

Four dimensions of narrativity: Towards a narrative analysis of gender identity that is simultaneously personal, local and global

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Abstract

Somers' (1992, 1994) describes four inter-related dimensions of narrativity – ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narratives. Drawing upon Somers' ideas about narrativity I suggest that narrative analysis could also involve attention to the way that stories about identity are embedded in relational networks that are simultaneously personal, local and global. Corporeality, gender, space and place are used to illustrate the way that inter-personal interaction is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs. Consideration of the way in which corporeality is constructed in relation to broader social configurations that transcend the individual enables a wider socio-political dynamic to narrative analyses of identity to be introduced. It is argued that extending the approach that Somers' outlines in relation to narrativity to narrative analysis provides a way forward for scholars involved in doing narrative research.

Introduction

Social life is 'storied', the networks through which subjectivities are constituted may be traced through narrativity. Narrativity may be thought of as stories and action in relation to times, selves and settings (Plummer 1995, p. 17-20). It is a social process and stories or narratives are crucial to that process. Somers (1992, 1994) describes four inter-related dimensions of narrativity – ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narratives. Drawing upon Somers' ideas about narrativity I suggest that narrative analysis could also involve attention to the way that stories about identity are embedded in relational networks that are simultaneously personal, local and global. Positioning theory enables ontological and public narratives within the micro politics of interpersonal interaction to be explored. Corporeality, gender, space and place are used to illustrate the way that inter-personal interaction is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs. Identities are crafted, modified and abandoned, and particular courses of action followed, according to how people are located by and locate themselves, however temporarily, in a range of given narratives. Narrative identities are never complete; they are always in the process of being formed. In this sense they embed identities in an ever unfolding flow of temporally and spatially specific social relationships (Somers, 1992, p. 603; 1994, p. 618).

Corporeal identities are open to the presence of social relations crafted at different spatial scales. The narratives of people who identify as transgendered interviewed for this project suggest that stories, contexts, and bodies are important to the (re)presentation of a gendered self. Consideration of the way in which corporeality is constructed in relation to

broader social configurations that transcend place such as space, place, nation, community, sex and gender enables a macro-level, socio-political dynamic to narrative analysis to be introduced. It is argued that extending the approach that Somers' outlines in relation to narrativity to narrative analysis provides a way forward for scholars involved in doing narrative research.

Narrativity

Somers (1994, p. 607) suggests that by tracing narratives it becomes possible to map the complex and contradictory means by which social relations are organised, made meaningful and maintained through inter-linkages within networks of relations which shift over time and space. She argues that narrativity is a social process that is embedded in four inter-related dimensions of narratives: ontological or personal narratives, public or cultural narratives, conceptual or theoretical narratives and meta-narratives (Somers, 1994, p. 618-619). Ontological narratives are the stories that social actors use to make sense of themselves and their relationship to the world. People draw on ontological narratives in order to act in their lives. The ontological dimensions of narrativity bring certain people into being, they shape identities and selves; narrative identities structure choices and activities. Story-actions in turn produce new narratives and hence new identities, politics and communities (Plummer, 1995, p. 152; White, 1992, p. 13-14).

Ontological narratives are crafted out of existing stories that circulate in certain contexts. These public narratives transcend the individual; they are the cultural stereotypes that exist in the wider communities of interpretation through which stories circulate (Plummer, 1995, p. 22; Pahl, 1995, p. 151). Public narratives may be local, national, or global. Shared social narratives encompass both the individual and the collective, while personal narratives are defined in relation to the broader public narratives in which they are embedded. Narratives are simultaneously general and specific because they are both individually produced and embedded in shared understandings of the social world (Somers, 1994).

Transitioning across binary gender categories is an exercise in ontological narrativity. Transgendered individuals are able to construct narratives about themselves as people who have 'chosen' their gender - who have transitioned or are in the process of transitioning. The story of the ideal transsexual who always knew that they were of the other gender is a public narrative, or Western stereotype, that many transsexual people draw on in order to explain their identity to themselves and to others. An example of this narrative is provided in the following opening lines of Jan Morris's autobiography *Conundrum*:

I was three or perhaps four years old when I realized that I had been born into the wrong body, and should really be a girl. I remember the moment well, and it is the earliest memory of my life (Morris 1974, p 11).

Morris appropriates psychiatric discourses and public narratives about transsexualism in the story that she tells about her childhood self. Morris writes that she was ‘born into the wrong body’ and she locates her transsexual identity in her earliest memory - both narrative conventions that imply an immutable, pre-discursive or biological origin for her ‘conundrum’. Morris’s personal narrative about her unconventional gender identity is embedded in broader public narratives about sexual difference. However, some narratives carry more weight than others; Somers refers to these narratives as public narratives or traditions, Bloom (1998) uses the phrase ‘master scripts’ and Butler (1990) refers to these dominant narratives as ‘normalising fictions’.

Public narratives are not neutral but shape and are in turn shaped by particular understandings of the world which tend to prioritise one meaning over another. The limited repertoire of representations and stories available to people who identify as transgendered means that certain experiences, events and identities will not be accommodated easily within the range of available cultural, public and institutional narratives associated with gender and sexual difference. Norrie May Welby, a transgender activist interviewed for this project, is critical of dualistic understandings of sex and gender, and narrow media stereotypes of transsexuals such as those found in women’s magazines, which impose limits on possible ways of being for ‘transys’:

...we live in a society that insists on the binary, and one that pushes these views of transys at us, you know “Women’s Day”, “I was a tortured transsexual and I could not wait until I had the operation to become a real woman...” (Norrie May Welby, 1997).

Welby is critical of the limited range of public narratives associated with transsexualism in the print media – narratives that focus on immutable binary sex/gender categories, pathology, medical intervention and heterosexuality. Individuals who identify as transgendered often selectively appropriate public narratives about sex, gender and transsexualism in the stories that they tell about themselves. However, Welby’s narrative indicates that social actors are not free to fabricate ontological or public narratives at will. In other words, to paraphrase a famous expression from Marx, social actors construct their narrative identities but not under conditions of their own choosing/making. There is ‘only a limited repertoire of available representations and stories. Which kind of narratives will socially predominate is contested politically and will depend in large part on the distribution of power’ (Somers, 1994, p. 630).¹

¹ In the area of health, the history of contested struggles around the meaning of childbirth among midwives, women and doctors is illustrative of this point. Depending upon an individual’s viewpoint childbirth could be seen

Somers identifies conceptual narratives as the macro-theories and analytic categories that sociologists use to make sense of social life. Somers (1994, p. 620) argues for a temporal and relational conceptual narrativity, but says that most of the analytical concepts that sociologists use have been ‘de-narrativised’. A narrative has been de-narrativised when it is abstracted from its conceptual origins. The temporal and spatial origins of conceptual narratives may be reintroduced by exploring the way that they are historically and relationally constructed through ontological and public narratives. I interpret conceptual narrativity to be the theories and analytic categories that are specific to a discipline or profession.² The term ‘concept’ in this dimension of narrativity, however, implies a more static and fixed definition than ‘narrative’/‘narrativity’ which I use in this article to convey the situated, contingent and relational nature of stories and story telling.

Public narratives that are so pervasive that their temporal and spatial origins are obscured are categorised as master-narratives or meta-narratives. I interpret meta-narratives to be the narratives that transcend the boundary of an individual profession or discipline.³ Meta-narratives may include the master narratives of contemporary social life, such as democracy, freedom or the doctrine of progress (Somers, 1994). Sets of understandings about sexual difference may be regarded as master-narratives (Somers, 1992, p. 594) as their spatial and temporal origins are obscured through their association with a naturalistic and ahistorical understanding of male and female. The location of sexual difference in a biology that is understood as fixed, universal and transhistorical, facilitates an explanation of social differences between the sexes in terms of the natural (Butler, 1990, p. 7). The multiple, or non-unitary, subjectivities (Bloom, 1998), of transgender people which emphasise the situated, active, fluid and contingent nature of identities also undermine the abstract, universal, rational actor typically embedded in the master-narratives of classical social theory (Somers, 1994, p. 633-635). ‘Renarrativisation’ (Somers, 1992, p. 595) involves exploring the historically and

as a normal physiological event, or as a double medical emergency for mother and child – these meanings around childbirth in turn influenced where women gave birth – home or hospital and who attended them (Treichler, 1990; Papps and Olssen, 1997). Thus the privileging of certain perspectives defines realities for some people (where women give birth), constructs identities (the construction of home birth women, and the midwives who cared for them, as irresponsible by medical professionals in the 1980s [Donley, 1986]) and affects the way that people assess risk, deal with illness and are treated by others.

² For example, the key underlying philosophies within midwifery in New Zealand are that midwives work in partnership with women, pregnancy and childbirth are a normal life event, midwives provide the total child-bearing service, midwives are autonomous practitioners, midwifery is women-centred or focused and midwives provide continuity of care/care-giver (Midwifery Council of New Zealand, 2004; Douche, 2007).

³ For example, ideas about informed choice, consent, equality, empowerment and autonomy while included in the midwifery philosophy of practice (Douche, 2007) also apply to health disciplines more broadly and therefore belong to the domain of meta-narrativity.

culturally specific origins and relational complexities of master narratives and the social scripts that they legitimate.

In this article I explore the way in which space, place and relationality destabilise narratives. Narrative research involves co-producing particularistic, socially situated ontological narratives through the interaction between individuals, stories and the interview context. I argue that stories, contexts, and bodies are important to the (re)presentation of a gendered self. For public and ontological narratives words and contexts are simultaneously in play. This is demonstrated in the way that the ontological narratives of transgender people may be disrupted in social interaction. In the following section positioning theory is used to illustrate the way in which ontological and public narratives are employed within the micro politics of interpersonal interaction. These dimensions of narrativity may be illustrated by looking at the way in which people are positioned as gendered subjects within conversations and in relation to the politics of spaces and places.

Positioning

Attention to narrative identity involves locating social action in the network of relationships in which actors are embedded, and in the numerous cross-cutting story-lines with which people identify (Somers and Gibson, 1994, p. 67). Social relationships and cultural practices are embedded in the stories through which people constitute their identities. Somers' focus on reinterpreting historical data means that consideration of the dynamic aspects of inter-personal social encounters is not the focus of her analysis. How people orientate themselves in relation to their experience of interactions, practices and the public narratives embedded in conversational story-lines is, however, outlined in the work of Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harre. Davies and Harre (1990, 1999) explore how selves are discursively produced in social interaction. According to Davies and Harre, selves are located in conversations; telling a story positions self and other in relation to the story-lines told. They refer to this process of relational story-telling as 'positioning' (Davies and Harre, 1990, p. 52; Davies, 1992, p. 54-55). Positioning is embedded in the dynamic aspects of social encounters. In conversational speech participants draw on personal and cultural resources in order to actively construct the present moment. The social meaning of a conversation is dependent upon the way actors are positioned in and through the speech acts of participants and the place in which it occurs. In conversational speech actors are located (or may locate themselves) in subject positions which are in turn embedded in historically and culturally specific shared understandings about the rights, obligations, expectations and social structures associated with that position. Thus actors'

understanding and experience of their social identity, the social world and their place in it is discursively constructed' (Frazer, cited in Davies and Harre, 1990, p. 45).

People who are in the process of transitioning across opposed gender categories are acutely aware of their own gendered subject position and the way that they are positioned as male or female in conversations with others. Davies and Harre's arguments about positioning are best demonstrated in the following narrative about getting a haircut from a person who had only recently transitioned:

I used to think that there was a certain haircut that you could get, I went to the hairdresser, this guy down the road, I was going to him for ages and I said to him: "If you were cutting a guy's hair would you be cutting it like you are now?" And I thought he would say "no", and he goes: "Oh yeah, I'd be cutting it differently". It just floored me, it was just devastating, he was just basically doing a number 1 all over, or a number 2, and fixing it up around the edges, and I thought that was a guy's haircut, and that is what he was doing. And I said: "Well if you were cutting a guy's hair now how would you change?" And he goes: "Oh, I would be cutting it a lot sharper around here", like he was doing stuff to my head, showing me. "I would make this a bit sharper and I'd have all the lines a bit sharper". He said: "For a female I'm doing it a lot softer and a lot more easier". I didn't go back to him ever again... So of course, then I went down Devon Street, and there is a seven buck shop, or something, and I picked out a girl there who I thought, and I was right, she's a lesbian, she's got everything pierced, she has got her head shaved, little tufts of coloured pink hair sticking up. I got her, explained the situation to her, exactly everything, well not everything, very briefly, and she has cut my hair ever since perfectly.

And I went into a shop yesterday, because I get my eyelashes done every now and then, and I just wanted to get a time with someone. I know the other girl there thinks I'm a guy, but this girl, I'd never seen before, she must have thought I was a girl and she goes: "I really like your hair, God I couldn't go that short you know". And I'm completely thrown. I'm just sitting there thinking I'm not following you at all. And then I realised she thought I was a girl, she was assessing my haircut in terms of what she could do, and how brave I was as a girl, in the girl's club you know. But it only made sense to me later, all of the things she was saying, if you were one of the club and you were challenging the club's rules or something. That's happening a lot, I guess because maybe I'm sort of still on the boundary there, or something, or I look on the boundary...(Craig, *Female-to-man*, 1996).

Craig provides an amusing anecdote about the seemingly mundane practice of 'getting a haircut' which illustrates Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harre's (1990, 1999) arguments about positioning. In the first part of the narrative Craig is positioned as a female by the hairdresser who gives him a feminine version of a number one hair cut. Craig is so surprised by this that he asks the hairdresser to demonstrate the difference between a male and a female haircut. Craig's objection to the hairdresser's positioning of him as female motivates him to seek another hairdresser. In conversation with me Craig indicates his opposition to being positioned as a woman by the hairdresser. In the actual salon Craig suffers this positioning in silence, he does not correct the assumptions of the hairdresser regarding his gender identity, and he remains in

the chair until his haircut is completed. Craig's thwarted subjectivity exemplifies the way gender identities are constituted and reconstituted in conversations and through the social interactions in which people participate. Craig learns that, although they appear to be short all over, number one haircuts are gendered. Male haircuts are 'sharp', female haircuts are 'soft'. He considers that his 'soft', 'female' haircut is incompatible with his view of himself as a man. In other words, in the area of appearance an aspect of self and other is learnt in this interaction.

Craig justifies his positioning of the second hairdresser as a lesbian by referring to the culturally established meanings associated with the cluster of attributes, body piercing, a shaved head, and tufts of pink hair, displayed by the hairstylist. Craig identifies these attributes as markers of lesbian 'unfashion' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 107). Craig's anecdote draws on cultural stereotypes (or public narratives) about lesbians which provide non-verbal clues as to the hairdresser's sexual orientation. This illustrates the way that people are sometimes passively positioned by others in public space. Craig chooses someone he defines as a lesbian as his new hairdresser because he assumes that she will be sympathetic to his situation. In order to ensure that this hairdresser 'reads' Craig as a man, and provides him with the desired male haircut, he provides her with a story about his gender identity.

Craig then goes on to describe another incident in a beauty salon in which he was unwillingly positioned by the receptionist as a woman. As is the case with most interactions, the receptionist's positioning of Craig as a woman was unintentional or taken for granted. Craig, who admits that his gender identity is currently ambiguous, was displeased at being positioned as a woman in this 'feminine' space. Craig interprets the receptionist's reaction to his haircut as violating the unspoken rules of the 'girls club'. In the context of Craig's ambiguous body the male haircut should work to provide strangers with non-verbal clues as to his male gender identity. In this interaction the short masculine haircut does not signify a male identity, but is instead read by the receptionist as challenging public scripts of femininity. Craig's narrative about being positioned as a 'girl' in the beauty salon is also shaped by the particular characteristics of the context in which he presents himself. A beauty salon is typically used by women, Craig wants his eyelashes dyed - a service that is more commonly requested by women. The salon and the procedure influence his interaction with the receptionist and therefore the likelihood that she would position him as a staunch female rather than as a male. This section of Craig's anecdote illustrates the significance of context to the way that we present ourselves; it is not just discourses but also spaces that make available certain subject positions to actors.

Harrison White (1992) argues that identities become salient when individuals encounter inconsistencies between their narrative constructions of (male) self and the social contexts (such

as the salon) in which they interact. Craig's positioning of self and other in conversation is dependent on his learning oppositional categories, specifically in this case male/female, masculine/feminine, soft/sharp, straight/gay. Craig participates in interactions where the meanings associated with these categories become salient. He recognises which categories he belongs to and positions himself as male in relation to the meanings associated with those categories. Craig's narrative illustrates the way subject positions offered by participants in conversation may confirm identities or block access to desired identities. As a result, contradictions between the self identity of transgender people and the way they are positioned by others in social interactions provides an important site for exploring what it means to be a gendered person.

The different ways that Craig positions himself and is positioned by others in this narrative illustrates the complex ways that identities are negotiated in everyday social encounters. His narrative also indicates that 'positioning' is not just a conversational phenomenon; subject positions are also tied to spaces and to a person's corporeality. Craig is aware of the way that he is positioned by the first hairdresser and the receptionist. Shared understandings about Craig's male gender identity are absent from both of these interactions. Craig wants to position himself as male physically rather than through just words or conversation. He pursues an embodied maleness and his story is about how he acquired the right number one male haircut only to find himself identified as a staunch 'girl' in a particular context. Davies and Harre (1990, 1999) and Davies (1993, p. xv) observe that the positions created for oneself in autobiography are not necessarily non-contradictory or linear. Craig's narrative concludes with a reflection on the difficulties associated with keeping a particular narrative of identity going when his current ambiguously gendered appearance means that he may be positioned as either male or female in social interactions. Implicit in this narrative is Craig's previous identity as female and his current identity as male. Craig is able to do both - the challenge is how successfully he manages to present himself as male and to efface his femaleness. The relative success or failure of these attempts depends on the context of the interaction.

Craig's narrative about the incident in the hair salon indicates that it is not just narratives but also spaces that make certain subject positions available to actors. Stories do not simply reflect social life. Rather the contexts in which lived narratives are assembled play an active role in the story-telling process. Craig's narrative about being positioned as female in the beauty salon indicates that stories and identities are constrained by the internal dynamics of the spaces in which they are told and heard. Moreover, spaces and places are open to the presence of social relations crafted at different spatial scales. Moving from consideration of space and

place within the micro politics of inter-personal interaction to an analysis of the way in which space and place are constructed in relation to broader social configurations that transcend place such as nation, community, sex and gender enables a wider structural dynamic to narrative analysis to be introduced.

Space and place

Space is relational in the sense that it is constituted by and constitutive of social processes (Massey, 1992, pp. 80-81; Fincher and Panelli, 2001, p. 130). Space is also geographical (McDowell, 1996 p. 32), political (Massey, 1992, p. 66) physical (Wendell, 1992: 69; Chouinard and Grant, 1996, p. 176), embodied (Grosz, 1994, p. 79-80) and social (Plummer, 1995). The social dynamics of space include its gendered (Massey, 1994: 2; Namaste 1996, p. 225) and sexualised dimensions (McDowell, 1995; Myslik, 1996; Valentine, 1996; Duncan, 1996; Namaste, 1996; Brickell, 2000). The embodied dimensions of space also refer to the social space immediately around the body. The size and form of this surrounding space varies according to the situation and the ethnicity, sex and culture of the individual (Grosz, 1994, p. 79-80). Geographic space refers to how the spatial is mapped in relation to bounded places from home to national territories (McDowell, 1996, p.32). Geographic space, as cultural object, includes symbolic and material interconnections between economic and political power relations that are simultaneously local and global (McDowell, 1996: 39). The political dimensions of space are indicated by geographic terms such as ‘margin’ and ‘centre’ that are used in academic analyses that explore the politics of location (Massey, 1994, p. 66).

Place is another significant element in the construction of relational identities on different personal, local and global scales. Place tends to be viewed as more bounded or localised than space (Massey, 1994, p. 5). Place of birth and place of residence, for example, refer to specific locales that are fixed in space and time (past and present respectively). The meanings associated with these examples of place are not given but are instead constructed in relation to broader social configurations that transcend place such as nation, sex, gender and family (Massey 1994, p. 5; Jacobs and Fincher, 1998, p. 21). Places are open to the presence of social relations crafted at different spatial scales. As a result, the meanings associated with place are never fixed but are instead open, porous and contested (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1996). Identities are shaped through individual relationships with places (Jacobs and Fincher, 1998, p. 20). For example, in the following narrative Elaine, who had moved from Perth to Sydney, commented on the differences that she noted in the transgender community and the meanings associated with the term ‘trany’ between the two places:

The difference between Perth and Sydney, what I find is quite different, Perth does not really have a transgender community as such, Perth does not have that much of (transgender) community other than the gay and lesbian community over in Perth. The gay and lesbian community is not all that popular over there or widespread. But it is funny how things work out, I find living in a lot of places you have little groups of friendships and family groups there that link up, especially in Perth. And what I found in Sydney is dramatically different in that all of sudden whereas OK I was a transsexual woman in Perth or someone making a gender transition, I was a tranny in Sydney. While the word tranny was used back in Perth, it was not used in the manner of a slogan if you know what I mean. Personally, I don't like the term it is misspelt over here with only one n... But it is so politicised over here now it wasn't over in Perth, despite the fact that I was at one point a spokesperson for the local lobby group in Perth, nonetheless you didn't have a close knit community as such you had people who knew people and they then spoke to those people but not overall (Elaine, 1996).

Elaine's comments illustrate the way in which places help to shape individual identities (Jacobs and Fincher 1998, p. 20). In Perth Elaine identified herself, and was identified by others, as a 'transsexual woman'. In Sydney she is identified by others as a 'tranny' but does not claim this label for herself. In Perth 'tranny' does not exist as an identity category, nor is it used as a political 'slogan'. In Sydney 'tranny' is the means by which people who transgress gender boundaries claim 'group identification' and/or membership of a politically active community.

While there are geographic differences between Sydney and Perth, differences are also noted within the Sydney community between the inner city and the suburbs. In the following narrative Nancy describes the way that differences between suburban transsexuals and inner city transgenders mirror differences between those transys who are involved in transgender politics and those who are not:

There is a whole "them" and "us" mentality. Them' are transsexuals, who generally have the surgery, live in the suburbs as women and are invisible as transsexuals, don't want to be involved in transgender politics, and 'us' are the inner city transys, that resist surgery, live ambiguously between men and women, are visible as transsexuals and are involved in transgender politics. Of course, there are other transys that identify as transgenders who are not involved in transgender politics (Nancy, Man-to-female, 1996).

The transgender community is not homogeneous. In this narrative Nancy suggests that divisions within the Sydney transgender community are broadly geographical, political and anatomical. According to Nancy, place of residence maps political differences between people who have transitioned across binary gender categories. Transsexuals live in the suburbs, they follow the medical model and tend to be 'secretive' or 'invisible'. Transys live in the inner city, they reject the medical model, choosing instead to be out and proud as transgendered people. But it is not simply that suburban transsexuals reject inner city transgender politics. Everyday locations assume the naturalness of binary gender categories and heterosexuality (Namaste, 1996); their place of residence is more likely to inhibit the expression of minority gender identities.

Choosing to be either/or rather than both/and may be simply a sensible strategy for surviving in the suburbs.

Doreen Massey (1994, p. 6) has argued that '[c]onceptualisations of space are tied up with dualistic understandings of gender and the bundles of characteristics assigned to each'. Within these arguments the public sphere is masculine; it is associated with work, strength, rationality, the civic. The private sphere is feminine; it is associated with home, dependence, reproduction and emotion (Cox and James, 1987, p. 2-3; Peak, 1993, p. 416-417; Massey, 1994, p. 2, 9-11, 186, 1996). Space is gendered and many spaces, public and private, are male dominated (Brickell, 2000, p. 163; Myslik, 1996, p. 159). Within these analyses the hegemony of binary gender categories within public spaces remains unproblematic. Ki Namaste (1996, p. 226) for example argues that everyday locations assume the 'naturalness' of binary gender categories:

Gender outlaws pose a fundamental challenge to public space and how it is defined and secured through gender... (Namaste 1996, p. 226).

Binary gender categories mean that transgenders need to live as one or the other in order to avoid verbal and physical harassment. In transgender communities this is known as the need to pass (Namaste 1996, p. 228).

Norrie May Welby also comments that because sexuality is often invisible in ordinary public interaction gays and lesbians are discriminated against, not because they are queer, but because they breach binary gender categories:

Gays and lesbians also breach the gender roles and get discriminated against for breaching fixed Western gender roles of behaviour. There we can find allies in feminists and any marginalised community... I also think homophobia is not so much fear of homosexuality as it actually is a fear of people breaching gender roles. And some of them (homosexuals) get called a 'poofter' in the street and they are walking down the street on their own, how can you tell who is a poofter? You have to be looking at someone else or holding someone's hand at least before someone can tell what sex you are attracted to or make any judgement about the sex you are attracted to. No the person is called a poofter because they are breaching gender roles, they are maybe walking with a bit of a swish or a limp wrist or a woman gets called a dyke because of her short hair and her clothes. It is because she is breaching the gender expectations we get called poofters or dykes (Norrie May Welby, interview, 1997).

Transgendered bodies disrupt the assumption of continuity between sexed bodies, culturally constructed genders and heterosexuality. Public space in general, and urban space in particular, is dominated by lines of connection between naturalised binary gender categories and heterosexuality (Brickell 2000, p. 163; Myslik, 1996, p. 159; Valentine, 1996; Duncan, 1996, p. 137-139; Namaste, 1996, p. 230). The heterosexualisation of space occurs through the positioning of heterosexuality as natural and universal. Heterosexual practices are omnipresent and invisible in public spaces (Phelan, 1993, p. 97). This dominance is not recognised, leading

to claims that heterosexuality is not publicly flaunted (Valentine, 1993; Myslik 1996: Brickell, 2000). The heterosexual domination of public space constructs homosexuality and transsexuality as visible, unnatural, specific and out of place (Brickell, 2000, p. 165; Namaste, 1996, 226-228). The naturalization of heterosexuality and gender in public space is so pervasive that it is noticed when it is not secured. This is illustrated in the following conversation:

An observation that I found interesting was when I went down to Newtown in Sydney - now that is a place that has got no majority in it! There is no one single group that is a majority in Newtown, and I've walked around Newtown and not worried about a single thing, because there are so many people who look so radically different down there that I was the most conservative person on the street (Elaine, Man-to-female, 1996).

Elaine comments on how the heterosexual domination of public space is disrupted by the diversity of the Newtown population. Furthermore, Elaine experiences Newtown as a place where it is possible to be openly transgendered because binary gender categories in this space are more open and fluid than is the case in her place of residence. Elaine's narrative is consistent with key arguments within feminist geography about the way in which space is normally constituted in gendered and sexualised terms (Duncan, 1996, p. 127).

Elaine's experience of difference in claims to identity and community between Perth and Sydney in 1996/97, and Nancy's observations about differences between transys within Sydney based on place of residence, is consistent with academic ideas about the way in which the meanings associated with place and the construction of local queer identities are constituted in relation to non-local processes (Massey, 1994, p. 5; Jacobs and Fincher, 1998, p. 21). Place introduces heterogeneity and difference into the category of 'transsexual woman' - a category that Elaine indicates she had previously experienced as a more-or-less homogeneous entity. In these narratives contests over identity are articulated through the spatial relations of places. Doreen Massey (1994, p.5) argues that the 'meanings associated with place are always articulated in relation to some oppositional relation or some other place that transcends the place in question'. As a result the meaning of place is always open and porous. Craig's story and Elaine, Nancy and Norrie May Welby's observations illustrate the way narrative identities have different interpretations whereby particular meanings, and struggles over identity, become salient in different relational settings.

Conclusion

The corporeal identities of transgendered people are open to the presence of social relations crafted at different spatial scales. Transgender identities are constructed through binary oppositions, self and other, same and different, overlaid on place. Metaphors of the local and the global embedded in the narratives of people, discussed in this article, are also crafted in

relation to the construction of heterosexuality as the dominant mode of identity and sexual practice and the construction of queer identities as subordinate or marginal. The corporeal identities of transgendered people are not unitary or static but are instead shaped by the narratives in which they are embedded (Somers, 1992: 1994). Narratives in turn are not unitary or neutral; they are shaped by the spaces in which they are articulated (Plummer, 1995). Identities are also constrained by the discursive production of selves in social interaction, and the politics of the spaces in which stories are expressed and received. The narratives of people interviewed for this research project suggest that it is not just discourses but also corporeality and spaces that make available certain subject positions to actors. Rather than being an exception to binary notions of gender, transgender narratives are able to illuminate the complex interaction between bodies, spaces and gendered conventions. It is therefore possible to see transgender bodies and identities, not as peripheral to binary notions of gender, but as examples of how gender identities come to be codified, constructed and crafted through the everyday practices of individuals.

This article has demonstrated how narrative analysis may be extended through attention to different levels of narrativity within the stories of research participants. Gender, space and place were used to illustrate the way that inter-personal interaction is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs. Consideration of space and place in relation to the politics of identity enables a wider structural dynamic to narrative analysis to be introduced. Narrative analysis requires attention to the location of bodies and identities with wider networks that transcend the individual. Extending Somers' analytical framing of the four dimensions of narrativity to stories about the way in which people constitute their identities through relational networks that shift over time and space enables the development of a form of narrative analysis that is simultaneously personal, local and global.

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