



‘A Right Geezer-Bird (Man-Woman)’¹: The Sites and Sights of ‘Female’ Embodiment

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Abstract

Queer theorizations of sexed embodiments have rendered the dichotomies of man/woman problematic and unstable. Yet these have yet to fully be incorporated into gendered and sexualized geographical enquiries. In turn, geographical understandings of the constitution of social spaces and embodied sites have not been extensively interrogated in queer deconstructions. In contending that bodies are the materialisation of time-space networks that are relationally constituted, the paper examines the wounding moments of encounter, whereby sexed bodies are (un)made and (re)made. Drawing on empirical research gathered with nine women who are mistaken for men, the paper purports that sexed/gender dichotomies are (re)formed both at the site of the body and through disruptive sightings of bodies

¹ This was a phrase used by Julie one of the participants in the doctoral research upon which this paper is based. The two English slang phrases ‘geezer’ and ‘bird’ refer to men and women respectively and illustrate the ambiguity and existence between the categories of man and woman that is central to this paper.

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that are manifest in policing practices. These policing practices that question women's categorisation within the man/woman binary (re)create sexed dichotomies and show the tenuousness of these norms. These experiences are traumatic and women seek to (re)place themselves within the intelligible category 'woman' highlighting the internalisation of sexed codes and the significance of sightings in contesting their understandings of self. By examining the (re)creation of sexed embodiments through their relational formation, in this case the sightings of bodies, the paper contends that moments of (mis)reading that move bodies between the man/woman dichotomy highlight the contingency of sexed embodiments which require constant reiteration.

Introduction

Increasingly, in popular culture, in the literature regarding 'butch' lesbian identities and in academia, attention is being paid to women who transgress the boundaries of masculinity (for example Ainley 1995, Armadume 1987, Boys Don't Cry 1999, Browne 2004, 2005b, Cream 1995, Devor 1987, 1989, 1993, 1996, Feinburg 1993, Halberstam 1998, Lee 2001, Munt 1998, 2001, Namaste 1996, Venus Boyz 2002). Halberstam (1998), in her groundbreaking book *Female Masculinity*, purports that female masculinity contests assumptions that masculinity can or should be reduced to the male body. As women move across and between the boundaries of man and woman they blur and contest these categories as well as the coherence they represent. This paper will examine how, through processes of sighting (here used in terms of acts of viewing/reading) and (re)constituting/recuperating body sites (this concept is further explored below but can initially be understood as the complex matrices of materialities, meanings, symbols, interactions and signs that we see as 'our body'), fluid sexed body boundaries are continually solidified into the binary divisions of man/woman. It will explore how sexed/gender dichotomies are (re)formed both at the site of the body and through disruptive sightings of bodies. The latter are manifest in policing practices that (re)create sexed dichotomies by expelling that which destabilizes the self-other binary (see also Browne, 2004). Specifically I will explore moments of encounter (Ahmed, 2000) when women³ are mistaken for men and how these transgressions/(mis)readings are then (re)made at the site of the body within the man/woman binary.

³ The category 'woman' is used here as this is how the participants in this study understood themselves. It would be insulting and indeed hurtful to these women if I contested these identifications alongside the discriminations that will be explored in this paper.

This paper draws on and augments queer studies which examine issues of gender transgressions, and which have played with questions, and questionings, of gender and sex (see for example, Queen and Schmeil 1997). Geographies of sexualities have argued that sexualities are fluid, contextually enacted and, importantly, spatially contingent (see for example Brown 2000, Bell 2001, Binnie 1997, 2004, Kitchin and Lysaght 2003, Knopp 2004). Yet, outside of discussions of 'camp' (Binnie 1997, Johnston, 2002) there is a dearth of research and theorisations of gender disruptions in geographic research with 'queer', usually explored in relation to sexual marginalisation/'deviancy' (exceptions include Cream 1995, Namaste 1996). On the other hand, Brown (2000) argues that geographers' emphasis on the spatiality of social relations is at odds with queer theories' imaginings of stages as contexts:

The problem for geographers with the stage metaphor was that it allowed theorists to divorce social processes from spatial contexts. (Brown, 2000: 33)

Moving between these lacunae and potential divergences, this paper seeks to integrate an embodied geography (Longhurst 2001) with disruptive sexed enactments that move between the categories of man/woman. Contrary to other projects that seek to establish social-psychological explanations for gender dysphoria (see Devor 1989, 1993, 1996), I seek here to explore the importance of spaces of betweenness and interaction, networks and connections (see below) in the reformation of sexed bodies. This contests the pre-existence of a dominant gender schema, and instead looks to the moments where the performativities of becoming woman (in this case) break down. In this way, I seek to advance a radically anti-essentialist agenda, where sex, as a contradictory set of relational processes that are constantly in the process of being (re)made, can in moments of disjuncture be exposed as fluid and contingent. The paper thus intersects geographies of gender, that centralise social relations in the (re)construction of gendered bodies and spaces, with queer theories, that conceptualise the fluidity of gender/sex boundaries at the site of the body. The next section will examine how Massey's conceptualisation of place can be used to understand the (re)production of bodies as 'sites', the emphasis on sights will explore the centrality of social-spatial relations in the (re)construction of body sites.

Prior to this, it is important to acknowledge the political fears of this form of theory. There has been a questioning of queer theory and a move to reinstate the place of the category 'woman' (see Butler and Scott 1992, Hartsock 1990, Ussher 1994). This is based on a backlash to what is perceived as dangerous and premature postmodern deconstruction of the category 'woman' just as women began to gain particular power (see Hartsock 1990, Ussher 1994). Authors in this vein posit that categories of woman are necessary for collaboration in light of continuing patriarchy and inequity between men and women. Within feminist

geographies the continued and often unquestioning use of categories of man/woman suggests that these have yet to be extensively problematised (however see Cream 1995, Namaste 1996). Using the theorization of sexualities as fluid, contingent and contextually re-enacted (re)forming place and space (see Bell et al 1994, Kitchin 2002, Knopp 2004, Knopp and Brown 2003) I take the position that, alongside discussions of patriarchy and other studies that begin from the premise of dichotomously sexed power relations (so often the focus of gender geographies), contesting the binary opposition of male/female may contest the system of oppression itself (Butler 1992). In other words, by contesting the dichotomy of man/woman and challenging the naturalization of division as a reiterated fiction we can problematise the hierarchisation of these fabricated categories, rendering them contextually contingent formed in, and (re)forming, place and space. Moreover, the focus here is on body sites that are re-placed outside the man/woman divide and hence experiences of discriminations that cannot be understood within these hierarchies.⁴

This paper investigates how ambiguously gendered/sexed bodies are experienced and specifically the sighting of 'abnormal' (outside man/woman, male/female) that (re)form sexed body sites, in this case the viewing and (re)formation of women who do not 'fit' within the boundaries of feminine norms. It will use nine women's accounts of their experiences of being mistaken for men, yet understanding themselves, and living, as women. The accounts were formed as part of a wider project that explored non-heterosexual women's perceptions and narratives of the everyday spaces they inhabit. The research used six focus groups, three coupled interviews, 23 individual interviews, 22 diaries and six sets of auto-photographs (see Browne 2003, 2005a for further details). The nine women that spoke of what I have termed genderism⁵ differentiated their experiences of being mistaken for men from heterosexism/homophobia (see Browne 2004 and Munt 2001 for an alternative view) and highlighted the pain associated with the policing of their bodies into sexed norms. From this I published an article in *Diva*, the British Lesbian magazine (Browne 2002). I also draw on some of the responses I received to this article.

This paper, whilst building on the understanding of gendered discriminations not being derived solely from the man/woman dichotomy, seeks to explore how bodies are mutually constituted through individual enactments and

⁴ Devor (1989) uses patriarchy to explain the discrimination and problems women who are mistaken for men experience. I would argue that this ignores the transgression of sexed categories (man/woman) that discussions of patriarchy rely on.

⁵ Elsewhere I have discussed the concept of genderism which was defined as 'instances of discrimination based on the discontinuities between the sex/gender with which an individual identifies, and how others, in a variety of spaces, read their sex/gender' (Browne, 2004: 332).

social relations specifically moments of encounter. The next section will outline how *sites* of sexed bodies are conceptualised, moving to the importance of *sights* in the (re)constitution of embodiments. From this, women's (painful and discriminatory) experiences of being mistaken for men are explored and used to discuss the constitutive relations between bodies' sites and the sights of bodies. By examining those who transgress sexed boundaries through the readings, enactments and presentations of bodies, the unstable processes that (re)form man/woman can be interrogated. Sex is thus read as:

... a contingent, reiterated and relational set of processes, that are multiple, fluid and heterogeneous, but congeal at the site of the body to produce the illusion of substance. (Butler, 1990: 33)

Embodied sites, sighting bodies: The relational (re)production of bodies

The body as the mundane 'stuff' of everyday life is understood using Massey's (1994) conceptualisation of place:

If, however, the spatial is thought of in the context of space-time and as formed out of social interrelations at all scales, then one view of a place is as a particular articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings. ... [I]dentities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is...[constructed] (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that [those] 'beyond'. (Massey 1994: 5)

If we read bodies as 'sites' in terms of places, they can be theorized using Massey, as physical manifestations of space-time interrelations that have diverse and fluid identities. In outlining the performative and relational (re)formation of bodies, this section argues that it is possible to see bodies as simultaneous 'done' and 'read'. The interconnections between these processes then (re)produce the 'moments' Massey discusses. Thus, in exploring the doing and reading of bodies, I am examining them as sites which are the 'nodes in the networks' of social-spatial relations and individual enactments, and as the materialization of these space-time interrelations.

Moving from this conceptualization of bodies, to the sexing of these sites, we can see that the materialities of sex are not fixed. Understanding sex as something we do, rather than an ontological fact, contests the gender/sex divide (Butler 1990, 1993). Gender is often explained as the ideologies, structures and processes that are diversely constructed onto pre-existing sexed bodies (Ussher 1994). Where sex has been theorized as biological, fixed and unchanging, gender

has been read as socially constructed through historical, cultural and spatial processes (see WGSJ 1997). In contrast, Butler (1990, 1993) argues that bodies are made through their gendered performances and therefore there is no pre-given biological sex upon which gender is built. Instead through our gendered enactments sex is materialized and comes into being. In other words, Butler (1990) argues that sex, rather than being a fixed biological state, is a manifestation of how we do our gender and these actions continually (re)create our bodies as intelligible. Butler's theories enable us to conceptualize sexed bodies as fluid and continually remade. Consequently, there is no pre-existing body (fixed biological sex) with which one acts. Instead in order to exist one must perform within intelligible discourses and these performances bring the body into being and need to be reiterated - a process Butler terms *performativity* (Butler 1990, 1997). Rather than looking for fixed categories or psycho-social problems/solutions (see Devor, 1989), I seek to explore the moment of encounter, misreading and the resulting recuperation, to examine the contingency of sexed sites and the processes of policing these threatening boundaries. Thus, the point is not to highlight or explain 'abnormality', but to point to the fluidity of dichotomous sexes at the site/sight of 'mistaken' bodies.

Brown (2000: 35) argues that the literary histories and bias of performativity slides uncomfortably over geographers' contentions that 'place matters'. However, performative geographies that recognise the fluidity of place and space can further contest the binary separations of man/woman, recognising not only the contextual contingency of sights/sites of bodies but also their continual (re)formation. Gregson and Rose (2000) have used Butler's arguments to contend that space is produced through its doing. What is pertinent for this paper is their theorisation of spaces as relationally (re)formed in part through interactions, what Rose (1999) terms spaces of betweenness (see also Knopp, 2004). These spaces are formative, as well as continually (re)formed which emphasises that individual bodies do not do their gender in isolation (Nelson 1999). Thus we are not simply (re)formed through individual performances. Bodies are formed through social interactions with others and come into being as a nexus of these performativities and relations.

The theoretical frame I seek to use to understand the relational (re)constitution of bodies as sites and sights is similar to that of Ahmed's (2000) discussion of 'strangers'. She contends that in discussing 'stranger danger', even in contesting the dangerous aspects of this concept or the relations between strange 'others' and the constitution of the self, the mythical figure of the 'stranger' comes into being. Ahmed goes on to argue that:

'...identity does not simply happen in the privatised realm of the subject's relation to itself. Rather, in daily meetings with others, subjects are perpetually reconstituted: the work of identity formation is never over' (2000:7).

These moments of encounters can be surprising and where 'we may not be able to read the bodies of others' (Ahmed, 2000: 8) can be threatening, and wounding for those who are 'misread' or unreadable. Bell et al (1994: 43) examination of 'lipstick lesbians' suggests that the transgressive aspects of their unreadability may not be related to the 'intention of the author' but the 'perception of the viewer'. I want to argue that there is a mutual process in these moments of encounter. The place of the 'looker' and observer (those who read/view/sight bodies) can be important in (re)constituting sexed bodies as sites and this includes those who embody 'strange'. Consequently, this paper explores not the formation of 'strangers' from the perspective of the looker, but the creation of sexed embodiments and identities when one is unreadable and therefore 'strange'.

Following Butler (1990; 1993; 1997) it is argued that bodies are (re)made as a result of (and remake) heterosexualised power relations that render 'man' and 'woman' as idealised and unobtainable opposite subject positions. These power relations can be seen in the Foucauldian sense (1977) where the visual assessment of one's body by others plays a part in bringing bodies into being and constituting them as comprehensible. Here in the (mis)naming of sexed bodies, the disruptions highlight not only the need for repetition in the act of naming, in order to fit intelligibly into the binaries of man/woman, but also the centrality of recognition from others in the reconstitution of the sexed self. Thus, the messy boundaries between us, as well as between man/woman, are fuzzy and unstable. In the creation of sexed body sites, these processes of sighting, making sense of and policing, highlight the fluidity of dichotomous sexes. This paper will now turn to nine women's accounts of being mistaken for men to explore the sexed webs of power that (re)create the site of the sexed body and the importance of the sight of the sexed body in these (re)creations.

Bodies as sites and the sight of bodies: Women who are read as men

Devor (1987) explored the life stories of 15 women who are mistaken for men and Lee (2001) compared 'butch' lesbians with female to male transsexuals. Although they were females, the women in both of these studies became 'masculine' and that masculinity was 'sufficiently developed' that strangers read them as men (Devor 1987: 19). However, they understood themselves and lived as women. The experiences of being mistaken for a man moves the individuals involved across and between the man/woman dichotomies. This is because the *sight* of the body is dissonant to the sexed-self and this points to the importance of interrelations not only in gender transgressions (see also Straayer 1997), but also in the (re)formation of normative sexed/gendered bodies (in other words, those that continually 'fit' into man/woman). However, discussions of intersexuality, transgender/trans-sex and drag that disrupt gender/sex dichotomies often focus on individual bodies and individual choices (see Butler 1990, Hird 2000, Mackie

2001). Here, understanding the relational (re)constitution of the sites of bodies through their citational enactments, it is possible to examine how the nexus of sexed bodies comes into being through sightings and moments of visual disjuncture.

Far from being harmless, judging body sites can dehumanise individuals such that when one does not fit within the category of man/woman, one exists outside intelligible humanness (see Butler 1997, Browne 2004). When there is ambiguity surrounding the sex of a body within the two sex system, it poses a threat to the presumed naturalness of man as opposite to, and different from, woman (Halberstam 1998). Threatening the dichotomous separation of man and woman can result in physical violence, verbal abuse along with more subtle cultural process that cause individuals to feel different and ‘abnormal’ (Namaste 1996, Browne 2004). In reinstating normative binary genders women who contest the sights of ‘women’s’ bodies can be rendered ‘out-of-place’ in women’s spaces:

Lorraine: I can’t believe how rude people are though, cos I have been in the toilets with you.

Janet: I mean you’ve been every single. I dread going to the toilets at (name of nightclub) on a Wednesday night I absolutely dread it I just think ‘fuck I have to go to the toilet’. And I hold it off as long as I can and I just think ‘no I have to go’. And I have to get someone to come with me because I just, I just get so many people shouting at me.

(Later in the focus group)

Janet: So you know going out for a meal and stuff if I need to use the toilets and you know stuff like that I worry about which is I know I get shit. I have had a fight in (name of restaurant) toilets once after having a meal there.

(Janet and Lorraine, focus group)

Where places are segregated into men’s and women’s spaces, such as toilets, ambiguous bodies can be subject to violence and abuse in these locations (see Browne 2004). Janet recounts being yelled at and being involved in a physical fight because of her presence in female toilets. The physical and emotional traumas associated with her transgression of gender norms are apparent in her anxiety and dread of bathroom spaces. In order to understand these processes, what are often considered the underlying and fixed structures of sex have to be questioned and this in turn renders them unstable. In recognising that sexed bodies as sites need continual (re)formation and dichotomisation between self/other, movements between man and woman are threatening because they contest what is

presumed to be fixed. The wounding moments where sexed norms are policed, illustrate fragility of this system. This vulnerability is clear even when these norms are 'accepted' by those who transgress the boundaries of man/woman.

Janet recognises that her body often does not 'fit' into the sight/site of 'woman' yet rather than question the dichotomous separation of man/woman, she looks for explanations at the site of her body for how her body is read:

Janet: And you know they don't look at my face or anything they just look at my build and look at my height and look at my haircut and they just instantly assume that I am some dirty man in the women's toilets.

(Janet, Lorraine: focus group)⁶

Janet believes that whilst her face is feminine, her body is read as male. The site of her body is 'built' in a way that contests gender norms. In particular Janet refers to her 'build' (by which she is referring to her muscular and bone structure) and her height. Attributes, such as large frames, can often be associated with men, constructing the sight of the body as male and consequently 'out-of-place' in women only toilets (Browne 2004, Cresswell 1996). Interestingly Janet also refers to her hair. Haircuts and dress styles are often associated with fashion and in contrast to the presumed fixity of sexed bodies, are seen as mutable and possibly altered. Where bodies do not fit neatly within the man/woman dichotomy how they are dressed and hairstyles can be blamed for (mis)readings. The site of the body is then 'wrongly' presented rather than contesting the fixity of sexed categories which are central to our/their intelligibility as 'human'.

Drawing on an understanding of 'self' that depends on dichotomous sexed norms and related gender codes, individuals can understand readings of their bodies outside 'woman' as their 'fault':

I refuse to grow my hair as I find it very uncomfortable and look like a man in drag! The clothes I wear may be part of the problem but mini skirts were never gonna look good on someone with a shaved head, fat legs and being 4 stone over weight!! Tight tops are fine as long as you don't have a beer belly like me! and stilettos look a bit silly with combats! So what is a girl to do??????

(Email communication in response to article in *Diva*, Browne, 2002. Used with permission)

⁶ See also Browne (2004: 337)

This 'girl' sees how she styles her body as 'part of the problem'. However, she argues her body would not 'fit' into clothes ascribed to feminine bodies. She interestingly moves between the body and fashion styles illustrating that the stylization of bodies is a nexus of build, hair, dress that are read within and through particular sexed discourses. Attempting to fit within feminine dress conventions would not halt this woman's problematic experiences of being mistaken for a man (genderism) because her body would 'betray' her and she would look like a 'man in drag'. Instead the dichotomies of male/man and female/woman, which make her, often simultaneously, intelligible (in her embodiment) and unintelligible (in the readings of others), are not based solely on individual performances. Rather, this dichotomy is constituted within the 'chronotopic tripartite dynamism - of the social, of the body and of the self' (Wilton 2000: 251). Thus the 'self-as-gendered is not purely socially produced, but a product of the meniscus between the body and the social' (Wilton 2000: 249). Placing explanations for genderist policing processes upon on the site of individual bodies does not recognize the constitutive betweenness that incorporates bodily sites, as well as sightings, in the formation of sexed corporealities.

Devor (1987) argues that because the dominant societal schema only allows for the possibility of 'men and women and no other gender status, these women found themselves becoming men by default' (Devor 1987: 22). However, Halberstam (1998) offers a less structured view contending that identities, in terms of ambiguous gender presentations and performances are best described in terms of 'processes with multiple sites for becoming and being' (Halberstam 1998: 21). This recognises the importance of context in reading bodies as 'woman' and the mutual (re)formation of sexed embodiments through performativities and the readings of bodies. Integrating the communication of sexed selves with sexed self-perceptions locates body formations in the spaces between stylised embodied identities and sights of bodies. This challenges Butler's (1990) individualised body by emphasising the centrality of interrelations in the constitution of body spaces. However, it supports her arguments in 1993 (p. 121) that suggest a subject is brought into being in part by social formations that can be seen as oppressive, in her example the reprimand of the law does not 'merely repress or control the subject... it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject'. In this way, individual enactments, whilst important, do not exist in isolation. Here, I have argued that the (re)creation of messy material embodied sexed sites relies in part on the (potential disruptions of) sightings and (mis)readings of bodies. In Ahmed's (2000) terms, these sightings and (mis)readings bring these bodies into being. I have examined how this is problematic, a result of violence, abuse and hurt, as well as how these processes can highlight the contingency of sexed formations.

Sexual sites/sights: Reading sex, (Re)reading sexuality

Female masculinity is often presumed to exist within homosexual relations, the sights of bodies justified on the basis of 'abnormal' sexualities on the part of these 'women' (see Estenberg 1996: 270). Indeed Lee (2001) argues that lesbian identification itself can be seen as a space between womanhood and manhood. Radcliffe Hall's, *Well of Loneliness* (1928) saw the mannish lesbian as the 'true' lesbian attracted to, and attracting, feminine (heterosexual) women. Vicinus (1992) asserts that in the 1950's the 'mannish' lesbian was privileged. However, in the 1960s some forms of feminism began to set criteria for the 'right' sort of lesbian and saw butch/femme couples as reproducing heterosexuality in terms of having a 'man' and a 'woman' in each relationship. The butch lesbian in the 1970s was sometimes considered 'self-hating' and 'unreconstructed' (Ainley 1995: 146, 148). There continues to be feminist authors who see butch/femme as attempting to replicate heterosexuality (for example Jefferys 1996) by attempting to 'be men'. Munt (1995) counters this, highlighting the contestations 'butch' offers to traditional gender forms. Yet she (1995: 120) recognizes that butch/femme are neither 'intrinsically radical' or 'naïve forms' of pure homosexuality. What these critical discussions of butch/femme also reveal is that relations between bodies, in terms of intimate relations, can be set within a particular (hetero)sexual framework that reconstitutes those within these relationships as opposites. Stevi, for example, believed that she was more likely to be perceived as a man because of her relationship with Virginia:

Stevi: I think when I was with Susan [ex-girlfriend], she is far more butch looking. I think people knew it was two dykes. Whereas now I think people sometimes genuinely think I am a bloke because Virginia [girlfriend at the time] looks so feminine, she could not possibly be gay. So its like or they you know I think that's how it happens. So in a way it does happen more but maybe it is because of how she looks as well. (Stevi, individual interview)

Stevi contends that her relationship with Virginia influenced how people understood her gender. Because Virginia 'could not be gay', Stevi was more likely to be mistaken for a man. Whereas, when Stevi was with someone who is more 'butch' their joint sexuality was known, but their gender remained unquestioned. Here the mutual (re)construction of Virginia's sexuality and Stevi's gender illustrate the assumptions that define bodies, problematically, as opposites within the heterosexual matrix. These extend the (re)constitution of the site of the body beyond individual enactments or even sightings of individual bodies. Here it is the sight of two bodies that (re)make sexed embodiments. Andie experienced similar mistakes with a previous partner:

Andie: I mean sometimes we [an ex-girlfriend and Andie] went somewhere and everyone would think I am a bloke. So it just looked

like she was with a bloke *so it wasn't a problem*. No can't see there was. (Andie, individual interview)

Andie here believes that 'it' (being mistaken for a man) is not a problem (see Browne, 2004, 2005b). Because Andie could 'pass' as a man, she argues that her partner and herself did not encounter any negative reactions to their sexuality. To gain normative heterosexual privileges, such as passing unnoticed, Andie's body must be read as male and her partner female in order to enact a heterosexual identity. This is similar to Devor's (1987) finding that some women choose to pass as men to avoid negative experiences. On the other hand the fluidity of reading/reinscription can be problematic in terms of sexualities when women's 'true' identities are established:

Janet: I am sure people instantly think, cos ... why would a straight woman, not that I want to look like a man, but why would a straight woman cut her hair off and dress masculine if she wanted to attract men? ... Whereas not that I am saying I am butch or I am masculine. I don't think I am. But people mistake me for a man and I think some people think that I do it, that I dress like it purposely to attract straight women. ... I do think that they kind of think that I am lesbian, that I do it to attract straight women. And you know it does. I do attract a lot of straight women. And I have had so much trouble in college [University] with straight women just having a go at me, you know. They have a go at me for fancying me because they have never fancied a woman before. And they have a go and it's all my fault because they fancy me. (Janet, individual interview)

In the traditional dichotomy of woman/man where bodies have particular and opposite haircuts and styles of dress Janet does not fit. However, she does not see herself as 'masculine' or 'butch'. Janet contests this categorisation of gender. Although she links her appearance to her sexuality 'why would a straight woman cut off her hair and dress masculine if she wanted to attract men', she still challenges dichotomous sexualities based on man/woman binaries. Reading Janet's body as male but then understanding her as female makes her threatening as a sexually attractive individual. She is seen as intentionally 'attracting' 'straight' women and is as a result portrayed as the predatory lesbian who preys on 'straight' women by assuming a male appearance through dress (see Hall 1928, Feinburg 1993).

The instability of sexes and sexuality is clear where Janet transgresses the conventional male/female divide and other women cross the straight/gay boundary. However, these movements are not comprehensible where the identities as women and men, straight and gay are perceived as fixed. Janet contends that 'heterosexual' women found the crossing of these boundaries threatening and, as a result, were hostile towards her. Perhaps because the other (lesbian), could not be distinguished

from, and thus create, the self (heterosexual), sexual identities are challenged and it is Janet's body that is read as threatening. Interactions between Janet and 'straight women' demonstrate that it is not simply women's bodies that are reconstituted through (mis)sightings, her interactions with and relationships to women are also (re)formed. The moments of incomprehensibility and the need to refigure Janet within dichotomous codes, along with her continued presence on the boundaries of man/female, homosexual/heterosexual illustrates the contingency of sexed (and sexualized) embodiments. Her (imperfect) reconstitution within sexed norms shows the importance of the man/woman dichotomy and how the instabilities of gender, sex and sexuality are made sense of through rendering Janet's embodiment 'threatening'. The threat is not merely an expulsion of the 'other' it is an attempt to re-establish the tenuousness self-other dichotomy.

It can be argued that Janet is never fully (re)placed as 'woman' and thus in some senses still read as 'manlike'. She continues to be threatening and subject to discrimination and abuse on these grounds. The 'disidentification' Butler (1993: 131) identifies what Senft (2004) interprets as when one moves from 'I am/I am not' to, 'I believed myself to be this now I no longer believe', can be appropriated by women who are mistaken for men. In this case, 'I believed myself to be woman, now I no longer believe' can be related to individual conceptualizations of self due to (mis)readings of bodies. However, here we can see that this disidentification can be associated with individual body sights and the sightings of bodies. Processes that establish self (I am) and other (I am not) are also brought into question when the *viewer* believed the person before them to be a man, now they no longer believe. At these moments of disjuncture Janet and other women who are mistaken for men become intensely threatening (particularly when they are attracting the 'wrong' person, in Janet's case 'straight' women). The concept of disidentification in part understands the messy spaces of interaction that constitute sexed embodiments.

It is not only heterosexual identities that can be questioned when the sights of bodies render sexed embodiments ambiguous:

Janet: I got they tried to throw me out of the woman's tent at pride. ... These big fat butch lesbians went 'erm you're in the wrong tent you know, can you please get out?' And it was pissing down with rain outside... Its just you know at the woman's tent at pride⁷. How bad? ... They literally tried to escort me out of the fucking tent. And I was just like. In the end, fortunately, I had my NUS card with me

⁷ Pride is a lesbian, gay, bisexual festival that takes place across the world in various different guises. Janet is referring to a Pride event in England where this should have been safe space for lesbians particularly in the women's tent.

which had my picture and my name on it. And I had to keep it in my top pocket cos it happened about 3 times

Lorraine: yeah it did, didn't it?

KB: at pride?

Janet: yeah like in the woman's tent, three times. ... The thing that made me laugh was there was these two gay men standing next to us and they didn't ask them to leave. I don't know whether it was, it was a woman's tent and you know you are not supposed to have men in there and stuff. But you know whether they thought I was like a straight man or something

Lorraine: perving

Janet: yeah, I just, it just made me laugh even around my own people, as such, I still get kind of ... I still get trying to get chucked out by the security. And there was just, there was this one big fat woman that just tried to get me out and she wasn't having any of it. And I was just saying 'look I am not being funny but you know I am a lesbian. I am woman, you know. Just let me stay here' and she was just not having any of it. (Janet and Lorraine, focus group)

Hird (2000: 359) argues lesbianism is defined by gender. Janet exists between the binary and dichotomous categories of gender *and* sexuality as her 'lesbian' status rests on her female status. When her female status is contested her lesbian identity can also be challenged. The constitutive connections between sex and sexuality are not restricted to heterosexuality as sexed body sites are also made in gay and lesbian spaces. During a lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans pride festival Janet was assumed to be a man who was 'perving' at lesbians in women-only space and asked to leave. She had to resort to formal methods of identification (her student identification card) in order to establish or 'prove' her status as female and therefore her entitlement to stay in a woman-only space. What is interesting is that assumptions of sexuality are linked to gender. In straight space, as outlined above, Stevi was more likely to be understood as male due to her conventionally feminine partner. In lesbian space, Janet was assumed to be male, was seen as 'out-of-place' and therefore deviant (Cresswell 1996). In an interesting reversal of hegemonic sexuality norms, heterosexuality is negative when associated with bodies read as male in female-only spaces. In contrast, the gay men who were present were not perceived as threatening in female only spaces, perhaps in part because their sexuality and gender were clearly definable within the male/female, straight/gay binaries. Interestingly it was the sighting of Janet's body as a *heterosexual* male that rendered her out of place.

Where heterosexuality is seen as the 'norm' Stevi is defined as opposite to Virginia, and thus within the heterosexual matrix she is perceived as male. On the other hand, in women only lesbian space the reading of Janet's body as male makes her 'different' rather than 'same' in terms of woman versus man. She has been read as a heterosexual male and does not fit in lesbian space. This is, however, premised on the opposition of male/female and heterosexual/lesbian. The sights of these women's bodies in relation to sexualized (as well as gender) norms moves them between man/woman contesting sexualities based on these categories and consequently, similar to intersexuals, transgendered individuals and transsexuals, they dispute the 'necessary' links between sex, gender and sexualities (Butler 1990). These body sites may be threatening because the reading (sighting) of bodies blurs the self/other in defining sexed and sexual identities in relation to body sites.

(Re)sighting bodies: (Re)instating intelligible bodies

Whilst queer theory may have established the possibilities of gender transgressions and the movements between man/woman may be played with, gender transgressions can be seen as 'wrong'. Clearly women in this study were disturbed, hurt, at times traumatized, subject to verbal and sometimes physical abuse by being mistaken for men (see also Browne, 2004) yet they were not passive 'victims' to the power relations that sought to (re)constitute them within intelligible categories:

Angela: going into the club and it was ladies drink free. And at the door they were handing out these tickets, raffle tickets to go the bar with and he handed them to my three friends and I said 'well don't I get one?' And he said 'if you had a skirt, if you had tits and a skirt I'd give you one.' And I just went 'okay what are these [points to her breasts] then?' It was like (laughs), 'oh my god' (laughter), and he was so embarrassed and I just laughed and he gave me one.

Jenny: I've only once I think that was in Burger King he just went 'oh thanks very much sir' ... [I had a] big top on and if I have loads of layers on you can't see my tits anyway so.

Angela: I think I got called, I think I got mistaken for a bloke today on delivery. Cos we went to the door and this woman, it was a new one that John had never been to before and she'd found out the name of the driver. She came to the door and said 'hi John which one of you is John?' (Laughs) I was like (Jenny laughs) 'hello' I have this big grey thing this great green luminous thing on so it did cover 'em [her breasts] up. (Jenny and Angela, focus group)

Those who have their sex questioned can actively seek to enact and reaffirm their identities and bodies within man/woman binary. Angela, in this case, was excluded from female entitlements of drinks on a ladies' night on the assumption that she was male. In order to 'prove' she was a 'lady' Angela had to have particular requirements: 'tits and a skirt'. As above, bodies and dress are co-constructed at the site of the body and (re)constitute the sight of the body. Discontinuities between readings of their bodies and these women's self-identities were addressed by recourse to their bodies. When Angela and Jenny are called men, they also looked to the signifiers of dress and sought to (re)make themselves 'women'. Both Angela and Jenny attributed the mistaken readings of their bodies to their clothes and the invisibility of their breasts. Following Butler (1990, 1993), these enactments can be seen as (re)making these women intelligible as human by reaffirming a female gender distinct from its opposite male gender. Interestingly although the presence of a vagina was not mentioned, the breasts, as 'female-only' organs, were seen as important in classifying their bodies within the grouping 'woman'. Perhaps because breasts can be visible signifiers that can often be identified under clothing, they are looked to as 'proof' of womanhood.

Janet understood her body in a similar way and used it to actively challenge the reading of her as male:

Janet: you know I have got bored of showing people my tits now just for the sake of being able to go to the toilet or you know.

KB: that's bad, isn't it?

Janet: you know why should I have to show my tits off to someone?
(Janet, Lorraine, focus group)

Where breasts are understood as something only possessed by the female sex (but see Longhurst 2005), Janet can use hers to illustrate her embodiment as a woman and gain access to female only toilets. Recourse to bodies can inform those who are (mis)reading bodies of these individuals' status as woman. Whereas Jenny, along with other participants merely pointed to their breasts under their clothing, Janet removed her clothing to illustrate her embodiment as female. Whereas, Janet is resisting particular readings of her body, there is a cost involved. The price of being allowed entrance to female only sites of toilets is the visual invasion of Janet's bodily space, in ways that can be seen as culturally inappropriate. For Janet the humiliation of this is better than being mistaken for a man. The wounding moment of the mistake must be recuperated and therefore she employs an element of shock in reclaiming her body site within the sighting of 'woman' (a process that can also be simultaneously empowering and distressing).

The active contestations of other people's policing of sexed norms draws attention to the attempt to expel that which destabilises self-other dichotomies, yet

we need to consider how women themselves saw these 'resistances'. Although women are not powerless in the readings and interpretations of their bodies, their own understandings may be based upon dichotomous sexes where in order to be intelligible one must be either male or female. Here, rather than explore the problematic discourses and definitions of male/man and female/woman, Janet, Angela and Jenny (as well as others in the study, see Browne 2004) (re)inscribed themselves within the female category at the site of their bodies by recourse to their bodies specifically their breasts. In this way, using their bodies as evidence they made themselves intelligible within normative genders/sexes. This is interesting because the dichotomy of male or female is not simply internalised but it is incorporated (see Butler 1990, 1997). The heterosexual law is not simply written on the body, it writes the body. The policing of bodies, spaces and identities illustrated the fragility of this law which requires continually embodied performances. Whereas these participants transgressed sexuality boundaries, they could not comprehend themselves outside of the discourses of gender and sex which place particular bodies with specific identities. It is important to recognise that the dissonances were attributed to the observers/readers of these bodies. How these 'women' understood themselves as female was not challenged. Thus whilst women are not simply the subject to societal norms they can construct themselves in relation to, and at times within, dichotomous sexed subjectivities.

Conclusion

Sexed geographies are reproduced at the site of the body through messy processes that include sightings that (re)interpret and, in part, (re)make sexed (and sexy) bodies. Thus, in integrating gendered geographies with queer theories, it has been possible to explore how the fluidity of bodies, as material sites, come to be (re)made within man/woman dichotomies. The processes of solidifying categories of sex are illustrated by the embodied spatialities of gender/sexed transgressions and their (mis)readings. Thus, the creation of the sexed body is not a sole individual endeavor, rather it is produced through a nexus of interrelations.

This paper has drawn on Massey's (1994) theories of the interrelational formation of place to argue that sexed bodies as sites are formed in part through their sighting. Using the conceptualization of bodies as physical manifestations of time-space relations I explored moments of disjuncture between the readings of sexed bodies, sexualized relations; and lived sexed embodiments and relationships. Combining social-spatial relations with understandings of fluid sexed bodies, which are not necessarily tied to specific sexualities, further destabilized dichotomous sexes based on man/woman. Therefore, I see this paper as intersecting geographies of gender with queer theories and beginning explorations of the possibilities of spaces of betweenness, interactions, specifically in this case

sightings, augmenting explorations of how sexed bodies are (re)made through reiterations of fictitious norms.

In focusing on the messy times and spaces of lived realities (Brown, 2000) it was possible to examine the solidification of fluid body boundaries into the binary divisions of man/woman. The nexus of social relations and performativities (re)make sexed bodies and this is clear where women are read as men and their assumed sex, 'woman', is challenged. The paper argued that the interaction between those sighting and embodied performances (re)create the man/woman binary. Although the reader contests the viewed self, both seek to (re)place dissonant readings within what is perceived as fixed sexes (whereas it can be seen that it is these very processes that bring dichotomous sexes into being, Butler, 1990, 1993). I contended that these, frequently 'accidental', transgressions often contest women's intelligibility as 'human'. The practices through which women who are mistaken for men reaffirm their embodied sites, such as showing their breasts, and use reasons such as clothing to defer questionings of their sex, enable them to 'make sense' of their bodies and the dissonant sightings of these. The active contestations of other people's policing of sexed norms draws attention to the attempt to expel that which destabilizes self-other dichotomies. This paradoxically reinforces both the mutability of dichotomously sexed bodies and the necessity of 'being' either man/woman in order to be human.

The interactions between viewer/viewed, as power relations that are both sexed (in that those who are questioning are (re)made as 'secure' in their sex) and sexing (they (re)form sexed bodies), can be painfully constitutive. The practices of self and the policing processes of others (re)create and maintain sexed regimes at the site of the body, such that some bodies remain 'other', or disidentified (Butler, 1993), even when (re)placed within the category 'real woman'. Perhaps because philosophical concepts and metaphorical stages (Brown, 2000) do not (appear to) hurt, spatial analysis of the (re)formation of embodied sites leads to more than theorizations of power relations: it enables us to explore the wounding moments that (re)create lived spaces.

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