

Trans experiences in lesbian and queer space

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This article explores how individuals who identify as transgendered and transsexual men experience the internal possibilities, limitations, and resistances found in spaces identified as 'lesbian' or as 'queer' in the City of Toronto. The article draws on interview data transcribing the experiences of 12 transgender and transsexual individuals in LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer) spaces. These interviews empirically illustrate how fluid and unfixed gendered and sexualized practices can transform spaces and their occupants. Further, this article considers the ways spaces may be 'queered' and the implications of these processes on the constitution of LGBTQ spaces. The experiences of transmen in lesbian and queer spaces bring into sharp relief the complex ways that material spaces, even those arising out of resistive impulses, incorporate disciplining expectations and new opportunities. Those who research or utilize these places must be attentive to these processes, if there is to be a serious commitment to the creation of liberatory, inclusive spaces.

Keywords: queer geographies, gay, lesbian, queer, trans, transgender

Les expériences transgenres dans l'espace lesbien et allosexuel

Cet article porte un regard sur la manière dont des hommes qui se décrivent comme des personnes transgenres ou transsexuelles ont fait l'expérience des possibilités, limites et résistances propres aux espaces de la Ville de Toronto reconnus comme «lesbiens» ou «allosexuels». Utilisant des données recueillies au cours d'entrevues, l'article traite de l'expérience de douze personnes transgenres et transsexuelles vécue dans des espaces LGBTQA (référant aux communautés lesbiennes, gaies, bisexuelles, transgenres et allosexuelles). Les résultats empiriques obtenus des entrevues ont permis de déterminer dans quelle mesure des pratiques sexospécifiques et sexuées, qui revêtent un caractère changeant et indéterminé, peuvent entraîner une transformation des espaces et de leurs occupants. L'article examine en outre dans quelle mesure les espaces peuvent être «allosexualisés» et les conséquences de ces processus sur l'émergence des espaces LGBTQA. Les expériences que vivent les hommes transgenres dans les espaces lesbiens et allosexuels mettent clairement en évidence la complexité avec laquelle ces espaces réels, même ceux qui trouvent leur origine dans les actions menées sous la poussée de la résistance, sont capables d'intégrer des perspectives raisonnables et des possibilités nouvelles. Autant pour les chercheurs que pour les utilisateurs de ces lieux, la prise en compte de ces processus est essentielle si l'on veut vraiment favoriser l'apparition de nouveaux espaces mouvants et pluriels.

Mots clés : géographies allosexuelles, gaie, lesbienne, allosexualité, transgenre, LGBTQA

Introduction

This article explores how those who identify as transgendered and transsexual men experience two kinds of urban LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer) spaces in Toronto—lesbian spaces and queer spaces.¹ LGBTQ is a catch-

all phrase for a broad array of distinctive types of identities, practices, and places that have unique histories and meanings. Drawing on data from interviews with 12 transmen, I argue that Toronto's LGBTQ spaces identified as lesbian or queer, respectively, and located both within and beyond Toronto's Gay Village offer contradictory

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¹ Trans individuals are present in all places, not just lesbian and queer places. This article reflects on the specificity of the

experiences of transmen in the latter places due to the relationships this particular group of participants had to these spaces over their life history. Clearly, transmen's experiences in heterosexual spaces, gay male spaces, and other spaces constitute a further area of research needing exploration.

limitations and possibilities for legible self-expression for transmen. Further, transmen rework the meanings embedded in those places in myriad ways—perhaps a queering of space, perhaps an erasure—that highlight the relational nature of identities, practices, and places. Understanding the experiences of transmen in lesbian and queer spaces is important as it brings into sharp relief the complex ways those material spaces, even those arising out of resistive impulses, incorporate disciplining expectations, normalizing practices, and new opportunities. It challenges those who research or utilize these places to be attentive to these processes if there is to be a serious commitment to the creation of libratory, inclusive spaces that support different ways of being (Nash and Bain 2007).

This argument builds, in part, on contemporary queer geographical scholarship in asserting that traditional gay and lesbian urban spaces are increasingly contradictory and contested locations. Political and social complexities related to newly constituted identities and practices underpin these growing divisions (e.g., Browne 2007; Nash and Bain 2007; Oswin 2008; Nash 2010b, 2010c). This is not to claim that these have been stable and untroubled locations in the past (they have not) but rather that new politics and practices are fundamentally altering how these spaces are understood. If places such as the Gay Village and other LGBTQ spaces are to continue, they will need to recognize and adapt to these changing social realities (Nash 2010c).

Defining terminology is an awkward and difficult pursuit; for the purposes of this research, semantic understandings were carefully worked out with each interview participant. The term transsexual is understood here as a person desiring a physical transition from one gender to the other through medical and surgical intervention. The terms transmen [FtM (female to male)] and transwomen [MtF (male to female)] were used in this research by individuals who may have had various surgical and medical interventions and may live primarily as men and women while refusing total submersion in those labels. The terms 'trans' or 'transfolk' were often used as umbrella terms for an admittedly diverse and not necessarily commensurate series of gender-variant subject positions. The interviews for this research made it clear that naming continues to

be a very complicated issue. Participants largely agreed that the term trans was suitable when finer distinctions are not required.

This article is divided into three sections. The first provides a theoretical overview of queer analytical approaches in geography—the underlying ontological and epistemological framework informing this research. Queer analytics are then linked with Butler's (2004) concepts of schemes of recognition and legibility (which are necessarily spatialized concepts) to provide a tool for understanding transmen's experiences in lesbian and queer spaces. The second section uses queer analytics and Butler's schemes of recognition to analyse data from interviews with 12 trans individuals about their experiences in Toronto's lesbian and queer spaces.² The final section offers some concluding thoughts about the implications of this research.

Queering Subjects, Geographies, and a Legible Self

Despite some attempts in the literature, no agreed-on definition of queer theory or queer analytical approaches exists. Any review of queer scholarship reveals 'considerable disagreement over its relationship with and debt to philosophy, women's and lesbian studies, second wave and postmodern feminism, and gay and lesbian studies' (Jagose 1996; Sullivan 2003; Browne and Nash 2010, 4). As Browne *et al.* note, 'queer is a highly contested term, one which has a variety of uses, applications and some would argue, misuses' (2007, 8).

At their heart, queer formulations (as they have been taken up by geographers interested

² As 'the researcher' and given my seemingly unproblematic self-identification as biologically female and lesbian, (as well as a feminist, a queer scholar, and an academic), the opening discussions in these interviews were largely given up to detailed (and careful) discussions about personal histories, politics, and positionalities. Despite the fact that there might be affinities between myself as researcher and the participants in that we are members of the 'LGBTQ' or 'queer' community, in many ways our histories and politics were simultaneously partly oppositional yet somewhat collective. Starting an interview with discussions about 'identity', 'gender', 'sexuality', and 'biology' opened any number of difficult avenues for exploration. The discussion here barely does justice to these complex and often challenging conversations.

in gender, sexuality, and space) seek to challenge the heterosexual/homosexual binary and to 'question the supposedly stable relationship between sex, gender, sexual desire and sexual practice' (Browne *et al.* 2007, 8). For same sex attraction to be coherent, relationships must adhere to fixed understandings of sex (biological as either male or female) and gender (as either masculine or feminine). Queer theoretical perspectives challenge, deconstruct, and decentralize the binary understanding of human subjects as male or female, masculine or feminine, and heterosexual or homosexual. As Knopp and Browne (2003, 410) argue, when lived experiences are examined through a queer lens, we are better able to see 'the indeterminacy, contingency, malleability and often repressive nature' of normative binary systems of gender and sexuality. Looking 'queerly' allows us to interrogate the lived experiences of individuals in ways that do not seek to impose a set of binary orderings as explanations for those experiences. Queer research seeks to understand the possibilities of lived experiences 'operating in incongruent and conflicting relationships with normative, binary systems of meaning' (Nash 2010a, 132). This refusal of the fixity of identity categories and practices seeks to render the notion of same sex attraction incoherent and sets at least some queer behaviours and practices in opposition to gay and lesbian identities (Turner 2000; Corber and Valocchi 2003). In this context, identities such as 'gay' and 'lesbian' are understood as one of two possible 'sexual orientations' (heterosexual/homosexual) based on assumptions that see these identities as fixed and stable along with gender and bodies. Further, these gendered and sexualized identities are understood as stable over one's life history (Gorman-Murray *et al.* 2010).

Queer theory in geographical research opened up new ways of thinking about and understanding sexuality, gender, and space. Much of the early literature on geographies of sexualities, while recognizing the complexity of gendered and sexual lives (as well as age, class, and racial intersections), tended to portray urban landscapes as ordered along a heterosexual or homosexual binary. Public urban spaces were understood as being heterosexual 'by default' and homosexual spaces were seen as locations of re-

sistance and transgression. Homosexual spaces, such as Toronto's Gay Village, were viewed as being carved out of a heterosexual urban landscape (e.g., Valentine 1993; Nash 2005, 2006). Such a perspective relied on an essentialist understanding of gays and lesbians, in other words, that individuals operated within stable, ahistorical, and immutable binary categories of biology (male or female), gender (masculine and feminine), and sexuality (heterosexual or homosexual).

Places such as Toronto's Gay Village became the political, social, and economic centres of the gay and lesbian movement (Kinsman 1996; Maynard 1996; Rayside 1998, 2008; Warner 2002). Toronto's homosexual spaces sorted themselves along classed, racialized, and gendered lines from the outset, although overlap between groups and spaces was frequent. Gay men and lesbians, often uncomfortably bound together in political and social struggle, largely occupied separate and distinctive social spaces (Chamberlain 1993; Ross 1995; Nash 2005). The social categories of gender, sexuality, race, and class that forged the initial spatial outlines of Toronto's Gay Village in the 1960s and 1970s are informally maintained today to a large extent. There is still a strong sense that middle class, white, gay, male interests, and a conservative politics dominate the area, although an increasingly active queers of colour community has developed (Warner 2002; Walcott 2003; Crichlow 2004).³

Nevertheless, traditional gay and lesbian spaces have often (but not always) provided safe harbour for myriad other sexual and gendered minorities, behaviours, and practices (e.g., Prosser 1998; Namaste 2000; Califia 2003; Noble 2006). In recent years, gay and lesbian social and political organizations have changed their names to some formulation of 'LGBTQ' to be more inclusive of those operating outside of or beyond

³ There is little historical research on the role that race and ethnicity played in the development of Canadian urban gay villages (but see Crichlow 2004). Research that does exist is largely silent on the role and visibility of racialized and ethnic minorities in gay and lesbian political and social organizing, representing a substantial gap in the research on Canada's gay and lesbian political movement. What is suggestive is the role that HIV/AIDS activism played in the emergence of self-identified, community-based organizations targeting Toronto's growing ethnic communities. In today's gay village, a large number of social and political organizations serve distinctive radicalized and ethnic minority groups (Crichlow 2004).

normative sex(uality)/gender binaries. Queer activism operates, with varying degrees of success, to open spaces to non-normative gendered and sexualized practices and identities (Nash 2010a, 132; see also Nash and Bain 2007; Lamble 2009).

Despite its arguably oppositional and critical stance to traditional gay and lesbian political activism, queer is a word used largely in an uncritical fashion in Toronto's traditional Gay Village spaces, in the gay media, and by various business/social and political organizations. Many queers regard mainstream, homonormative gay, and lesbian politics (perhaps unfairly) as outdated oppositional and assimilationist politics 'bogged...down in polemic, critique and endless analysis' (Browne 2007, 198). Canadian scholar and activist Tom Warner (2002, xxvi) argue that as a political stance, and in opposition to gay and lesbian political organizing, 'queer' 'rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest representation in favour of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal'. Thus, as Rouhani (2007, 169) suggests, 'queer' in this mode takes on a tone of 'authenticity'. Queer spatialization and activism are seen to operate somehow 'outside the spaces of domination'. In these accounts, gay politics are regarded as politics that 'capitulate and are inauthentic; while queer politics resist and are thus authentic' (Rouhani 2007, 169; see also Bell and Binnie 2004). In this conceptualization, being queer is to be 'cutting edge' and to reject old school conservative and assimilationist politics in favour of more radical and resistive practices. In this framework, gay and lesbian identity-based politics are located within the spaces of commodification and consumption, while 'queered' spaces represent the possibility of finding alternative 'anti-capitalist means of living autonomous queer lives', although it is difficult to know how queerness can operate outside capitalist systems (Rouhani 2007, 179; Oswin 2008; Brown 2009).

This queering of space arguably reflects a spatialization of the queer project in creating places for those who operate outside of essentialized gay and lesbian identity politics and those who do not feel welcome in gay and lesbian spaces. Spaces designated as 'queer' are portrayed as important because, as Tattleman claims (somewhat idealistically), the queering of space

... involves the construction of a parallel world, one filled with possibility and pleasure, while functioning simultaneously as an intervention in the world of the dominant culture, replacing its fixed principles and binary modes of thinking with the mutability of our everyday queer actions... In its space of opportunity, we are free to construct ourselves in flexible, unspecified and unpredictable ways. (2000, 224)

The queering of gay and lesbian spaces arguably expands the possibilities for living open and flexible lives beyond what some might find as limiting binary gendered and sexualized categories. Yet, despite the optimism around the possibilities found in the queering of spaces, tensions emerge when the disruptive (re)making or queering of space is not necessarily found to be liberatory for all. As Nash and Bain (2007, 58) argue in their research on the Toronto Women's Bathhouse, 'while queer spaces are often presented as progressive, inclusive and tolerant, these same spaces may be exclusionary or limiting despite efforts at openness'. The queering of space can lead to the possible eradication or exclusion of identities no longer deemed liberatory. Some argue, for example, that queer politics has resulted in a loss of lesbian space, both geographically and intellectually. Queer women 'now seem to have given up entirely a conceptual space for themselves as lesbians in adopting the term and the concept "queer"' (Faderman 1997, 226; see also Prichard *et al.* 1998). Other scholars suggest that so-called queer dykes, in their privileging of gay male culture and their dismissal of lesbian feminism, have contributed to the accelerated loss of material lesbian social and cultural spaces such as women's bookstores, coffee houses, bars, and clubs (Casey 2004; Jeffreys 2003; Podmore 2006). Ironically, 'queer' identities risk taking on the essentializing and stable characteristics that queer theorizing, politics, and practices seek to avoid. Thus, the queering of gay and lesbian identities and spaces raises compelling questions about the ongoing processes at work in gay and lesbian spaces, places historically constituted through the normative social categories of men/women, heterosexual/homosexual, and male/female.

The experiences of trans participants in lesbian and queer spaces in Toronto ably demonstrate

how the possibilities for being understood (being legible) as one wishes can be variously a tenuous, problematic, and/or exhilarating experience, much dependant on the nature of place. Being possible or being able to live a legible life at some times and places but not at others suggests that 'being' and 'place' are not all-encompassing or uncontested and that multiple, resistive, and subversive ways of being exist simultaneously. As Judith Butler argues, 'if the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that "undo" the person by conferring recognition or "undo" the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes the site of power by which the human is differentially produced' (2004, 2). Schemes of recognition—those forms of social and cultural markers that make us visible to others as a certain sort of being—only render some possibilities as legible and render others as illegible. Being legible as a certain gender and/or sex when one understands oneself as another (or none, or fluid) is to be 'undone', to be recognized as something one is not. If one desires to be understood or legible in ways that are not recognized, are refused, or are invisible to others, one is undone again. Transfolk in this study struggle with being and legibility and the possibilities for recognition beyond gendered and sexualized binaries.

Butler's schemes of recognition are relations of power in that dominant and normative expectations constrain and discipline how we are understood irrespective of how we understand ourselves. Yet, schemes of recognition and legibilities vary from place to place, opening up possibilities and opportunities. As Cresswell (1996, 117) suggests, places are saturated with 'multiple meanings despite the fact that some meanings are encouraged more than others'—normative meanings render certain places and practices possible. The possibilities for self-understanding and recognition by others depend on the available schemes of recognition embedded in place. If we are not recognized in certain places for what we believe we are or if we are recognized by others for what we are not, we can be undone—our sense of self refuted by others who cannot recognize us for who we understand ourselves to be. And yet, even in being undone, there is the possibility that illegible practices can

reconstitute that place with new possibilities for being.

Trans Experience in Lesbian and Queer Spaces

Twelve individuals generously shared their time and their experience with me for this article. All were from the Greater Toronto area and ranged in age from 20 to mid-60s. In order to locate participants, I drew on local contacts in Toronto who circulated my contact information to all who might be interested. All interviews were conducted in downtown Toronto in public locations. They participated in one to two hours, in-depth, semi-structured interviews exploring their differing experiences in lesbian and queer spaces. Some of the spaces discussed were in the Gay Village at Church and Wellesley streets and some were beyond that area but almost all were in the downtown core. All participants described themselves as being born biologically female and their current self-identifications varied along a transgender and pansexual continuum.⁴ Several participants identified as male and heterosexual while others employed a range of terms that crossed normative categories, for example, heteroflexible, intersex, queer, transsexual, and genderqueer. All agreed that 'trans' could be used as an all-encompassing term. Collectively, participants largely identified as white and middle class, although several understood themselves as having a middle class upbringing while currently living a working class life based on income and employment. Most had some post-secondary education. The participants' individual experiences in different places were as varied and distinctive as anyone else's, so there is no attempt here to claim comprehensiveness. However, these differing knowledges and experiences in Toronto's lesbian and queer spaces illuminate how attempting to live

⁴ The question of surgeries and degree of medical intervention was not a central issue in discussions about identity and subjective sense of self. In several interviews, participants did volunteer that a sort of 'hierarchy' existed in some segments of the trans community in Toronto. As one participant argued, 'the hierarchy has always been ... the more procedures you had, the more medically transitioned you were, the better you were, the better you passed' (Kyle, 3 August 2007).

a legible life, that is, being read or understood by others as a particular sort of subject, is rendered possible in some places and impossible in others (Butler 2004).

All interviews began with a lengthy discussion about the complexities of self-understanding (and its shifting and malleable nature) and the implications for considering how one is and is understood in particular places. Taking up queer subjectivities and positionalities makes it difficult (often intentionally) to pose questions about self-identification, especially given the limitations of contemporary vocabularies. During the interviews, we (as 'researcher' and 'participant') collectively explored an infinite range of possibilities for understanding subjective life experiences and commented on the social and cultural limitations embedded in current vocabularies, including the problem of understanding the self within dualistic notions of male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual. As a white, middle-aged, and middle class academic who unproblematically identified as a lesbian, I shared much history and familiarity with the places under discussion with the participants. However, as feminist and queer scholars argue, given researchers' distinctive positionalities and the changing nature of the field, the knowledges produced in the research processes are necessarily partial and situated (Haraway 1991; Staeheli and Lawson 1994). This makes the process of working out meanings and definitions extremely important (and difficult). We spent considerable time in the interviews making sure we agreed on how issues should be understood.⁵

Contemporary trans scholarship is highly critical of academic work that draws on the figure of the transsexual or transgendered individual as a trope or metaphor for postmodern deconstructions of subjects and identities, particularly work based on Judith Butler's notion of performativity. MacDonald takes aim at postmodern feminist scholarship that promotes the playfulness and performance of gender without addressing the lived realities of transfolk or acknowledging 'the direct and visceral terms in which transgendered people experience the boundaries and instabil-

ity of identity' (1998, 4; see also Wilchins 1997). Janice Raymond's (1994) attack on transsexuals in her book *The Transsexual Empire* (reprinted from 1979) also contributed to the longstanding rift between some feminists and trans academics and activists. Scholarly work that only attended to a notion of the transsexual as constructed through medical intervention but paid little attention to subjective experiences (e.g., Billings and Urgan 1982; Hausman 1995; Stryker 2006) was also the subject of intense critique (Prosser 1998; see also Namaste 2000; Rubin 2003; Hines 2007). Hints of this lingering distrust surfaced in several interviews, particularly in discussions about various theoretical approaches to gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Kyle, a community worker in Toronto, expressed disdain for some feminist and gay and lesbian scholarship, asserting that 'every time that I had previously seen some article by some person talking about what it meant to be trans, it had nothing to do with the lives of the people'. Kyle highlights the problematic application of scholarly theories to lived experiences:

... I think my frustrations are around the aspect of theoretical frameworks themselves in some respects because people don't fit in to theoretical frameworks. Often theoretical frameworks can be created and morphed to adapt to a person... It's when it happens the other way around where suddenly people are saying, "well now we know the theoretical framework, now we understand how this works for everybody". Everybody fits in to these ... scenarios or these identities or these categories and I think that that's problematic. (3 August 2007)

For all participants, the interview format required some form of self-description and we struggled to work beyond the limitations of vocabulary. For example, in my conversation with George, he argued against being positioned within pre-existing categories of legibility and recognition. He felt that these categories impose a stability and certainty about identity that is too narrow a referencing system for life experiences. In resisting existing categories, participants often used terminology that, while seemingly more comprehensive, also created seemingly stable categories for self-expression, such as heteroflexible. George notes: 'In an ideal world, where no one

⁵ For a detailed discussion on the questions of positionality, reflexivity, and the shifting nature of the field related to this research, see Nash 2010a.

needs me to use more commonly used terms, “heteroflexible” is my preferred term because ... I definitely prefer women, there’s definitely a preference there but I have a boyfriend. So, I’ve come to terms with that. We both identify as heterosexual because until we dated each other we were mostly into women’ (11 November 2006).

Similar sentiments surfaced in most interviews and required careful discussion. Many of the participants, in making sense of embodied gendered and sexualized experiences, argued that self-identification was often contingent on distinctive situational and relational circumstances (e.g., Diamond 2004). Interactions, practices, and desires in relation with others had the potential to destabilize, transform, or remake self-understandings. Jose, who identified as intersex but preferred to be recognized as male (although not always), noted:

I know about the fluidity of gender and, because of my social involvement in the community, my ideas of gender might change and if I change, [I might] not be a trans queer man but a trans gay man or, which I highly doubt, if I start identifying as straight if I am only going to pursue relationships with women who are not queer. (21 June 2006)

Jose’s comments highlight the complex intersection of gender, sexuality, and legibility and the fluid possibilities for self-understanding based on interactions with others (e.g., in relationships with women who are not queer). Jose and several other participants also sometimes asserted a distinctly trans identity—a self-understanding that deliberately refused any stabilized position with contemporary gendered, sexualized, and embodied categories. Public legibility as either male or female is expressly rejected in favour of an ambiguity to be understood as trans. This ambiguity is not intended by the participants to be read as androgynous but as an alternative subject position—a difficult subject position to occupy given that a trans subjectivity might be illegible to many people. Androgyny, by its definition, relies on the binaries of male/female, man/women, and masculinity/femininity and for many of the participants in this research, their sense of self worked be-

yond or outside these binaries. Caleb, who asserted trans legibility as a political expression, noted the difficulties:

But coming into ... my trans identity was even more difficult because my gender expression does kind of vary day from day, hour by hour if you will depending on my situation... and I’m constantly kind of policing myself because I want to be accepted as legitimate and it’s hard because the majority of the people here don’t understand what I’m doing. (18 August 2006)

Identities were quite stable for some of the participants, while others worked towards legible recognition by making constant and conscious strategic choices about self-representation. For many transmen, ‘what it means to be a real man has been thoroughly problematized’ (Rubin 2003, 125). Many participants, to ensure legibility in particular places, carefully deployed normative ‘schemes of recognition’—choices made about clothing, hairstyles, bodily comportment, speech patterns, and voice pitch. Participants considered a large number of social scripts as well as the location where such scripts would be enacted and exercised considerable agency over self-presentation. Participants acknowledged that there are limits to these choices (as there are for all of us) in ensuring the desired recognition in social interactions. Knowledgeable occupants legibly inhabit spaces by adhering to collective sets of hegemonic meanings about who shares those spaces and for what purposes. In speaking about heterosexual and masculine spaces of sport and fitness, for example, Caleb, who self-identified as trans or male, noted the need to reflect appropriate gendered scripts:

when I’m at the gym I want no questions about my male identity and that is ... I mean maybe I am taking this too far and I ... maybe I really have no idea of how the gym atmosphere would change if they figured out that I was trans. But as for now I am very traditionally [male] ... and I hate it. I hate the way that I have to do that, but like there is etiquette in the gym between men that just can’t be breached. (18 August 2006)

Also troubling our conversations about identity and self-understanding was the sense that

self-understanding shifted over the course of a lifetime and, in all likelihood, might be different again in the future. Nevertheless, most participants embraced this flexibility and uncertainty, regarding it as a positive and liberating possibility. As Nick noted, 'So ... am I going to be male for the rest of my life? Probably, but I don't really ... that's not a preoccupying issue for me right now because I recognize that things change all the time and I'm comfortable with that complexity now' (10 August 2007).

By contrast, two of the participants felt no ambiguity or instability about their self-understandings. Denis, a lawyer practicing in a small community on the Canadian west coast, was quite clear about the proper performance of his gender and sexuality given the expectations embedded in particular spaces. Unlike most of the participants, he unambiguously identified as a heterosexual man, although this positioning could be situationally and relationally complicated. Denis acknowledged that choices about presentation and legibility depend on place and its normative boundaries around heterosexual masculinities. In speaking about his interactions in certain places, he noted:

I mean things that I would feel free [to say], jokes that I would feel free to make among gay men, I wouldn't around straight men ... I mean mostly if I'm in or at the bike shop or something like that, that's just more watching my audience, put it that way, which is the same way I am at work. It's the same way I am in court... but I don't feel I have to swagger around, smoke cigarettes in a kind of funny way or belch too much. (7 March 2007)

Only one participant, Nick, identified as a queer man, reflecting his desire for more flexible ways of self-representation. As he made clear, however, even the seemingly limitless possibilities of queer sometimes need stabilizing:

I used to make a lot more choices than I do now mostly because things are so relational and complex that I don't desire to make my life so full of stress that I'm always trying to negotiate what other people are thinking and also because I pass without a problem. So I'm able to just sort of move comfortably in the world. I do make decisions about how queer I want to look based on where I'm going and who I'm going to be talking

to and generally that's an empowering choice for me. (10 August 2007)

These preliminary comments foreground the multiple ways participants understood selfhood both within and beyond established normative categories of sex, sexuality, and gender. Participants' commentaries illustrate Noble's assertion that 'transsexual and transgender folks do not transcend the sex/gender system; trans folks are an important site where its contradictions and inabilities ... are imploded from within ...' (2006, 100). How and whether one successfully participates in schemes of recognition in such unstable circumstances foregrounds the possibilities and limitations of legibility in certain kinds of spaces.

Legibility in Place—Becoming Undone

For the trans participants in this research, Gay Village spaces, including those sporting the lesbian or queer label, were generally understood as permitting more possibilities for being than places dominated by heterosexual normativities. Nevertheless, and perhaps not surprisingly, while we (researcher and researched) seemed to have a visceral understanding of what we meant by lesbian or queer space, our attempts to define it more closely were constantly undermined by the tensions between fixity and instability. Many participants related instances where an event was advertised as LGBTQ or queer, yet the space was *really* lesbian-only or women-only, or *really* gay male, or *really* queer. A space may be understood as lesbian but straight women may be welcome (and gay men and straight men might be tolerated in certain circumstances). While gay male space may be male but with a tightly policed expectation that only biologically born men would be present and lesbian spaces were largely associated with an essentialist (fixed and stable) identity (biologically female, same sex desire), queer spaces were often simply defined as 'not straight' (not predominantly heterosexual), and promoting an 'anyone goes' atmosphere.

Depending on the nature of the location of an event, assessments were made about class and racial affiliations. For example, some events were

regarded as 'white', middle class women's affairs closely associated with feminist sensibilities (e.g., Toronto Women's Bookstore author readings), while others were designated women of colour events (women's bathhouse events) with a different racial and classed sensibility. Each of these spatial categories (gay, lesbian, queer) provided a tentative starting point for discussions about who might be present in certain spaces while acknowledging from the outset that there are serious limitations in using these labels.

Toronto's lesbian spaces

All participants identified for some part of their lives as lesbian and had frequented lesbian-only spaces. For a majority of the participants, identifying as lesbian represented a stage in a long process of working out a self-identification that resolved internal dissonance around gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Admission to contemporary urban lesbian community spaces (bars, restaurants, dance parties, etc.) such as those found in Toronto's downtown provided entrance into certain social networks and communities.

Several participants recounted being labelled as tomboys in their early childhoods. When this conduct seemingly lingered into adolescence, many found themselves labelled as 'lesbians' by genuinely concerned and oft-times well-meaning relatives and friends. Given the association of forms of masculinity with lesbianism and the contemporary acceptance of butch identities within lesbian communities in Toronto, participants found a certain level of comfort in taking up a butch lesbian identity (Halberstam 1998; Prosser 1998; Cromwell 1999; Noble 2006). Bry, a participant working through a transition from a lesbian identification to a trans identification at the time of the interview, noted that he had unquestioned social acceptance as a butch. Bry was able to maintain lesbian social networks while increasingly identifying as male.

I don't think they really see me any different because there's different degrees of, if you want to call it, [of] lesbianism. There's like the femme girls. There's, you know, the androgynous type. There's like the more butch women ... Like you're gay, you see people at the gay bar all the time that look exactly like I do if not more like a guy than I do and

I guess I come off that way to people or it could be the way that I act or present myself in some way. (29 September 2006)

While a lesbian identity permits membership and acceptance in community spaces and in various social networks, which identification often represented an unsettled and ill-fitting compromise. Some participants reported finding it awkward to be read as butch (as opposed to 'male') within lesbian spaces but declined to dispute that reading by others. Participants often struggled to find workable ways to identify or situate themselves in the lesbian community while attempting to put some distance between themselves and the label lesbian. George argued:

I came out as gay. I didn't know why I had an issue with the word lesbian but I did. That was definitely one of those gut feelings that the word doesn't work for you... coming out as gay was totally positive... So that's why I came out as gay. But the whole time ... like I said, the word lesbian was just like no, I'm not a lesbian. I somehow felt better with the word dyke, I'm not sure why. But if you ask me I was like 'I'm gay' and they'd say 'oh lesbian' and I was like 'no, gay'. (11 November 2006)

One participant found the imposition or assumption that he was lesbian unacceptable from the outset and expressly rejected affiliation with that identity or community. Nick described a period in his life where, while still self-identifying as female, he shaved his head. Nick experienced considerable discomfort at suddenly being the subject of interest to women whom he understood to be lesbian:

Nick: So it was a huge shift in my social experiences of how people related to me. When I shaved my head is when the lesbians started whatever they were doing, being my friends (laughter) or like wanting to meet me.

I: You were getting cruised?

Nick: Yeah, I guess and I found it really creepy and gross and awful (laughter). (10 August 2007)

This illustrates how working within the intertwined scripts of sex, gender, and sexuality both limit and enable various possibilities for understanding one's life experiences. A desire for

women, translated or understood as reflecting a lesbian identity, gave participants access to community spaces where certain gendered displays along a continuum of feminine to masculine were acceptable. Nevertheless, some degree of acquiescence and compromise was required and a sense of continuing displacement lingered on.

While Toronto's clubs, bars, and dance parties initially offered some sense of belonging and acceptance, remaining in lesbian's spaces became increasingly complicated once the possibility of a trans self-identification emerged. Participants came to a male identification in diverse ways. While some participants were pursuing various medical interventions including surgeries and hormone therapies, others were not. Irrespective of the path chosen, a shift towards a transgendered or transsexual self-understanding had serious ramifications for continued participation (and acceptance) in Toronto's lesbian (or women-only) community places. While transgendered identification where one is understood as playing with gendered presentations is largely accepted, many participants found they were increasingly unwelcome in lesbian spaces when their transition from a lesbian to a trans or male identification was accompanied by physical changes such as facial hair and mastectomies. As Caleb noted:

I had a lot of trouble moving out of the lesbian community. But ... I wasn't so much moving out of the lesbian community as I was kind of booted out if you will. Because in the beginning I was pre-testosterone and pre-surgery and in the lesbian community that is way more accepted. If you are transgender in that sense [you] just become sort of a really radical extension of drag king masculinity butch type stuff. But once I started making the steps to medically physically transition, I was out and that's when I [was booted out]. (10 August 2006)

Caleb's legibility as a certain sort of gendered, sexualized, and embodied human being was relationally constituted within a particular set of legible scripts or schemes. The limits of an acceptable masculine presence ('drag king masculinity butch type stuff')⁶ became apparent

⁶ The term 'drag' is a complicated, historically, and culturally specific term. For present purposes, it is used to signal a ques-

when he moved beyond those schemes into a more visibly embodied masculinity. He experienced hostility and exclusion in lesbian spaces in ways that made it increasingly uncomfortable for him to maintain certain social networks. While still frequenting some lesbian venues, Caleb suggested he does so now as an 'outsider'. Other transmen related that merely *identifying* as a transsexual, prior to any medical intervention, was sufficient to prompt expulsion from particular social spaces.

... it was interesting because I was ... true to my own form of course, I was facilitating the lesbian support group here at the 519. One day, I just announced as part of my check-in 'I think I'm a transsexual and I'm going to try to transition'. And they said okay, you can leave now. It was as simple as that. (18 August 2006)

For participants who first identified as lesbians and socialized in lesbian social and political spaces, transitioning rendered them differently legible in those spaces. While several participants left the community altogether (voluntarily or otherwise), others struggled to work out some form of accommodation. In many cases, transmen began their transition while members of lesbian social networks and in a lesbian relationship. Transitioning reworked not only self-understanding but redefined relationships with others, particularly partners. Again, in his position as a community worker assisting trans individuals, Kyle noted:

Most of the transmen that I know are not at all part of that [lesbian] community. They may have started their process, their transition, while dating someone in that community and they struggled to maintain that relationship and in almost every case that I'm aware of, that relationship ended up buck-

tioning of the 'naturalness' of the sex-gender system through performances that parody traditional forms of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. Therefore, drag kings are individuals understood as women, who may be lesbian, who perform various forms of traditional masculinities largely to trouble or disrupt sex-gender understandings. Drag queens have traditionally been understood as homosexual men who may both perform or habitually dress in what is defined as female clothing. Clearly, in the present discussion, such performances are potentially rendered incoherent by the presence of individuals whose identifications disrupt these understandings (Halberstam 1998, 2003; Volcano and Halberstam 1999; Noble 2006).

ling perhaps because of that pressure or perhaps not and they moved out. (3 August 2007)

For several participants, participating in lesbian social spaces required remaining legible in these spaces as butch lesbians, a position that could lead to questions about disclosure and visibility. As George described it, disclosing as a transman might prompt one of several reactions, none of them satisfactory from his perspective:

So the lesbians who find out that I'm trans will go one of two ways. They will either resent that I'm stealth and want me out of the space because I'm stealth and they remind me that I've got male privilege and get the heck out or they start fetishizing me and being like "oohh, so down there it's still the same". So I don't want to talk to them or they don't want to talk to me and the ones that don't want to talk to me want me out. (11 November 2006)

George's comments highlight the historically complicated nature of spaces in urban centres such as Toronto with a long history of lesbian feminist organizing (Ross 1995; Nash 2005, 2006; Nash and Bain 2007).⁷ Longstanding feminist critiques of masculinity and male privilege underpin objections to forms of embodied maleness in women's spaces. These perceptions often sit alongside arguments that transsexuals are buying into gender stereotypes or have some internalized form of homophobia (Halberstam 1998; Rubin 2003). Caleb, while echoing George's comments about how interactions in lesbian spaces are complicated in terms of a trans visibility, pointed out that:

... within that [lesbian] space I'm still just kind of a butch and there is no recognition of my trans identity and if there is a recognition of my trans identity it's either one, fascination or two, like disgust right... Because within the lesbian community there's a lot of resentment you know be-

⁷While beyond scope of this article, the specificities of intertwined lesbian feminist, queer, and trans political and social histories embedded in places such as Toronto's LGBTQ spaces are implicated in trans experiences (see Halberstam 1998; Cromwell 1999; Califia 2003; Rubin 2003; Noble 2006). Understanding this historical invisibility and the linkages to queer political and social histories would reveal much about the constitution of acceptable identities and practices in gay and lesbian political and social organizing (see Stryker and Whittle 2006; Nash and Bain 2007).

cause FtMs are essentially sort of stealing the hot butches from the community if you will (18 August 2006)

This idea that the lesbian community is losing its butches is a part of a larger conversation about the possibilities for masculine gender performances for people who are biologically female and has prompted much scholarly and community debate (e.g., Halberstam 1998; Rubin 2003; Stryker and Whittle 2006). Rubin (2003), in his analysis of the historical development of the US lesbian feminist movement in the early 1960s, argues that the newly emergent hegemonic model of female homosexuality excludes older versions of butch-femme culture—a 1950s and 1960s North American subculture largely associated with heterosexual gender performance by lesbian couples that also tended to ignore the possibility of a trans existence (e.g., Feinberg 1993; see also Kennedy and Davis 1993; Faderman 1997). Faced with exclusion from lesbian spaces because of masculine or butch identifications, Rubin argues, some 'male-identified butches changed in order to accommodate themselves within the new model of lesbianism' (forms of gender 'androgyny') while others opted to transition (2003, 87).

The linkages between female masculinities, butchness, and transsexuality remain complicated and contested (e.g., Halberstam 1998). Kyle acknowledged:

I'm almost an alarmist and I'm sure that people will kill me for saying this. But I do think it's a little weird that there are no more butch women. Everybody is suddenly trans because that almost implies to me ... we decided oh no wait, women aren't allowed to be masculine, women have to be feminine and if they're not feminine, then that means they're trans. But that's not what transness is supposed to be about. That's not what transsexuality is supposed to be about. Transgender, of course, is about gender. But for those people who are undergoing transition of some kind, taking hormones, changing their name, I really hope that it's for good reason and that it's not because they've learned that women aren't allowed to be masculine and still be women. (3 August 2007)

Remaining in the lesbian community after transitioning made little sense for several participants who no longer found lesbian spaces of

interest. While friendships with lesbians might be sustained, relationships that were more intimate might be too complicated to negotiate. Denis, who identified unambiguously as heterosexual and male, said that he would not date a lesbian with strong ties to the lesbian community because of the perceived difficulties his lesbian partner would experience in being with him. He argued:

I wouldn't date somebody who identified as a lesbian... if it was a woman who was very involved in lesbian culture and lesbian identity is very important to her, she's going to look like she's in a straight relationship. So she's either going to have to spend her entire time with a bullhorn shouting out "this is really a queer relationship" or she's going to feel out of ... you know, a fish out of water. So I would think that that particular sort of relationship would cause way too many difficulties. (7 March 2007)

Many of Toronto's lesbian spaces provide support to transmen before, during, and after transitioning (e.g., Toronto Women's Bathhouse). Yet, the possibilities for being legible are always partial and compromised. For many participants, transitioning meant losing friends, social networks, and acceptance in particular places. This raises the question of whether queer spaces offered greater possibilities.

Toronto's queer spaces

Many Toronto locations self-consciously assert themselves as queer or LGBTQ venues.⁸ This naming is often an attempt to distinguish these places from more traditional male/female, lesbian/gay village spaces, and their supposedly essentialist expectations. Nevertheless, as some scholars have noted, queer is often used unproblematically for spaces that are actually gay/lesbian (Browne *et al.* 2007; Oswin 2008). The overt queering of gay and lesbian space has also met resistance from those who see it as an erasure of those essentialized gay and lesbian identities that led to the success of the political

⁸ Most participants pointed out that 'queerness' was largely an urban phenomena. In smaller cities and rural communities, being 'queer' is not a recognized possibility, not only amongst the mainstream population but often within the local gay and lesbian community as well.

and social movements of the last 30 years (e.g., Prichard *et al.* 1998; Podmore 2006; Nash and Bain 2007). Many of the tensions experienced in lesbian spaces by those not fully identifying with lesbian identities mark the conflicts involved in the queering of spaces. Transmen, through their very presence, are part of the (re)constitution of lesbian spaces as queer space, a process not necessarily appreciated by all those present (e.g., Noble 2006).

Participants made a clear distinction between what they considered to be lesbian spaces and those places considered queer. Sometimes queer spaces were defined more particularly as queer women's spaces, distinguishable from lesbian spaces by assumptions about the attitudes and sensibilities of those present. Bars, restaurants, coffee houses, and various events (dance parties, concerts, etc.) billed as queer or as queer women events were generally regarded as locations where forms of recognition and legibility were more easily negotiated. These locations were assumed to have fewer of the difficulties experienced in lesbian spaces (or in gay male or straight spaces). Caleb argued:

I generally try ... to stick to queer circles, queer as opposed to gay and lesbian. So most of the time, my identity is never really something that is a question in the queer community ... I differentiate between the two communities [queer and gay/lesbian] mainly on their knowledge of trans people. So for example if I'm in gay and lesbian circles, gay men for the most part have no idea about trans men. Trans people to them are the girls that they go and see do drag on a Saturday night. (18 August 2006)

It is perhaps not all that surprising that 'transness' is more easily legible in queer spaces than in other spaces, including lesbian spaces, given the embedded normative expectations. For most participants, queer spaces were places where individuals were expected to be attentive to or aware of alternative possibilities for being, including non-normative formulations of bodies, genders, desires, and practices. Given this, queer spaces were seen to offer the possibility of avoiding the fixing of sexual orientation, gender, or embodiment. Queer women's space in particular was regarded as more open to alternative practices, desires, and ways of being. And so queer

women's space has become this amalgamation of everything from FtM gender queer lesbian identified but completely opened to dating a trans man or even an MtF. As Caleb notes

Queer has become sort of the open door subversion if you will because it opens the door to all these identities. But at the same time it's subversive because I could be in a heterosexual relationship but we maintain a queer identity to show our difference from kind of a heterosexual crowd. So ... my partner is female. But we both choose to not identify. People are like "so what's your sexual orientation" and I'm like 'well I don't have one' you know. I have a female partner so you can make whatever conclusions you want. But we choose queer. (18 August 2006)

Queer as an identity or a subject position, while seeming to create a category of essentialized identity, provides an alternative positionality that seeks to avoid essentialized expectations and the labelling of relationships as either heterosexual or same sex. Caleb also noted the amalgamation of queer with queer women's space where one might expect to find people who largely define as women but who do not identify strictly with a lesbian sensibility. Self-identified queer women are positioned as more open to or less constrained in their partner choice and less concerned with preserving normative alliances between bodies, genders, and sexual practices.

The presence of transmen in both lesbian and queer spaces in Toronto's Gay Village is part of the ongoing and multiple processes of queering spaces; transmen reflect practices and ways of being that challenge the essentialized lesbian (and gay) identities that grounded the political and territorial aspirations of Canada's gay and lesbian movement. Noble's (2006) work on the entwined emergence of FtM and Drag King culture in Toronto's lesbian community in the 1990s outlines the impact such cultural shifts have on the understandings of spaces as lesbian. Noble argues, in part, that Drag King performances deploy 'complex performances of masculinity that move beyond the anti-misogynist, butch-femme and female masculinities of queer conceptualizations'. In doing so, Noble is arguing that the audiences participating in these performances are themselves increasingly queered

through the complicated meanings circulating in traditionally lesbian space through their being read 'against the grain of hegemonic gender and desire' (2006, 61; see also Noble 2004). Noble's arguments illustrate how the occupants of spaces, in their interrelations, are themselves reworked and, in the process, rework the meanings circulating in particular spaces. Noble's arguments highlight the on-going historical, political, and social processes mediating the possibilities and limitations of being in place.

Many queer women's places in Toronto make great efforts to ensure that transmen are welcome and to foster diversity and inclusion. The Toronto Women's Bathhouse (also known as the 'pussy palace') is a queer women's event held annually in Toronto over the last eight years, which supports the presence of transfolk with strong statements about acceptance and tolerance. Such an open-door policy at such a strongly sexualized event has raised troubling questions for some over when queer women's space should be preserved for women, as well as when transmen should no longer want to be in such places (Gallant and Gillis 2001; Nash and Bain 2007). While the baths may be understood as women's space, the queering of that space not only encourages transfolk to participate but their participation (together with the myriad ways of being present at the baths) contributes to the queerness of that space. As Kyle noted:

It fascinates me that while most transmen who identify as men, pass as men, removed themselves from pussy palace, there are still transmen who identify as men and pass as men who keep going or who have just started going. They've just come out more recently and they feel comfortable there. I think that says something about the fact that the space is queering in some way if those guys are able to be there and feel good about it. (3 August 2007)

Finally, for at least one participant, queer spaces were not necessarily the liberating and all-inclusive locations they are generally understood to be. Nick argued that the seemingly endless iterations evoked by queerness can be overwhelming and disconcerting. Despite the promise of queer, social interactions for many still depend, in part, on some stable legibility

in identifications. The oft-maligned homonormativity of the traditional Gay Village continues to provide that coherence despite its many drawbacks. As Nick said:

.... homonormative in the gay ghetto is an explicitly gendered sexual community. It's very clear what people are doing and why they're doing it and who they are and how they want to be read and there's codes It is very clear, which I appreciate the clarity because then you can work through the complexities with the actual awareness that I need in order to function. This all-queer business, there's a lot of assumptions I find ... mixed signals and things that are not clear and there's a lot of ... violence, like figurative violence, sort of like emotional or like things that I don't feel comfortable with. (10 August 2007)

Venues understood as queer were regarded by almost all participants as the locations where the possibilities for being were the least problematic. Yet, as the discussion of the Women's Bathhouse suggests, queer spaces still have boundaries regardless of how fluid these appear to be. Nevertheless, queer spaces and practices do create room for more nuanced, complicated, and fluid ways of being recognized.

Final Thoughts

Trans experiences in lesbian and queer spaces illustrate what Massey describes as the understanding of space as 'the sphere of the possibility of the existence of the multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality' and where multiple and distinct trajectories co-exist (2005, 9). Spaces and their inhabitants are engaged in an elaborate and relational transformative dance where the possibilities of being and doing come up against limitations and resistances. Working with Butler's notions of schemes of recognition and legibility, I have argued that when looking through a queer lens, we can work with the multiplicity of distinctive ways of being and practices and examine how spaces are implicated in the ability to live a legible life. LGBTQ spaces offer the opportunity for non-normative individuals to find locations that allow for broader forms of social engagement and interaction. These places themselves are of the relational constitution of

social practices and identities that favour some and weaken others.

Transmen's experiences, when considered using a queer analytic, highlight how representations of self are flexible and unstable but come up against the limitations of what can be understood. Their presence challenges and reworks the places themselves. Such potentials and possibilities are not uncontested as different groups attempt to delimit and contain certain disruptive practices. Trans visibility in queer and lesbian spaces pointedly demonstrates how these spaces are defended and maintained as well as constantly being reworked. This is particularly important at this historic juncture as trans scholarship, queer theory, LGBTQ political movements, and queer activism come up against each other in both productive and contested ways.

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