Hemingway, J. (2008). Taking place seriously: spatial challenges for sex and relationship education. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning.* 8(3): 249-261.

Title: Taking place seriously: spatial challenges for sex and relationship education

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Editorial

Taking place seriously: spatial challenges for sex and relationship education

> Place is not a specialized piece of academic terminology. It is a word we use daily in the English-speaking world. It is a word wrapped in common sense. In one sense this makes it easier to grasp as it is familiar. In another sense, however, this makes it more slippery. (Cresswell, 2004, p. 1)

This special issue of *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning* brings together a collection of innovative research papers delivered at the third biennial international sex and relationship education conference held at the Institute of Education, University of London, in May 2007. The conference title, 'Place-Based Sex/Sexualities and Relationship Education', emerged from intellectual interest in the scope of *Sex Education* which states that the journal 'does not assume that sex education takes place only in educational institutions and the family'. This editorial position exemplifies taxonomic and intuitive apprehensions of 'place'. It does so by identifying two particular *kinds* of place, not just different places, which are influential in organizing everyday life. It also illustrates how notions of place permeate language. These and other conceptualizations and uses of place are pursued in this compilation of papers which signifies why place is worthy of

scholastic investment by those working in the field of sex and relationship education (SRE).

Travelling theory: place and the social sciences

In beginning to explore the idea of place in terms of SRE, the editorial references to 'educational institutions' and 'the family' index categorically distinct and immediately recognizable places. Although, as contributors to this special issue demonstrate, these and other seemingly well-known places become 'strange' when their geographies and social relations are interrogated. Contra popular ideations of place as merely a 'backdrop' to human activity, recent publications have revealed how the seaside and rural areas influence young people's sexual experiences, behaviour and attitudes (Stanley, 2005; Hemingway, 2006). Against the alleged neutrality of place, geographers, educators and other social scientists have explicated how 'places, like space and time, are social constructs and have to be read and understood as such' (Harvey, 1993, p. 25). Of analytic importance too is the notion that places are not essential or boundaried phenomena. They are produced and intermeshed with other places as Massey has explained:

> Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extra-verted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider

world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local. (1993, p. 66)

The unboundedness of Massey's 'progressive sense of place' reveals ideas of hybridity that disrupt essentializing binary discourses of real/imagined, public/private, professional/playful place. This re*cognition* of place as process indicates not only its making but the optimism associated with its continual re-making. Hence, the pedagogical places explored in this special issue – *human bodies, domestic homes, residential care homes, friendship groupings, classrooms, textbooks, schools, newspapers, and museums* – and the spaces between them are fluid and open to change.

The assertion that sex education 'takes place' references a commonly used spatial metaphor which demonstrates the taken-for-grantedness and embeddedness of place in everyday language (Reynolds, 2004, p. 12). This figure of speech contributes to a socially pervasive spatial lexicon which includes terms such as 'location', 'situation', 'mapping' and 'centre-margin' (Keith & Pile, 1993). The alleged passivity of this linguistic register is countered by the deployment of geographical metaphors in the making of ideological judgments. These 'container' metaphors, exemplified by 'gone too far', 'not gone far enough' and 'don't go there' (Reynolds, 2004, pp. 12-13), have sexual connotations and, more widely, determine who and what is 'in place' or 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996). Rather than being weak reflexive expressions, these and other

geographical metaphors which foreground place as a critical intervention in daily routine show the inherent spatiality, or spatial politics, of human life (Soja, 1996).

Orthodox boundaries, for example, provide reassurance for those who are accustomed to knowing their place and 'abide by dozens of spatial practices in the everyday' (Reynolds, 2004, p. 6). Particular comfort may be derived from the establishment of proscriptive sexual boundaries through the abstinence rhetoric of 'just say no'. More insidious, though, is Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'doxa' [1]. This internalized notion of boundaries reveals the inseparability of the 'real world' and the 'thought world' so that relations of order are accepted as self-evident (Bourdieu 1986: 471). The conflation of social and mental formations ensures that 'the *sense* of limits implies *forgetting* the limits' so as to instil a 'sense of one's place' (original emphases, Bourdieu, 1986, p. 471). Marston's research on the 'domestication' of the United States has argued that through 'Americanization programs' the inculcation of middle-class mores ensured that the bedroom became the natural place for sexual intercourse (2004, p. 180).

What is being argued here is that in SRE a reconceptualised notion of place has the capacity to disconcert, or displace, familiar terrain. As with other 'troublesome knowledge' (Meyer & Land, 2005), paradigmatic revolution seldom results, at least not immediately (Kuhn, 1970). Nonetheless, fresh ways of thinking through alternative 'conceptual gateways' can promote a changed 'subject landscape' (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 373). This mediated environment can stimulate different

topics for research and encourage diverse trajectories for teaching and learning, in addition to revitalizing enduring concerns. While much thinking in SRE remains 'stuck' (Ellsworth, 1997) in biology and human reproduction, a transdisciplinary agenda based on critical explorations of place could advance a 'transformative', 'irreversible' and 'integrative' (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 373) field of inquiry.

'Stuck places': SRE is more than just biology

> Men and women have always sought, by one means or another, to be
> together rather than apart. At first they were together by the simple
> expedient of being unicellular, and there was no conflict. Later the cell
> separated, or began living apart, for reasons which are not clear even
> today, although there is considerable talk. Almost immediately the two
> halves of the original cell began experiencing a desire to unite again –
> usually with a half of some other cell. This urge has survived down to our
> time. Its commonest manifestations are marriage, divorce, neuroses, and,
> a little less frequently, gun-fire. (Thurber & White, 1947, p. xv)

Offering good SRE to all young people, including minority groups, challenges educators (Alldred & David, 2007). It can be especially fraught in the UK where parental rights include the withdrawal of children from all but statutory programmes of study for science in the National Curriculum (Department for Education and Employment, 2000, section 5.7). Yet, as Reiss has argued, it is in

science where reductionist approaches remain commonplace, for instance in textbooks where 'school and college biology typically examine issues of human sexuality and femaleness and maleness through the lens of human reproduction' (2007, pp. 64-65). Concern with pregnancy, particularly teenage conception, also features prominently in the narrow thinking of the government and policy makers where anxiety about teenage pregnancy rates led to the establishment of the 10-year Teenage Pregnancy Strategy in the UK. Its aim is to halve the under-18 conception rate in England by 2010 and the latest available statistics indicate that the conception rate is currently at its lowest level for over 20 years. Provisional figures for 2006 show under-18 conceptions standing at 40.4 per 1000 girls aged 15-17. This marks a drop of 13.3% since the baseline year of 1998. The under-16 conception rate reveals a parallel reduction with 7.7 per 1000 girls aged 13-15 becoming pregnant which is 13.0% lower than the 1998 baseline rate of 8.8 conceptions per 1000 girls aged 13-15 (Office for National Statistics and Teenage Pregnancy Unit, 2008). As reported recently in the tabloid press, the government's continuing concern with teenage conception was revealed in a leaked Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) discussion paper which detailed plans for schools to record teenage pregnancy rates as part of their reports to the inspectorate (Clark, 30.04.08).

The 'top-down' organized decline in teenage pregnancy rates has worked towards the accomplishment of a particular UK government aim, albeit one which

is not necessarily shared by young people or their parents (Stanley, 2005, p. 337). In an American context, Aitken observes that:

> Given the historical tendency for women to conceive in adolescence, the stigma attached to teenage pregnancies is a very recent phenomenon with an interesting local geography. (2001, p. 77)

The particularity of this geography draws on research with sexualized and racialized young Latina women in Los Angeles (Hyams, 2000 cited by Aitken, 2001, pp. 77-79). Here, as in the UK and elsewhere, large-scale societal concern with teenage pregnancy is predicated on a developmentalist notion of children where the recently constructed and 'distinctly sexual' age-stage of 'adolescence' is attended by a new orthodoxy established on the postponing of pregnancy until the attainment of 'adult' independence. The centrality of delayed conception in this locating matrix pathologizes those who do not subscribe to the new agenda as 'deficient', 'deviant', and 'delinquent'. The local geography of these 'out of place' young Latina women, or 'hoochie mamas', is grounded in their Mexican heritage and maintained by generationally older females whose stories of 'purity', 'modesty', 'chastity', and 'sexual propriety' represent 'their counterparts south of the border [as] an idealized, and unreachable, moral apex'.

If educators are to demonstrate that 'sex is more than just biology' (Bloom, 27.05.05, p. 6) [2] there is a need for SRE to adopt a broader agenda. A positive

step in this direction is the publication of the first national framework for SRE, *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance* (Department for Education and Employment, 2000). The three main elements of the guidance, 'attitudes and values', 'personal and social skills' and 'knowledge and understanding' appear to widen the SRE curriculum, although Alldred and David (2007, pp. 34-35) have highlighted a number of limitations. In order to distance thinking from the conceptually 'stuck places' (Ellsworth, 1997) in which many educators and young people are situated, a more productive version of SRE which grounds sexual relations in different kinds of place would open the field to new 'conversations, persuasion, and learning' (Reynolds, 2004, p. 1). This, however, is not to suggest that place is a 'threshold concept' in the restricted sense of leading to 'a pre-ordained end' (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 379). It is perhaps more useful, as Meyer & Land suggest, to think of place in terms of 'liminality' since its recalcitrance resists closure. The positive value of indeterminacy is made clear by Ellsworth when arguing that, 'knowledge, once it is defined, taught and used as a "thing made," is dead' (2005, p. 1).

Making space: critical journeys

In the latter parts of the twentieth century there was a resurgence of 'space' in social theory, a resurgence, or 'turn', that education has yet to address, at least in any concerted way. (Gulson & Symes, 2007, p. 1)

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Representing the world is an undertaking which renders complex issues seemingly straightforward and, therefore, manageable (Reiss, 2001; 2007). Much intellectual effort has been expended on this project which underpins the categorical thinking associated with traditional Western 'either/or' dualisms. Although the binaristic distinction between place and space 'may appear self-explanatory', according to Hubbard, 'they have been (and remain) two of the most diffuse, ill-defined and inchoate concepts in the social sciences and humanities' (2007, p. 41). Ideographic humanistic accounts, for instance, have dwelt on the specificity of particular locations, urban/rural, town/city, region/country whereas the focus of materialist inquiry has been on the social production and consumption of space. The movement towards understanding space *'as process* and *in process'* (original emphases, Crang & Thrift, 2000, p. 3) suggests that it is 'more of a verb than a noun' (Gulson & Symes, 2007, p. 2). In recent decades, interest in these two closely allied concepts has shifted 'from place to space and back again' (Harvey, 1993). However, the problematization of place and space in the 'new' cultural geography has resulted in there being little shared agreement about the meaning of the terms (Hubbard, 2007, p. 41). Similarly, Crang & Thrift observe that the concept of space is generally used with uncritical 'abandon' (2000, p. 1). A particularly insightful characterization though, is the configuration of space as 'physical extent infused with social intent' (Neil Smith 1990 cited in Gregory, 1994, p. 3). This place/space definition both illustrates the complex relationship between space and place at the same time as interrupting the impulse to categorize.

While the ground-breaking work of geographers has combined place and space in terms of everyday social and economic relations (Harvey, 1993; Massey, 1993; Smith, 1993), another landmark publication, *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (Bell & Valentine, 1995), utilized this convergence. As in subsequent geographical investigations of 'dissident sexual politics', research has revealed 'how different sexual desires are not only articulated and fulfilled but regulated, repressed and resisted' across place, space, and place/space (Blunt & Wills, 2000, p. 128). Sexualities and queer geographies are now a well-established sub-disciplinary field (Brown & Knopp, 2003) and geographical ventures into the heterosexual politics of place/space are also familiar terrain (Shields, 1991; Hubbard, 1998; 2000; 2002; Tani, 2002). Nevertheless, geographical studies of young people's sexuality are less frequent and notably absent from the milestone volume *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (Skelton & Valentine, 1998).

The immensely creative, and perhaps most complex, bringing together of place and space is seen in *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre's trialectic of perceived (real), conceived (symbolic) and lived (real-and-imagined) space brings together three qualitatively different, but inseparable and contingent, spaces. From this perceived-conceived-lived triad, 'place emerges as a particular form of space, one that is created through acts of naming as well as through the distinctive activities and imaginings associated with particular social

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spaces' (Hubbard, 2007, p. 42). Soja's explication and development of Lefebvre's work shows how 'it all comes together in Los Angeles' (1989, pp. 190-221). His 'thirdspatial' analysis of the city draws on the 'insistent disordering' of a 'both/and also …' logic which displaces either/or binaries in order to expand what is known and ways of knowing (Soja 1996: 7). This strategic borderlessness of lived space, 'as a realm of the imagination and as an incitement of the possible' (Gulson & Symes, 2007, p. 5), supports the 'right to be different' which, significantly, Lefebvre identified as beginning with the body and sexuality (Soja, 1996, p. 35).

Using scale: from the body to the globe

> Scale is not a preordained hierarchical nomenclature for ordering the world, but rather a contingent outcome of the tensions between structural forces and the interventions of human agents. (Marston, 2004, p. 172)

As 'the geography closest in' (Rich, 1986, p. 212), the body signifies the smallest scale in what some human geographers have traditionally regarded as a 'nested hierarchy' that travels from the body, household, neighbourhood, city, and metropolitan area, to the province/state, nation-state, continent, and globe (McMaster & Sheppard, 2004, p. 4). Others, including Massey (1998, pp.124-126), have critiqued this notion on several fronts by pointing to the 'vast complexity of interconnections' between scales, the omission of certain scales

such as the workplace, and how the scale of the community, among others, is not necessarily spatial. Nonetheless, scalar thinking is a central tenet of geography and not 'merely a question of methodological preference for the researcher' (Smith, 1993, p. 96). It has attracted much scrutiny regarding its meaning and deployment but due to lack of consensus some scholars have attempted to 'eliminate scale as a concept in human geography' (Marston *et al.,* 2005). However, the broad rejection of an 'infinitely fixed' hierarchical notion of scale along with the development of politicized interpretations informed by the widely influential paper *Homeless/Global: Scaling Places* (Smith, 1993) have made thinking through scale, as investigative tool and organizational strategy, attractive to other geographers exploring food consumption (Bell & Valentine, 1997) and sociologists of education investigating new scales of knowledge production (Robertson, 2007).

It is as an analytic instrument and structuring framework that scale has been mobilized to link the multiple spatialities of the nine conference papers that follow. The scales deployed, *body – home – family and friends – residential institutions – schools – textbooks – educational policies – national newspapers – diaspora communities,* are hierarchically arranged. It is important to observe that these scales are 'actively socially connected, not rigidly separate' and, further, that they are socially, culturally, economically, and politically produced rather than being an 'ontological system' (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 12). These relational scales, which progress from the body as 'the irreducible locus for the

determination of all values, meanings, and significations' (Harvey, 2000, p. 97), to the 'gay haven' of the global merchant navy, show how progressive ideas of place, space, and place/space as already outlined can shed new light on current perspectives in SRE.

The body: corporeal geographies of 'other'

> The dialectic of identity and difference is central to the definition of scale but nowhere more important than with the body. (Smith, 1993, p. 102)

Concern with the human body marks relatively new intellectual terrain in geographical inquiry (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 12). Informed in the early stages by the feminist critique (McDowell, 1992), the 1990s saw an upsurge of interest with diverse research trajectories pursuing the gendered, sexualized and corporeal body in place and space (Bell & Valentine, 1995), space (Duncan, 1996), and the geographical imagination (Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). From this 'body fixation', a significant canon of geographical literature has emerged (Moss & Dyck, 2003), central to which are notions of the body as socially constructed and situated as well as being the 'cultural locus of gender meanings' (Butler, cited in Smith, 1993, p. 102). This is not to suggest that the body is simply shaped by exogenous forces, it exerts influence too, as Harvey explains:

As a 'desiring machine' capable of creating order not only within itself but also in its environs, the human body is active and transformative in relation to the processes that produce, sustain, and dissolve it. Thus, bodily persons endowed with semiotic capacities and moral will make their bodies foundational elements in what we have long called 'the body politic'. (2000, p. 99)

The iconic maternal body, which is figured just as it is configures, is conventionally identified with the place/space of the home, child-bearing, and child-rearing. The pedagogic role of the mother in teaching her offspring is complex, not least with regard to sexual identity and behaviour. Blum and Nast (2000, pp. 184-192), for instance, draw on Lacanian theory to argue that in following 'the laws of the paternal order', the separation of mother and infant is 'at the heart of the maternal function'. They go on to explain how it is the mother's 'invidious lure that threatens to make psychotic the subject who fails to separate' (p. 185). The surveillant and regulatory home in which certain sexual subjectivities are nurtured, and others deterred, is the focus of the paper by Nicholas Addison whose discussion of teaching children to fear sexual 'other' uses an artwork to disrupt the space of the heteronormative household. Addison's developing pedagogical project of using art as an interlocutor to explore sexuality (Addison, 2006) opens a creative space which offers 'inner ways of knowing' into 'outer events, selves, objects and ideas' (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 7).

Addison's dislocating reading of the mother-child relationship represents the home as an equivocal space. The next three papers also unsettle conventional notions of the home. In the context of abusive same-sex partnerships, the first paper situates the home as a violent place instead of 'a refuge, a source of comfort in a world otherwise replete with tension and conflict, and the only environment in which individuals can function as autonomous agents' (Sibley, 1995, p. 93). The second paper positions the familial home as a preferred site for gaining information and advice about sex and relationships. In so doing, the importance of formal places of learning about SRE is decentred. The last paper in this cluster interrogates how the experiences of young people in public care homes influence their attitudes towards sex, teenage pregnancy, and parenthood.

The home: dis/continuities

Home is a word that positively drips with associations – according to various academic literatures it's a private, secure location, a sanctuary, a locus of identity and a place where inhabitants can escape the disciplinary practices that regulate our bodies in everyday life. (Johnston and Valentine, 1995, p. 99)

The multiple meanings of the word 'home' indicate that is it a place of contradiction. Dualistic thinking, for instance, connects the domain with notions of heaven/hell, work/play, and public/private, which 'thirdspace' conceptualizations have disrupted by placing it somewhere in between (Reynolds, 2004, pp. 60-61). While another trajectory has shown how the home offers a site of resistance to dominant culture (Reynolds, 2004, pp. 152-153), the growing literature concerned with children's geographies of the home makes a further contribution to understandings of this complex arena which is so significant in everyday lifeworlds (Holloway & Valentine, 2000).

To those for whom the adage 'east, west, home's best' is axiomatic, the domestic home connotes warmth, intimacy, and protection, although for a great many women, men, and children, it is a site of physical aggression and subjugation. Specifically, the enduring association of the home with heterosexual family life suggests that for those young people who are non-heterosexual the parental home can be a place of violence 'perpetrated by family members "disgusted" by their sexuality' (Johnston and Valentine, 1995, p. 103). It is the high incidence of domestic violence in same-sex relationships which Catherine Donovan and Marianne Hester present in their qualitative research that supports the mainstreaming of same-sex sex/relationship education in schools. Their study reveals that those in first same-sex relationships are particularly vulnerable to experiencing domestic violence. This marginalizing behaviour is due, in part, to their lack of knowledge about what to expect and their control by abusive

partners who establish the terrain of the relationship. Crucially, the isolating geographies of exploitative relations rely on restricted contact with potential sources of support including family members and friends.

It is the place of family members, friends, and other peers in providing sex and relationship information and advice that Eryl Powell interrogates in a Cardiff-based study of the information-seeking behaviour of young people. Rather than accessing information from formal sources such as teachers, school nurses, and GPs, participants sought advice from inter-generational family members, friends, and peers. Significantly, and in contrast to an evaluation of the national Teenage Pregnancy Strategy which found that many young people still find it difficult to talk to their parents/carers about sex and relationships, this local investigation reported that informal contact with friends and family provided the most trusted sources of information and advice. Powell argues that much of this 'legitimate, intimate, appropriate and private' sex and relationship advice came from peers. Yet, peer groups are frequently associated with exerting pressure such that their contemporaries engage in negative behaviours which render them 'conspicuously deviant' in local, regional, and national, social space (Sibley, 1995, p. xiv). The paper by Claire Maxwell and Elaine Chase critically examines the complexities of the concept of 'peer pressure' with regard to the experiences of sex and pregnancy among young people in public care. Through stigmatization, labelling, and judgement, the young parents felt a sense of

displacement, although the research also indicated that a wider range of positive and negative pressures influenced the decisions that were made.

Another kind of institution with which young people are closely associated is the school. As the predominant site of formal learning, the everyday organization of schools actively intermeshes a breadth of scales. These begin with the situated body in the classroom and extend to the nation state from whence emanate directives relating to the content permissible in textbooks and appropriate pedagogical approaches to SRE. The following group of papers commences with an overtly spatialized reading of a research project which addresses lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality in the primary school. This is followed by a nuanced examination of the politics underlying the representation of sex and relationships in Greek primary textbooks, while the third paper offers an examination of the internal contradictions attending SRE policy and practice in the UK.

The school: formal learning and policy directives
While education has been slow to pursue spatial modes of interrogation (McGregor, 2004; Gulson & Symes, 2007), the contours of the paper by Alexandra Allan, Elizabeth Atkinson, Elizabeth Brace, Renée DePalma, and Judy Hemingway are intellectually shaped by this emergent discourse. Their discussion engages with the contingency of space- and place-making by presenting three vignettes which examine the ways in which the primary school is

produced as a bounded place where sexuality is vigilantly policed. Drawing on data from the *No Outsiders: Researching Approaches to Sexualities Equality in Primary Schools* project, the authors deconstruct examples of how non-heterosexuality is represented in the formal classroom, the staffroom, and an after-school club. The catalyst for raising discussions was the loan of gay-affirmative story books. Their introduction in participating schools, however, was not always straightforward.

It is the issue of ambivalence surrounding the introduction of certain books in schools that Margarita Gerouki takes up in her paper which examines the place of new sex and gender relationships education textbooks in Greek primary schools. Despite the publication of recent research which shows the school to be a sexualized place which also offers space for negotiating romantic relationships (Renold, 2005; Youdell, 2006), Gerouki reveals the asexual manner in which the textbooks represent the human body and human relationships. The conflicting societal values behind this approach to sex education disempower young people in terms of their reproductive and sexual health. In their conceptual paper which advances an alternative framework for school-based SRE, Grace Spencer, Claire Maxwell, and Peter Aggleton unpack the rhetoric of empowerment. They argue that the regulatory agenda of the UK government which is concerned with risk reduction stands at odds with notions of empowerment. Offering a less determined set of outcomes, an empowering model of SRE in schools would embrace the diversity of young people's sexual knowledge, experience, and

concerns; address issues of pleasure and intimacy; and engage with the resistance of young people to dominant discourses of youth, sexuality and gender norms.

The development of strategies to redress the narrow agenda of hegemonic discourses is at the heart of the final papers in this special issue. The first analyzes coverage of SRE in national newspapers in England and the second explores gender and sex relations in an exhibition of gay life on the ocean wave. The spatiality that connects them is the scale of community. This is exemplified by the 'imagined community' of the nation which, in part, is created and sustained by the press (Anderson, 1991), and the non-site specific diasporic community of gay men in the merchant navy.

Nation/globe: representing communities

Whose crisis of representation is it anyway? (Crang, 1992, p. 541).

According to the paper by Piers Simey and Kaye Wellings, the powerful influence of the national press on public opinion has contributed to a negative image of SRE in the classroom. Their qualitative analysis of newspapers, a print medium deeply implicated in the formation of national consciousness (Anderson, 1991), indicates mass recognition of the importance of SRE but general dissensus

regarding its provision at the local scale. The statutory inclusion of SRE as a component of the National Curriculum, they argue, could resist the conservative agenda that underpins media hyperbole.

Under-representation, not its binary opposite as in the case of Simey and Wellings' research, is the theme of the last paper by Pam Meecham who considers the 'hidden histories' of gay men in the British merchant navy during the second half of the twentieth century. The community identity of this dispersed group is maintained, rather than diminished, with distance through a mutual sense of place which re-connects the body with the globe:

> The diaspora invokes an imagined geography, a spatiality that draws on connections across oceans and continents and yet unifies the [gay] experience inside a shared *territory* (original emphasis, Keith & Pile, 1993, pp. 17-18)

Meecham's research, which draws on a travelling museum exhibition, fits well with Bhattacharyya's (2002, p.145) geographical analogy of human sexuality as 'a land apart – foreign in the best sense of freeing possibility, but also strange and requiring translation and mediation'. The issue of 'foreignness' to which Bhattacharyya refers, is a point also considered by Meecham who contends that the dangers inherent in offering 'a glimpse of alternative ways of being in the world' can reinforce traditional ways of thinking instead of opening new horizons.

It is from the perspective of opening up discussions that Meecham critiques the exhibition when asking what re-constructions of 'hidden histories' (and geographies) might bring to bear on gender and sexual relations in the present.

This brief introduction has been organized by deploying a hierarchical arrangement of nine spatial scales all of which are imbricated. Having avoided making 'ritualistic connections' (Massey, 1993, p. 66) between scales, understood as 'different *kinds* of places' (original emphasis, Smith, 1993, p. 99), it has been suggested that issues of interest and concern in SRE are not locally contained and may operate at a number of scales simultaneously. For example, formal and informal resources which young people might access for learning about sex and relationships stretch from the human body (Addison), family and friends (Powell), schools and clubs (Allan *et al.*), and school textbooks (Gerouki), to national museums which take in the world (Meecham). But many young people fall through the spaces in between, as newspapers are keen to report (Simey & Wellings), because of factors which include restricted access to support (Donovan & Hester), being subjected to a wide range of pressures (Maxwell & Chase), and due to lack of empowerment (Spencer *et al.*). Geographers make much of these spaces between scales (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 12) as they provide room for critical reflection and new ways of thinking.

Knowledge in the making: bringing SRE back to life

Places, whether textual, material, or imaginary, are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of *habitus* (original emphasis, Reynolds, 2004, p. 2)

The habitus of SRE is deeply embedded in the regulation of 'risky behaviours' associated with some young people. However, this academic/professional disposition underestimates the complexities that attend the real-life situations in which many young people find themselves (Alldred & David, 2007). This paper has suggested that a catalyst for bringing SRE back to life is offered by a deepened and politicized understanding of place, along with the allied concepts of space and place/space. The generative potential of place, when deployed as a threshold concept in the broadest sense (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 374), can stimulate the production of new knowledge and not merely confirm what is already known. This process of 'knowledge in the making' (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1) might provide an inclusive framework for rethinking SRE.

Notes

[1] Whereas orthodoxy relates to convention and denotes what is considered to be 'proper' and 'improper', or 'right' and 'wrong', doxa is internalised as an accepted and unquestioned 'given'. Thus, social constructions are 'naturalized' and rendered 'obvious' (Bourdieu 1986: 471).

[2] 'Sex is more than just biology', the title of an article in the *TES* (Times Educational Supplement), arose from an interview with Professor Michael Reiss during the third biennial international SRE conference held at the Institute of Education, University of London in May, 2005. The 'Cultural Aspects of Sex/Sexuality Education' conference shifted the research focus away from human reproduction to the roles played by culture in SRE.

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