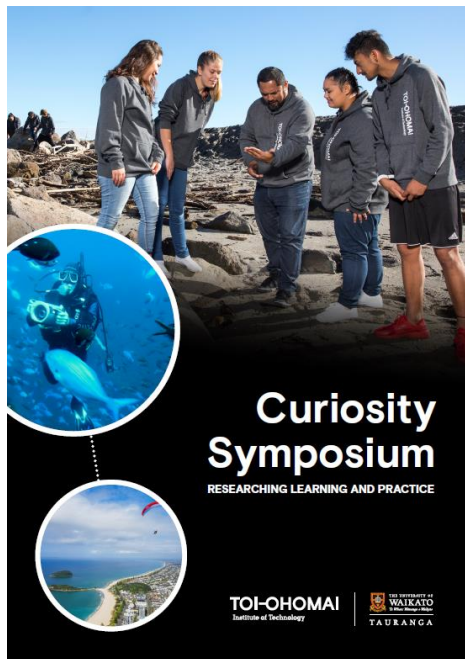


‘Hey! This is me, this is what I want to do!’: Gender transitioning in workplaces



Curiosity Symposium
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Tauranga
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Women body builders and gyms



- Johnston, L. 1995: Flexing femininity: The built body of female body builders and their training environments. MSocSc Thesis in Geography, University of Waikato
- Johnston, L. 1995: The Politics of the Pump: Hard Core Gyms and Women Body Builders, *New Zealand Geographer*, 51, (1), 16-18.
- Johnston, L. 1996: Pumped up Politics: Female Body Builders Refiguring the Body, *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 3, (3), 327-340.
- Johnston, L. 1998: Reading sexed bodies in sexed spaces, in H. Nast and S. Pile (eds) *Places Through the Body*, London: Routledge, pp 244-262.

Gay Pride Parades



Auckland HERO Parade Marching Boys: 'Marcho Men'
Ponsonby Auckland 1997



Auckland Pride Parade 2016:
Proud to Play research team

‘Hey! This is me, this is what I want to do’

Sally: Peter [the surgeon] gave me the boobs. I hadn’t told Jill [ex-wife] about this ‘cause I thought they can’t take them away from me now, you know, once they do that. And I’ve got to say that I think I needed to make an outward expression of faith. ... I had to do something. I had to say **‘hey! This is me, this is what I want to do’**. I can’t afford to get them out, so they’re going to stay there (emphasis in original).

Introduction

Gender variant geographies research project

- empirical material – interviews, community activism, media, and participant sensings – in order to understand further the relationship between trans identity, place, and power through an embodied, queer and trans geographical framework



Riff Raff Statue, from the cult film Rocky Horror Picture Show, south end of Hamilton's main street



Introduction

- Extends emotional geographies and workplace geographies
- I highlight experiences of seeking work, gender transitioning at work, 'coming out' and keeping work when one shifts from hiding one's trans identity to living it openly
- The idea of security – both ontological security and work security - influences the ways in which gender variant people feel about work.
- I offer accounts of gender variant people's feelings of (dis)comfort and (not)belonging to illustrate the constitutive relationship between workplace, bodies and (in)security.
- Considering gender variant people's feelings reveals how power and privilege operate, and the possibilities of challenges to cisgendered workplaces.

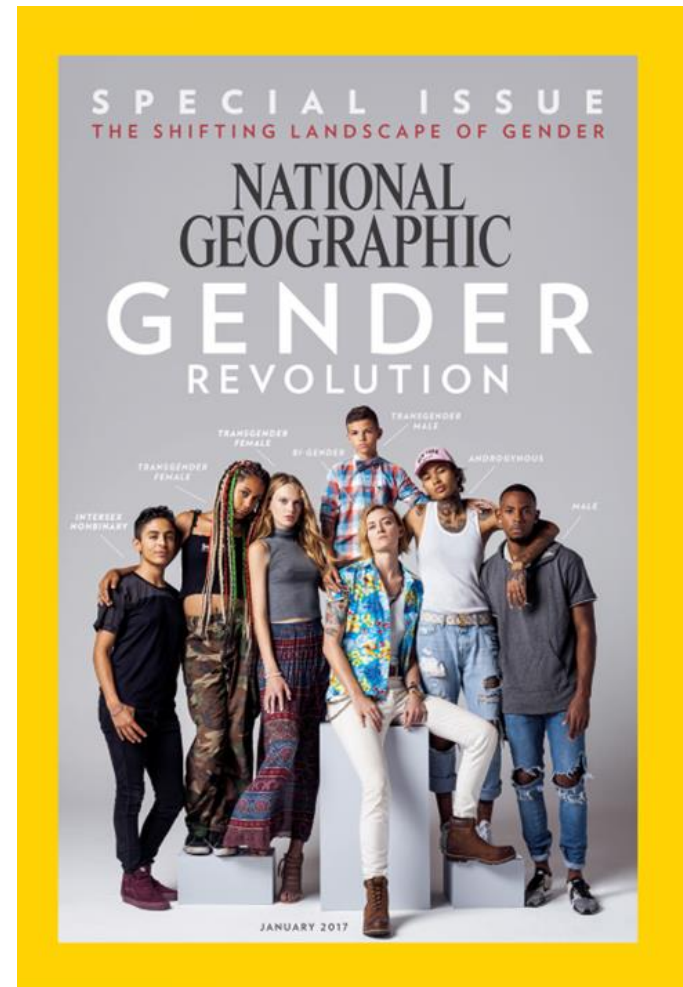
Transgender geographies

- The notion of 'trans' unsettles dominant framings of man/woman, male/female, masculinity/femininity, large/small, and sex/gender.
- Transgender is one identity subset in an array of gender variance (Doan 2007).



Transgender geographies

Petra Doan (2010, 635) reminds us all 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 behaviour in western society’.



Why am I doing this research?



HAMILTON PRIDE Inc.

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Waitati



Participants

- Female MTF
- Transgender woman
- Woman MTF
- Female transsexual
- Transmasculine
- Trans female
- Genderqueer
- Intersex
- Intersex trans male
- Female
- Transgender

- 17 Pākehā/European/White
- 1 Indian/Chinese
- 1 Taiwanese
- 3 Māori

- Ages between 18 to over 65

- Jay – genderqueer, aged in their early 20s, New Zealand European – experiences of working in an office as part of a sales team
- Jenny – MtF transgender, aged 23, white – experiences as working as an office administrator
- Karina – transgender woman, aged between 60 – 64, white and born in England – experiences of working for airport security
- Sally – transgender woman, aged in her early 70s, Pākehā – experiences of being self-employed food artisan in a farmers' market
- Emily – female, aged in her early 40s, Asian – experiences of working in a university
- Sophie – intersex, aged in her early 40s, New Zealand European – experiences of working in a university

Farmers' market

Sally: Now when I go to the market everyone thinks I'm the oldest butch lesbian in town, I think, since I've, I've got these [points to her breasts]. These [eyebrows] are tattooed on. This [points to eyeliner] is tattooed on. I wear makeup and I do eye pencil. My lipstick is semi-permanent and my boobs don't go away.



Farmers' market

Sally: So I'm standing there and every now and then someone will say 'excuse me you didn't take your makeup off last night' or someone I don't know might say 'are you wearing a bra?' So you get this every day, every day someone says something.

Lynda: Every day?

Sally: Well yeah, these are out of towners but that's alright, that's okay.



Petra Doan (2010: 642) in a powerful account of her own embodied transitioning at work, notes:

‘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.’

Farmers' market



Image taken by Lynda

Sally: So I have this invitation, well I want to talk but I want to go as Sally. So I email [the organisers] and say 'look if you want me to talk you need to know that Sally's going to talk'. I got all these emails back saying 'good on you', 'well done'. You know it was really touching, really, really touching. So I arrive up there looking drop dead gorgeous. I go for a make-over and people I've known for, for years from way back, we just embraced each other and cried in each other's arms. Why do we wait? And I don't know. It's something to do with being what you want to be. Looking drop dead gorgeous I speak and I get a standing ovation. And I'm thinking to myself, what is it about? Why have I waited so bloody long to do this and it's about, and I know what it is, it's about having the courage to do it, I have no illusions about it.

Jay: Every two weeks we have an induction meeting for the new ones ... That's always a bit awkward because then you have to be coming out to the new people ... I work with one other person very closely so we do the same sort of job for the entire sales team and um she's really good. She usually - we'll both walk into the induction meeting - she'll usually introduce me with male pronouns very loudly, so they kind of get the message um and then they look confused for a while and then she kind of reiterates it throughout the meeting and so a few of them get it, usually, and then a few of them, I think, I assume they talk amongst themselves and figure it out. I like to think that's what happens. I don't like having to do more. I find it a bit weird at work coming out cos it's feels like you should be doing your work and stuff and yeah. I think there's about three or four people who really didn't get it and so I send them an email asking them to please use other pronouns.

Nordmarken (2014, 38) explains the feelings associated with being in-between:

‘I feel the feelings I have habitually felt as a result of being positioned as female and treated as inferior. Yet, now people often position me as male in social interactions. In many of these moments, I experience a feeling of inclusion that I have not ever felt. Yet, at times, the femininity I continue to embody as a transmasculine being leads people to look at me funny.’

Jenny: I worked at McDonalds briefly, [then] quit. I was unemployed for about a year from 2009-2010 before getting hired into my dad's company (who I'm not out to yet so my employment depends on how accepting he'll be).



Offices - Jenny

Jenny: I will find out when I come out to my parents. The plan is to take hormones for as long as possible before it's impossible to hide, by which time the "damage" will be done and I'll hopefully be able to convince my dad not to fire me.

Jenny: On workdays I just get up, get ready, go to work, avoid interacting with people and quietly do my job so as not to be reminded of how everyone is perceiving me currently. I'm not out at work so I present as male and try not to think about it too much.

Jenny: I spend a lot of time on the internet, talking to people online at work which helps with the isolation that comes with working in an environment full of out of touch real estate agents.

Karina: I certainly found out that I could be who I wanted to be. It wasn't anything to be ashamed of. And I started going to work with female clothes on and make up on and I got in trouble at work.



Karina: I told the boss I wanted to transition. She said 'I'll help you. You've got to get a name change, you've got to get a legal name change and then I'll open the door for you'. But she was just fobbing me off. Really the truth of it was that she wasn't interested in me at all. I was not really sure, not really, really sure about what I should do. I am going to lose my job and I am going to lose my family. I am going to lose my house. It was too much. Anyway it just happen that I resigned from my job ... I was stressed there. And of course now my wife wants a separation.

Precarious work, new feelings

Karina experiences new feelings. These feelings are 'particular to transness: anxiety, fear, hypervigilance. It can be dangerous to be a transsexual. It can be a lot of emotional work to navigate the cisgender world' (Nordmarken 2014, 38).

As an airport security officer Karina had a history of short term casual employment contracts that could be ended or not renewed at any time.



Emily: I like to wear dresses or skirts, sometimes jeans to work depending on whether I have meetings to go to. Very, very occasionally sometimes a jacket but I don't like it ... I observe others and try to learn from them but I feel frustrated in terms of how, in this day and age, people still have to, perhaps, unconsciously hide femininity.



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Emily: Students are more likely to challenge me [if not in a suit], there is that, but I still don't want to let any of the bias stop me from being who I am ... I just didn't want to participate in their attack of femininity. What is so wrong with being a woman? Why do women have to dress in an androgynous way to gain respect? Why is girl empowerment all about emulating boys?



<http://www.waikato.ac.nz/>

Sophie: On days that I'm tutoring I try to wear tunics and leggings rather than dresses just so I don't freak some students out. Not that I should have to be scared about that but I want to keep my job so. I know there are some that are probably born in conservative families that would freak out. Um and you just don't want complaints against your name so it's easier just to conform. And I think that's more of a sadness than anything else that you have to change just to make other people happy, not that there's anything wrong with wearing tunics. I like tunics too but you kind of limit what you're going to wear for certain days because of that.

Nordmarken (2014, 37) dresses to pass as a professor:
“I wear a costume to make my class believe I am the instructor: professional khaki pants, dress shoes, a button-up shirt, an argyle sweater, and a tie. For the first two weeks of the semester, I am so nervous to perform “instructor” that I do not sleep the night before I teach”.



<http://www.waikato.ac.nz/law/about-us>

Conclusion

- Charting gender variant people's embodied feelings exposes other people's marginalising actions and reactions.
- Gender variant people's feelings of (dis)comfort and (not)belonging illustrate the constitutive relationship between workplace, bodies and feelings of (in)security.
- (In)secure workplace geographies, then, maybe characterised by the embodied emotions of those who do not qualify as 'legible', recognizable, or readable.
- Attention to gender variant embodied emotions helps undo the heteronormative 'tyranny of gender' (Doan 2010) so that new belongings are formed and felt, beyond cisgender norms.

Pātai?