

# Discuss the view that in our cultural discourses, the 'home' is encoded as a feminised space.

In our western cultural discourse, the concept of feminine can be defined as 'having qualities or an appearance traditionally associated with women, especially delicacy and prettiness' (OED, 2015). **This definition** would suggest that the feminine is of an appearance rather than actuality, so therefore, if the home is a feminised space it must be, logically, a space where these physical qualities may manifest themselves. However, the concept of the home is not straightforward, and is hard to pin down. According to Gregory et al (2011, p312), home is defined as 'a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear, the home is invested with emotions' and this outlines the presence of opposition and alternative perceptions of the home, and the complexity of its conflicting environment (ibid). **This essay will consider relationships between men and women with regard to this space, how this space of the home is socially viewed and interpreted, as well as the perceptions of women within a scalar approach. It will also consider the consequences of the discussion of 'feminised space' for society and humans.**

**To evaluate whether the home can be read a feminised space,** it is important to consider the relationships between men and women and the role and interactions of gender within space. Gender plays at many levels within space. Marston (2000, p 240) found that 'scalar narratives' are gendered; social constructions, such as the home, body, neighbourhood become feminised, whilst 'large scale processes' such as the economy are socially constructed to be perceived as masculine. **To understand the home** being read as a 'feminised space', one must consider the role of gender within space and what is known as feminine and masculine in conjunction with gender of female and male. Bell et al. (1994) introduces concepts of appearance for the interpretations of spaces in relation to gender and femininity. It could be argued that females and femininity have always been perceived together. **However,** more recently, there has been a move away from the idea of gender as a binary concept, but rather, it is a spectrum offering a range of subtle characteristics between male and female. It has **also** been accepted by many that one can be

Structural features

Communication features

Standard Essay Structure (see Ch. 1 'Getting started on your essay')

Immediate link to the title in the first sentence with definition of key term

Use of 'this + noun' to show cohesion

Statement of purpose. Thesis is not made overt, but the intention to argue a case is implied in the phrase 'consider the consequences of the discussion of feminised space...'

Brings the wider discussion of space and gender to the specific focus of the home

Topic narrowed and made explicit.

Linking words used to achieve flow and cohesion

female yet also lack, so called 'feminine qualities', and Bell et al. (1994) outline this in their research into 'lipstick lesbians'. **Consequently**, it may be that there has been a move away from the home being perceived as a feminine space, but rather a space with spectrums of both feminine and masculine traits and characteristics, reflecting shifts in societal norms. **For example, the traditional nuclear family where women had sole responsibility as the child carer is 'on the decline' (Valentine, 1997)**. This nuclear family is being 'reshaped' by employment of women and divorce. The most recent figures from the Office for National Statistics show that the divorce rate was 9.3% per 1,000 married men or women in 2014 (Statistics, 2016), and this has also coincided with a large decrease in numbers of marriages, as being unmarried loses its social stigma. This dispersed family model suggests the need to reconsider gender associations with the home and to move away from the ability to read the home a feminised space; a new hybrid model is needed that is adapted to fit the plethora of varied family units.

Use of an example as clarification

Debates about essentialist theory and social construct theory play a significant role in the consideration of how the home is to be read, whether as a feminised space or genderless. The definition of essentialist theory (Irvine, 1990) would suggest that identity of gender is natural and biologically determined. Holloway (2014) however, showed that constructionist and psychoanalytic approaches reject the essentialist theory of identity, presenting identity as a social construct, showing that difference in gender is a social process defined by a 'specific to time and space'. This is important when considering the perception of space and the concept of a space as feminine or not. Interpretations could be informed or distorted by whether essentialist theory or social construct theory is applied. In social construct theory, the views and interpretations of children are formed through the influence of adults. Holloway (2014) outlines how children are less able than adults to interpret the world around them and need to be educated in their future adult roles. Matthews (1987) found that from age 8 (middle-class) parents tend to allow boys to explore more independently at much greater distances from home, **which would suggest that** from a young age children are nurtured to believe that the home is a safe space for girls, whilst boys are encouraged to leave the home to support social norms. This is supported by Laurie et al. (1999, p 154), who suggested that the 'women's place has, at some points in British history, been idealised at the home'.

Range of sources used to build a critical response to the question

Evaluation of sources

These social constructions could be argued to lead to greater ingrained perceptions on feminised space and the presentation

of the home through actions larger than originally perceived. For example, the kitchen is one of the key rooms of the home, and is also presented in society as where women should spend majority of their time. Llewellyn (2004, p45) said that **'it is not just the spatial that is socially constructed; the social is spatially constructed too.'** Here, Llewellyn considers the role of constructing space to define society and societal expectations. When looking at the design of the kitchen, it is clear that modern architecture takes a systematic approach to design all spaces of life, whilst postmodernism architecture highlights the presence of the feminine in ironic historical contexts, placing the women in the kitchen, the centre of the home. In postmodernism architecture, the kitchen is designed as the domestic workplace for women, in contrast to, but inspired by, the male workplace outside the home, often in Fordist-style factories. The kitchen was designed to maximise efficiency, inspired by and incorporating ideas from the streamline approach adopted by the large US car plants in the 1930's. This can be seen in diagrams of old kitchen layouts which display maximisation of efficiency by minimising 'waste of footsteps' in an 'easy circulation' pattern. This reinforced the position that 'the woman's place was still in the kitchen'. Artist Jane Rendell (2012) suggests that architecture is understood in the context of society, politics, economics and culture, and societal norms are represented through design to show that 'women are perceived as having very little to do with public spaces.' This supports the idea that whilst women may not agree with the concept of their designation to stay in the home and the home being read a feminised space, women were not sufficiently empowered to change the status quo due to these entrenched social constructs. Whilst society is now in the 4<sup>th</sup> wave of feminism, the first wave of feminism needed to fight for women to be included in the public sphere, and thus the battle to change views of the feminised private space of the home came later; most housing was designed and construction occurred before these recent changes. This relates back to Llewellyn's comment on the spatial construction of society, and suggests that this is correct in the sense of feminised space, as whilst society **may** want to inspire change and shift away from the domesticated woman image, this is ultimately limited by the borders established in the original construction and design of the home. This **may** result in an automatic bias of how this space is read as a feminised space. Further evidence is provided by Bondi and Domosh (1998, p 272), who found the home and, in particular, the kitchen to be a 'site of long memory and cultural heritage', This view supports the idea that

Use of a quotation embedded in the sentence.

Range of sources used to build a critical response to the question

Use of cautious language to evaluate information

spatial construction and social norms are inter-related, and that tradition plays an influencing role in the entrenchment of beliefs and norms.

**In addition**, the global understanding of the home as a feminised space can be interpreted differently, when considering designs north or south of the equator. **Whilst** the global north may persist in a belief that women in the kitchen should ‘be seen and not heard’, the global south celebrates the woman in the kitchen as she is enabled in creativity (Rigg 2007). This suggests that while on a global scale there is a norm of the woman being placed in the kitchen, there are regional disparities in the role of the woman and the production of the feminised space, suggesting there can not be one single reading of the home as a feminised space, and interpretations of gender itself can vary.

The evidence suggests that because of social constructs and an underlying and persistent traditional perception of the home as providing a domestic workplace for the woman, it can be read as feminised space. It could also be said that children are brought up to adopt this ‘norm’, and accept that girls should stay close to the home while boys are more ably equipped to explore further afield. This results in the home becoming a type of socially constructed and out of date feminine space that may not reflect modern life. Despite this issue, the word ‘feminised’ allows for the home as a feminised space to be re-evaluated as questions of gender-specificity and shifts in social norms arise. As Lee & Lee (2016) suggest, these shifts are driven by recent and profound changes in the educational, occupations and economic statuses of both men and women. **It may be important therefore to now consider how the next generation of men and women both drive change and adapt and interpret new social constructs and norms and how these new behaviours and ways of living impact on the design and use of space in the home, and in turn, how these new constructs are interpreted. It may be that future studies in human geography will explore space as genderless rather than as feminised or masculinised, and finally release the woman from the kitchen.**

## Bibliography

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Linking expressions to provide cohesion

Clear, succinct conclusion that follows a standard essay style structure (see Ch 1. ‘Getting started on your essay’)

The writer’s voice evident in consideration of the future of the topic and how perceptions may change

APA Referencing system (see Ch 8. ‘Referencing with accuracy’)

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(No Date) Available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/feminine> (Accessed: 22 February 2017).

## **Diana and Tom's Comments**

**This essay is well-researched and manages the content well to build the argument. Although the thesis is not directly stated, the writer's stance is implied from the outset, and the arguments are structured to build a logical line of reasoning. Sources are used well to add weight and strengthen arguments, and examples applied to help clarify ideas. It could be improved by the use of clearer cohesion such as links between paragraphs, thus aiding flow.**