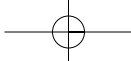# ACROSS AND BEYOND SOCIAL DIFFERENCE

PART
III

While the chapters in Part II of this book have presented a record of core work being completed in contemporary social geography, scholars have wished not only to highlight these differences, but also to look forward. Considering these differences, they have asked why, how and so what? They have also asked where next, and what changes are possible? These questions have encouraged geographers to respect – but look beyond – the specialist research details and conceptual debates surrounding specific differences like class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. While not discarding them, many social geographers have turned to consider how social differences can be further understood (even challenged and reshaped). As a result, I have structured the third part of this book as a way to investigate the concepts and work that scholars are considering both *across* and *beyond* difference. The following chapters enable us to consider how people and groups may connect and mobilize around particular differences, experiences or goals, using constructions of difference and space strategically in the process.

Chapter 7 commences with identity, a topic that can be both a personal and an accessible way to interrogate how social differences coincide and an accumulate in layers of uneven meanings and relations for individual lives, specific places or even imagined national identities. Chapter 8 focuses on the concept of power as a notion that underlies the formation and struggle over both social differences and expressions of identity. The chapter reviews a variety of ways power is conceived and then highlights both the institutional and informal relations and struggles that social geographers have investigated in their interest with the processes and outcomes of power. Finally, Chapter 9 extends the general interest in power to a specific focus on one outcome of power relations, namely the exercise of social action. The chapter records geographers' approaches to the notion of social action and the investigation of how difference, identity and power are played out when people take action in different settings and forms (e.g. individual acts, formal organizations or more fluid social movements).

Together, these three chapters provide avenues for both recognizing and moving beyond the potential divisions that can occur when we highlight categories of social difference. Moreover, unlike some recent geographies that focus more on spaces and scales (Valentine, 2000) or processes, flows and problems (e.g. consumption, leisure money, crime, poverty or globalization:

Hubbard et al., 2002; Pain et al., 2001), this set of chapters concentrates on strategic concepts that can be used to combine study and imaginings of alternative futures for the social relations, struggles and opportunities that shape our place-specific, spatially-potent social lives.
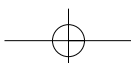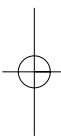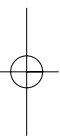
Identity

7

7.1 INTRODUCTION: RECOGNIZING SOCIAL DIFFERENCE THROUGH EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY

How would you describe yourself?

Would this description vary depending on whether you were talking to a friend, grandparent or employer?

Would this description be associated with particular places or types of space?

Would you use a different description in your parents' home at university, at a police station, or on a holiday in Amsterdam or Bangkok?

Take a few moments to answer these questions in some oral, written or visual way. If you do, you will likely find that you use a variety of descriptors that might convey your class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, but a whole array of other attributes, including personal interests and qualities together with selections from a wider set of social values and norms.

This type of exercise quickly shows how we constantly negotiate a variety of social differences in our daily lives; and how, across the differences, we experience moments of recognition and identification with other people and groups. Geographies of identity can show how we experience identity through interconnecting formations of ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality and so on (Dwyer, 1999). These geographies also show how processes of identification involve spatial relations, or how *where* we are (in physical, social and discursive senses) will affect the identities we might choose to convey, as well as the way others may identify us.

A descriptive activity like that suggested above can indicate the varied way we live and perform a selection of identities in different circumstances and places. For instance, while initially drafting this chapter, I lived for two weeks in a student college while visiting the geography department at the University of Glasgow. It was the beginning of the

autumn term and the energy, activity (and occasional inebriation) of the new students establishing their life in the college meant that I had plenty of occasions to dwell on issues of identity (mine and theirs)! In the week before arriving, I was very conscious of my identity as a mother, for I was about to leave my son and daughter in New Zealand. Once in Glasgow, I see-sawed between this identification as a mother and my professional identity as a visiting academic. I was also conscious of both my shared identity with first-year students as a 'new user' of the college facilities and as someone negotiating access to the university campus. I was equally aware of how I held contrasting identities. I spoke as an Australian who often had to work hard to understand the Scottish accents of these pre-dominantly 'local' first years. I also looked and behaved as a slightly unconventional older woman. A woman who had very short hair, and who tended to walk alone, mainly in daylight, and in utilitarian ways down Byers Rd. This contrasted with the highly social and relaxed way many groups of young male and female students traversed the same street together at all times of the day and night. These experiences reminded me that identities are simultaneously always about both recognition and difference (Hetherington, 1998; Pratt, 1999b). I recognized shared experiences as a resident of the college and as an academic in the department, but I also experienced many differences: from accents, through choices in femininities, to daily patterns of movement. Cumulatively, these experiences reaffirmed for me that identities involve sets of meanings and qualities that we convey (or sometimes set aside) in order to establish recognition and difference with others. They are constantly negotiated and read by ourselves and others, and they change in value and implications in different places.

This chapter outlines how notions of identity are used in contemporary social geography and it focuses on the social and spatial ways in which identities are both constructed and contested. The next section (7.2) reviews how identity has been theorized. It explains how recent attention has been given to the constructed nature of identities, having both relational and spatial dimensions. Section 7.3 considers the different ways geographies of identity have been assembled. Note is made of the different scales at which identity has been studied, and the political nature of identities. It shows that many individuals and groups can selectively and explicitly engage with strategic identities – both those they wish to promote and support, and those they wish to challenge or contest. This discussion forms one bridge between the preceding chapters on social difference and these latter chapters, looking at the ways people work with, and across, difference. It draws together the purposeful ways social differences are negotiated and, in looking forward to Chapters 8 and 9, it highlights some of the power relations and actions that are involved when individuals or groups engage with questions of identity.

TABLE 7.1 CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY

Theorist/Thinker	Perspective on identity
Descartes (Orthodox European Philosophy)	Identity is based on the notion of an autonomous thinking self who can both form independent meaning and act with agency.
Durkheim (Sociology)	As a challenge to individualism, identity for the individual is seen as an outcome of society, including its dominant norms and values, as well as the way its economic life is organised.
Freud (Pscyhoanalysis)	Identity is based on the complex self that is produced from relationships between the instinctive 'id', the wider cultural and moral consciousness of the 'super-ego' and the individual ego.
Althusser (Structural Marxist Philosopher)	Identity is produced through ideology via social institutions which position subjects within society (e.g. via church, education, media).
Foucault (Poststructural History)	Identity (of self or other phenomena) is constructed through discourses which position subjects (both those being produced through the text and those reading or consuming the discourse).

7.2 CONCEPTUALIZING IDENTITY

Identity has a long history as a concept in philosophy, psychology and more recently social and cultural theory. A sketch of five broadly different views is provided in Table 7.1. The first four thinkers draw on orthodox or structuralist thinking, which, in different forms, sees identity in relation to notions of 'self' as a stable and autonomous entity, or as an entity shaped by the context and structures surrounding one's life. In contrast, Foucault's approach emphasizes the process by which individuals and groups are positioned and identified through discourse; where a sense of self cannot be fixed or certain, but instead is experienced in different ways, through a variety of different *subject* positions. Within social geography, work in the 1980s and 1990s had included Marxist geographers' attention to 'class consciousness' and feminists geographers' attention to gender identities and racial or class identities that disrupt broad categories of 'woman' and 'man'. However, concepts of identity have received greatest attention since the 1990s as postmodern and poststructural approaches overtook the popularity of the critical and humanist work of the 1970s and 1980s. Consequently, non-essential and poststructural approaches to identity taken by Foucault (1990) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have been widely

embraced by geographers (see, for example, Massey, 1999; Natter and Jones, 1997). Poststructural thinking has encouraged investigations of identity as multiply defined and unfixed phenomena, where the self (or others or places) is constructed through discourses and social relations. Identity is thus recognized through both discursive subject positions and social encounters.

Universities provide a useful example of discursive identity formation. University spaces and promotional materials, regulations and graduation ceremonies involve institutional discourses that can construct a 'student' identity (see Figure 7.1). Alternatively, local and student newspapers are part of a popular discourse that may construct student identities in quite contrasting ways. Each of these discourses highlights certain aspects and differences that are assembled to constitute knowledge of a particular category. Identity involves the meanings and expressions of self (as student), and others (e.g. lecturers, administrators), and places (e.g. offices, lecture theatres, graduation ceremonies) that may appear relatively stable and singular but are likely to be multiple and unstable, and may be challenged or renegotiated in a range of ways.

Identities may be attached to many contrasting phenomena: identity of the self, identification of others, and identification of places (e.g. a town or community identity). Each of these identities is a social construction, developed as social understandings that may define our experiences of difference and sameness, and that will form boundaries. For instance, Wall explains:

> The process of identity is experienced through constructing boundaries between Self and other, the conceptualisation of groupings: an inclusionary sense of shared connection and affinity held by people, contrived in opposition to exclusionary imaginings of difference. (Wall, 2000: 82)

This self/other construction of identity has been a powerful consideration for many social geographers and sociologists, and it encourages a focus on how boundaries work, boundaries that can aim to define self but also create distance from 'others'. Hetherington's account of this process echoes and elaborates Wall's, as he argues:

> Identity is ... associated with processes of self-recognition, belonging and identification with others. Identity is also a way whereby we create forms of distinction between ourselves and those who we see as being like us and those who we see as different. We generally do this by creating divisions between those with whom we identify and those with whom we do not. Identity, therefore, is how we do membership and how we include or exclude others from membership of a particular identification. (Hetherington, 2000: 92)

While sociologists may concentrate on the social processes of such identification, social geographers can combine an interest in both the social
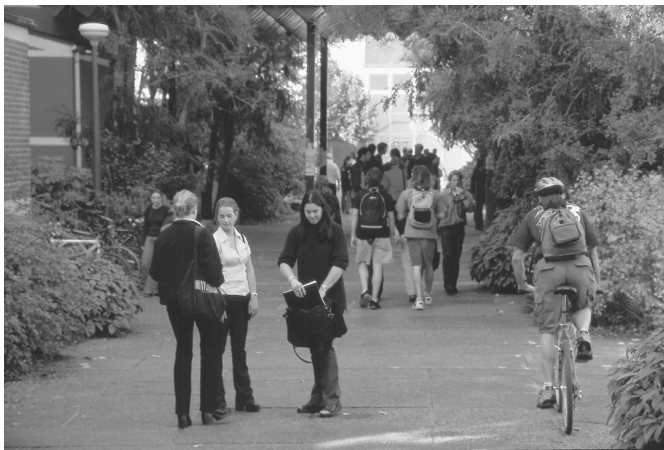
FIGURE 7.1   CONSTRUCTED STUDENT IDENTITIES
Source: University of Otago

processes and the spatial dimensions involved, for space is implicated in constructing an identity, drawing boundaries or distinguishing/excluding others. Massey explains this by stating:

> [W]e make, and constantly remake, the spaces and places and identities through which we live our lives. This applies to the ways ... we construct our personal and communal identities ... to how we construct the spaces of 'home' and of 'employment' and how we negotiate the power relations and the boundaries which exist between them. (Massey, 1999: 291)

As will be shown in section 7.3, these spatial considerations are a major part of contemporary geographies of identity as different scholars have considered the personal through to national and international spaces that are constructed and negotiated in forming – or performing – identities.

Identity is 'done', therefore, through discourse and through space via dynamic processes of formation and expression. In terms of identity formation, two dimensions have stimulated and shaped geographers' work. First, identities are seen to be formed through discursive processes or narrative. By attending to the narratives individuals and institutions construct, it is possible to document and read (or deconstruct) the 'narrative constitution of identity' (Somers, 1994). Somers argues that narratives enable us to locate ourselves on the basis of certain collections or meaning:

> [P]eople make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives. ... [P]eople are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public and cultural narratives. (Somers, 1994: 614)

Somers (1994) points to different forms of narrative, including ontological narratives or stories by which we make sense of who we are (and therefore what we may choose to do); public narratives expressed through culture and institutions (e.g. 'working-class hero'); and metanarratives or master narratives by which history and society are recounted, (e.g. Enlightenment, Modernization, Nationalism, Globalization). Somers' perspective has been most commonly adopted in the study of people and personal identity. However, other authors have also noted that 'constitutive narrative' processes can involve the production of identities that are attached to places and communities (Bellah et al., 1985; Entrikin, 1991; Shotter, 1993). In section 7.3 we will see some geographies of narrative identity, where both personal and place-based identities are formed through the different social and spatial relations.

The second aspect in conceptualizing identity formation that has influenced geographers' conceptual and empirical work involves the way identity is practised. Attention to this enactment of identity has centred on concepts of **performativity** or **identity politics**. Identities are performed through

bodies, language, dress, actions, spaces. This view encourages the study of identity beyond language and discursive processes. It highlights the idea that identities are practised and articulated, thus different expressive arenas have been considered (e.g. music: Wall, 2000; food: Valentine, 1999; media: Jackson et al., 1999; and work practices: McDowell, 2002b). However, theories of performativity highlight the fact that expression of identity is not necessarily freely expressed or voluntary (Butler, 1990, 1997; Gregson and Rose, 2000). For instance, Gonzalez and Habel-Pallan (1994: 82) have noted that 'identity is not simply a matter of choice or free will, but is rather a negotiation between what one has to work with, and where one takes it from there'. The act of 'taking up' an identity focuses attention on the dynamism or active expression of identity. This resonates with Butler's accounts of performativity, for identity can be understood not only via discourse but also through the performance of meanings and categories that involve bodies and actions with social processes and historic contexts. And, as shown in Chapters 4–6, these contexts frequently privilege certain social differences as norms (e.g. masculine, white and heterosexual norms).

Alongside the attention given to performance or articulation of identity, the power relations and politics of identity have also stimulated theoretical and empiric thought. As poststructural approaches have highlighted the unfixed and contested nature of identity, power relations have come into focus – especially their role in contextualizing the formation and practice of identity. Massey explains:

> Identities' ... are temporary ... held together by different relations, with varying degrees of longevity, and so forth. What is (or could be) at issue politically is the power relations through which such identities are constituted and those through which they interact with each other and the wider world. (Massey, 1999: 291)

Identity politics is the most common way in which these power relations are interrogated. Identity politics may be formally practised as different activist groups or social movements strategically construct and promote key cultural identities (or challenge those they wish to see changed). Considerable work has been done in investigating these political choices and negotiations. The spatialization of identity politics has been especially important for geographies of identity (Keith and Pile, 1993). Debates around the way that social struggles over identity *take up* or *reshape/reconstruct* space have enabled study of the locations, 'space/time', **margins**, and alternative spaces of identity politics (Bondi, 1993; hooks, 1990; Knopp, 1998; Massey, 1999; Soja and Hooper, 1993). Examples of how these ideas have influence geographic studies are detailed in section 7.3.2.

Beyond the view of 'identity politics' as a fairly formalized activist struggle, the term can also be recognized in the less organized and more informal ways in which individuals experience and work with (or around) identities. In these cases, identities can be understood through practices of

'mixing' and 'managing'. For example, Hetherington (1998: 26) argues that 'identity involves combination and the mixing of things at hand, and an ordering associated with that process of mixing'. This can be suggestive of a degree of a freedom that many people will not necessarily enjoy, since some forms of sexuality, ethnicity or disability may involve identities that are constrained or excluded in certain settings. Thus Valentine's (1993b) notion of 'managing' identities is probably a more appropriate argument for understanding some identities. She has shown how gay women have needed self-consciously to manage multiple sexual identities as they move between different social spaces, as will be detailed in the following section.

7.3 GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY

Studies of identity have become increasingly common in recent years as social geographers have been influenced by cultural theories and reinvigorated cultural geographies. While previous 'modernist' approaches to identity focused on relatively structured 'lifescripts' that where thought to shape identity formation (Hetherington, 1998: 23), contemporary geographies of identity have drawn primarily on new cultural impulses and poststructural theories. This has allowed researchers to consider the multiple and constructed nature of subject positions generated by competing discourses, e.g. of 'women' or 'healthy bodies' or 'race' or 'sanity', etc. The work of Karen Morin is an example of this trend in contemporary social geographies and a brief biography of her approach and research is included in Part V while a detailed description of one of her collaborative works in discussed in section 7.3.1.

Social geography has long included analyses (and classifications) of different types of people and places (e.g. of working classes, or migrants, or neighbourhoods, or ghettos). But, the term 'identity' has become an effective shorthand way to signal some of the key discursive and material qualities or meanings that might be associated with, or re-present, these different groups of people or places. Identity is therefore a useful concept for highlighting the competing meanings that might have broad currency and that distil (or selectively summarize) some features over others. It is also a notion that suggests action to the degree that meanings associated with any particular identity will be conveyed (purposefully or not) in a range of ways, e.g. through dress, language, behaviour, symbols. Attention to these practices and texts mean that social geographers are concentrating on how identities are constructed, re-presented and even struggled over (see summary in Figure 7.2).

7.3.1 Scaled accounts of identity: relational and performed identity

Geographers have investigated identity at many scales. In recent years, geographers have increasingly debated and reconfigured the notion of
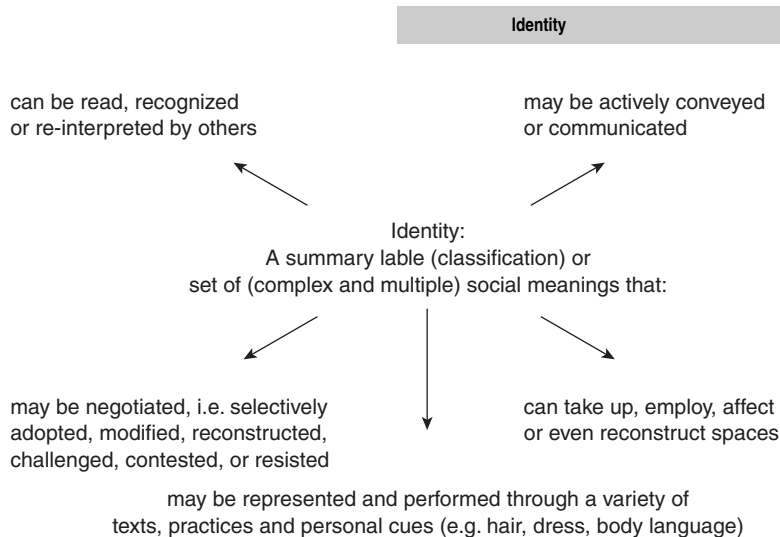
Identity

can be read, recognized
or re-interpreted by others

may be actively conveyed
or communicated

Identity:
A summary lable (classification) or
set of (complex and multiple) social meanings that:

may be negotiated, i.e. selectively
adopted, modified, reconstructed,
challenged, contested, or resisted

can take up, employ, affect
or even reconstruct spaces

may be represented and performed through a variety of
texts, practices and personal cues (e.g. hair, dress, body language)

FIGURE 7.2   GEOGRAPHIC FOCI ON IDENTITY

scale. For simplicity′s sake, I have used the term here to refer to different
levels of attention and representation geographers have used in approach-
ing identity. However, scale is *not* seen as *absolute.* Nor are different scales
seen to be inevitably or naturally indicative of specific relationships or
processes. Rather, scale is recognized as a notion and a set of arenas of
activity that are actively *produced* in economic, social and political ways
(Delaney and Leitner, 1997; Smith, 1992b). The following discussion notes
three of these levels of foci: individual, place and nation. Table 7.2 pro-
vides an overview of this type of work. Across these examples we can see
the spatial and relational ways identity is formed and performed.

In the case of homeless young people in Newcastle, Australia,
Winchester and Costello (1995) reported that the personal and group iden-
tities of ′street kid/s′ were communicated or performed in social, material
and spatial ways. They showed that street kids demonstrated their shared
identity through territorial identification (including the coding of spaces
with graffiti) and social codes.

> The street kids were territorial in their use of derelict land and property
> and adjacent waterfront both as residential and activity space ... their
> residential space ... consisted of squats in abandoned warehouses, offices,
> houses, and other property. ... Their activity space often focused on the
> SOS centre for meals, and on various squats, corners, and parts of the
> waterfront as hangouts. ... The group was not only territorial, but had a
> number of identifiable characteristics and symbolic identifiers. ... In
> particular, they chose generally to dress in black jeans, T-shirts, and sloppy
> joes or jackets, wearing Doc Martin boots or Reebok training shoes on

TABLE 7.2 GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY AT DIFFERENT SCALES: SELECTED EXAMPLES

Scale (Chapter section)	Example (Author/s)	Relational and spatial themes
Individual (7.3.1)	British Muslim young women's personal identities (Dwyer, 1998, 1999)	• Young women experiment with and assemble identities that alternatively (or simultaneously) connect them with family and ethnic communities as well as wider British culture. • Choice of 'Asian' or 'western' dress allows identity to be expressed and actively performed through the spaces of the body.
Individual (7.3.1)	Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, Canada (Pratt, 1999a, 1999b)	• Domestic workers' identities link gender and ethnicity and class. • Bounding and using space (e.g. bedrooms) can express personal territory and difference.
Individual (7.3.1)	Lesbians' negotiation of identity in different everyday places in Britain and Aotearoa/ New Zealand (Valentine, 1993a, 1993b; Johnston and Valentine, 1995)	• Lesbians express their identity to each other through dress, social interaction and arrangement of personal space. • Lesbians 'manage' their sexual identity and relations within wider heterosexual society and public spaces.
Individual and place (7.3.1)	'Street kids' expression of identity and creation of their own space within Newcastle, an Australian city (Winchester and Costello, 1995)	• Group identity is expressed through symbols and actions including dress, aggressive behaviour, language, moral codes of mutual aid and graffiti. • Performance of identity is spatial (e.g. territorial behaviour in derelict properties and subversion of formal (policed) boundaries and uses of space.
Place (7.3.1, 7.3.2)	Formation of a gay identity for a local neighbourhood in Los Angeles (Forest, 1995)	• An identity (based on a form of gay male lifestyle) is constructed and attached to a specific urban area. • West Hollywood's identity is expressed through meanings and specific spaces associated with gayness (e.g. creativity, aesthetic sensibility and consumption).

(Continued)

TABLE 7.2   *Continued*

Scale (Chapter section)	Example (Author/s)	Relational and spatial themes
Place/ Community (7.3.1)	Expressions of community identity in the face of proposed superquarries in Scotland and Canada (Dalby and Mackenzie, 1997)	• Community identity is formed as a strategic resistance to external mining threats. • Identity is mobilized around symbols (e.g. the Canadian mountain: Kluskap; the Scottish tradition of crafting) to create boundaries between those sharing recognition of the symbol and 'outsider' developers.
National (7.3.2)	Formation of (Finnish) national identity through athletics (Tervo, 2001)	• National identity is formed through narratives of competition and victory in Olympic sports. • Expressions of this sport-based identity are selectively masculine and confine women's position to conservative and traditional identities and roles.
National (7.3.2)	Formation of (New Zealand) national identity through mountaineering (Morin et al., 2001)	• National identity is formed through mountaineering narratives that are gender, ethnicity and class specific. • Expressions of this heroic masculine identity marginalized the many other social groups and cultural values that have surrounded mountains and the Aoetearoa/New Zealand population.

their feet. This in no way distinguished them from many other teenagers. Their behaviour and language [however] were generally more extreme than would be expected from school children. Their behaviour was often aggressive, and included stealing, alcohol abuse ... and foul language ... (Costello and Winchestor, 1995: 336)

Winchester and Costello (1995: 338) also documented the social and cultural practice of this street kid identity – through the use of strong moral codes, including 'mutual help and support', 'violent action in defence of its members' and 'respect' for prior occupation of squats by other 'owners'. Together, these practices created a recognizable performance and spatialization of identity and lifestyle.

Other examples of performed identities are shown in geographies of lesbian choices. Sexual identities are constructed and communicated through 'subcultural codes contained in dress, body language and conversation'

(Valentine, 1993b: 244). These identities may be constructed through individual actions and choices while also being read by others who may interpret and recognize them. They are not simply selected by individuals, but rather, lesbians often move between and perform different sexual identities over time and space. Valentine's (1993a, 1993b) work highlights how a variety of everyday spaces create identity conflicts that can sometimes be anticipated and that need to be managed.

> [B]ecause of the taken-for-granted assumption that everyone is hetero-sexual and the inaccurate images of lesbianism, gay women are often able to 'pass' as heterosexual, and choose when and where to disclose their sexual identity. … Some women are careful to express their lesbian identity only in public places at specific times. For example several women interviewed feel able to walk through the town centre at night holding hands with a partner because they anticipate they are unlikely to meet anyone they know, but they would not do this on a Saturday morning when family, friends and colleagues are likely to be out shopping. (Valentine, 1993b: 241, 244)

Valentine's work shows that for lesbians identity involves constant selection and management of sexual identities through different social contexts and spaces. And in Chapter 6 (section 6.4.1) we saw how both British and New Zealand lesbians actively managed their dress, the arrangement of their homes and their interaction with friends, family and colleagues in order to express or conceal their sexual identity (Johnston and Valentine, 1995). In this way identities both involve social relations and the negotiation of different spaces.

This combination of individual and external recognition of identity is also explored in the work of Claire Dwyer (1998, 1999). Her research shows how young British Muslim women explore a variety of different identities that are based on notions of femininity, Islam, and Muslim and western cultures. 'Gender, class, ethnicity, racism and religion' are entwined as young women explore and select ways to express a sense of themselves. One way identity was performed involved young women's choices of dress. Dwyer (1999: 20) argues that for Muslim young women 'dress functions as a contested signifier of identity'. Both their own dress choice, and other people's reading of that dress, are full of meanings, depending on whether they were wearing traditional Asian or western clothes:

> 'Asian clothes' are signifiers for young women's religious and ethnic integrity. They draw on representations of feminine (hetero)sexuality, where 'English clothes' signify rebelliousness and active sexuality and threaten religious or ethnic 'purity'. (Dwyer, 1999: 11)

Dwyer's work also highlights the *spatial* nature of identities since the social constructions and choices that are managed by these Muslim women

are constantly shifting and negotiated through space. For instance, some young women explained:

> Sameera: I'm constantly thinking about what people will think of me, they must think that I'm really typical. Even when I haven't got a scarf on my head, but I'm like in Asian clothes, I'm so paranoid. Oh people must think typical … you know that I'm from the dark ages and that. …

> Rozina: If you just walk down the streets and you've got trousers on and one lady says 'I saw her' and that's all they do they gossip.

> Shamin: They say 'I saw so-and-so's daughter and she's started going out with boys' … just because you're wearing English clothes. (Dwyer, 1998: 56–57)

Dwyer's work shows that everyday spaces will need constant negotiation. She illustrates how identities use or take up space, and how they can be differently interpreted in various spaces. Whether they are in their home, in a local street or at school, these young women will be making choices and taking opportunities to maintain, challenge or mix identities. For instance, Dwyer's analysis of interaction in the female school toilets and a school fashion show indicated that these spaces enabled young women to explore the possibility of alternative or hybrid identities – trying things out. These were important experimental spaces that contrasted with the more challenging conditions and expectations of women that were experienced in public spaces such as their local streets or the universities they planned to attend.

Beyond the scale of individual people's lives and personal identities, we can also see place-based and national identity formation. These are very much *social* projects, even though they involve attaching meanings and identity to particular forms of space. In the case of Forest's (1995) study of sexuality and place in Los Angeles, we see how a strategic gay identity was constructed during the lobby for independent local authority incorporation of the area known as West Hollywood. As noted in section 7.2, identity formation can mobilize and project a commonly recognized identity that belies difference, and this was the case where a specific gay male identity was promoted ahead of the diversity of sexual, gender and class differences existing in the population. Drawing on ideas of the narrative constitution of identity, Forest documents the way a specific gay identity was constructed through the press where a gay discourse narrated themes that associated stereotypical aspects of gay identity with the local character of West Hollywood as a self-governing municipality:

> The gay press tried to construct a stable identity for gays by creating a necessary connection between the city of West Hollywood and the 'idea' of gays. … This connection was established through the construction of a 'constitutive narrative' that sought to establish the 'sexual meaning' of West

> Hollywood, along with elements such as occupations, norms of behaviour, clothing styles, political outlooks, and cultural activities. ... As an ideal city, West Hollywood incorporated the attributes of creativity, aesthetic-sensibility, an affinity with entertainment and consumption, progressiveness, responsibility, centrality, and maturity. (Forest, 1995: 151)

These themes formed not only a constitutive narrative but were also attached to specific sites – the Pacific Design Centre and Santa Monica Boulevard – that were promoted as embodying the existence (or potential) for aesthetic sensibility, entertainment, progressiveness and the like. Here, then, both cultural meanings and specific locations are woven together to associate a particular social group with a place identity.

   In a parallel example of place-based identity, Dalby and Mackenzie (1997) have shown that Canadian and Scottish communities will mobilize around symbolic identities that 'present a front of homogeneity' even when great social difference exists. These place-based examples of identity illustrate the strategic and political nature of identity formation and expression and thus a detailed discussion is left for section 7.3.2. A similar case exists for Tervo's (2001) analysis of Finnish national identity forma-tion, which is shown to link the performance of their Olympic athletes with the strategic identity politics surrounding Finland's nationalism.

   Before turning to these strategic and political dimensions of identity, however, one further example of scaled investigations of identity involves the study of national identities. A number of geographers have now begun to investigate how particular identities (including specific social differ-ences) are constructed in association with ideas of nationhood (Morin et al., 2001; Nash, 1996; Sharp, 1996; Tervo, 2001). In the case of New Zealand identity Morin et al. (2001) have documented the way differences of gender, ethnicity and class intersect and they show how some dominant categories have evolved in the construction of a national identity that is based on the masculine mountaineering hero. Reviewing the performance of Edmund Hillary and the history of mountaineering, they argued:

> Hillary and the archetypal mountaineer that he came to represent ... came to play a significant role in the construction of national identity in New Zealand ... mountaineering allowed men to display their physical strength, endurance and bravery. ... Hillary's climb was heralded as a major sport-ing achievement and one to which 'all' New Zealanders could aspire. (Morin et al., 2001: 120, 134)

Morin and colleagues critiqued this association of heroic masculinity with national New Zealand identity. They argued that the portrayal of Edmund Hillary's climb to the summit of Mount Everest was based on specific ideas of gender, class and ethnicity (see Box 7.1). Morin et al. employed ideas about identity as they studied the history of mountaineering, the slopes and accommodation sites at Mount Cook, and the contrasting

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Identity

Box 7.1 Heroic male identity: conquering mountains

Morin et al. (2001) record how affluent white males' ascent of mountains such as Mount Everest and Mount Cook involve meanings and practices that suggest they conquer and 'knock off' the peak. Practices such as urination can be incorporated in such moments and further extend the contrasting cultural values that might be attached to mountains where men from one culture might revere the mountain and its peak while men from another might seek to show imperialist domination. In the debates around the climbing of Mount Everest, Morin et al. cite Hansen (1999: 229) who notes:

On the summit Tenzing buried an offering to the gods in the snow and thanked the mountain in prayer: 'I am grateful, Chomolungma'. Hillary took photographs, urinated onto the peak and told another climber, 'We knocked the bastard off'.
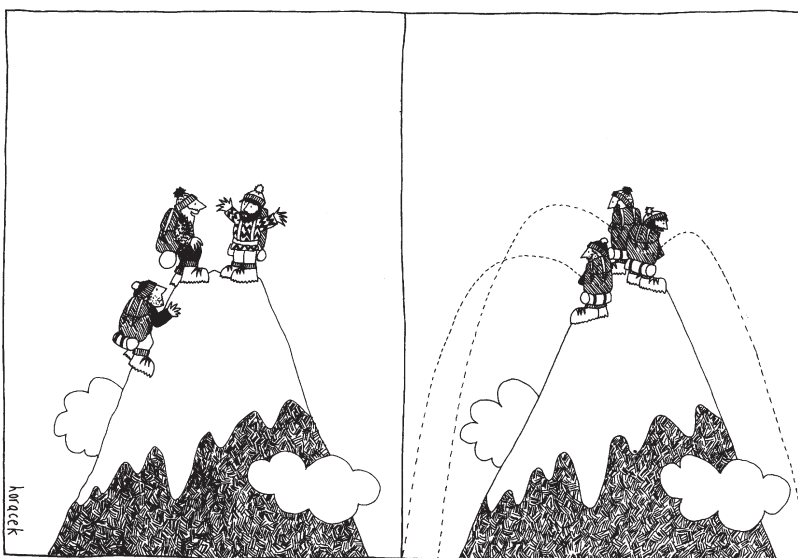
Maori values of the same mountain – known and respected as Aorangi or Aoraki. (Throughout the paper, Morin et al. (2001) consciously use the terms Mount Cook and New Zealand to emphasize the 'colonial relations inherent in ... mountaineering' and the lack of recognitions of Maori culture and rights.) They also documented the variety of men and women who climbed, guided and worked in other ways on and below the mountain. They concluded that a hegemonic and heroic masculine national identity marginalized other values and work. Maori values of mountains had no place in this identity, and women mountaineers who climbed Mount

Cook and other peaks were seen as a direct threat to the status of the mountain: 'If women could climb it, then the mountain lost its status as a dangerous and powerful space in which New Zealand masculinity could be tested' (Morin et al., 2001: 133). Likewise the guide work, together with the service and reproductive work that maintained ancillary support and accommodation had little place in the narration of a heroic, mountain-conquering national identity.

Throughout this discussion, geographies of identity have highlighted:

- the way identities are formed, expressed and negotiated at personal, place-specific and national scales;
- the narrative ways identities are constructed through discourse;
- the performative ways identities are expressed in practice;
- the spatial ways identities are conveyed or negotiated through spaces such as bodies, homes, workspaces, public sites and physical environments;
- the strategic ways identities can be mobilized for political purposes; and
- the homogenizing ways particular meanings are mobilized and privileged in identities while other social differences and cultural meanings are submerged, ignored or actively marginalized.

The final point above registers the 'uneven power relations and boundaries' that Massey (1999: 291) associates with identities. Geographies of identity show how people explicitly or otherwise negotiate power relations in a variety of settings. If we consider how people choose to construct, perform or challenge these identities, we arrive at the second broad theme in this field, namely, analyses of powerful and strategic identities.

7.3.2 Powerful and strategic identities

The acts of constructing, relating to or performing different identities are not neutral. In choosing how to adopt, challenge or resist different identities we engage in the *politics of identity*. We are often strategic in our choices and we may even choose to contest identities and their meanings. At its simplest, this politics arises as we choose to represent certain meanings through the identities we relate to. These meanings carry contrasting values and implications for different people and in varying places – thus we are immediately launched into a personal politics of enacting identity. At an individual level, we saw in the last section that people could be strategic in expressing 'street kid', British Muslim and lesbian identities through their choice of dress, behaviour and use of space. Strategy was employed because various unequal power relations were negotiated by these groups, including processes such as law enforcement, control of ethnic and religious norms, and dominance of heterosexual culture and expectations.

More commonly, geographies of identity politics have been studied where collective identities are developed or contested for an explicit reason. We can see this illustrated in several examples listed in Table 7.2, namely: the formation of West Hollywood as a 'gay city' (Forest, 1995); the mobilization of community identity against super quarries in Scotland and Canada (Dalby and Mackenzie, 1997); and the construction of a gendered nationalist identity through Finnish sport (Tervo, 2001).

In the place-specific case, Forest's (1995) work indicates how a gay identity (that subsumed in other identities of class, ethnicity, and so on) could be strategically constructed so that West Hollywood was recognized as a local government entity embracing and promoting affluent gay male lifestyle and culture. Forest (1995) showed that a specific (affluent gay male) population and specific sites and spaces were highlighted as representative of the area. But he notes: 'The highly visible expression of gay men in West Hollywood [is] in contrast to lesbians. ... The symbols and meanings used in the gay press are also almost certainly class specific' (1995: 135). Thus, even while making relevant conclusions about the creation and perpetuation of important links between place and identity, Forest promotes the need for more critical analyses of the uneven power relations surrounding strategic identities.

Analyses of identity and power are furthered by geographers who concentrate on specific examples of power struggles and resistance. Dalby and Mackenzie's (1997) study of community identity as a form of mobilization against threat is a case in point. When super quarries were proposed for Klusap (Cape Breton, Canada) and Roineabhal (Isle of Harris, Scotland) the affected local residents mobilized a sense of community as they developed strategic opposition to the mining. Community identity was purposefully and explicitly assembled as a 'form of resistance' (1997: 102). In the Canadian case, resistance to the mining of granite was couched in terms of a struggle to protect and preserve the spiritual and cultural quality of Klusap Mountain, including a cave that was sacred to First Nation culture and religion. In the Scottish case, resistance to the mining of anorthosite was focused on respect for, and preservation of, Roineabhal and crofting as an historic way of life. Dalby and Mackenzie note that strategic identities were formed that could counter the progress promised in the planned developments. These were identities that drew on a 'deeply embedded sense of place, of local identity, and of spiritual values centred on Klusap and Roineabhal' (1997: 104–5).

As noted in section 7.2, however, identity formation also constructs boundaries between that which is common and that which is different or 'other'. Strategic identities are no different. Indeed, these Scottish and Canadian examples show how differences based on ethnicity, gender, education, politics and occupation all operated under the apparent collective resistance to the quarries. The power of identification through symbols provided one way across these tensions:

> The process of creating community identity frequently relies on mobilisation around a set of symbols. … Symbols of community identity present a front of homogeneity *vis-à-vis* the other, a 'commonality', a necessary strategic resource in the face of perceived danger. Yet these same symbols are generally sufficiently imprecise or ambiguous that, although on the one hand they form effective 'boundary markers' for the community, differentiating it from the outside and demonstrating its distinctiveness and its common purpose, on the other they provide scope for individual or group difference. (Dalby and Mackenzie, 1997: 102)

This type of geography shows how 'the social' and 'the spatial' share simultaneity (Massey, 1993). Strategic identities that mobilize powerful symbols in the face of larger threats rest on the combination of key sites with culturally and historically significant social values and meanings (sometimes covering major axes of difference). Exploration of these tensions between difference and identity are taken further in Chapters 8 and 9 as a closer consideration is made of how differences (and the identities that convey them) are played out through power relations and social actions.

An alternate form of powerful and strategic identity politics is provided in Tervo's (2001) analysis of Finnish identity. Independence as a nation state (in 1918) corresponded with social and political processes that constructed:

> a national identity and consciousness in Finland. … National socialisation [was] mediated by numerous administrative, cultural and political institutions. … The aim of such institutions [was] to spread knowledge of national symbols, narratives, traditions and rituals to people and to fuse local and personal experiences with the national experience, so that territoriality, nationalism and discourses of national identity [became] part of people's everyday lives. (Tervo, 2001: 358, 359)

Tervo's work documents the contribution made by journalism and Olympic sports to this social project of national identity politics. As noted in the New Zealand mountaineering example, discursive and cultural links were made between sporting achievements and heroic nationalism. In a similar vein to the 'heroics' of war, Tervo (2001: 360) argues that 'sports journalism played a powerful, intermediary role in the Finnish national project, as it made the images of sports heroes and victories part of people's everyday lives and thereby gave people new ways in which to identify themselves with their national community'.

As with other geographies of identity, this case illustrates how constructions and boundaries of an identity are also predicated on privileging some axes of social difference and managing or marginalizing others. For the strategic Finnish identity, masculine aggression and duty were

dominant, while the position of women Olympians was marginal and where recorded – in connection with gymnastics – it was controlled in a sexist and patriarchal way:

> Sports were on a par with military service in that they were both providers of masculine identity in Finland. To represent, defend and fight for a nation state – whether on the battlefield or in the sports arena – was thus considered exclusively a male duty. ... Gymnastics, in particular, was considered a commendable activity for women, as it maintained and enhanced traditional feminine qualities, such as harmony, beauty and suppleness. ... The aim of physical education was to strengthen the female body in such a way that women could grow into dignified daughters and healthy mothers of the nation. (Tervo, 2001: 365)

Tervo also noted that class struggles and narratives that pitted Finnish values and identities against other nations formed a complex politics of identity. For this discussion, however, the study reinforces the previous themes regarding scale, discursive construction and strategic mobilization of identity. In defining a common identity (for nation, social group or place), narratives and territories are defined while differences, exclusions and silences lie just below the surface.

7.4 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has presented the notion of identity as one way in which individuals and groups live out – but negotiate across – multiple social differences. While undoubtedly the British Muslim women and the American gay men of Dwyer's and Forest's research are heterogeneous groups affected by diverse material conditions and social differences, a focus on identity shows how meanings of self and others can be assembled, constructed and communicated in homogenizing ways. Originally I noted that such constructions rest upon the identification of our lives in relation to others – the formation of self and other, or of 'we' and 'them' (Pratt, 1999b: 156). Hetherington effectively sums this up by stating: 'It is through identifications with others, identifications that can be multiple, overlapping or fractured, that identity – that sense of self-recognition and belong with others – is achieved' (1998: 24). But recognition and differentiation alone do not create identity. Consequently, this chapter considered how identities are actively constructed and performed through phenomena as diverse as dress, behaviour and media discourse.

Equally importantly, this chapter has demonstrated how recognition and performance of identity involves a range of spatial issues. Examples illustrated how identities are often involved in place-making (e.g. a place for gays: Forest, 1995; or a community to be preserved: Dalby and

Mackenzie, 1997). Other examples illustrated how identities are also often explored and managed through specific types of space (e.g. heterosexualized public space: Valentine, 1993a; or 'westernized' secular and permissive spaces beyond the Muslim home: Dwyer, 1999).

Together, material, discursive and spatial constructions enable people to convey meanings about identities. They also provide opportunities for people to mobilize meaningful identities for political purposes. These strategic politics of identity range from individual expressions of agency (e.g. in clothing choice) through to nationalistic projects. But in all cases, the identities being explored or performed are underpinned with culturally and historically specific power relations, which result in a finite repertoire of choices. Some meanings and values attached to identities are applauded and privileged while others are constrained as much as possible.

Some of these issues of power are taken up in more detail in the following chapter, for power shapes the relations of individual social difference such as class and gender, but also stretches across them to form terrains and practices where privileged meanings and practices are promoted beyond, or over and above, multiple forms of social difference. Thus it is timely to close this chapter acknowledging that identities are never divorced from power, but instead they signal a variety of power relations, constraints, capacities, possible opportunities and politics that require negotiation.

SUMMARY

- **Geographies of identity consider how people and places are linked with certain meanings through both social and spatial processes.**
- **Identities enable recognition of meanings and attributes that are presented or performed through processes as varied as dress, behaviour, use of space and expression of culture.**
- **Identities also highlight difference since the formation or articulation of identity involves constructing and promoting certain attributes (or self or place) while expressing difference or distance from others.**
- **Identity formation, in the construction of sameness and difference, can result in boundaries being formed and exclusion being expressed.**
- **Theoretically, notions of identity have traditionally been linked to ideas of self and subjectivity – either as relatively fixed autonomous entities or as the subject of wider social structures and ideologies.**
- **More recent poststructural concepts of identity challenge any essential essence or stability associated with self or identity. Instead, they concentrate on the multiple identities we negotiate via contrasting discourses and identity performance or politics.**

- **Processes of identity formation are linked to the physical, social and discursive contexts surrounding people and places. Discursively, identity formation can be studied as a narrative process (Somers, 1994), as people assemble meanings about themselves, others and places from a repertoire of social and cultural narratives.**
- **Identity formation can also be understood as a dynamic process of performativity (Butler, 1990, 1997). In this view, identity is not necessarily a free performance of choice but rather an expression of identity/identities that will be historically embedded and mediated through power relations and varying spatial contexts.**
- **The expression and practice of identity can also be highly political. Identity politics enable the construction and promotion of key identities for specific purposes.**
- **Geographies of identity have been written at a variety of scales. Detailed studies of bodies and individual or personal identities are common as are those of community/neighbourhood and national identities.**
- **The formation or struggle over these scaled identities has also shown the social character of these meanings, where social differences are expressed, managed or mobilized for personal and/or collective interests.**
- **The expression and practice of identity can be explicitly strategic. Geographers have noted how collective and place-based identities mobilize certain constructions of identity for a range of social and political purposes.**
- **Both the formation and politics of identity is deeply spatial. Geographers have noted how different spaces influence the expression of identities while processes of identity formation and struggle also engage with (and sometimes reconstruct) spaces for political ends.**

Suggested reading

One accessible way to start engaging with the concept of identity is to read Kevin Hetherington's (1998) *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics*, especially the first chapter – 'Identity Spaces and Identity Politics'. To understand more about how identities can be constructed and communicated through narrative, see Valentine's (2000) article on how school children explore and experiment with identities. In a complementary way, Dwyer's (1999) article outlines her study of young British Muslim women while she argues that identity is performed and negotiated as a dynamic process at a personal scale. Turning to the more political or strategic dimensions of identity, several levels of reading can be attempted. An early theoretical consideration of identity politics is given by Bondi
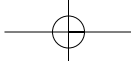
(1993) in a chapter within a key compilation of works, *Place and the Politics of Identity* (Keith and Pile, 1993). Forest's (1995) article on West Hollywood outlines how a neighbourhood can be associated with a specific (gay) social identity, while Morin et al.'s (2001) and Tervo's (2001) articles outline clear examples of how several layers of social difference can be entwined into specific forms of national identity.