

Review

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Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge by Gillian Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 205 pp., \$44.95 hardcover, \$17.95 paper.

Finding a Way: Encouraging Underrepresented Groups in Geography: An Annotated Bibliography by Michal LeVasseur. Indiana, PA: National Council for Geographic Education, 1993, 53 pp., \$5.00 paper.

Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions by Lisa Bloom. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 163 pp., \$34.95 hardcover, \$14.95 paper.

Women of the World: Women Travelers and Explorers by Rebecca Steffoff. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 151 pp., \$20.00 hardcover.

ALISON BLUNT

As these four books show, work by and about geographers is diverse. This diversity is, however, informed by a common interest in spatial differentiation. Human geographers address the interfaces between society and space, often emphasizing their historical, cultural, economic, political, urban, and regional complexities. Over the last decade or so, notions of the production of space have become particularly influential, and there has been a growing awareness that constructions of, for example, gender, race, class, and sexuality position human subjects in different ways. The theoretical and empirical work of feminist geographers has been particularly important in articulating the connections between spatiality and subjectivity, although, as Gillian Rose argues, this work remains marginalized in the academy. Linda McDowell has written two review articles in the 1993 volume of *Progress in Human Geography* (17.2,3) that provide an extensive introduction to and bibliography of feminist geography. Feminist geographers have shown ways in which feminism should inform geography and also ways in which geography should inform feminism (as shown by geographers' responses to the wide currency of spatial imagery in feminist theory). The four books reviewed here relate to these concerns in different ways. Gillian Rose and Michal LeVasseur address the gender of geography as an academic discipline, while Lisa Bloom and Rebecca Steffoff address geographies of gender and are more concerned with the production of geographical knowledge beyond disciplinary limits.

In her important book, Gillian Rose challenges the masculinism that, she argues, continues to define the discipline of geography. In contrast,

Michal LeVasseur's practical guide remains within rather than fundamentally challenges the disciplinary parameters of geography. The *Bibliography* published by the National Council for Geographic Education is part of the project *Finding a Way: Encouraging Underrepresented Groups in Geography*. Focusing on teaching strategies, this project aims "to enhance the achievement and motivation of young women and racial and ethnic minorities in geography classes across the nation" (iii). Referencing an extensive range of research, the *Bibliography* provides a strong starting point for a project that also plans to offer summer institutes and workshops and to publish a book. Priced at only \$5.00, the *Bibliography* should be widely used as a teaching resource at all educational levels. It will be useful not only to geographers but also to those working in other disciplines with similar concerns about the underrepresentation of women and minorities.

As LeVasseur shows, studies from the 1970s on have consistently shown poor enrollment in geography at the graduate level and beyond for women and minorities. In addition, several national surveys in the mid-1980s revealed high levels of "geographic illiteracy" among high school and college students, particularly women and minorities. LeVasseur identifies three broad areas of concern: "(1) individual factors, such as innate ability, personal history, and prior experience; (2) sociocultural factors, such as sex role stereotyping and social attitudes toward women and minorities and academics; and (3) school factors, such as classroom environment, teacher-student interactions, textbook and curriculum materials, and instructional strategies" (4). He suggests directions for research through a series of questions under different headings, and the 250 entries in the *Bibliography* are indexed under similar headings. This publication is successful on two levels. Not only does it identify barriers to equal participation and achievement, but it also provides clearly structured suggestions for future discussion and research aiming to tear down such barriers. Each entry in the *Bibliography* is annotated in a concise and helpful way, providing the tools for this important work. LeVasseur cites references from other physical—but not human—sciences as well as work by geographers. There are important reasons for this, as participation and achievement by women and minorities are most likely to be lower in the physical than in the human sciences, but I think LeVasseur's account would have been strengthened by a clarification of emphasis and, perhaps, by the suggestion of differentials between physical and human geography.

Gillian Rose begins her book by stating that "the academic discipline of geography has historically been dominated by men, perhaps more so than any other human science" (1). Throughout, the "limits of geographical knowledge" of her subtitle are shown to be set by masculinist geography. Drawing on poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories, Rose identifies the limits set by a geography that remains masculinist in theory and

practice; critiques the location of feminist geography within these limits; and suggests that the repositioning of feminist geography in paradoxical space (where there is a simultaneous and fluid occupation of both center and margin, inside and outside) is a way to challenge these limits.

Rose is most successful, I think, in her representations of the masculinism of a disciplined geographical knowledge. She vividly reveals masculinist meanings of space, place, and landscape through her critiques of time geography, humanist geography, and cultural geography. For example, Rose shows that studies of time-space routines have perpetuated a masculinist transparency of both bodies and space. This relates to what Rose terms a social-scientific masculinity, which "claims complete access to a transparent and knowable world" (61). In contrast, aesthetic masculinity "claims complete sensitivity to a mysterious yet crucial world" (61). As an example of this, Rose shows how humanist geographers have revered the home as a site of intense experiences and memories but have failed to contextualize knowledge, with the result that gender differences continue to be ignored. Rose points to the uneasy coexistence of social-scientific and aesthetic masculinities in cultural geography, whereby "pleasure in the landscape is often seen as a threat to the scientific gaze, and it is argued that the geographer should not allow himself to be seduced by what he sees" (72). The tensions of Rose's critique are apparent in her simultaneous use and critique of a nature-culture binarism. By offering a feminist analysis of fieldwork without considering different theories and methods of (increasingly feminist) fieldwork, Rose herself is not only critiquing but also potentially totalizing the production of geographical knowledge. It would be helpful to examine the work of feminist geographers here—and throughout her account—instead of limiting the description of that work to chapter 6.

As Rose writes, "the master subject of geography is not only masculine but white, bourgeois and heterosexual" (10). However, the importance of constructions of race, class, and sexuality to the masculinist production of geographical knowledge is more often implicitly assumed than explicitly discussed by Rose. This seems ironic as Rose is critical of their assumed transparency in masculinist discourses. One way in which Rose could have considered the whiteness of geography's masculinism would have been to expand her reference to geography and imperialism. Rose could have said more about both the importance of imperialist, white masculinity in the emergence of geography as an academic discipline and discussed the persistence of this imperialist legacy. The connections between post-colonial and feminist critiques of such a legacy are critical to—and of—geography and a range of other disciplines.

In her attempt to challenge masculinist discourses in geography, Rose proposes a politics of paradoxical space. Paradoxical space, and its politics,

is elusive, referring—I think—to a grounded position that escapes being grounded. By its very definition, therefore, this concept is hard to grasp, and this seems—paradoxically enough—both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. In her book, Gillian Rose herself seems to be in paradoxical space as she is both inside and outside a feminist as much as a masculinist geography. She is not only a feminist critiquing geography but also a feminist geographer. I highly recommend this book, and suggest that it be read alongside other feminist geography. I am sure that it will be read very differently by different people and that it will stimulate wide discussion among feminists, geographers, and feminist geographers.

Lisa Bloom also addresses the masculinist production of knowledge in her fascinating study of polar expeditions and American national identity. Instead of concentrating on geography as an academic discipline, however, Bloom considers more popular geographical discourses, focusing on the *National Geographic* magazine and (more recently) videos from the early twentieth century to the 1980s. Following Rose's analysis, both scientific (rather than social-scientific) and aesthetic masculinities have informed geographical discourses. Bloom graphically shows how these gendered discourses are also racialized and sexualized. She examines "homosocial relations as well as the broad process of gender exclusion and racial discrimination that occurs within the domains of discourse and institutional practices that sanction nationalism" (11).

In 1909 two American explorers, Frederick Cook and Robert E. Peary, each claimed to have "discovered" the North Pole on separate expeditions, only days apart. Cook was unable to "prove" his discovery, however, and for this and other reasons only Peary was celebrated as a national hero (although, as Bloom notes, Peary's discovery also remains contested). Bloom shows how constructions of masculinity and national identity—and the connections between them—have informed representations of polar expeditions and their "heroes." The representations she discusses include accounts written by the explorers themselves, and those popularized by the National Geographical Society. The first edition of the *National Geographic* came out in 1888 and was aimed at scientific professionals. By the 1890s, however, it was facing bankruptcy, and in 1899 a new, more popular magazine was launched. Benefiting from recent technological advances, photography was particularly important in the ways that the magazine represented the rest of the world to the United States and, in so doing, represented the United States to itself. Bloom argues that the realism of photography—that "seeing is believing"—and the universal accessibility of its images were important parts of the democratic rhetoric that underpinned the magazine's popularity. Photography was also associated with modernity and scientific progress. At the same time, the poles were seen as empty spaces that could only be made known by the

achievements of modern—and masculine—science. Representations of the poles—both how and why they attracted so much popular attention—were tied to ideas about modernity and progress that helped to produce, and were produced by, a masculine national identity.

Bloom stresses the whiteness of this masculine national identity. In Peary's writings, for example, he largely ignores the Inuit who made his expedition possible and completely omits his African American companion, Matthew Henson. Henson traveled with Peary on all of his seven Arctic expeditions and in 1912 published his own account. It is only in recent years, however, that revisionist histories have included Henson alongside the long-celebrated white male heroes of polar exploration. Bloom argues that this inclusion sometimes amounts to little more than tokenism. For example, she suggests that the way in which the 1988 centennial issue of the *National Geographic* described Henson as Peary's "companion" rather than his "servant" "represents more the ploys of multicultural policy than a socially conscious institutional engagement" (85). In his attempt to reconstruct the "North Pole myth," S. Allen Counter has been a leading proponent of official recognition for Henson. Bloom argues that Counter played down constructions of race in favor of Henson's masculinity. The connections between masculinity and white national identity, on which Henson's previous exclusion had been based, therefore remain largely unchallenged.

Bloom considers widely ranging and sometimes complex arguments in her relatively short book and, at times, her analysis could go further. For this reason, her last chapter is, in my opinion, her least successful. In it Bloom discusses the failed British expedition to the Antarctic led by Captain Scott. She compares American masculine discourses of polar exploration based on scientific achievement with British masculine discourses based on honor and personal gallantry. Given that the rest of the book focuses on American national identity, this comparison seems one-sided and incomplete.

Lisa Bloom's book is one of several recent publications that focus on the gendered nature of travel. Several feminist accounts study women travelers (and, particularly, women travel writers) to reveal how travel, travel writing, and representations of women as travelers are all distinctively gendered. Bloom documents the virtual erasure of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary from her husband's accounts. She did not accompany him on his 1909 expedition to the North Pole but had accompanied him on an earlier expedition and had published an autobiography, *My Arctic Journal: A Year among Ice Fields and Eskimos*, in 1893. Peary refers to her only in conventionally feminine and domestic terms, terms contrasting with his (and the *National Geographic's*) eroticized portrayals of Inuit women (particularly, in Peary's case, of his mistress Allakasingwah). Bloom sug-

gests, but could further develop, the different ways in which gendered, racial, and sexual discourses positioned women.

Rebecca Steffoff's book, for ages ten and up, is a clearly written introduction to nine American and European women travelers. Over time, they range from Ida Pfeiffer, born in 1797, to Freya Stark, born in 1893; and over space, their travels range from the Arctic to West Africa, and from Peru to Tibet. This well-illustrated book supplements other descriptive accounts, anthologies, and bibliographies about women travelers. One hopes it will inspire its young readers to turn to more critical commentaries in the future.

In her introduction, Steffoff writes that thousands of women have traveled as pilgrims, guides, family members, and emigrants. In the nineteenth century, however, according to Steffoff, "a new class of woman traveler appeared in Europe and the United States" (9) who "claimed the right to see the world on [her] own terms" (10). Unlike some other writers, Steffoff manages to avoid caricaturing these women as intrepid, often rather comical individuals. She also describes each woman's life before and after as well as during her travels, often revealing the confining constructions of domestic femininity. She neglects to stress, however, that all of these women were white who were from, but traveling beyond, the West. By writing that "each of them was a true explorer, going someplace where no one had gone before or doing something that no one had done before" (10), she echoes the imperialism that enabled many of these women to travel. As other, more critical accounts have shown, many white women were able to travel to places under imperial rule because they could share in racist constructions of imperial power and authority. In their travels away from home, such women gained license to behave in ways perceived as masculine. Constructions of masculinity and femininity were negotiated and contested as they moved within and between the spaces of home and away, revealing the gendered spatiality of both travel and imperialism.

The four books under review here are diverse but share some common themes. Most important, they reveal both the gender of geography and different geographies of gender. They do so in a range of ways, and often for different readers. I am confident, however, that all will stimulate interest and further research by geographers and nongeographers alike.