

Book Reviews

Dorothy Moss, *Gender, Space and Time: Women and Higher Education* (Lexington Books, London and Lanham, MD: 2006), 273 pp., ISBN 13:978-0-7391-0997-7.

This book represents a departure from much of the research on women in contemporary higher education in that it focuses less on practices within institutions and more on the ways in which women manage and experience their studies as a part of their lives. Moss explores the diverse ways in which women's physical, social and emotional approaches and reactions play out in the spaces and times of home and family, paid work, leisure and their communities. The research was set in a small town in the north of England, and the women were in or had just completed their final year of programs in social, community, health or leisure studies. They represent a range of personal characteristics in terms of age (early 20s to mid-40s), social class (though they tended to self-identify as working class), color and "geographic origin" (some specified Asian or Afro-Caribbean), sexuality, and marital and parental status. About half had entered higher education directly from school, the others from colleges of further education. About 80 percent were in paid work at the time of the study; some reported small grants, social benefit payments, loans or parental financial assistance; and about 20 percent had financial support from a male partner. I detail these attributes since the make up of the study group has bearing on the findings. So too, do the place setting and type of institution, although these are not aspects of "space" that are central in the discussion.

Moss's research dates initially from the late 1990s, a time when the larger political-economic and social policies were leading to changes in higher education that had considerable implications for priorities in research, curricula and academic calendars and for students' daily lives. Among these were restructuring of the annual time organization of courses and the availability of affordable housing on or off campus. These contextual changes were relevant for women's management of their daily lives and studies.

The first half of the book offers detailed reviews of literature. Chapter 2 examines feminist approaches to research on women, with Moss favoring "critical realist" perspectives and the complementarity of structural and post-structural theoretical positions rather than adherence to one or the other. In Chapter 3, she reviews multiple

theoretical approaches to understanding “space” and “time”; in Chapter 4, theories on spatial and temporal relations in women’s everyday lives; and in Chapter 5, spatial and temporal relations in higher education. From these reviews she advocates approaches to conducting research that will address conjunctions of space and time (Chapter 6). Together, these chapters take up almost half the book. They explore many perspectives, including those of widely known social and spatial theorists (for example, Anthony Giddens, Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, John Urry, Nigel Thrift) and scholars who have examined time from the perspective of its social dimensions and feminism (such as Barbara Adam). It is not possible for me to summarize the complex perspectives of these writers—and reading these chapters does leave one wondering when Moss will present her own research on women students. The chapters are a reminder that the book is a published version of Moss’s doctoral dissertation. As such, it has the extended literature review to justify the research approaches. Still, these chapters could serve as useful assessments of perspectives to bring to bear on space/time, at least as these were articulated by the late 1990s. Moss draws on them in developing her research methodology and research questions.

For me, the empirical study in the second half of the book is more interesting. Moss employs two main strategies. The first engaged 44 women students with whom she had contact as a teacher. They were asked to complete a written survey that enabled open-ended responses. The second, which serves as the main basis for her research, involved interviews with a sample of 17 of those women after they had completed their final year of studies. By waiting until this time, issues of power relations with teacher and student were reduced. Moss chose the interviewees to include diversity based on age, living with or without dependent children, color, geographical heritage (specifically self-identifications as Afro-Caribbean or Asian), type of residence, sexuality, income, living with partners or alone, with or without caring responsibilities, and on the basis of health or impairment. She also kept a personal log in order to reflect on the processes and challenges of her research.

In Chapter 7, drawing on the survey, Moss presents what she describes as “snapshots” of spatial and temporal strategies—static images of the web of relationships at specific times and places, rather than explorations of their emotional meanings. She examines categories of women and activities in separate sections of the chapter, such as the salience of age/life stage in relation to ways in which integrating parenting is a factor in how women manage times and places for study, or how age intersects with motivation for undertaking higher education (e.g., to enhance self-esteem or to prepare for employment). Particularly interesting in terms of gender and the women’s current paid work and study time is the author’s examination of limits on occupational choices (e.g., part-time and shift work in care facilities), as well as how women may maneuver in such jobs to find brief opportunities for study time.

In the following chapter, Moss turns to the “landscapes” of space and time and draws on the interviews for insights into longer term perspectives that illustrate the women’s emotional values, expectations, choices and responses to others. These may be influenced by experiences of their youth, desires for change, the regimes and structures of higher education or the expectations of their partners. The examples reflect stresses generated by gender norms, such as assumptions about good mothering and tidy homes, or traditions of segmentation of spaces within homes for specific purposes. What are the options and preferences for places and times to study? How are resistances of others expressed and handled?

The temporal and spatial environments of institutions of higher education are the focus of Chapter 9. Emphasized are not only the rigidities of deadlines (such as semester exams and projects), but also access to and uses of spaces on campus. This is one of the few chapters where attention extends beyond the emphasis of living with families (whether with partners, children or parents) to examples from students living in residence halls regarding their feelings about noise, access to study areas or other facilities, or the uncongenial time behavior of their peers.

In Chapter 10, Moss presents interpretations of the ways that women handle the overlapping challenges of time and space in their studies, especially in relation to barriers or obstacles they encounter. She identifies “women as centers of action” and examines pathways that involve negotiations with both space and time. Examples include attention to navigating hours of the day or spaces within the house for study that may mean challenging or working around the constraints imposed or expressed by the preferences, expectations and needs of others. She draws especially on the thinking of Adam and Lefebvre on rhythms and ways in which bodies attempt to unite time as they move through spaces, making choices that consciously integrate domains in their daily and periodic rhythms, and how they manage discordant priorities.

The concluding chapter (11) summarizes the research findings and their wider implications. Moss points out the importance of the intersections of multiple spheres of individual experiences, present and past, and the power dimensions that impinge upon decisions and opportunities, as these involve state policies, workplace conventions, and cultural and personal resources and values. She advocates the utility of the constructs of space and place at multiple levels, not only in relation to higher education, but also in other arenas in which women are attempting to change their lives. The chapter concludes with reflections of Moss’s personal space/time practices and emotions while undertaking the research and writing. The book also includes appendices with the research instruments, summaries of the quantitative survey data, short profiles of the women interviewed and the timeline of her work.

Overall, the chief contribution of this book is in its approach to and validation of bringing together space and time as a way of understanding opportunities and

strategies for change in women's lives. As research on women and higher education, Moss's empirical findings are somewhat bound by the specificity of the locality and the curricula that these women were pursuing. I had the impression that the interview material drew disproportionately on the women living off campus and of those with family responsibilities. How might findings differ if, for example, the study had involved higher proportions of younger women, a larger urban setting or type of institution, students from middle and higher income backgrounds, current international students, or those pursuing courses that required laboratory or field time, and not mostly classroom education, essay writing and exams? As a "book," this work retains the somewhat laborious style of a doctoral dissertation—densely written and extensive reviews of the literature, repetition in the structure of each chapter (what it will do, what it does, what it did), and, for current readers, the limitation that the literature reviewed is mostly from the 1990s or earlier. Nevertheless, it remains a useful contribution to the literature for widening understanding of the meanings of higher education for women, as well as for its attention to diversity among women and the complexities that need to be negotiated to make changes in educational systems that continue to present constraints of time and space.

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Karen M. Morin and Jeanne Kay Guelke (eds.), *Women, Religion and Space; Global Perspectives on Gender and Faith* (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse: 2007), 216 pp.

First, a disclaimer: I am not a geographer. My interest in space as an analytic category is secondary to my interest in social and political critique, including feminist critique, of Judaism and Israel, and of human societies and their cultural history at large. It follows that I am impressed by the centrality of space as an analytic category not in itself, but only to the extent that it strikes me as a central concept that throws new light on the topic it deals with. Thus, I found that geographers such as Oren Yiftachel (1997) have indeed advanced the academic discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by standing previous research on its head and making the issue of space—the control of territory—the major prism for reexamining well-known facts. A different narrative has emerged and aroused new controversies.

Can the same be said about the present collection of articles, that bring the concept of space to the study of gender and religion? In all honesty, I think not.