place- and work-based description of identity construction to consider in relation to others. We do not claim it as a complete mapping—no mapping ever is—of subjectivity.

In the next section, we draw out the main lines of our argument about the centrality of geography to the construction of differences across women. We then illustrate and expand upon this through a case study of gender and work in Worcester, Massachusetts.

**How Geography Constructs Difference**

Much has been made of the shrinking world, of the increasing ease of travel and communication, and of the resulting homogenisation of space around the globe. Although the world is indeed increasingly well connected, we must hold this in balance with the observation that most people live intensely local lives; their homes, work places, recreation, shopping, friends, and often family are all located within a relatively small orbit. The simple and obvious fact that overcoming distance requires time and money means that the everyday events of daily life are well grounded within a circumscribed arena. In part, the localisation of people's lives reflects too the fact that much information—especially information about job and housing possibilities—is subject to the same friction of distance, mainly because so much of it is exchanged informally in the social interactions of everyday life.

And despite the internationalisation of the economy and some consumption practices, distinctive places continue to exist, reflecting different histories and mixes of contemporary influences (Massey, 1991). This is true across regions and within cities; we focus our attention on the latter. We shall not review here the many reasons for the emergence of distinctive neighbourhoods and economic areas within cities as excellent reviews are available elsewhere (e.g. Ley, 1983). We want to develop the idea that the social characteristics of women and men living in different local areas define the character of the places but, once rooted in space—and this is our point—those places play a role in hardening the boundaries between social groups; this is especially the case for most women because of the local nature of many of our lives.

One aspect of this process of the hardening of boundaries around spatially-defined social groups is the fact that distinctive mixes of employment opportunities develop in different places, in part because employers work with a vivid set of social and spatial constructs that structure their locational decisions. Often using a familiarity bred of their own deep local ties, employers are very much aware of the social geography of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other work-culture characteristics and are sensitive to the unwillingness or inability of various categories of workers, particularly female and what they consider to be unskilled labour, to travel substantial distances to jobs. Employers therefore survey urban and regional landscapes and select a location to optimise access to a particular preferred labour force, e.g. skilled male machinists or married female assemblers. These locational decisions build on existing social geographies to sharpen differences from place to place within and across metropolitan areas, at the same time as they reproduce pervasive structured patterns of inequality. As part of this process, employers construct jobs and the labour process differently in different areas in line with their perceptions of the labour force they are aiming to tap. In particular, jobs may be constructed as part-time or full-time, as day shift or night shift, as more or less automated or labour intensive depending on
the employers' conceptions of gender, race and class. Thus employers' location strategies intersect with their production strategies to yield both spatial and social segregation within the labour force.

This segregation is often strongly reinforced in the micro-geography of work within the work place. In many workplaces, not only are women and men, and women with different class and racial characteristics, employed in different occupations; they spend their work days in spatial isolation from each other, thereby further circumscribing their lived experience.

In the context of work places and small areas within the city, distinctive cultures of gender, race and class (among other) relations develop. As Parr (1990,p. 10) notes in her study of two distinctive cultures of gender relations that develop in two Ontario industrial towns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "[b]oth men and women are gendered subjects, but there are many ways of being in gender ..." Our study extends Parr's observation by showing that the ways of being in gender vary not only from town to town but also from area to area within cities and towns. We hasten to add that, across these differences, exist pervasive patterns of inequality.

Gender is constituted differently in different places, in part, because residents in those places differ in class or racial or other social variables; that is, places are sites where particular sets of social relations are experienced and compressed. But geography is implicated in a deeper way. Class itself is a process that is mediated by place and space (Thrift & Williams, 1987). The experience of class and gender and race are structured by local resources, including locally-available forms of paid employment, as well as local cultures. These resources develop synergistically in relation to the social characteristics of existing residents; Massey (1984) has drawn upon the geological metaphor to capture how previous layers of place-based social relations structure new rounds of industrial relocation which, in turn, restructure local social relations.

We turn to our research on women and work in Worcester, Massachusetts in a gesture towards explicitly uncovering some of the dynamics of the geographies of difference that operate in that particular context. This empirical study highlights the point that the ideal of displacement must be held in tension with geographies of placement. In this interpretation of life in Worcester, we stress the situatedness of individuals and the hardening of boundaries between women. For the most part, we tend to read geography as a medium for fixing identities and hardening boundaries.

This is a singular reading of the role of geography, a reaction to what we see as rather speculative feminist interpretations of displacement. Another reading lies implicit in our argument that geographies of difference can uncover interdependencies and connections. In stressing the potentially transformative role of plotting relations of space that underwrite variable constructions of gender, we do not intend to imply that movement and displacement are never transformative. Our argument is that most people are fixed in and by space. Understanding these processes provides one way of seeing differences as socially constructed.

Our reading of difference is partial in another way as well. Our immediate concern is with 'horizontal hostilities' that are building among some women. Our efforts are directed, therefore, to showing how space and place enter into their construction, with the hope that an understanding of these processes will play a role in making these boundaries more permeable. We do, however, recognise the importance of strategic identity politics and the political and emotional strengths that flow from them. Our intent is not to deny the real differences that exist between women or that highlighting these differences sometimes serve useful social and political purposes. Rather, it is to explore the spatiality of the social construction of differences and the overwhelming importance of placement in the day-to-day of individuals' lives. In developing this argument, we think that we have something to offer the positionality debate. Our focus tends to undercut the personalist bias ('I am a white, middle-class intellectual') and refocuses attention on the constructed nature of differences and linkages across
individuals and places.

A final preliminary qualifier: the reader (we suspect especially non-geographers) may resist our attempts to draw together more metaphorical, personal uses of geography and place with a more materialist account. Our perspective is that this type of dichotomy is inappropriate: metaphors and imagined geographies underlie the concrete construction of social and economic relations and places (and vice versa), a point that should be obvious in our case study.

**Geographies of Difference in Worcester, Massachusetts**

We have studied the ways that social difference and place shape each other within the metropolitan area of Worcester. Worcester itself has some qualities that possibly make it an extreme case for a study of geography and difference. It is an old industrial centre, now the second largest city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (with a population of 373,940 in 1980). Although a mid-sized metropolis, contemporary Worcesterites are much more stable geographically than is the national norm for cities of its size [2]. Paired with this rootedness is a type of atomism, taking the form of very low levels of labour activism. Rosenzweig (1983) details the early history of this labour passivity. In 1889, a keynote speaker at a mass meeting at Mechanics' Hall in Worcester was explicit about the city's reputation within the labour movement when he declared that "Worcester has been known for years as one of the scab holes of the state" (Rosenzweig, 1983, p. 20). By the end of Rosenzweig's study period, 1920, nothing much had changed: Worcester had a relatively low rate of unionisation and "an extraordinary record" (p. 23) of labour tranquility. Rosenzweig roots this local labour history not only in the strength and cohesiveness of the local industrial elite but also in the deep ethnic and religious divisions among Worcester workers, reinforced, he notes, by cohesive residential communities, segregated in the day-to-day of living, one from the other. In our study of manufacturing and producer services firms in 1989, we found very few to be unionised, just 13 out of a total of 131. With few strong unions in Worcester, one mechanism for transcending neighbourhood boundaries is absent. These distinctive characteristics of Worcester no doubt make it an extreme case study of spatial containment and the rigidification of social differences. Rather than being problematic, however, this is what a focus on place is all about—the geographies of difference are constructed in varying ways in different places and the interest lies in interpreting them in their variation, rather than suppressing place-based differences.

We have tried to understand the construction of differences among women by making a close study of four local communities located within a 10 mile radius in metropolitan Worcester, each having distinctive race, class, and work traditions [3]. We provide a sketch of each, moving from the central city, out to the two suburban areas.

Main South is the old industrial heart of the city. Many old, red-brick factory buildings remain, some boarded up, the odd one (such as an old corset factory) converted to apartments, the rest subdivided for smaller businesses or more compact work processes. Over the last decade or so, this area has become the point of reception for a large number of Spanish-speaking immigrants, mostly from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. More recently, immigrants from Vietnam and Cambodia have arrived. One should not romanticise this area; Main South is impoverished, both in terms of a decaying infrastructure and the poverty of many of its residents. It can also be a dangerous place at night, when very few people, especially women, are seen on the street.

A second area, Upper Burncoat, lies at the city's eastern boundary. This area is more diverse, though for the most part it houses white, middle-class residents. Within the general area, however, is located one of the city's largest and certainly most highly-stigmatised social housing projects, Great Brook Valley. Built after World War II for war veterans on the site of the city's old poor farm, its present population is largely Latino and many of the households are headed by women. (It is difficult to understand the
actual household structures of Great Brook Valley residents using official statistics because state regulations pertaining to public housing almost dictate that women represent themselves as single parents in order to gain access.) Great Brook Valley is quite dramatically sealed off from its neighbours by an elaborate system of roads on three sides and by an industrial park on the fourth. The industrial park was created in 1965 on city-owned land. The first and largest tenant was a micro-electronics plant which, when it first opened, hired a large unskilled female labour force, described in a local newspaper at the time as needing only "good eyesight and a high degree of manual dexterity" (Worcester Telegram, 1965).

Driving east from Upper Burncoat towards Boston, one soon arrives in the third area, Westborough. Westborough lies within the high technology belt ringing Boston for 40 miles or so, which has been dubbed 'Silicon Valley East'. Residents of Westborough are, for the most part, middle-class, and white. Most homes are detached and much of the local employment is organised in dispersed industrial and office parks.

Finally, the Blackstone Valley is an entirely different type of suburban environment. What we represent as a community is actually a series of valley towns located at sites of water power along the Blackstone River, which flows south from Worcester to Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The towns were mill towns, some of the oldest production sites in the USA. Many of the mills have closed or moved away and some high technology industry has moved in, but these are still working-class towns, in fact and ambience. The populations are overwhelmingly white. We were told by a local resident of Uxbridge that: "There are no ethnics. Uxbridge doesn't allow them. There's a dark undercurrent of racism in Uxbridge". From a respondent in another town, the estimate came: "We have maybe two coloured families in the whole town". One of the employers interviewed in the area referred to the Blackstone Valley as "The Appalachia of New England". He characterised the local employees as "lower class".

We carried out a series of interviews in each area, with a representative sample of roughly 40 employers in each except Upper Burncoat, where we interviewed 16 because only that number of employers was available and willing [4]. At several of the establishments we also interviewed workers, about 50 in each area. We restricted our curiosity to producer services and manufacturing firms because geographic theory suggests that the locational strategies of these firms are most sensitive to the characteristics of the local labour supply.

The interviews were structured but fairly open-ended, and we hired graduate students to do the bulk of them. This research strategy poses--as all do--some challenges for representation and we struggle not to objectify the lives of those who were generous enough to speak with us. But it is a struggle and there are questions to be asked about rights and speaking for others. Ours is not an autobiographical self-exploration; we are partial outsiders to all of the worlds that we attempt to describe. At the same time, we are women who live or have lived in Main South, and have possibly passed on the street some of the women and men who we interviewed there. Both know what it is to be a woman afraid on the street in Main South. Although we are certainly privileged in our occupational standing, we have both juggled mothering and paid work, relying upon formal and informal forms of child care. Our biographies overlap and differ in varying ways with at least some of the women from the four study areas. Along with the understanding that there are partial points of connection, we also believe that it is important for us as scholars to look beyond ourselves and our worlds, especially if we take the exploration of difference seriously and if we take seriously the business of tracing interconnections between groups.

On the matter of research methodology, although individual interviews often went on for well over an hour, we certainly do not claim an ethnographic, qualitative approach (itself not unproblematic). We have used a partially structured interview schedule to produce a snapshot of the ways that very local labour markets are developed and the ways that these in turn contain and shape identities. Our
empirical research allows us to sketch a preliminary argument, which could be pursued more fully through more qualitative research.

(a) Localism in Worcester

The power of geography as creator of both commonality and difference among women is most evident in the intense localism of most Worcester women's everyday lives. The women living in each of these areas tend to work close by, although our claims about localism are certainly truer in the working-class areas of Main South and the Blackstone Valley than they are for affluent Westborough. Fig. 1 displays the median distance to waged work for residents of each of these areas: in all cases resident men travel further than women but it is clear that middle-class Westborough women travel much further to work than do working-class women in the other areas [5]. This signals the important, if by no means novel, point that women's experiences are mediated by class. They are also mediated by race and ethnicity. For example, one firm on the outskirts of Main South hires exclusively Latino women for the first shift and primarily Vietnamese and Cambodian women for the second (from 3.45 in the afternoon until 11.15 at night). This is because the majority of the Latino employees at this firm do not have access to an automobile and only the first shift is served by public transportation. The Asian workers tend to have collective access to cars, and to both apply for jobs and drive to work together. Clearly the constraints of distance are felt differently by different women both across and within areas, depending on their class and other circumstances.

Granting these qualifications, most women do work locally, search for their jobs locally and find their paid employment through a network of women relatives and friends living within their neighbourhoods (Hanson & Pratt, 1992). In general, women make extensive use of gendered, local networks to find jobs (and are much more likely to do so than are men) and in many firms we found a rich set of linkages between relatives and neighbourhood-based friends. It is important to note that this was true as well for recent immigrants to Worcester, suggesting a very fluid and complex relationship between migration (movement) and placement. A Puerto Rican woman who worked as a machine operator at a slipper factory in Main South described the transplantation of a set of Puerto Rican geographical relations to Main South. Her sister-in-law, who also worked at the slipper factory, is from the village next to her home village. All of the other Puerto Rican workers at this factory had known each other from childhood as they too had grown up in this neighbouring village. The informal manner of job search and labour recruitment tends to reproduce place-based, gender, and racial homogeneity within occupations and firms, with women from the same neighbourhood, for example, drawing each other to the same work places.

Given that Westborough appears to be the exception to this pattern of localism, it is worth listening to what some of the Westborough workers and employers had to say. A supervisor of data entry operators at a clerical back office for state agencies told us: "We're all from town here. We are all local. It's handy and it pays good". From a data entry worker: "I heard from my mother's neighbour about this job and that they would train me". The top manager at this establishment confirmed the employee's impressions:

One hundred per cent of our employees are recruited by word of mouth. They always know someone who wants to come here. All of our workers come from within a 10 mile radius but most are closer than that. The closer the better, they're happier, less stress and strain. They can be relied upon more to stay late and come in early. I think they're more productive if they live closer.

An employer of 31 female workers at a retail/wholesale clothing warehouse told us:

We have a lot of older, middle-aged women. You seem to attract the same type of employees, in their late forties and fifties. It's almost like a social club to them. Word-of-mouth is an important means of recruitment for the warehouse workers. Once we got our first six ladies, we got everyone else. There is
not a lot of pressure on the job, they socialise with each other. They must like it. They bring in their daughters to work. Out of 30, at least 10 came by word-of-mouth. I don't know how it happens ... Where do the workers come from? Pretty close to this building, even in this building, they either come from this immediate area or from Worcester. Personally, I like them to live close by. The less commuting they have to do, the better.

These types of stories are told by worker after worker, employer after employer, in all four areas.

Women in Worcester tend to find paid employment close to home. Women's working lives tend not to take them across the boundaries of the local community. This important dimension of placement means that many women's lives are at least partially shaped by the employment opportunities that happen to be close by; to the extent that opportunities differ from place to place, gender relations evolve in somewhat different ways in different places, even within a metropolitan area.

(b) Employers as Social Geographers and the Construction of Local Labour Markets

Employers in the four areas had different preferences about labour: a larger proportion in Westborough sought out engineers, professional and clerical workers; while employers in the other areas were more closely attuned to unskilled and skilled production workers and an inexpensive (as opposed to appropriately skilled) labour pool. Employers had a very good sense of which areas of the city met their labour needs, in terms of ethnicity, costs, work ethic, skills and access to transportation. Employers in Main South were fully cognisant of the proximity of Latino and Vietnamese workers to firms in the area, and many recently arrived employers had located specifically to gain access to that labour force. One Main South employer, an owner of a slipper factory, moved to the area expressly to take over the labour force of a recently departed shoe factory, testimony to his confidence in the attributes and immobility of Main South workers. Those in the Blackstone Valley mentioned local workers' willingness to accept low wages, relative to those in Worcester and Boston. Several referred to the attractions of the mill work-culture of the area; where workers 'pay attention to detail' and have a 'drive for quality'. An owner, in this case of a chemical company, who moved to the area in the 1960s, noted: "The labour pool was magnificent, very bright older people. The textile mills had left. You had people who give [sic] a damn about their work ... [They had] general factory intelligence, they were well-trained, well-disciplined, willing to work overtime... [They had] an excellent work ethic. They were very frugal people. They lived within their means" (which may be another way of saying that they accepted low wages).

Employers' knowledge of their prospective work-force included information about access to transportation. From a Blackstone Valley employer who runs a cleaning service:

We are looking for cheap labour, unskilled labour. All of our labour force are women and all work part-time. I considered locating in Worcester, there's a better labour base there. But most of the people I could hire in Worcester don't have vehicles. You have to have a car to work this job.

This employer uses very local methods for recruiting workers--community newspapers or word-of-mouth. He did this, he told us, because "people don't want to travel more than 10 miles from where they live". Another Blackstone Valley employer noted: "The people we employ won't go more than 5 miles. There are only two males on the premises. [There are 16 women employed]. Most are married women working for second incomes; a lot work during school hours. Fifteen miles is like global exploration to these people".

Once employers offering specific kinds of employment seek out particular types of workers, defined, in their own minds, in terms of race, education, skills, work-culture, docility, etc., local employment niches develop that may reinforce and exacerbate existing differences among workers. It becomes relatively difficult, for example, for women in the Blackstone Valley to do clerical work; that type of
work is simply not as readily available there as it is in Westborough.

Women from the Blackstone Valley describe the almost trance-like inevitability of working for particular employers in specific types of work:

You had to get out and work, college was not an option. Everyone went to work when they graduated, it was automatic that everyone from Whitinsville went to White Machine Works. You automatically went to them first. A lot of my classmates worked there. I worked on days and nights.

From another woman: "I woke up one day and said, I'm going to work. I just went up to the mill and asked, and they put me on that day". For her, the decision to enter paid employment was consonant with seeking work at the local mill; no alternative was even considered. Especially in the Blackstone Valley, women were keenly aware of the restrictions placed upon them by their location in space. Again, fragments of conversation give a sense of this:

When I got this job [at a yarn mill], there were not many places to work in Uxbridge.

I've worked in the mills because the only other kinds of job available was working as a cashier or as a waitress. I don't want to work with the public.

We asked women interviewed in the four areas to give us a sense of their employment histories, by listing up to nine jobs, starting with their present one, working into their past. If occupations are classified loosely as 'manual' and 'non-manual', it is clear that more women in Main South, Upper Burncoat, and the Blackstone Valley, as compared to Westborough, are familiar with manual work, and that a good proportion have moved between office and factory labour (Table I). Individual women's employment histories reflect the current mix of jobs available in the area (Table II). The comments quoted above suggest that many of the women we interviewed also exaggerate the restrictiveness of the employment opportunities in their area, calling attention to the highly interpreted nature of place and space.

We do not wish to imply an extreme spatial fetishism, with geography given the leading or only role in constructing differences in women's employment chances. Clearly many different types of opportunities are available to Westborough women because of their middle-class backgrounds, opportunities that are simply unavailable to those living in other areas. Summary statistics of educational attainment in the four areas give a sense of this; Westborough women are, for example, much more likely to have attended university [6]. Our claim is that a dynamic develops [7] in which employers seek out women with particular characteristics, for example, class or racial ones. Local labour markets with distinctive occupational niches are constructed. The narrow range of employment available in an area then becomes part of the racial, gender and class characterisation of local residents (e.g. middle-class women do clerical work, working-class women do factory labour). Some employers were very explicit about their role in the dynamic that maintains distinctive communities. For example, the owner of the slipper factory in Main South spoke of the advantages of having similar employers in the area because this "holds the [Latino] community together" and attracts still more Latino immigrants to the area. Locked in low-paying jobs, often working long hours (in some work places in Main South a 12 hour day is the norm), segregated into occupational niches largely in the company of Spanish-speaking workers, a particular racial and class identity congeals around the individuals that live and work in Main South. Different identities congeal around those living in other areas.

(c) Local Labour Markets and the Construction of Gender Relations

Different gendered identities congeal around women living in different areas. Aside from different types of work, different mixes of scheduling arrangements are possible in different areas; this has implications for the organisation of work within households and, in turn, gender relations. Firms in Westborough are geared towards offering part-time work to women: fully 70% do so and almost one-
third of these firms say they do this in order to attract female workers (Table III). Employers in the other areas are evidently less concerned to schedule work on a part-time basis in order to attract women. This no doubt reflects the fact that female employees in these latter areas are unable to forego the pay and benefits that attend full-time employment.

A look at the timing of shifts (Table III) reinforces the view that paid employment in Westborough buoys 'traditional' middle-class gender relations, both at home and work, with women fitting part-time paid employment unobtrusively around what has become constructed as their domestic responsibilities. A minority of Westborough firms hire women for evening or night shifts while quite a number of firms in Upper Burncoat and the Blackstone Valley hire both men and women during these times. Employers in the Blackstone Valley have been known to advertise: 'Work while your kids are asleep, the Mother's Shift'. The flexibility of arranging domestic and paid work in this way are not as readily available in Westborough and Main South, or at least not in the same form. In Main South some firms do advertise 'mothers' hours' but in this area the term refers to a shift that runs from 9 o'clock in the morning until 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The characteristics of place dictate the timing of this shift, as few women are willing to travel to or through the area at night [8]. In this sense, the timing of shifts is constituted in place; it is not simply an attribute of jobs in particular areas. Differences in the availability of part-time and shift work affect the arrangements of work (and consequently gender relations) within households in each area.

Whether ideal or not, the availability of shift work does allow dual earner, two-parent households in Upper Burncoat and the Blackstone Valley to arrange shifts sequentially so as to share child care. It is notable that only employers in these areas mentioned that women and sometimes men work evening or night shifts so that child care can be shared between partners. In these areas, from one-fifth to one-quarter of all employers offering shift work spontaneously mentioned the sharing of child care within employees' households [9]. We have no illusions that gender relations between men and women are any more equitable in Upper Burncoat and the Blackstone Valley; our point is simply that women arrange domestic and paid employment in different ways in the four areas and that local employment opportunities at least partially dictate the limits of these arrangements.

One can also speculate about the different cultures of femininity within work places in the four areas, sustained by different types of work traditions, and different expectations about the accommodation of work by men and women within households. The influence of type of work on cultures of femininity is captured in a fleeting way by a woman working as a twister at a spinning mill in the Blackstone Valley: "I tried office work," she says, "Got up twice as early. Got dressed up. Here there's no one to impress. I'm here until they [the mill owners] close down. I like it here. I just feel at home here".

When you listen to employers from the four areas speaking of female employees, about whether women have certain skills or other characteristics that they value in workers, one hears different things, which suggest that employers in each area mould and reproduce different forms of femininity. These forms are captured in a 'shorthand' way in Table IV. In Westborough, many employers were simply unwilling to reflect on the special characteristics of female workers. This, in itself, is rather interesting and may reflect the fact that we more often spoke with 'human relations officers' in Westborough than in other areas (as opposed to owners or managers) and they may have been more 'savvy' to the art and politics of image management [10]. But when Westborough employers did indicate that they value women employees for certain qualities, they emphasised personal ones: they mentioned that women are hard working, dependable, loyal. These are rather positive, respectful, perhaps 'wifely' characteristics. In Main South, women are also valued for their stability and loyalty but employers are also appreciative of women's capacity for doing boring, repetitive work and for their manual dexterity. Upper Burncoat employers also speak of women workers 'nimble fingers' but even more stress their pliability and docility. Blackstone Valley employers most often mention women's capacity to do
careful, detailed work, as well as their stability and loyalty. Many spoke of women's physical weakness, telling us that: "Women can't do heavy work" or "you can't push women as hard". In the last three areas there is a physicality to the stereotyping, undoubtedly reflecting the higher proportion of manual work done by women in these areas. In Main South and Upper Burncoat, stereotypes of 'nimble fingers', tolerance for tedium, and docility no doubt operate at the intersection of race, class, and gender, reproducing pervasive cliches about the skills of Asian workers.

The constructions of femininity voiced by employers float throughout the various work places, sometimes resisted, but more often recirculated among employees. It was fascinating, and simultaneously disturbing, to hear them spoken by female employees as well, as, for instance, when a 53 year-old white, female plant operator at a large microelectronics firm in Upper Burncoat told us: "Most [assembly] jobs are not for men ... It's very boring for men. Men like machines and stuff; they aren't successful because they want to know what makes the machine run and how the process works, and that's not their job. It's fight work for women". This comment was by no means exceptional. The different cultures of femininity in the four areas may, if anything, become more exaggerated in the future, as women in each area make inroads into different types of traditionally 'male' jobs [11]. In Westborough, the popular media stereotype of 'changed times' receives some substantiation: a fair proportion of managerial and computer analyst jobs are filled by women (21.5 and 21.3%, respectively). In the other areas, women are rarely managers, although they have broken into other types of traditional male employment. In Main South, almost one out of every five machine operators working on metal and plastics is a woman. In Upper Burncoat, women have been drawn into technical occupations from which they are usually excluded. One quarter of all science technicians and draftspersons, 41% of manufacturing sales representatives (for products such as valves) and almost one-third (29%) of all production supervisors are women. That different types of traditionally male occupations seem to be permeable in each area may exacerbate differences between existing cultures of femininity, certainly those built around a manual/non-manual divide.

While we have stressed the ways in which the localism, the placement of women's lives, undergirds and sustains difference, we must hold these differences up against the common backdrop behind all the opinions employers voiced on women as workers: the range of traits attributed to female workers is entirely predictable; it is confined to stereotypes. Different phrases of the stereotype are amplified in each of the areas, but one listens in vain for an employer to remark on women's strength or ingenuity at work.

(d) Microgeographies of Firms and the Construction of Difference

Containment and separation are spatial processes that operate at a variety of scales. Occupational segregation and the microgeographies of firms also play a role in the construction of differences and buffer some of the slippage that occurs of workers across neighbourhoods.

The extent and persistence of gender-based occupational segregation is thoroughly documented (Bielby & Baron, 1984; Fine, 1992). Worcester provides no exception to the trend. In roughly one-third (37.3%) of the firms that we studied, there was complete gender-based occupational segregation: not one single occupation was shared by men and women. Over two-thirds of firms (67.5%) were either completely gender segregated or had gender mixing in only one job category [12]. Segregation actually goes far beyond this; for example, women categorised as different races rarely share the same occupations. This separation happens at a very fine level within firms, as the documentation from two (by no means unusual) firms indicates (Table v). Because this job segregation has a spatial dimension, workers of different genders and races rarely interact (at least not as equals) on the job.

Occupational segregation is infrequently read as a spatial process, but there are two ways that spatial relations sharpen and perpetuate differences among those who work within the same firm. First, those
who work within different occupations tend to come from different parts of the city. We illustrate this for one firm, a factory located in Main South (Fig. 2). Clerical workers are clearly drawn from different parts of the city than are women who work in production and packaging jobs.

This pattern develops to some extent because employers use different channels to advertise for varying types of workers, being more likely, for example, to use local newspapers to fill unskilled and semi-skilled production and clerical jobs and metropolitan and national papers for some skilled production, and managerial and professional ones. Employers’ propensity to recruit through employees’ word-of-mouth networks also reinforces the tendency to attract a particular category of worker from the same residential area (Hanson & Pratt, 1992). The outcome is that differences between groups of workers and the status hierarchy within the firm are reinforced by different residential locations. Residential distance overlaps with and reinforces occupational differences.

The spatial organisation of workers within firms is the second way that spatial relations feed the development of difference. Workers doing particular types of jobs are segregated from other workers, so that they rarely see, communicate or socialise with each other. In many cases, each has very little knowledge of the other, or the type of work done by others in the firm. Office work is usually spatially segregated from production work. Breaks are taken at different times and in different places. In the waste disposal plant studied in Westborough, the spatial separation between paper sorters and others breeds almost total mutual ignorance. In general, Mexican and Brazilian workers gave unrealistic estimates of the number of workers in the entire firm, judging it to be much smaller than it was, and were in many cases unclear about the benefits that they were eligible to collect, leading the interviewer to infer that their benefit packages differed from those of white workers.

As one further example, a woman who works in customer services at a newspaper supply company in the Blackstone Valley claimed, "I don't know anything about production, I don't even know what it looks like out there". She eats lunch with others in the clerical and customer services departments but "never sees" workers in production and sales (among whom there are a good number of women). As for management, "Well management, you see them around all the time, but you don't have a conversation with them". Her patterns of communication almost exactly replicate the spatial organisation of the firm: the customer services and office staff are located downstairs in a room of small cubicles created by room dividers. Sales staff and management are upstairs, in shared or private offices. Production occurs in an entirely separate part of the building, with individual production departments separated on the basis of machinery and work task. Among the production workers very little communication takes place across departments; members of each department meet daily for coffee breaks and lunch and workers in each department have their own separate annual parties.

One employer at a wool mill in the Blackstone Valley captured the difference among women who worked in production and office jobs in the most appalling terms. "It's strange country up here," he told us. "All the women are the same girls in high school. Five years down, they are in the shop and they are changed. They look haggard, old, they don't want to come up front [into the office area]." (This was his explanation for the lack of mobility between production and clerical occupations.) Certainly spatial segregation is not the only factor conditioning occupational segregation and perceived differences among workers, but it is one that breeds strangeness across groups of workers and boundaries of social differences, while simultaneously building identity and cohesion within localised social groups.

**Geography and the Politics of Difference**

Feminist uses of geography to think about difference tend to stress fluidity and movement. In Young's account, though identities and the city are portrayed as fixed, a new vision of community is fashioned around unrestricted movement through the city. In attempts, such as Pratt's (1984), to situate identity in order to displace it (as well as a type of feminist theory and politics), identity is conceived as fluid and
geographical movement as a prop or a vehicle for self-transformation. New forms of feminist community are rooted in movement, in the ability to disidentify, and dislodge privilege.

We have examined another geography, one that emphasises placement. We do not see our analysis as opposed to previous feminist uses of geographical metaphors and reality. Our analysis offers another vantage point for thinking about differences among women. We stress that there is a stickiness to identity that is grounded in the fact that many women's lives are lived locally. Many people simply do not move through the city in the way that Young or other feminists suggest, at least not within certain spheres of their lives--especially in relation to labour and housing markets. These people may 'travel' globally (for example, when they tune on their televisions or when they go out to eat) in some parts of their lives, and identities no doubt combine a complex layering of geographical experience. At the very least, this simple observation suggests that feminist theorists must work with a more complicated set of geographical constructs to conceptualise adequately subjectivity and community. As geographers, we are also concerned to highlight the fact that place and space are not neutral backdrops or uncomplicated stages for people's lives. Neither are space and place simply containers within which social relations develop. Places are constructed through social processes and, so too, social relations are constructed in and through place.

We think that it is important to recognise the geography of placement for four reasons. First, a recognition that differences among women develop out of real differences in daily experience suggests that the dividing boundaries are by no means trivial; social boundaries are constructed and maintained through geographical ones that mark off distinctive ways of life. The weight of locality, so evident in Worcester, poses some real dilemmas for feminist political organisation. Rooted in local communities, many women have an ignorance of the lives of others, experience different work opportunities, may work at varying times of the day, and view different home-work arrangements as natural.

Second, the recognition that these boundaries are constructed, in part through employers' locational decisions, also means that they are permeable and can be reconstructed in new ways. Differences among women are by no means natural or unchanging. We have argued, for example, that differences between working- and middle-class women are not written according to an inflexible class script; in Worcester, the differences have evolved, in part, because the local opportunities allow these different groups of women to blend various forms of work in different ways. No doubt class differences are further conditioned by not only the paucity of registered child care spaces in Worcester, but the seemingly widespread and deep distrust of formalised child care [13]. These attitudes towards child care narrow the range of what are generally perceived to be 'legitimate' parenting options: to some sort of private arrangement within the household (i.e. either with a woman acting as full-time mother or some sort of sharing between partners and/or across extended families). In a different place, where more child care options are conceived of as legitimate, the class script of gender identities may be written differently. (We use this example to highlight the fact that class, too, is a social and economic construct that is lived in and mediated through place.) A careful unravelling of these processes breathes life into categories--e.g. those of race, class, sexual orientation--that are sometimes conceived of in static terms. At the very least, it complicates the type of 'marking' that many feminists currently engage in, through an often hostile positioning of each other in terms of static categories of class, race and sexual orientation.

Third, by writing about the ways in which differences are constructed, we hope to allow groups of women, who conceive themselves as different from one another, to gain some mutual understanding; we hope, not for cross-cultural identification, but an informed knowledge of how the conditions of others' lives are shaped by local opportunities and in relation to each other. For example, many of the white women with whom we spoke in Worcester made comments about the inability of Latino workers to speak English and how this legitimised the absence of communication between and difference in
occupational mobility of recent immigrants and English-speaking workers. When one recognises the material constraints lived by some of the recent immigrants to Worcester, questions of cause and effect are reassessed and reversed. One can think, for example, of the woman from the Dominican Republic who worked as a folder and ironer in an industrial laundry in Main South for 12 hours a day. She often worked an additional 3 hours, and only the latter were considered to be overtime. Her inability to learn English is hardly a mystery or an indication of lack of ambition, especially given the ethnic uniformity of those with whom she worked. Other Worcesterites, of course, benefit indirectly from her labour conditions, in the form of reduced costs of industrial laundry services. A convincing analysis of these interdependencies may offer a starting point for opening communication between English- and Spanish-speaking women in Worcester. A study of the ways that employers actively construct a Latino labour force places individual women's lives in context. Analyses of the interdependencies between women (of which the above is merely a gloss) also point to the inadequacies of a position that sees differences in pluralist terms, as identities created in isolation from each other, to be enjoyed and respected in their separateness. The recognition that differences are constructed relationally and contextually also suggests that there is no privileged position that allows one to critique from 'outside'.

Finally, by studying lives in context one can probe similarities as well as differences. While concerned to document the construction of different cultures of femininity in Worcester, we are also struck by the relentless repetition of many aspects of most women's lives. The majority of women in Worcester (including those who live in 'middle-class' households) are tied to a fairly local labour market, and are constrained to jobs that pay relatively poorly. If living in dual-headed, heterosexual households, most continue to do the bulk of domestic work. In an earlier study of Worcester women, which involved a survey of a representative sample of households in 1987, we found that only 3% of employed women had an income of $35,000 or more (compared to one out of every three men who we interviewed) and only one woman in a sample of 335 employed women was juggling child-rearing with a job in this income range [14]. We must remind ourselves of these common experiences of low-waged work and the difficulties of combining mothering with well-paid employment, which exist across groups and places, in our efforts to build a feminism that admits differences and yet remembers why we are committed to feminist social change. This desire emerges, not out of a belief in a stable essence that binds all women, but from a political commitment to social change. If we fail to acknowledge our commonalities, as well as our differences, we may rewrite our International Women's Week poster on a much larger scale, effectively silencing each other, inadvertently giving voice, by default, to virulent defenders of the status quo.

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NOTES

[1] Of course, 'taking back' public spaces is a widely-shared feminist objective and this is no doubt what Young has in mind.

[2] Some 60% of those interviewed in a survey that we conducted in 1987 with a representative sample of Worcester residents stated that they had spent at least 90% of their lives in the Worcester area and fewer than half (41%) said that they would even consider leaving for a better job. Census figures tell
the same tale: in 1980 only 38.7% of the resident population in the Worcester metropolitan area had lived at a different address in 1975. This compares to 47.3% in all US metropolitan areas.

[3] We used the Coles Directory to inventory all firms within each study area. Within each area, we focused on manufacturing firms and producer services, with the expectation that their location decisions were likely to be sensitive to the characteristics of the local labour force. We developed a list of eligible firms and telephoned each to find out firm size, firm type, and contact person. We excluded the health, education and welfare and consumer services industries because the location of firms of this type is more sensitive to demand than to the availability of appropriate labour. We excluded distributive services because the location of these firms is more dependent on proximity to transportation facilities and land availability than on labour characteristics. Also excluded were extremely small firms with fewer than five employees. From the list, we selected a sample of 40 firms within each area except Upper Burncoat, such that the selected firms represent a range of manufacturing and producer services firms. Firms were selected without regard to whether they were likely to have a preponderance of either male or female employees. We wanted the final sample to reflect the variety of firm sizes and firm types in each area.

[4] Of the 237 firms asked to participate, 159 (67%) agreed, and 149 of these were actually interviewed. Ten of the 149 have been excluded from the sample because they turned out not to be a manufacturing or producer services firm. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the work place and lasted an average of 78 minutes. In half of the firms the employer interviewed was the firm's owner or co-owner. In the other half, the person was a senior manager. Interviews with employees took place at the firm. We can not make claims that the employees we interviewed are representative of employees in their firm.

[5] These maps are created from information collected in a 1987 survey of a representative sample of Worcester residents. Median distances for men living in Upper Burncoat are not shown as only four men were interviewed in the area.

[6] These educational statistics are drawn from our 1987 survey data. In Westborough 30.3% of women had undergraduate or graduate university degrees. Comparable figures from the other areas are: 12% in Main South, 16.7% in Upper Burncoat, and 14.3% in the Blackstone Valley. Only 6.2% of women in Westborough had no high school diploma, while this was true for 28.0% interviewed in Main South, 27.7% in Upper Burncoat and 15.7% in the Blackstone Valley.

[7] We are not suggesting that labour is the only factor that creates local industrial and office niches; we have also looked closely at the linkages between firms in terms of subcontracting. (For a discussion of the role of these types of linkages in creating industrial territorial niches, see Scott, 1988.) Many employers were, however, explicit about the extent and types of labour that they shared with other employers in the area and saw this in positive terms.

[8] One of the reasons why few Main South employers hire women to work on the evening or night shift is intrinsically related to the geography of the area: it is known as a relatively rough part of town. Two-thirds (62%) of Main South employers who run shifts said that they do not hire women to fill them because women have no desire to work the night shift, in part because of the location. (This compares to 27% of Westborough, 13% of Upper Burncoat and 40% of Blackstone Valley employers who offer shift work.) In the words of one Main South employer: "People are uncomfortable here, leaving here at 4 o’clock when it’s dark". From another, "There are no women on the night shift because they are afraid. Would you want to come down here at night?"

[9] The following are some of the comments made by employers in the Blackstone Valley about the accommodation that employees make around child care and shift work. From an employer at a mill that manufactures pile cloth: "Women work the second and third shift. They ask for it. It's good
scheduling to watch children. They either get someone or the husband watches the children while they work”. From the owner of an establishment that designs, develops and markets hand-knitting yarns: "[The women who work from 6.00 pm to 10.00 pm] have young kids and their husbands are home during these hours to watch them". From the owner of a spinning mill that hires women for the second shift: "A lot of people like the second shift. It's because of the way home life is structured". And finally, another Blackstone employer notes: "Some guys would rather work nights with daycare concerns. Being flexible as you can with that stuff, the petty ass stuff is put to rest".

[10] Indeed, Westborough employers also seemed to be more sensitive about gender issues in general. It was in Westborough that we were asked, "Who's sponsoring this project? Gloria Steinem?"

[11] Male-dominated occupations are those for which over 70% of employees in the 1980 US census were men. Fortunately, for our purposes, the occupational categories are not entirely 'clean' (they incorporate some characteristics pertaining to industry). So, for example, machine operators in the textile industry are coded separately from those working on metal and plastics. Because of this, the occupational categories coded as male-dominated are less likely to hide jobs that are in fact traditionally female-dominated.

[12] There are some variations across neighbourhoods: in 28.6% of firms in Westborough, 38.5% in Main South, 28.6% in Upper Burncoat, and 51.6% in the Blackstone Valley, no occupations were filled by both men and women. We calculated these estimates by asking employers to list the different occupations in their establishment (up to 15—if there were more than 15 we asked him or her to list those with the greatest number of workers). For each of those listed we obtained details about the gender and ethnicity of the workers. The establishments that we studied in 1989 were by no means unusual in their high degree of occupational segregation. From a survey of a representative sample (of over 600 households in the Worcester metropolitan area) that we conducted in 1987, we calculated that more than half of all employed women in Worcester hold jobs in female-dominated occupations (those for which over 70% of the employees are women) and almost two-thirds of all employed Worcester men work in male-dominated ones.


[14] The household circumstances of high-earning women (and those who are employed in traditionally male-dominated occupations) add weight to Rich’s (1980) point that we must clarify the extent to which 'women's' circumstances are tied to the more specific institution of heterosexuality (and particular household types). Almost without exception, women in high-paying jobs and those in 'male-dominated' occupations are not married with children. The majority are single or divorced (see Pratt & Hanson, 1993)

**TABLE I. Women employees' histories of employment[*]**

Legend for Chart:

A - Westborough (N = 39)
B - Main South (N = 28)
C - Upper Burncoat (N = 35)
D - Blackstone Valley (N = 29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always employed in non-manual occupations=</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always employed in</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
manual occupations

Moved between manual and non-manual occupations

5.1% 17.2% 20.0% 17.2%

* Individuals could list up to nine occupations that they had held over the last 10 years; +Jobs such as waitress, nurses' aide, and cashier seem to act as a 'buffer zone' between manual and non-manual jobs. They are effectively discounted in this table in so far as they are counted as either manual or non-manual, in line with the rest of the individual's employment history. These jobs are excluded from calculations of movement between manual and non-manual occupations. (Source: interviews with Worcester employees, 1989)

**TABLE II. Types of work that women do in the firms surveyed in four Worcester areas**

Legend for Chart:

A - Westborough (N = 42)
B - Main South (N = 40)
C - Upper Burncoat (N = 16)
D - Blackstone Valley (N = 31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of jobs in firms surveyed</td>
<td>2589</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>1251</td>
<td>989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs filled by women (%)</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of all employed women working in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Unskilled Jobs (e.g. cleaner)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled and unskilled</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Engineering</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and sales</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: interviews with Worcester employers, 1989

**TABLE III. Opportunities for part-time and shift work in manufacturing and producer services firms in four local areas in Worcester**

Legend for Chart:

A - Westborough (N = 42)
B - Main South (N = 40)
C - Upper Burncoat (N = 16)
D - Blackstone Valley (N = 31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firms offering part-time work (%)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Firms hiring women part-time (%)  
70  45  50  48

Firms that have evening or night shift work %  
26  28  50  52

Firms that have women working evening or night shift (%)  
11  7  38  26


**TABLE IV. Percentage of employers citing trait as skill or characteristic that they value in women[***]**

Legend for Chart:

A - Westborough (N = 33)
B - Main South (N = 37)
C - Upper Burncoat (N = 10)
D - Blackstone Valley (N = 24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Nimble fingers'</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to do repetitive work</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Docile</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard workers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheaper</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More careful</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't push too hard</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(negative characteristic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These answers were given in response to the question: 'Do women have certain skills or other characteristics that you value in a worker? We have classified the variety of responses into the categories shown in the table (Source: interviews with Worcester employers, 1989).

**TABLE V. Gender and ethnic segregation within firms**

(a) Firm One: Industrial Laundry, Main South

Legend for Chart:

A - Job category
B - Gender of workers
C - Race/ethnicity of workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drivers</td>
<td>2 men</td>
<td></td>
<td>'White', 'anglo'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorters</td>
<td>10 men</td>
<td></td>
<td>'White', Jewish, Polish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washers</td>
<td>2 men</td>
<td></td>
<td>'White'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General labourers</td>
<td>13 men</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironers</td>
<td>20 mostly women,</td>
<td>'White' and 'Latino',</td>
<td>a few young,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Latino men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Folders**  
20 women  
'White' and 'Latino'

** Packers**  
5 men and women  
'White' and 'Latino'

**Clerical**  
2 women, 1 man  
'White', 'anglo'

**Managers**  
4 men, 1 woman  
'White', 'anglo'

*(b) Firm Two: Waste Removal, Westborough*

Legend for Chart:

A - Job category  
B - Gender of workers  
C - Race/ethnicity of workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>4 men, 1 woman</td>
<td>'White', 'anglo'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>2 men, 6 women</td>
<td>'White', 'anglo'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>2 men, 2 women</td>
<td>'White', anglo'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck drivers</td>
<td>30 men, 1 woman</td>
<td>'White', 'anglo'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>8 men</td>
<td>'White', 'anglo'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy equipment operators</td>
<td>5 men</td>
<td>'White', 'anglo'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper sorters</td>
<td>15 men, 3 women</td>
<td>2 Brazilian women, 6 Mexican men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: interviews with Worcester employers, 1989*

MAPS: FIG. 1. Median commuting distances for women and men living in four local areas in Worcester, Massachusetts; (a) City of Worcester, (b) Worcester SMSA (Source: interviews with a representative sample of households, 1987).

DIAGRAM: FIG. 2. Location of all employees' residences for a Main South firm, broken down by gender and occupational

**REFERENCES**


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