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GENDER AND THE BODY IN TOURISM GEOGRAPHY

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Abstract:

Gender, sexuality and the body have appeared as new and interesting research subjects in geography and the study of tourism, especially since early 1990s. The gender-sensitive approach has, however, remained a complicated one to adopt. The common prejudices against the feminist discourse, correct and incorrect, often mistakenly render the gender-sensitive approach a women's issue. The following article is going to argue for a wider adoption of gender-awareness in tourism geographies, and to provide a selection of approaches to choose from. Gender, sexuality and the body are important features of both the practice and theory of tourism, and provide important new insights to those who are ready to explore them.

Keywords: Geography, tourism, gender, the body.

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Introduction

Gender, sexuality and the body are often supposed to belong to the main stream of today's social and cultural studies, including geography and the geography of tourism. At least that is expected in the FUNTS lectures on qualitative methods in tourism research. Nevertheless, each year a growing number of students appear to be totally unaware of the subject, and have increasing difficulties in implementing the gender-sensitive aspect in their course reports. Asked to resolve a simulated tourism customer satisfaction problem, too many of them expect to survive the competition by addressing the statistical average of their customers, with little attention to the variety of needs among their clientele, some of which clearly are gender-related. Gender may be included in the basics of methodological studies in Finnish universities, but it is not in fashion among the students. Neither is it favoured by the majority of lecturers who appear to treat the subject in a superficial way in order to fulfil the requirements of political correctness.

Few seem to remember the introduction of feminism and women's studies in the academia, and the changes which occurred more than a decade ago. In the early 1990s, during my geography studies in the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Joensuu, gender and feminism surfaced as new and critical subjects in

the discourse as it was taught to us. In the beginning I, as a male student, had no personal relationship to the topic. Much like today, gender equality, understood as equal treatment of men and women in the society, was taken as granted by the Finnish students. The rest of the message was commonly understood as something which belonged to the women, and especially to women who were against men. Gender and later the body were commonly associated with radical feminism and the odd aggressive female student complaining about all-inclusive oppression by men, a self-victimizing ideology against which few teachers or other students dared to say anything in public.

Later on, the original impression of gender as women's question deepened as women's studies started in the university, more or less under the banner of Anglo-American (and French) second wave feminism, as a part of politicized power struggle in the academia, and ended as a feminist ghetto, a self-made isolation anticipated by more broad-minded feminist academics such as Irma Sulkunen (1991). The subject was something a man should not touch, unless he dared the reaction of bitter and easily provoked women colleagues. Additionally, especially in the context of sexuality and the body, the conservative Anglo-American moralism in-built in the feminist doctrines appeared quite alien to a liberal Scandinavian mindset, much the same way they did, for somewhat different reasons, to the Mediterranean mind. People born in the culture of sauna and relative sexual freedom could not easily consider nakedness as something 'dirty' and heterosexuality in general as 'oppressive'. Consequently, the adoption of feminism, gender and

the body was a reluctant and ambivalent one for a student of geography, regardless of her gender, not to mention the academic discipline in general.

Only later on, during field work among Western backpackers in South Asia (Hottola, 1999), the full personal realization of the importance of gender, sexuality and the body finally occurred, not because of what had been taught in the university, but because of new insights grounded in the field material. Already since the very first backpacker interview, it was clear that being a woman traveler in the patriarchal India and Sri Lanka creates a significantly different experience to that of men, who confront distinctively different constraints in the Other environment. The sexed human body became an important factor which affected encounter situations between hosts and visitors, and made them particularly difficult for women, whereas men consumed tourism with relative ease. In South Asia, the gendered and embodied variation of tourist encounters with the Other became so apparent, interesting and central in its explanatory power in the context of intercultural adaptation, that it became necessary to develop a personal relationship not only to the discourse of gender, but to the different schools of feminism, as well.

Today, it is important to recognize the strengths of the gender-sensitive approach. In fact, there should be growing interest in these matters in a situation where the Western culture has increasingly begun to celebrate leisure, hedonism and unrestrained consumerism, including tourism (Featherstone, 1991; Davis, 1997). One should, however, also

recognize the problems involved. How to overcome the ambivalence surrounding the subject? How to incorporate this aspect in one's personal research agenda? The question of gender is an interesting one, and of fundamental importance, but it is also very complicated and emotionally and politically charged. The following text will try to find some explanations to the dilemma, by providing a variety of approaches to choose from, and by making the situation clearer through a process of argumentation and categorization.

Gender and the Body in Geography

The body was incorporated into Anglo-American human geography in the late 1970s through the work of humanistic geographers, notably David Seamon (e.g. 1979) who studied the ways people experience their bodies and move through space (see also Bell & Valentine, 1995). For him human bodies were, however, neither gendered nor sexualized but some kind of behaviorist equations of the Cartesian 'man'; asexual masculine beings of calculative rati- on. The thoughts of Descartes, and the Cartesian conception of human being was inherited to social sciences from Enlightenment which misused science to prove that the Christian religion was 'right' (e.g. Bowen, 1985; Livingstone, 1993). As Margaret FitzSimmons (1989) has found out, human geography is implicitly structured around the distinction between nature and culture. Academics upholding this tradition have

avored the mind over the body, much like Christian theologians have constituted the body as the enemy of the soul (Davis, 1997).

Radical geographers brought out the issue of gender in the 1980s but disregarded the body (e.g. Foord & Gregson, 1986; Knopp & Lauria, 1987). Esthetic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan (e.g. 1974, 1993) acknowledged the esthetics of the sexed body but were not as interested in its societal functions. Only since the 1990s a more extensive realization of the body has surfaced among social and cultural geographers. 'Sensuous geographers' such as Paul Rodaway (1994) attempted a comprehensive geography of senses (see also Porteous, 1986). Authors such as David Harvey (1996) recorded the developments in neighboring disciplines and sought to create new interdisciplinary insights. Pronouncedly transdisciplinary human geographers such as Derek Gregory (1994) and Edward Soja (1996) incorporated the body in their analysis of 'deep space', adopting the ideas of feminist geographers and inspiring a new generation of cultural geographers. Soon afterwards, the sexual human being emerged in geography (e.g. Bell & Valentine, 1995; Mort & Nead, 2000; Bell et. al., 2001), indicating a long overdue departure from the strained analysis characteristic of much of the earlier human geography.

The main geographical work on gender, sexuality and the body was, however, done by feminist geographers. Authors such as Linda McDowell (1992, 1996), Susan Hanson (1992), Gillian Rose (1993), Doreen Massey (1994) and Nancy Duncan (1996) had been influenced by feminist social theorists, especially by Judith Butler (e.g. 1990). The

feminist geography suggests that we see the construction of gender and the construction of the environment proceeding simultaneously, in a process of interaction. Furthermore, it therefore suggests that we should see our environment as an active, political and conscious creation. Gender, sexuality and the body become space-structuring forces, and vice versa. Unfortunately, many 'second wave' feminists had their focus on relatively narrow gender politics of the body rather than the full variety of its societal implications, underlining the experience of certain (often privileged) women instead the diversity of women, and dismissing the Other gender. A good example of this is the 'geography of fear and oppression', a popular subject also in the Finnish feminist geography (e.g. Koskela, 1999).

Gender and the Body in Tourism

The need for gender-aware research was well argued also in the tourism and leisure studies of the 1990s (e.g. Dustin, 1992; Henderson, 1994; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Shaw, 1994; Richter, 1995; Swain, 1995). As Vivian Kinnaird and Derek Hall (ibid., 24) say, '*tourism revolves around social interaction and social articulations of motivations, desires, traditions and perceptions, all of which are gendered*'. Any societal study of tourism which ignores this basic standpoint is therefore today considered to be less than valid. There is no doubt that the two genders have a different involvement in the

construction and consumption of tourism, an involvement historically variable in different situational and societal contexts. Although not everything is gender and consequently sex related, there are tendencies in the ways people experience tourism which are not shared both by men and women.

Kinnaird and Hall (*ibid.*, 5) made the following statements on the importance of gender:

1. Tourism is a process that is constructed out of gendered societies and therefore all aspects of tourism related development and activity embody gender relations.

2. Gender relations both inform, and are informed, socially, in a number of diverse and complex ways. Tourism can consequently not be analyzed as a separate sphere of social, environmental and cultural life in any society.

3. Since tourism-related activity has become an important process of development, the social, economic and political relations which result are part of overall issues of power and control. These power relations can be articulated through race, class or gender.

Regarding case studies, special attention has been paid to sex tourism, which is a major part of the industry (e.g. Cohen, 1982; Graburn, 1983; Thanh-Dam, 1990; Hall, 1992; Leheny, 1995).

Fortunately, it is not only the woman who has been presented as a 'source of fun' in the research of tourism and prostitution. All forms of leisure, including sex tourism, have become accessible for women who live in Western societies (e.g. Momsen, 1993; Swain, 1995; Dahles, 2002). The difference between 'holiday romances' in Bali and the 'meat-markets' of Pattaya is not that great if we analyze these situations in terms of difference in wealth and power (see also Herold et. al., 2001).

Other fields of gender studies in tourism have included gender-aware employment studies (e.g. Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1994; Scott, 1995; Phillimore, 2002; Martin et. al., 2002), gendered aspects of tourism induced acculturation and marginalization (e.g. Swain, 1989; Nash & Smith, 1991; Marshall, 2001; Devedzic, 2002), gender in rural tourism (e.g. Canoves & Pérez, 2002), the effect of tourism on women's self-perception (e.g. Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Henrici, 2002), sexual and romantic relations between women travelers and local men (e.g. Meisch, 1995, 2002; Hottola, 2002a,b), celebration of gay sexuality in tourism (e.g. Johnston, 2001; Visser, 2003), the effect of gender in intercultural adaptation and conflicts (e.g. Brown, 1999; Hottola, 1999), gendered holiday experiences (e.g. Selännemi, 2002; Small, 2002), women's travel narratives (Garcia-Ramon & Albet i Mas, 2002), gender differences in tourist cognitive mapping (e.g. Young, 1999) and gendered motivational studies (e.g. McGehee et al., 1996; Anastassova, 2002). Additionally, we should not forget the gender-aware theoretical and empirical work women researchers have published in the field of

leisure, a discourse intimately close to that of tourism (e.g. Henderson, 1994; Shaw, 1994; Sky, 1994).

The new millennium has seen an increase in gender-aware tourism studies. The tradition is nevertheless a developing one and therefore offers a variety of relatively unexplored research topics. As Margaret Swain (1995) and Lynda Johnston (2001) have pointed out, there has for example been a virtual absence of sexuality and the body in tourism and leisure research. This absence has perhaps been most apparent in the theoretical work of tourist experience where analysis has tended to focus on distanced gaze instead of the embodied and lived space, and to avoid the subjects of sensuality and sexuality. This is rather surprising because sensuality, sexuality and the body play an important role in much of tourist lifeworlds. To give one obvious example, eroticized imagery and gender stereotyping are commonly used in tourism promotion to increase the desirability of tourism destinations (e.g. Dann, 1996). Nevertheless, the content of these images has only occasionally been critically analyzed (e.g. Oppermann & McKinley, 1997; Desmond, 1999; Hottola, 2002b).

And what about the tourist beach, the sea, the sand, the sun, and the local cuisine which are enjoyed by the tourists? The living human body is often the primary location of tourist pleasures. Tourism and travel are, after all, sensual experiences considering all of our senses (e.g. Porteous, 1986; Tuan, 1993; Rodaway, 1994). Perhaps the main weakness of the 1990s postmodern 'end of tourism' scenarios (e.g. Lash & Urry, 1994; Waters, 1995) was their supposition that visibility

could explain the whole of the tourist experience, when it actually is but one dimension of tourism (see also Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). As Susan Bordo (1997) points out, the Cartesian erasure of the body, 'the view from nowhere', had been traded for a postmodern dream of being 'everywhere'. And because this 'everywhere' was mediated by cyberspace, the being seemed to be everywhere and nowhere.

Dean MacCannell (1997) has indeed captured the essence of virtual reality by defining it as the 'death drive as entertainment'. We are not computer appendices but flesh and blood. Our brain does not go on vacation by itself. Our body is not merely a vehicle of the brain but an equally important mediator of our existence. We do not only see the Other environment. We hear it. We feel it through our skin. We inhale it into our lungs. We taste it in our mouth. It does not matter how many three-dimensional images can be restored in computers in the future. Imitations cannot substitute reality more than temporarily, and they wake up our desire to travel, much the same way movies, television and printed materials have done earlier. Virtual realities are in general no alternative to tourism and may eventually even increase it.

The Question of Feminism

The question of one's relation to feminism as an academic discourse and political movement, the inseparable dualism which often makes feminism such a unique subject, has remained a complicated

one. As already implied, negative perception of feminism often is the reason for the existing avoidance of gender, sexuality and the body as research topics in tourism geography. There are good reasons to hesitate in the adoption of feminist references and analysis. Feminism as a discourse and political movement has not always been open for criticism, external or internal, in the same sense many other discourses have been. Parts of it have become stagnated and represent the powers of the establishment rather than those of change and progress. The sexist stance towards men apparent in some feminist writings does not help the situation.

The emerging postfeminism, the new feminism of the next generation, and its celebration of individual choice have increased heterogeneity of opinion and critical discussion in the feminist movement, also by exposing the darker side of the second wave feminism; its hunger for power and control, and women suppressing and betraying women and men (e.g. Paglia, 1994; Wolf, 1994). Critical postfeminist studies (e.g. Sommers, 1994) have revealed a large number of false information and statistics produced and reproduced as academic research in the United States and Europe. In many similar cases, also in Finland, the overzealous researcher has decided to inflate the already significant numbers to create an overwhelmingly negative image including almost all of men. In the discourse of tourism, claims such as that of Jill Gay (1985, 34), published in *The Progressive* journal, are equally dubious. According to her, about 75 percent of Western male tourists who travel to Asia do it solely for the purpose of sexual

entertainment. The claim is not likely to be valid and has not been validated by Gay, either.

On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine gender-aware study in tourism which would totally ignore feminism and its recent developments. Feminism is, after all, the discourse which has promoted gender awareness and theoretical understanding of gendered power relations more than any other discourse in the academic world. Much of the feminist research is quite reliable and, at times, outstanding. There may occasionally be a strong subjective bias and tendency to be action oriented (cf. Lund, 1993), but even then one should take a second look. We need research which is meaningful in the improvement of everyday life. What is more, today's post-feminism is not 'against men' but also for men. Feminism is a diverse discipline with an interesting variety of often diametrically contradictory viewpoints regarding gender, sexuality and the body.

Reading feminist texts not only increases one's understanding of the gendered aspects of human social and cultural existence, but it also helps one to understand one's subjectivity as a male or female researcher and increases one's awareness of the situation of the Other gender. The emancipation of both men and women, and equality between the genders, are positive and necessary developments which serve both sexes if they are realized in the spirit of liberalism. According to this viewpoint, all human beings should irrespective of their gender, race or sexual preference have a right to control their social lives and their social bodies by themselves and live free of

oppressive control which too often emerges in human societies. Also in tourism we frequently encounter situations where people are mistreated because of their gender, or subjected to gender-insensitive services and practices. It is the duty of the students of tourism to critically examine and try to correct these situations.

Six approaches to gender

Karla Henderson (1994, 122) has named the five main approaches to the question of gender in leisure studies as the invisible ('womanless') scholarship, the compensatory ('add women and stir') scholarship, the dichotomous differences ('sex differences') scholarship, the feminist ('woman-centered') scholarship, and the gender scholarship ('relations of women and men'). Later on, a sixth scholarship has become established as a counterpart or an ally, depending from one's viewpoint, of the feminist approach; the masculinist ('man-centered') scholarship (e.g. Farrell, 1996). Together these scholarships form a palette to choose from, a guideline to define our relation to the question of gender. In human sciences, such a definition can not, after all, be avoided. We study people among whom the primary categorization is that of men and women; before we proceed to age, socioeconomic status, ethnic background and other more specific categories. Also among the researchers of the human society themselves, being a woman or a man makes a difference in the

practice of field enquiry.

The first two scholarships are more or less representative of the 'objective science'. To reject the body entirely equals accepting the traditional academic viewpoint that all humans are alike, in other words Cartesian 'men'. This approach is not only 'womanless', as Henderson says, but essentially 'manless', as well. In the logocentric world where the Cartesian brain rules there is no body, and therefore also no bodily passions or desires, or constraints explained by one's gender. In the reality of tourism the opposite is often discovered to be true. Those who realize this may occasionally adopt the compensatory scholarship, superficially adding the gender aspect in their texts in the end of the research project, as a forgotten ingredient which does not really have time to blend in the 'stew'. In many cases, this remains to be a rather empty gesture, with little difference to the invisible scholarship.

The dichotomous differences approach, on the other hand, is favored by researchers who are aware of the importance of gender but desire to keep distance to feminism (and masculinism). They often meticulously list and categorize the data, being true to their field material, but restrict their analysis and conclusions to a level which does not include the wider theoretical and societal implications of their discoveries. In other words, they maintain some of the ideals of 'objective science', a conceptual impossibility, by observing and documenting phenomena in a neutral way, but are not more than superficially interested in the theory and practice of tourism as an interactive activity involving men and women. This is a popular

approach which may be useful in explaining tourism phenomena on a structural level, although it does not really help in the understanding of lived tourist spaces and their individual implications. A good example would be a comparative study on tourism employment patterns in selected regions.

The feminist scholarship, on the other hand, focuses on the experience of women, and the improvement of their situation. It is therefore characteristically biased in its analysis of gender. The Other gender, the man, if present at all, has a secondary status at best, and may even be reduced to a level of stereotypic counter-image with little to do with the realities of men. Similarly, the masculinist approach focuses on issues particularly relevant to the everyday of men, and its improvement by seeking to emancipate them in situations where men experience misuse of power in the society because of their gender. Equally biased in its analysis, the masculinist approach tends to pay less attention to women and underline the male viewpoint. Both approaches are quite useful when the idea is to focus either on men or women, and to create a deep understanding of their situation. The studies tend to be action oriented, geared to solve a particular problem in the society. In tourism such problematic questions could include, for example, rural women's access to tourism, or the current (mis)treatment of Oriental men on vacation in the United States.

The last scholarship, gender scholarship, is the one out of the six main approaches which acknowledges both men and women, and is interested in their interaction, the inter-gender relations both on the

situational and societal level. In order to understand the full picture, as it is often desirable in tourism, we can not leave either of the two genders out of the analysis. The majority of social and cultural roles and activities are, after all, shared by men and women, including tourism. A study on daily decision making in package tourism to Portugal, for example, ideally includes the arguments and counter-arguments of both wives and husbands in its research material, and seeks to understand the whole interactive process. The gender scholarship probably is the approach which best answers the questions of gender in the societal discourse and provides most potential for understanding the experience of women and men in tourism.

The six approaches to gender are not, however, mutually exclusive in the practice of tourism research. A single research paper may utilize several different approaches side by side, depending on the topics studied and effectiveness of the approaches in each case. Let us imagine a research project on social interaction, use of space and creation of borderlines on a Mediterranean tourist beach. In the beginning, the dichotomous approach may be useful in the collection of basic data on, for example, the spatiotemporal aspects of beach life among men and women, singles, couples and family groups. As the researcher goes deeper in her analysis, the gender approach may best answer the questions of male-female interaction (gender relations). Specific questions such as sexual advances, including harassment, may be best explained against the theoretical background of feminism and masculinism. All these scholarships may be included in the project

which seeks to understand the tourist beach as a human lived space.

The Gendered Researcher

On the other side of the coin is the researcher himself. Especially in the qualitative tourism research the gender of the researcher and its consequences to the research practice and material should not be disregarded. The validity of the analysis and conclusions may only be measured by the others if a satisfactory amount of information on the qualities of the 'research instrument', the researcher, have been enclosed, and the potential and the limits of her gender have been discussed and evaluated. For example, male researchers are able to cover more space in traditional patriarchal tourism destinations (such as India) than women researchers because they can enter both the neutral and masculine spaces with relative ease. Their access to the women of the society is, however, limited and controlled by the relatives of the women approached. It is therefore easier for them to interview the local men than women on their opinion of tourists. Similar gender-related problems occur also in the more open, modern societies.

Men and women not only have differentiated access to knowledge but also have their societally constructed ways to see and analyze the information collected. In addition to the individual variation, the male and female gazes tend to produce somewhat different pictures of the world, also in tourism studies. This is a fact

which should be kept in mind when one seeks to understand the variety of gender-related issues in tourism. In the development of tourism services, for example, a male or female gaze easily focuses on features preferred by his/her own gender, and may neglect the other viewpoint unless he/she is aware of such a risk and remembers to analyze his/her standpoints in a critical manner during the research process. At the end of the day, even when we make a determined attempt to understand the Other gender, to adopt the Other position, we tend to fail at least to some degree. A mixed sex research team would be an ideal solution in many cases.

This does not mean that only women can 'do' gender or that only men can understand men (see also Spivak & Gunew, 1993; Fine, 1994). The first notion appears to be a surprisingly common presupposition, and is also actively advocated by some feminist geographers (e.g. Rose, 1993, 33), despite the fact that the experience of women by itself can not be taken as a basis of societal theory concerning phenomena shared by both women and men. Both sexes have the potential to eradicate gender-related problems in international tourism, to help the representatives of the Other gender whenever it is discovered to be necessary.

What is more, studies of the Other gender/sex/body can also be seen as an effective medium of self-examination and reassessment. Women who study men and men who study women inevitably confront their personal views of gender issues. This may be a source of personal growth and improvement of the validity and reliability of one's research

work. Ontologically, there is no masculine or feminine truth. The truth is all-inclusive. Unfortunately we are unable to find that truth in a scientific way and have to satisfy ourselves with various truths of temporal validity, which may be gendered. We need everyone's contribution to find the partial knowledges available to us. Classical emancipatory feminism, not to mention post-feminism and the more progressive branches of masculinism, not only allow but encourage all human beings, irrespective of their gender, to raise their voices. In order to reach the common goal, sustainable tourism, we should listen those voices and develop tourism accordingly.

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