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The tyranny of gendered spaces – reflections from beyond the gender dichotomy

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This article argues critically that the consequences of a binary system of gender norms is experienced as a kind of gender tyranny both for those who transgress gender in their daily lives, but also for those whose lives are lived within such constraints. Feminist geographers and urban theorists have argued that space is gendered and that gendering has profound consequences for women. This article extends this analysis and shows how rigid categorizations of gender fail to include the intersexed and transgendered populations, a small and highly marginalized segment of the wider population. This article uses autoethnographic methods to illustrate the ways that those who transgress gender norms experience a tyranny of gender that shapes nearly every aspect of their public and private lives. The nature of these consequences is explored using citations from the transgender and queer literature as well as the lived experience of this tyranny by the author in a continuum of public to private spaces, including: parking lots, public restrooms, shopping malls, the workplace and the home.

Keywords: transgender; gender variant; public space; queer theory; autoethnography

Tyranny refers to the exercise of power which is cruelly or harshly administered; it usually involves some form of oppression by those wielding power over the less powerful. John Stuart Mill (1869) warned about the tyranny of the majority since the sheer weight of numbers can never be sufficient to make an unjust act any more just. History gets written by those who claim victory, and the winners wield the economic power and social influence that enable them to establish the standards for acceptable political and social behaviors. When these histories and standards routinely exclude minority groups, tyranny flourishes.

In this article I argue that transgendered and gender variant people experience the gendered division of space as a special kind of tyranny – the tyranny of gender – that arises when people dare to challenge the hegemonic expectations for appropriately gendered behavior in western society. These gendered expectations are an artifact of the patriarchal dichotomization of gender and have profound and painful consequences for many individuals. For the gender variant, the tyranny of gender intrudes on every aspect of the spaces in which we live and constrains the behaviors that we display. I use an autoethnographic lens to highlight the ways that this tyranny has shaped my life and the lives of others whose gender does not conform to a narrow dichotomy.

The term transgender is a collective term that refers to people assigned to one gender who do ‘not perform or identify as that gender, and ha[ve] taken some steps – temporary or permanent – to present in another gender’ (D. Valentine 2003, 27–28). Most often

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included in this category are transsexuals, transvestites, crossdressers, drag queens, drag kings, tranny bois and other gender queer individuals who defy easy categorization. The edges of the category are less clear – i.e. not all intersexed people consider themselves transgendered, though some do (Chase 1998; Kessler 1998; Turner 1999). Even more individuals may identify as their birth sex, but present in such an ambiguous way that their gender is often mistaken (Browne 2004; Lucal 1999). For this entire spectrum of individuals I use the term gender variant (Doan 2007), of which the transgendered are one subset.

In the following pages I write autoethnographically to reflect on my own experiences of gendered spaces from the vantage point of a transgendered woman. Autoethnography combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narratives of the self (Chang 2008) resulting in a thick description of life experiences which reveal emotion and insight in a variety of ways (Ellis 2004). Moss (2001) suggests that the technique can provide an opportunity to reflect on one's location and position in the web of power. Knopp (2001) uses autobiography to reveal the dimensions of his life journey as a queer geographer attempting to merge his training in the political economy of urban space with queer theory. Reed-Danahay (1997) argues that some autoethnography is 'native' anthropology in which individuals usually studied by ethnographers begin writing their own studies. This kind of writing allows the colonized to regain power over the colonizers (Besio 2005) and permits minority groups to describe settings of which they are a part (Ellis 2004).

In recent years trans activists and scholars have worked to reclaim their narratives. Some transsexual authors from the UK (Morris 1974), the US (Hunt 1978; Martino 1979; McCloskey 1999; Jorgenson 2000; Dent 2002), and Australia (Cummings 1992) have used autobiography with mixed results. In the American context Prosser (1998) suggests that the transsexual narrative is an important component in the therapeutic rite of passage in order to be approved for hormones and surgery under the specific criteria of the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association). The resulting narratives often reinforce gender normativity because medical approval sometimes requires transsexuals to display an essentialist construction of gender (Butler 2004, 71).

However, some trans activists criticize this gate-keeping by the medical community which Foucault (1978) would recognize as a regulatory power. Some scholars have elaborated upon this perspective and explored its links to queer studies (Butler 1990; Stone 1991; Bornstein 1994; Stryker 1994, 2004; Rothblatt 1995; Feinberg 1996; Wilchins 1997, 2004; Namaste 2000; Sullivan 2003; Green 2004; Hines 2006). These authors critique the gender dichotomy and their work has provided the theoretical underpinnings of my own understanding of the ways that gender varies from the heteronormative.

In this article I merge autobiographical elements of my life history with trans and queer theory to argue that gender variance colors every space that I enter. To illustrate the profound effects of gender tyranny I present my experiences in different spaces beginning with several types of public spaces, extending to several types of the quasi public domain of the university, to semi-private shopping malls and ending with the privacy of my home. In each of these spaces I argue that the tyranny of gender exerts a pervasive influence on the way I experience different locations as a transgendered person. In spite of these constraints I seek to live with openness and integrity beyond the dichotomy of gender. In using a personal narrative to reveal patterns of inequality, I draw for inspiration upon other feminist social scientists who have used personal accounts of harassment (G. Valentine 1998, Lucal 1999) to raise awareness about discrimination. Doing this kind of reflective feminist research has generated some internal resistance (Gibson-Graham 1994) and

concern about the value of my own transgendered perspective. I recognize the risk of solipsistic reflection as well as the danger of over-generalizing inherent in the reflexive research process (Rose 1997), but feel my subject position as a visibly transsexual woman provides a unique perspective and opportunity for thick description of the ways that the tyranny of gender shapes perceptions of gendered spaces.

Coming to terms with my transgendered self

As a child I was powerfully aware that I did not fit into the box marked boy, though I struggled for many years to fit into the gender assigned to me by society. The details of the intertwining of my gender and spiritual journey have been explored elsewhere (Doan 2000, 2002), but the consequences of that transition have not. As a young person I understood that I was born in a boy's body, but I also felt a conflict between the inward sense of my gender and the outward expectations for my behavior as a boy. I asked a therapist many years later whether my acquiescence to these gendered rules undermined my authenticity as a transgendered person. He told me that in 1959 gender variance was seen as a severe form of mental illness and if I had told my parents I wanted to be a girl, I might have received electro-shock and aversion therapy as a cure. At that time, my understanding of the gender rules enabled my self-preservation, by opting for self-suppression.

Accordingly, I buried my gender deep in my bodily core and struggled mightily to maintain a bearded façade, the increasingly brittle outer shell designed to project masculinity. After many years of struggle, the lack of authenticity was causing many sleepless nights and much introspection about whether or not I could continue to live my life as the man I was seen to be. At some point the depression became so intense that I experienced a kind of dark night of the soul. After much reflective searching I realized that to keep living, I had to face the world as my 'true self' (Brown and Rounsley 1996). Making this change was one of the most difficult experiences of my life. At the age of 42, I 'came out' to my family¹ and to my department colleagues, explaining that integrity required that I no longer silence the gender I knew myself to be.

My transition was facilitated by my therapist (a psychiatrist) who eschewed gate-keeping and encouraged me to explore the multi-dimensional and non-dichotomous identity that I was experiencing as gender. However, his questions helped me understand the consequences of displaying my differently gendered identity to the rest of the world. Although I wanted desperately to be a girl since I was young, I came to realize that I could never be 'just a girl'; I will always be something more and something less. In most public settings I present as and am read as a woman, though often a rather gender variant woman. Because the patriarchal social structure does not tolerate intermediate genders, rejecting the male label meant I had to embrace the label female. Accordingly, I underwent reassignment surgery so that my driver's license and passport indicate that I am female. But I refuse to retreat into that post-operative closet and live in fear that I will be outed as once having had an M on my passport. I choose to live as a visibly queer transgendered person and refuse to re-enter the closet of some post-operative transsexuals who live in fear they will be 'outed' as once having lived as some other gender.

My employment as a tenured professor provided me with a relatively 'safe' location within which to transform the public presentation of my gender. It also enabled me to begin to shift my research agenda during a one semester sabbatical in which I 'discovered' the field of feminist and queer geography. Previously I had researched transgender and transsexual identities, but until I came out as transsexual I was afraid to integrate these

insights into my academic work for fear of being marginalized for writing about such a controversial topic. When I encountered the rich research on spatial aspects of queer identity on my sabbatical, it was like finding a vein of unexpected gold.

Part of my intellectual journey has involved coming to grips with the way that the spaces in which I live, work and play are inherently gendered. For many years I literally only expressed the gender of my true self in the most secret spaces within the privacy of my own home – in the very real confines of a large walk-in closet. The closet is both a literary metaphor for gay and lesbian oppression in the US (Sedgwick 1990) and a form of material reality within diverse spatial contexts (Brown 2000). However, for transgendered people it is an essential space in which we live and at times hide the clothing and accoutrements of our identities. I think my fascination with the public or private nature of space is based on this highly personal understanding that for me coming out meant that I had to move from the protective shelter of the closet, to the slightly more risky privacy of my bedroom, to the semi-private space of my living room in the evening with the shades tightly drawn, to the bright glare of daylight where I would be in public view of the neighbors and all the world.

For me these spaces were not examples of a dichotomous division of public and private space, but were part of a much richer continuum (Kofman and Peake 1990; Duncan 1996; Fincher 2004). I was especially intrigued by the ways that spaces were queered through the interaction with gay and lesbian identities (Peake 1993; G. Valentine 1993; Bell et al. 1994; Bell and Valentine 1995; Binnie 1995; Ingram, Bouthillette, and Ritter 1997; Nast 2002; Rushbrook 2002; Knopp and Brown 2003; Browne 2007). However, I have also found that with few exceptions (for instance Browne 2004, 2006b; Knopp 2007) there is little consideration of how variations in gender identity and performance can change the subjective nature of gendered spaces. For instance, variations in the way that gays and lesbians categorize their own genders are a better predictor of how they navigate through space than their sex (Doan and Higgins 2009).

My own experience of meeting other transgendered people suggests that there is a wide diversity in our understanding of what gender is and how it should be displayed. Gender is not a dichotomy but a splendid array of diverse experiences and performances. I resonate with Bondi's (2004, 12) argument that 'the binary construct of gender ... [is] a superfluous and unnecessary distraction from the reality of the human condition'. She notes that transsexual reassignment surgery is 'hotly contested by some feminists' who argue that trans people wrongly place gender inside rather than outside the body, instead of accepting that gender attaches to the external surfaces of bodies. She asks, 'Is transsexuality about opening up spaces for gender ambiguity, whether understood as hybrid identities, queer identities or third genders, or is it yet another way of shoring up a fiction of gender coherence within a dichotomous, either/or model?' (2004, 12).

I recognize that gender is fluid and performative (Butler 1990) and transcends the boundary of the human body. The experiences of particular situations that we obtain through our bodies both shape and are shaped by the public and private spaces in which they occur (Rose 1993; Longhurst 1995). Our embodied experiences are both natural and cultural (Alcott 1996). Although phenomenology locates subjectivity firmly in the body, there is a 'complex feedback relation' between bodies and the environments in which they mutually produce each other (Grosz 1992, 242 as cited in Longhurst 1997). Butler's performativity adds fluidity to our understanding of the ways that gender is embodied and defies simplistic categorization. The performance of gender in space not only shifts with each performance, but in a very real way each performance also changes the space in which it is performed (Gregson and Rose 2000; Browne 2006b). The shifting nature

of genders and spaces provides a Heraclitean analogy about whether one can perform the same gender twice,² because each performance is subject to the performer, the observer and the space in which it is performed and if that space is also in flux, then we have an infinite array of possible genders.

Reading the geography of sexualities as a call to explore more fully the fluidity of subject positions vis-à-vis carefully drawn boundaries of established identity positions (Browne 2006a) has prodded me to reconsider the fluidity of my own gendered positionality. I reject the attachment to boxes and boundaries that implies a fixation with the structures which maintain the fundamental inequalities of the sex and gender system (Lucal 2008), though I acknowledge some benefit from having the letter F on my driver's license. Some queer theorists suggest responding to these inequalities by adopting a non-dichotomous vision of gender that is inclusive (Wilchins 2004), similar to Bornstein's (1994, 51–2) description of how she came to a new understanding of the meaning of her own gender as a transgendered person.

And then I found out that gender can have fluidity, which is different from ambiguity. If ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a prescribed gender code, then fluidity is the refusal to remain one gender or another. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender.

I recognize that my identity is contingent and 'constructed in relation to temporal factors of generation, transitional time span, and social and cultural understandings and practices' (Hines 2006, 64). However, a critical component of that contingency is an awareness of the ways that expressions of non-dichotomous gender are still resisted by the dominant social structure. I understand clearly that gender variant identities challenge gender norms at a significant social cost, namely the 'trade-offs in terms of such things as social power, social approval and material benefits' (Mehta and Bondi 1999, 70). The tyranny of gender oppresses those whose behavior, presentation and expression fundamentally challenge socially accepted gender categories. Gendered bodies are subjected to a regulatory regime (Foucault 1978) that enforces the boundaries of properly gendered behaviors. Browne (2004) has called this gender policing 'genderism' and argues that the 'active contestations of other people's policing of sexed norms draws attention to the attempt to expel that which de-stabilises self–other dichotomies' (Browne 2006b, 122). This disciplining takes place both within ourselves, but also in external spaces that permit others to pass judgment on people who transgress the gender dichotomy. From my own experiences I can attest that individuals who persist in violating gender norms are marginalized in both queer and other public spaces (K. Namaste 1996; Doan 2001, 2006, 2007). This article explores some of the mechanisms of that gendered policing in different spatial contexts.

My transgendered experience of gendered spaces

In the following sections I present my experiences as a transgendered woman across the continuum of spaces ranging from more public to more private locations. I am cognizant that my experiences, difficult as they may have been, are grounded in a complex web of privilege including: my tenured faculty position, my white racial identity and my upper middle class upbringing. I consider myself lucky that I have never been gender-bashed (K. Namaste 1996), though I have certainly experienced blatant genderism (Hill 2003; Browne 2004) and violent trans-phobia (Feinberg 1996) triggered by my gender status. Some transgendered people respond to this tyranny with rage (Stryker 1994), and that anger can lead to a manifesto for change (Stone 1991) and increased gender activism.

We are entitled to our anger in response to this oppression: our anger is a message to ourselves that we need to get active and change something in order to survive. So we resist the oppression, the violence – we resist the tendency of the culture to see us as a joke. (Bornstein 1994, 81)

In my case I have tried to channel my anger along a different path that avoids what Viviane Namaste (2000) has called the powerful silencing of transgendered individuals, rendering them invisible for the most part to North American society. Gender transitions are almost never private affairs; by design they occur in public space and provide a different lens with which to view the gendering of public spaces. The following examples illustrate some of my own experiences with public spaces as a person whose gender does not easily fit into a dichotomous box.

Harassment in public spaces

In public spaces the tyranny of gender operates when certain individuals feel empowered to act as heteronormatively constructed gender enforcers in public spaces. These policing behaviors are sometimes exaggerated by the presence of other silent but supportive watchers. At the same time gender variant performance in public spaces that is supported by a wider community can be a powerful statement against the dichotomy.

Public transit and public harassment

Public spaces such as streets, transportation facilities and elevators contain structural elements that enable the operation of gender tyranny. Gardner (1995) describes the public harassment of women by men as endemic in our society, but it is a more serious problem for those whose expression of gender varies from the heteronormative, as the following experiences illustrate. After my first overseas trip using my new passport with F for a sex designator, I passed through US Customs at JFK airport without so much as a raised eyebrow. Outside the secure area I had a pre-arranged meeting with an airport limo driver. The arrival area was jammed with people and I followed the driver outside to the equally crowded sidewalk to the parking area. When the limo driver asked about my trip, I responded without thinking in my deep bass voice. I was happy to be back in the US and must have relaxed my usual vigilance because I paid no attention to the crowd of people around us. Shortly thereafter I stopped abruptly before crossing an exit for an underground parking garage, causing the man who was right behind me to bump into me. This man immediately began screaming at me and I realized his anger was not because of the bodily collision that had prevented us from being hit by an oncoming car, but because he realized that I was trans. He must have heard me speaking earlier and my sudden stop had ignited his smouldering anger. He started yelling, ‘I know what you are! You can’t fool me! You are disgusting!’ I refused to be cowed and asked him point blank what he thought I was. He, in turn, became so agitated that I thought he was going to throw a punch. If the limo driver had not quietly stepped up next to me as a supportive presence, I would have been assaulted on the spot. My gender expression in that public space offended his sense of appropriate public behavior and he acted to sanction that violation in as public a fashion as possible.

Vulnerability in an elevator

Crowding in public spaces brings people into closer proximity than usual and increases gendered vulnerability in such spaces. Several years ago I experienced this gendering

in an up-front and personal way. One evening on a business trip I entered the ground floor entrance of a hotel and entered a reasonably full elevator car. I stood next to a youngish woman and across from an older man who appeared to be her companion for the evening. He was clearly inebriated, and as soon as I entered the space, he began staring at me, obviously disturbed by something about my presentation of gender. Just before we reached the next floor, he stepped up very close to me, and giving a lecherous wink said 'Well, look what we have here!' I tried simply staring him down, but as the doors opened, he reached up and grabbed both of my breasts and squeezed, apparently expecting to find the falsies used by drag queens. I was stunned by this unexpected sexual assault and stood there in a speechless state of shock as he turned and walked away. By squeezing my breasts he was objectifying and assaulting what Young (1998) calls the most visible sign of a woman's femininity. In my case he assumed he was attacking my false femininity to expose me for an imposter. Unfortunately his discovery of his error did little to lessen the indignity of the assault.

Elevators are odd enclosed spaces. Caesar (2000) suggests that elevators are a bridge between public and private space and that in Japan, for instance, a degree of intimacy can occur in an elevator between two people that would never occur in any other public space. This close proximity can be the source of considerable risk according to one study of transit crime in the US that found personal assaults tended to occur in elevators, public restrooms and dark corners (Loukaitou-Sideris, Liggett, and Iseki 2002). Other women friends have since told me they are always careful about riding in an elevator with people they do not know, since they learned at an early age to avoid being in close quarters with unknown men. The fact that my assailant was clearly with another woman had lulled me into feeling safe. I am fairly certain that if he had tried to fondle a female whose femininity was unimpeachable, his companion would probably have pulled him back in horror. But in this case her quiet observation of my gender and her acquiescence in his violent behavior was instrumental in creating the space in which this assault occurred. For me, her silent collusion in this violence was the worst part of the experience. This incident simply drove home the point that people whose gender does not seem quite right are fair game for all manner of treatment.

My experiences in the airport and the elevator have driven home an awareness of my vulnerability in congested public spaces. The literature on transit safety (Loukaitou-Sideris, Liggett, and Iseki 2002) suggests that isolated spaces are the most dangerous, but my experience suggests that those who are gender variant are at risk wherever they travel. The bully at the airport and the jerk in the elevator each drew strength from the presence of others to sharpen their verbal and physical assaults on my person. I realize that my gender performance may be contested by some more vocal observers, but the tyranny of their gender policing was enabled by the collusion of the quiet watchers. In response, I am learning to raise my voice and speak up about the tyranny of gender for myself and for others, but I also have learned the value of quiet support from others in deflecting violence.

Quasi public spaces

Quasi public spaces are not technically public since most are privately owned but they provide a space in which the public may gather as long as certain rules and standards are upheld. Being gender variant in these spaces can also be problematic. For example, public universities are technically owned by the public, but the university reserves the right to limit access to those not from the university community, creating an odd quasi public category.

Transition in the workplace

Coming out at a public university provided many unique experiences of gendered spaces. My first day on the job as a woman was especially memorable. As I entered the building I felt I was entering the eye of a hurricane, at the calm center of a turbulent storm of gendered expectations. As I walked down the hall I could hear conversation in front of me suddenly stop as all eyes turned to look at the latest 'freak show'. As I passed each office there was a moment of eerie quiet, followed by an uproar as the occupants began commenting on my appearance. Some people just stared, a few others told me how brave I was and one person told me that I looked 'just like a woman'. Another gave me a taste of what it means to be objectified by telling me proudly that I was his very first transsexual. These events helped me to realize that my presentation of gender was not just a personal statement, but a co-constructed event. I presented myself, and the academic world watched and passed judgment. I am grateful for the presence of my colleagues and students whose support deflected some of this turbulence.

Classrooms as a mixture of public and private

Rooney (2004) suggested that academic classrooms operate as semiprivate rooms which blend public and private elements. When a woman stands in front of the classroom the private aspects allow for a degree of intimacy and expectation of subordinate behavior that can be problematic. My experiences in the classroom subsequent to my transition bear this out. In my new mode of presentation as a woman, I noticed an undermining of the implicit assumption of my academic competency. When the world perceived me as a man, I found it quite easy to step to the front of a lecture hall and assume the role of a knowledgeable professor. I never had difficulty in keeping or maintaining the attention of any class. After transition, however, this experience changed quite markedly. On the first day of class my students accepted me as an openly transgendered woman, but it slowly dawned on me that I was also no longer automatically perceived as an expert in my field.³ I perceived a distinct 'prove it' attitude on the part of the students. Since my transition I have to work much harder to establish my credentials and maintain control of the classroom than I did when I was perceived as a straight man.

At my university all classes with more than 10 students are required to provide a standardized student evaluation form. Although my overall student evaluations are high, in almost every class there are some who resent being taught by an openly transgendered professor. The mandated evaluation survey includes the following open-ended questions: *What did you like most about the course? What could be improved?* One undergraduate student in my World Cities class responded, 'Nothing. Input a new teacher. S/he's a man dressed like a female! It's gross!' In this comment the student critiques my teaching, refutes my gender and expresses disgust typical of trans-phobic comments. A second open-ended question asks: *What did you like best about the instructor?* Another undergraduate respondent answered, 'How could a university hire a person who pretends to be female? It's horrible! I recently explained to my parents that one of my professors is a man that had a sex change and she about lost it'. This comment refutes my gender as well as the possibility of sex change itself and then implies some administrator may get an irate phone call from a parent. These comments are attempts to regulate my behavior or at least to strike back at my gender non-conformance.

These examples from two separate student evaluations do not represent the vast majority of my students, but they do illustrate the vitriol lurking in the back of the classroom. Part of the cost of being gender variant is exposed by this student-oriented

evaluation system that allows the tyranny of the majority to pass judgment on teachers who are visibly different. Teaching what has been called ‘oppositional multiculturalism’ (Nast and Pulido 2000) is risky, but exposes students to differences that they might not otherwise face in the classroom. Undertaking such teaching does risk student retribution in the form of negative evaluations and for female faculty, highly personal remarks in anonymous student evaluations (Nast 1999).

Only once have I ever felt physically threatened from students who were not known to me. I was proctoring a final exam for my graduate Growth of Cities class when there was suddenly a lot of loud talking just outside the classroom. Since several of my students seemed disturbed by the interruptions, I opened the door and asked the disruptive students to be quiet since I was giving an exam. Several minutes later someone in the hall kicked open the door with a loud bang and yelled at the top of his lungs, ‘Shemale!’ Although this person did not dare show his face, the uproarious laughter suggested that his feelings were widely shared. I was upset and felt very vulnerable after this violation of my classroom space. I stifled the rage that told me to charge into the hall and confront the disruptive students and sat in silence, unsure how to proceed. Eventually, a student loaned me her cell phone to call campus security. When the campus police arrived five minutes later, they cleared the students from the hallway and escorted me back to the safety and privacy of my office. Although I was grateful for the support of my student and the assistance of the police, I was deeply shaken at the public humiliation and sense of violation created by this hate speech.

Butler (1997) suggests that speech acts must be analyzed within the totality of the experience. In this case, the use of the term ‘shemale’ was clearly intended to expose and demean, but the violent act of kicking open the door prefigured a different kind of violence, visited in this case against a door, but clearly intended to intimidate me. The violent nature of this public insult exemplifies the assertion of male privilege to judge and condemn those who are gender variant. Nielsen (2002, 266) suggests that ‘public hate speech provides a clear example of one of the ways in which such social hierarchies are constructed and reinforced on a day-to-day basis’.

Special circumstances in public restrooms

One of the scariest spaces for a person in the midst of a gender transition is a public restroom. The biological urge forces a regular choice between one of two doors with different labels (men/women, gents/ladies, guys/gals, buoys/gulls, etc.). Each excursion for me into the most private of public gendered spaces risked discovery and a potential confrontation with others outraged by my perceived transgression. Browne (2004) has called this ‘the bathroom problem’ and suggests that masculine appearing women regularly experience harassment and difficulties in such places. Lucal (1999) uses her own masculine appearance to reflect on similar restroom experiences of gender-based harassment. For trans people, the full weight of the legal system is against us, requiring a hyper-vigilant approach. For instance, when I came out to my teenage daughter, I told her that she could continue to call me Papa anywhere, except when we were using a women’s restroom, since prior to my surgery I literally risked arrest for performing a basic bodily function.

At work I had to face the gendered restroom question directly. When I first transitioned, I became temporarily ‘disabled’ since the administration’s interim solution was that I use the single access handicapped restroom on a different floor of my building. One day not long after I began using this facility, I was mortified to discover the bathroom

had no locking mechanism. I was using the facility when the door opened unexpectedly, exposing me for a moment to some students in the hallway just outside. My gender difference provided a new-found awareness that I too was 'not anywhere near the project' (Chouinard and Grant 1996), that I and others like me had fallen between the cracks of a dichotomous world.

After a six-month wait to allow the other women on my floor to acclimate to my gender presentation, I asked for permission to use the women's restroom down the hall from my office. In response, Administrator Y asked me to attend a specially called meeting with higher level Administrators W and Z. I attended with a sense of dread since I perceived that my request had stirred up a hornet's nest. At the meeting I was informed in no uncertain terms that they had received legal advice that I was NOT to use any restroom designated for women until such time as I had undergone complete gender reassignment surgery and provided documentation of a court ordered change of sex. When I relayed my story about the restroom without a lock, I was told that would be rectified. When I asked what I should do in other parts of campus where single access handicapped facilities were not readily available, Administrator Z informed me that 'the campus police were not in the habit of staking out restrooms', but if there were any complaints about men using women's restrooms, they would know where to find me.

My argument that pre-operative transsexual women working in other state-owned office buildings were allowed to use the women's restroom in those buildings was dismissed. Apparently the university's legal team had determined that restrooms at a public university were more public than restrooms in state-owned buildings off-campus, and therefore I was to be regulated and excluded. In this case the tyranny of gender was exacerbated by what felt like an arbitrary and opportunistic labeling of bathrooms as public versus private spaces. In retrospect I should not have been so astounded that the geography of what I had presumed was private space could be redefined as public to 'protect' the established hetero-normative administrative order. I complied with this restriction because I did not wish to violate the law in order to use the restroom; my 'gender outlaw' status (Bornstein 1994) was already a more than sufficient burden.

Since my surgery I make a point of using the women's restroom wherever I am, though I do my best to do so unobtrusively. Because of my large body type, I am still liable to undergo the kind of genderism described by Browne (2004), but since the law is now on my side, I am willing to risk it. However, I also recognize that for women who have experienced rape and harassment at the hands of men the women's restroom can be a place of perceived safety. I was helped to this understanding by an experience at a summer conference on a different college campus that was attended by a number of gay men and lesbians. At my request I was housed with other lesbians, but since this was shortly after my transition (and prior to my surgery), I was not certain how to handle the showers which were only partially shielded by inadequate 'privacy' curtains. I decided that when I had to use a restroom I would simply do so, but that I would only shower after midnight when everyone else was in bed. When I shared this decision with some of my lesbian friends, some were shocked that I would feel so constrained, but others were very appreciative. My thoughtfulness enabled one woman to open up to me and thank me for taking such care, explaining that the women's restroom was often her only place of sanctuary at times when she felt especially vulnerable to the pervasive dominance of men. But she also said that she did not consider me a man and welcomed me to use these women-only spaces at this and future conferences. Accordingly, I recognize that restrooms add a special nuance to the notion of private spaces, and as a result I walk gently and speak softly when I am in such

highly gendered spaces because I wish to do no further harm to those women who have been deeply wounded by others.

Semi-private spaces

Semi-private spaces are spaces that for the most part are privately owned but are often used by the public as long as they comply with any restrictions established by the owner. These could be malls, churches, auditoriums, or other performance spaces to which public access can be denied.

Doing gender at the mall

Shopping malls are enclosed spaces that use private security to provide the appearance of a safer experience than a public street. Some geographers have argued that malls create 'a setting for free personal expression and association, for collective cultural expression and transgression, and for unencumbered human interaction and material transaction' (Goss 1993, 25). The transgendered rite of passage known as mall-walking puts this to the test. Frequently novice trans women have not yet grasped that the mundane act of shopping is a highly gendered experience, especially for women whose size (bodily bigness) does not fit normative expectations of attractiveness (Colls 2006). As a transgendered person inhabiting a tall and broad-shouldered body, I was unsure how well I would pass as a woman and so postponed my first mall-walking experience until I was out of town. I was determined to explore my emerging sense that I was a woman by performing that gender in public. In preparation for the excursion, I donned my favorite dress, put on two pair of hose to cover my not yet shaven legs and took extra care with my make-up (to cover evidence of my male beard).

As I entered the mall, it slowly dawned on me that performing gender at home in front of a mirror was nothing like the dance that is gender in a public place. I felt that everyone was staring at me. In hindsight I realize that I was feeling the panoptic (Foucault 1977) nature of shopping malls, both because of the omnipresent but often hidden security guards (Ainley 1998) and also because of the power of the hetero-normative gaze (Pérez 2003; Doan 2007). I experienced an odd sense of 'being watched' that was partly a result of my own anxiety about 'passing' and partly my rather over-dressed attire for a mall on a Saturday afternoon. I could feel the stares boring into my back as I passed, and decided to skip the shopping and just walk from one end to the other. My best attempt to blend had not succeeded, and I realized I was triggering reactions from other shoppers who were expecting a place to 'minimize encounters with people and things that are unknown to them... in the sanitized and controlled spaces of the mall' (Williams et al. 2001, 216). Malls are clearly not places that welcome gender transgressive behavior.

I had just wanted to express the gender I knew myself to be in public, but I had not considered that gender is a fluid and continuously constructed category. Although I thought at the time that my visit to the mall was an independent expression of the gender that I wished to project, in retrospect I understand that genders are mutually constituted by the performer and by the viewer in a particular space. The gaze of each person I passed was part of the overall 'policing practices' that questioned my gender and undermined the tenuousness of the category (Browne 2006b). I experienced my gender as a kind of moving target, like one of those opposing moving sidewalks in modern airports. I was moving in one direction and the spectators were moving in the other, and somewhere in between my gender was constructed and re-constructed with each fleeting moment. In this way not only

was the gender I expressed subject to the fluidity of my movement through the mall, but the spatiality of this performance was also shifting with each instance of my performative interaction (Gregson and Rose 2000). I recognize that because of the fluidity of gender as performed and as observed, I have limited control over the prevalence of the male gaze that regulates women's bodies and appearances through subtle and not so subtle harassment (Gardner 1995). However I do have control over how I present. Most women who go shopping on a weekend at the mall eschew make-up, heels and hose in favor of more casual (and comfortable) jeans and sneakers. In addition to comfort, these outfits also enable women to deflect some of the stares and idle curiosity of others. The lesson for me on this day was that I only control a portion of my gender presentation, namely the clothes that I wear and the spaces I choose to occupy. The rest is in the eye of the beholders.

Semi-private performance space: reclaiming my voice

In the midst of learning about the powerful limits on transgressing gender, I continue to work on reclaiming my voice both literally and figuratively. I am aware that I have a deeper vocal register than most men and shortly after my transition I was concerned that my voice would cause problems for me since many specialists argue that having a male voice and a female outward appearance presents a serious 'obstacle to full social integration' as a woman (Neumann and Welzel 2004). Accordingly I decided to work with a voice therapist to see if I could use any vocal exercises to change the pitch or lessen the resonance in my voice. Unfortunately, I was told that while I might change the resonance, there was nothing short of surgery that could be done to raise my pitch into an 'acceptable' female range. Since surgery on the vocal cords remains highly experimental, I have opted not to risk losing the voice with which I lecture and sing, and continue to use my gender non-conforming pitch in my everyday life.

My voice therapist suggested that I could also change my cadence and word choice. When I asked her to elaborate, she indicated that women speak with a more musical variation in pitch and often end their sentences with an upward lifting of the pitch. She also indicated that I should add more uncertainty to my statements such as: 'This is a wonderful movie, don't you think? This tastes lovely, doesn't it?' Evidently, it is more feminine to be uncertain, express doubts and expect others to have to confirm your opinions. This is not what Carol Gilligan (1982) meant by 'In a Different Voice'. I decided that I could get along without such stereotyped linguistic coaching. I do not want my daughter or any of my students to talk like this. I realized that in order to thrive I needed to reclaim my own voice in all its basso profundo richness. If my vocal variance enables other women to find their own authentic voices, so much the better.

Shortly after this experience, a friend invited me to join the local A Capella Community Choir which badly needed more deep voices. I was attracted to the choir's feminist and anti-racist approach to singing songs about community building, so I stopped by one day after work. When I entered the rehearsal space, my friend introduced me saying, 'Hey everybody, this is my friend Petra and she wants to sing with us'. A woman sitting in the soprano section invited me to sit with them and she was followed by a woman in the alto section who asked me to sit with them. I responded in my deepest voice that I thought I should probably sit over here with the basses. The room grew quiet for a moment from surprise and then I was given a very warm welcome. I came to realize the value of being surrounded by an affirming community when challenging the tyranny of gender.

I sang with this choir in churches, charter schools and other community spaces. The opportunity to perform my gender variance in these semi-public spaces and to receive

a warm reception was uplifting. Finding safe spaces in which to perform my gender empowered me and sustained my ability to continue to express my gender variance and be openly transgendered in the wider community. I now dare to express whatever shade of gender that I am feeling on a given day, to be a visible transgendered woman and to sing bass with gusto. I am aware that this may cause a kind of cognitive dissonance in some people when they see a person they perceive to be a woman singing with a bass voice. I embrace this ambiguity in my gendered performance as a means of both holding onto my own integrity, but also contributing to a radical expansion of people's understandings of what gender is and can be for myself and for others.

Private space

Private spaces can be places of refuge or exclusion. In theory the owner of such spaces has the right to admit or exclude as well as have some say in activity within that domain, but this is not always the case. The following section considers the domestic space of the home as an archetype of the private and illustrates the extent to which it can be invaded.

Telephones and the invasion of home space

The home is often considered a space of safety in which individuals escape the constant surveillance of identity (Saunders 1989), but for lesbians the home does not always deter heteronormativity that may infiltrate via neighbors and family (Johnston and Valentine 1995). For many in the LGBT community, 'evocations of home are embedded in the struggles to create and maintain spaces of belonging and comfort in the face of adversity without (or within) the lesbian and gay community' (Fortier 2001, 412). Although the home is usually considered a heteronormative habitation, it can be queered through private interactions with same-sex partners or by supportive family members (Gorman-Murray 2007, 2008). In my case, after being subjected to the ever present tyranny of gender across the continuum of public and quasi public spaces, my home is a necessary place of refuge, but one that is not uncontested. The tyranny of gender intrudes via modern communication systems which allow the home to become 'a "phantasmagoric" place, to the extent that electronic media of various kinds allow the intrusion of distant events into the space of domesticity' (Morley 2001, 428).

The telephone constitutes the most significant invasion of my private space. Though I have put my phone number on a Do Not Call list for telemarketers, I still receive a large number of unsolicited calls. I do not allow trans-phobic people in my home, but I generally answer the phone when it rings. Callers who do not know me invariably hear my voice and assume that I am male. Part of my witness related to integrity involves telling them patiently that they are speaking to a woman. However, many callers refuse to disbelieve their ears and continue this pronoun abuse by calling me Mister and Sir. After a few attempts to persuade them otherwise I often simply hang up in frustration at this intrusion of the tyranny of gendered pronouns into my own space. Many people do not understand the power of these little words and how painful the persistent use of inappropriate pronouns can be. After a long day of being out in heteronormatively defined spaces (and getting my share of confused looks and the occasional, yes sir), it feels like a violation to be subjected to such indignity at home. As a result I find that I am less likely to answer the phone (no doubt skewing all those public opinion survey calls). When I need to make a new contact with someone, I am much less likely to call on the phone and will use either a face to face meeting or an exchange of email. I do not mind

being visible and even speaking in public spaces as a differently gendered person, but I need a home-place where I can simply be myself without being subject to the insults of the tyranny of gender.

Conclusions

In this autoethnography I have argued that the relationship between gender and the space in which it is performed is dynamic and contingent upon both the spatial context and the degree of heteronormative variance of the performer. Gender matters, but due to its discursive complexity, how gender is performed matters even more. Feminist geographers have provided a rich critique of variations along the continuum of public and private spaces. They have done less well analyzing the nature and consequences of the continuum of gender. The experiences of transgendered people, as well as the gender variant, provide a number of important insights.

Some feminists have argued that the existence of transsexuals serves not to undermine but to reinforce the gender dichotomy (Lorber 1994; Lucal 1999), in part because transsexual people cling to highly dichotomized conceptions of gender. This article argues that adding a spatial dimension to analysis of gender reveals the pervasive action of the tyranny of gender which explains why some transsexuals cling to rigid models. The problem is not just contained in the behavior of transsexuals, it is rooted in the ubiquitous nature of this heteronormative gender tyranny. Any form of gender variance can have large personal costs (Lucal 1999; Browne 2004). The question is not whether performing gender variance destabilizes the heteronormative structure, but how can such performances be amplified in order to re-shape our understanding of gender. I would argue that without considering specific spatial contexts, this is not possible.

Different types of gendered spaces have varying potential for confrontation and transformation. There are places in which I never raise my voice above a whisper, such as public restrooms. In addition, when I use public transportation in unfamiliar locations or when I travel the back roads through unfamiliar terrain, I rarely engage those around me in idle conversation until I am able to get a reading on how invested they might be in the dichotomy of gender. I am not shy, just careful. I recognize that my gender performance is simultaneously modulated by the observers of my gender as well as the spaces in which we interact. These modulations do not shift my own sense of gender, but they do shape the visibility and impact of my gender performance. Sometimes I can choose when to perform my gender in ways that might expand the boundaries of the gender dichotomy and sometimes I cannot. I recognize the privilege contained within my subject position as a white middle class transsexual woman and resonate deeply with what Green (2004, 183–4) has written about becoming a visible trans man.

By claiming our identity as men or women who are also transpeople, by asserting that our bodies are just as normal for us as anyone else's is for them, by insisting on our right to express our own gender, to modify our bodies and shape our identities, is as inalienable as our right to know our true religion, we claim our humanity and our right to be treated fairly under the law and within the purviews of morality and culture. To do that we must educate – if we have the ability and emotional energy to do so. That is what visibility is all about.

As more victims of gender tyranny step into the light and become visible, the need to re-conceptualize the relationship between gender and space will also become more evident. In the introduction to the special 'Trans' issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Stryker, Currah, and Moore (2008, 12) suggest that:

we understand genders as potentially porous and permeable spatial territories (arguably numbering more than two), each capable of supporting rich and rapidly proliferating ecologies of embodied difference. . . . Any gender-defined space is not only populated with diverse forms of gendered embodiment, but striated and crosshatched by the boundaries of significant forms of difference other than gender, within all of which gender is necessarily implicated.

Consequently, a number of questions arise from this work at the intersection of gender and spatial theory. Feminist and queer geographers might usefully explore the parameters of the tyranny of gender as it constrains behavior in a spectrum of spaces and localities. Are there social and spatial contexts that empower the performance of non-binary genders and how do they operate? How does non-normative gender performance influence others' perception of space and the action they take as a result? How does the spatiality of non-conforming gender performance serve to strengthen or weaken the gender dichotomy?

The time has come to expand our understanding of gender beyond its social construction and include a distinct spatiality within which a range of gendered and other differences can be performed. Gender variance exists throughout the human and natural world and has real consequences for people in their daily lives. Gender strongly influences the ways that spaces are perceived and the kinds of activities that are possible, acceptable, or even safe within them. The tyranny of the gender dichotomy is an artifact of the patriarchal structuring of gendered space and it is time to lay it aside, not just for trans people, but for us all.

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Notes

1. I had hoped that getting married and fathering two children would silence my gender questioning and anchor my identity as a man, but that is not the way that gender identity works. Though my marriage ended, I remain in close contact with my children and am now in a committed same-sex relationship.
2. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus argued that it is not possible to cross the same river twice, since a river is always in flux and with each step it is no longer the same river as before.
3. I can not be certain whether it was my womanhood that caused the issue or my gender variance, but I am sure it was vastly different from the response I received when I was perceived as a man.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

La tiranía de los espacios generizados: reflexiones desde más allá de la dicotomía de género

Este artículo sostiene críticamente que las consecuencias de un sistema binario de normas de género, es vivido como una forma de tiranía de género tanto para aquellos que lo transgreden en sus vidas diarias, como para aquellos cuyas vidas son vividas dentro de tales restricciones. Las geógrafas y geógrafos feministas y las teóricas y teóricos de lo urbano han sostenido que el espacio está generizado, y que la generización tiene profundas consecuencias para las mujeres. Este artículo extiende este análisis y muestra cómo las categorizaciones rígidas de género no logran incluir a las poblaciones intersexuadas y transgenerizadas – un pequeño y altamente marginado segmento de la población en general. Este artículo utiliza métodos autoetnográficos para ilustrar las formas en que aquellos que transgreden las normas de género experimentan una tiranía de género que da forma a casi todos los aspectos de sus vidas públicas y privadas. La naturaleza de estas consecuencias es explorada utilizando citas de literatura transgénera y queer así como la experiencia de esta tiranía vivida por la autora en un continuo de espacios públicos y privados, incluyendo: estacionamientos, baños públicos, centros comerciales, el lugar de trabajo y el hogar.

Palabras clave: transgénero; variante de género; espacio público; teoría queer; autoetnografía

性别化空间的专制: 从性别二分反思起

本文批判性地指出, 性别范式的二元对立系统所造成的专制后果, 便是使日常生活中跨性别的社群以及受性别规范限制人们同时受到压迫。女性主义地理学者以及都市理论家主张空间的性别化, 而此一性别化过程对女性有着显著的影响。 本文延伸上述分析论点, 展现性别的僵固分类如何排除跨性别人口——一群极少数且受到高度边缘化的人们。本研究运用自身民族志的研究方法, 描绘跨性别社群在生活中公私领域各层面如何遭受性别压迫。这些后果将透过跨性别与酷儿文献, 以及作者生活中来自停车场、公厕、购物商场、工作场所以及家户空间等公、私空间中持续不断受压迫的亲身经验加以探讨之。

关键词: 跨性别、性别多元、公共空间、酷儿理论、自我民族志