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Situated Transgressiveness: Exploring One Transwoman's Lived Experiences Across Three Situated Contexts

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Abstract

This study investigates the lived experience of one transwoman, Claire, a public advocate and a manager with client services responsibilities. We examine Claire's story in order to discuss how situated contexts, such as different roles, locales, and interactions, shape the way she experiences and perceives her trans body and gender identity. In particular, our analysis centers on how Claire's lived experience of personal and professional life shift across three different situated contexts, each enabling and constraining opportunities for political transgression. Our findings contribute to existing conversations within queer theory, transgender, and organization studies by highlighting how situated contexts mediate the political potential of queer bodies at work. By developing the concept 'situated transgressiveness,' this article challenges notions of transgender as a stable, ideal disruptive category and advances a more contextually sensitive approach to understanding the contingency of transgender lives and politics. Such insights are important in facilitating more nuanced understandings of the situatedness of transgression and transgender bodies within work and professional settings.

Introduction

This article introduces the concept of 'situated transgressiveness' in order to engage debates in queer theory on the transgressiveness of transgender bodies and identities (or 'trans'gression) and to underscore how context shapes the lived experiences and political potential of being trans. For queer theorists, work organizations are important contexts where gender, work, and organizing intersect and where queer bodies and lived experiences are concealed, revealed, read, reacted upon and accepted (Thanem, 2011). Despite making major strides in recent years, people who identify as queer continue to face discrimination and stigmatization across public and private spheres (Budge, Tebbe and Howard, 2010; Sangganjanavanich and Cavazos 2010; Sear and Mallory, 2011). These experiences are especially acute in work, organization, and employment contexts in which people who identify as queer often find themselves belonging to a gendered and sexualized minority typically not associated with professionalism (e.g., Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009). As a result, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers frequently manage their queer identities in relation to normative expectations of sex, gender, and sexuality (e.g., Lewis, 2009; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Philips, Pullen and Rhodes, 2013; Rumens, 2008; Schilt and Connell, 2007; Spradlin, 1998; Thanem, 2011; Woods and Lucas, 1993) as well as normative ideas around professionalism and work (e.g., Ashcraft, 2013; Ashcraft, Muhr, Rennstam, and Sullivan, 2012; Sullivan, 2012; 2014).

Transgender has been identified by queer theory as a particularly disruptive way of being queer. By defining transgender as "deliberately reject[ing] their original gender assignment" (Connell, 2010, p. 33), transgender people are often used by queer theorists to denote a form of ultimate transgression of the heterosexual matrix (e.g. Butler, 1990; 1991; 1993). For example, transgender is said to "disrupt the assumption that sex (designation at birth as either 'male or female'), sex category (social designation as either 'male or female in everyday interactions') and gender (management of conduct based on one's assigned sex category) correspond with each other" (Connell, 2010, pg. 32) in ways that are different from other queer persons. More specifically, Connell writes that:

> While cispeople, or nontrans-identified individuals, are assigned a sex at birth, placed in a corresponding sex category, and held accountable to the corresponding gender norms (doing masculinity or doing femininity), the sex category and/or gender of trans-people does not match up

seamlessly with their sex. Theoretically, this disruption opens up an opportunity to undo or redo gender. (Cornell, 2010, p. 32; see also Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009)

Because of this assumed radical break with heteronormativity, one key argument in the queer literature is that transgender bodies—despite being a small minority—hold significant transgressive and political potential and therefore can or should be used as a trope in the battle against the marginalization caused by gender binaries (Davis, 2008; Garber, 1992; Whittle, 2000). In work and organization studies inspired by queer theory, transpersons have been said to be an excellent case to confront the heteronormative ideals we often take for granted in, for example, studies of leadership or professions (see Schilt, 2006; Thanem, 2011). Using trans individuals to showcase and discuss how bodies transgresses the man/woman, masculine/feminine and homo/heterosexuality binaries is valuable as transpersons cannot be said to be one or the other, and often do not wish to be (Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2014).

However, this emphasis on the political potential of the transgressive trans body has been criticized for not taking into account the lived experience and rich contextual conditions that underscore transgression (e.g., Connell, 2010; Davis, 2008; Halberstam, 1998; Namaste, 1996; 2000; Thanem, 2011). These critiques do not debate the merits of transgression or whether a trans body can achieve this or not; however, they stress that the degree to which a transgender person experiences and materially lives out their gendered identities is diverse and negotiated. In other words, transgression is not a given. For example, Halberstam (1998) cautions against leaving out the embodied lived experience of trans persons because such avoidance tends to result in understandings or analyses of transgender identities as infinitely fluid and disruptive. This mistake risks using transgender as an ideal political trope, which limits the transperson to "an imaginary, fictional and merely metaphorical presence in the service of an intellectual project" (Nash, 2010, p. 583). Thus, as Hines (2012, p. 599) puts it, "the pleasures of queer theory – the joys of an imaginary that resists categorisation – are also its fault line." Instead the trans literature calls for more qualitative research on the lived experience of transpeople as well as the contexts that mediate their experiences in order to appreciate the nuances surrounding being trans rather than simply using trans as an ideal transgressive category (see also Thanem and Wallenberg, 2014).

In this article, we respond to this call by investigating the lived experience and extent work and non-work contexts of one transgender manager in order to give life and voice to the otherwise 'imaginary category' of trans. Lived experience, as we refer to the term, stresses the importance of context and how an individual experiences a variety of contextual factors that shape their day-to-day lives (Hines, 2006; Pitts, 2000; Thanem, 2011). We use the term 'situated transgressiveness' to capture this context-specific lived experience of transgressiveness.

More specifically, our case follows Claire, a middle-aged, male-to-female (MTF) transwoman. Claire is active in the LGBT community, advocating for trans rights, and she works as an IT manager in a large international organization, where she has management responsibilities as well as obligations to serve clients. Claire provides us with valuable insights into lived transgender experiences across different situated contexts, a term we use to articulate distinct material and social conditions that exact particular gendered expectations. In the case of Claire, focusing on situated contexts illuminates how gender and social lives are infinitely fluid, contradictory, and complex as well as how transgressiveness is situated and negotiated within these contexts. In particular, we explore three situated contexts that Claire frequently occupies: 1) a public advocate, where she speaks to the media and at public events on transgender rights, 2) a manager at BigStore, where she supervises employees and 3) client services, meaning that part of Claire's management responsibilities involves selling and servicing clients or potential client organizations. Each of these situated contexts foregrounds different roles, physical locales, and relationships and expectations around interactions with others. Importantly, Claire negotiates and expresses transgressiveness differently in these situated contexts each enabling and constraining her lived experiences as a transwoman.

By focusing on roles, locales and interactions, we follow recent trans literature and its emphasis on situatedness (Browne, Nash and Hines, 2010; Hines, 2010). Hines (2010), for example, studies how being situated into different types of work and professions influences people's trans identity. However unlike Hines' work, where each transperson is located in one work setting, we study the interactions between different situated contexts, lived experiences and possibilities and expressions of transgression. Our analysis shows how transgressiveness itself is situated—even when performed by the same person. To examine

situated transgressiveness, we ask the following questions: 1) How does one transgender manager's lived experience of political and professional life shift across situated contexts, and 2) How do various situated contexts enable/constrain political 'trans'gressions?

By asking these questions, we add to the queer, transgender, and organizational literatures by showing how Claire's experiences of doing gender shift across situated contexts. By empirically identifying these moments of shifting, we advance understandings of transgressiveness—not as an ideal disruptive process, but as a lived experience that varies across situated contexts, suggesting fluidity instead of stability. Our aim is to provide additional insights into the situated nature of political transgression in a way that does not reduce the political body to an 'imaginary category.'

Queer politics and transgression

Queer theories have made great strides in challenging western dualistic notions of identity and embodied belongings. Although true of a variety of differences, gendered and sexual binaries, such as masculinity/femininity or heterosexuality/homosexuality, are particularly troublesome and well documented within queer studies, often leading to the potential for discrimination and marginalization. In response, queer theories highlight the "contingent foundations" of gendered and sexual subjectivities (Butler, 1995), and in so doing, they forward a political project aimed at opening up restrictive, dualistic notions of embodiment to a wider multiplicity of sexed, gendered, or sexual being. Transgender, which can signify transsexual, transgender, cross-dressing, or other groups identifying as gender variant (Whittle, 2000), has been located in queer theory as a particular way of being queer, and the term is often used to denote discursive transgressiveness and disruption.

Although spurred by a number of key scholars (e.g., de Lauretis, 1991; Sedgwick, 1985; 1990; Fuss, 1991), Judith Butler's (1990; 1991; 1993) work on gender performativity and critique of the heterosexual matrix has served as an important launch pad for queer interrogations of identity politics. According to Butler, gendered binaries are organized and proffered through a heterosexual matrix that constructs normative bodily assumptions across sex, gender, and sexuality binaries. Through this lens, bodies are culturally organized as exclusively male or female, and this sexed bodiliness forms a biological anchor

for gender, a correspondingly natural masculinity and femininity. The coherence of sex and gender is further galvanized through a normative heterosexuality, such that oppositional desire validates sexed and gendered difference as well as erects heterosexual desire as a standard of union. As a result, bodies are caught up within a severely limited heteronormative field of intelligibility: not only is anatomical sex conflated with gendered expression, thus limiting gender possibilities as either masculine or feminine, but also a multiplicity of sexed, gendered, and sexual bodies are rendered abnormal, unnatural, or deviant.

According to queer theory, transgender bodies hold significant transgressive and political potential precisely because they illuminate the artificiality of gendered binaries (Deutsch, 2007; Garber, 1992; Risman, 2009). Put simply, poststructuralist and queer arguments take discursive constructions of sex/gender as a starting point to highlight the problematic nature of bodies and embodiments being wholly contained within a system of binary, dichotomous identity categories and instead replaces these with an understanding of gender and sexual identities as sets of discursively fluid, plural, and largely in/coherent constructions. Transgender people are envisioned as political—"queering" the stability of binary categories that form the foundation of the heterosexual matrix by exposing a broader fluidity of sexed and gendered possibilities (e.g. Davis, 2008; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Thanem and Knights, 2012).

Yet a pointed debate exists around *how* transgressive transgender bodies can be and how to bring the material and lived experiences of transgender people to light. As noted above, some queer theories have encouraged a sensibility of the queer body as a discursively unbounded agent in its playful and fluid challenge to rigid, binary categories of identity, at times erecting transgender bodies "as ideal representations of gender disruption and fluidity" (Davis, 2008, p. 98). However, scholars in both queer theory and other areas have increasingly questioned this celebration of gender's fluidity (Halberstam, 1998; 2005; Muhr, 2012; Namaste, 1996; 2000; Rubin, 1996). For instance, Hines (2010) suggests that queer theory has a tendency to overstate the relationship between "trans and transgressive," and Connell (2010) argues "…simply *being* transgender does not necessarily disrupt doing gender" (p. 42, italics in original). Within this critique, scholars fear that

'fixing' transgender as transgressive also limits how diverse materialities or embodied experiences come to be known. Paradoxically, queer theory's lack of emphasis on material particularities "has led to a homogenous theorization of transgender" (Hines, 2006, p. 50) instead of a focus on pluralism. At the heart of this critique are concerns that queer theories have tended to privilege the discursive construction of gender and sexuality over lived, material realities, which threatens to reduce transgender to a transgressive rhetorical device (Namaste, 1996).

To address this theoretical shortcoming, several scholars suggest a politics of transgender mobility that seeks to capture the complexities of lived experiences and identifications. For instance, Connell (2010) argues for a contextual view while Hines suggests scholars adopt situated (2010) or particular (2006) understandings of embodied transgender life. Still others argue for greater attention to how specific places and spaces (Browne et al., 2010; Halberstam, 1998), embodied or material negotiations (Thanem, 2011), professional roles (Connell, 2010; Pitts, 2000), interactions (Davis, 2008), or social contexts (Namaste, 2000) change the shape or contours of transgender experiences. Despite a lack of common terminology, a shared sentiment emerges that transgender individuals negotiate their moment-to-moment performances of gender within a myriad of frameworks that both enable and constrain possibilities of gender diversity. In particular, our contribution of situated transgressiveness takes up this call in order to move understandings of transgender beyond discourse to foreground lived experiences within their situated contexts.

Transgender politics and lived experience at work

Organization studies of LGBT workers have long documented how heteronormative discourses create challenges for queer bodies and subjectivities (Acker, 1990; Burrell, 1984; Hearn, Sheppard, Tancred-Sheriff, and Burrell, 1989; Gherardi, 1995). As a result, many workers carefully negotiate their queer identities in order to carve out situated belongings within organizations (Rich, Schutten, and Rogers, 2013; Ward and Winstanley, 2003), and for transgender workers in particular, their bodies are often disciplined around

seemingly intractable gender norms (Connell, 2010). Because many trans people still suffer negative employment consequences such as firings, harassment, discrimination, ostracization, and violence (Budge et al., 2010; Sangganjanavanich and Cavazos, 2010), carefully negotiating gender and work is crucial, even for those with stable or satisfying careers (Doan, 2010; Thanem, 2011).

Insights from transgender studies of work and organizations (e.g., Schilt, 2006; Schilt and Connell, 2007) provide important context for questions of professionalism, being transgender and the politics of gender transgression. Key insights suggest that regulation, or at least careful negotiations of gender appearance and expression, is a hallmark of transgender working life. While there is great variety in transgender workers' experiences, most are highly cognizant of their bodies, including gender expression and how their bodies are read and understood by others. Thanem's (2011) reflections as a male-to-female transvestite offer a glimpse into the lived and visceral reactions made salient through one's role and physical locales as well as the expectations (or assumed expectations) of others (see also Thanem and Knights, 2012). To make our studies of transgender persons more sensitive to how bodies are interactive, Thanem (2011) suggests explorations around, "… how our interactions with colleagues and clients affect and are affected by our expression or hiding of transgender embodiment, and the bodily feelings and experiences that are spurred as we express or hide our transgender and as we interact with others" (p. 17). Thanem and Wallenberg (2014) follow up on this and show how transgender people perform a variety of gendered practices by combining masculinity, femininity and ungendered practices in ways that both repress and express transgender. As Thanem and Wallenberg (2014, p. 18) conclude "gender trouble [is] played out in more nuanced ways" and a transgender body is therefore not transgressive in and of itself.

Too strong a focus on individual regulation and negotiations can suggest that gender occurs in a vacuum, which belies how the interactive nature of work is consequential. Taking a more contingent approach, Budge et al. (2010) found that transworkers consider several factors, beyond their own appearances, when imagining a career or making career decisions, such as occupational barriers and prospects, gratification, and the potential to do advocacy work. The authors share the story of one transwoman who believed she could not

do service work at a restaurant because she "looked strange" and had the wrong company image. She hoped instead to wash dishes away from the public. This woman's beliefs, whether accurate or not, are upheld by Hines' (2010) study of how trans identities are regulated, enabled, or constrained by occupations and organizations. She found that some queer subjectivities might be lived out more smoothly in less constraining work environments, such as cultural workplaces that value art and design or government workplaces that offer formal protection for trans employees. Comparatively, Hines found that both manual work and service work that requires a high degree of interaction with the public requires greater self-regulation around gender performances.

These occupational considerations are wrapped up with actual, physical locales. Doan (2010), a tenured professor and post-operative transwoman, uses autoethnographic methods to show how those who transgress gender norms experience tyranny *across* a variety of public spaces. She notes that "gender variance colors every space that I enter" (p. 636), and yet, "there is very little consideration of how variations in gender identity and performance can change the subjective nature of gendered spaces" (p. 638). Because of this, studies that take a complex view of how situated contexts, such as occupations and physical locales, mediate gendered expression have the potential to show how transgender lives are lived in motion, through the body, and in interaction with others.

Therefore, regardless of how transgressive a trans worker might wish to be, the degree to which this is the case is heavily situated, both enabled and constrained by one's own desires and by the desires of others. For example in Connell's (2010) study, Julie, a transwoman who works at a call center and who wished to achieve gender congruence, remarked how customers would often make sense of her masculine voice by mishearing her name as Julian, George, or Jake. Connell remarks, "Julie's experiences imply interactional limitations to the possibility of undoing or redoing gender when other participants in the interaction uphold gender accountability by resisting or reinterpreting discordant gender cues" (42). In this case, Julie's transition was misunderstood. In other cases, workers' transitions signify to others that a gender change has occurred and colleagues respond by reproducing gendered norms at work thereby limiting the possible political impact of trans bodies (Schilt and Connell, 2007). For instance, both Schilt's (2006)

and Dozier's (2005) studies found that transmen gain cultural capital and are valued more, characterized by greater respect, talking time, or inclusion in decision-making, after they transition to masculine subjects in organizations. Inversely, transwomen often experience a new devaluing, such as being talked over in meetings (Muhr and Sullivan, 2012). These studies are concerning reminders that transgender bodies are subject to heteronormative gender disciplining, both spurred by others'—and sometimes their own—desires for gender congruency.

Key insights emerge that to study transgender experiences as contextually situated, one must stay mindful of how bodies and embodied subjectivities (such as whether one is MTF or FTM; pre, post, or non-operative; young or old; as well as raced and classed) entwine and are lived within professional and working life. We argue that the political potential of queer bodies at work must be understood and examined within situated and embodied contexts that provide nuance around one's shifting roles, locales, and interactions, especially for how these shape opportunities for gender transgression or congruence. In particular, we advance the term situated transgressiveness as a lens to approach the situated, contextual experiences of transgender work lives and transgression. In line with Halberstam's (1998) call to study transgender mobilities, we seek to provide nuanced insights into the working life of one transwoman, recognizing that no single study can fully grasp the entirety of one's complex existence.

Methodology

Data collection

One of the authors met Claire while conducting research on gender and leadership among 57 top Danish managers. Claire was interviewed as a participant in this study during the spring of 2010 and later invited to give a public interview at an event where the results from the study were discussed. The author kept in contact with Claire and interviewed her approximately twice a year, the last interview being conducted in September 2013. One of the other authors also interviewed Claire in April 2013. Using an in-depth interview approach (Kvale, 1996), we explored Claire's experiences of being transgender across

situated contexts. Our objective was to foreground Claire's reflections, and therefore we asked questions about how she experiences work and non-work. That said, our observations from conducting interviews with Claire in different settings (at her workplace, in public places, and at speaking events) enabled both Claire's reflections and our own.

All together the empirical material consisted of seven interviews with Claire: four long interviews (two hours each), one public interview (45 minutes), three follow-up interviews (30-45 minutes each), and one follow-up interview over the phone (one hour). The first four interviews were centered on Claire's change in appearance from a man to a woman and how this affected her as a person, her personal life, her work life, and the relationships between her and her employees. For the purpose of this article specifically, the final three interviews were focused on her political activities across work and non-work contexts, her experiences of these activities, and the reactions she received from others.

Data analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed by doing several close readings. We took a constant comparative approach to reading the data, keeping our primary research questions in mind in order to highlight key themes regarding Claire's representations of her political and professional life. Our analytical approach was inductive yet theoretically sensitive. For instance, we did not approach the analysis with pre-defined categories or knowledge of where our data would take us, but rather we remained sensitive to certain categories, such as transgressions, embodiment, physical locations, roles, and interactions, (Ryan and Bernard, 2003), and how these played out around materiality and heteronormativity. This approach was beneficial because it allowed us to explore the texts for interactions, ruptures, insights, and contradictions (El-Sawad, Arnold, and Cohen, 2004) around the way Claire understands and performs her queer body as political and professional. After our first close reading, we noticed that Claire's story held contradictions around the ways she saw herself as politically queer and professional. After reading and discussing the material again, it became clear that the way she negotiates her queer and professional identity depended on her role, locale, and with whom she was interacting. We

focused our analysis on shifting moments of transgression across three different roles, locales, and interactions: 1) a trans advocate in the public sphere interacting with the general public 2) a manager at BigStore interacting with colleagues and co-workers, and 3) client services at external organizations with clients and other professionals. The following table presents these three situated contexts.

Table 1

Claire's Situated Contexts

Roles	Locales	Interactions with Others
Trans advocate	Public Sphere	General Public
Manager	BigStore	Co-workers
Client services	Client Organizations	Clients and Other Professionals

Although the final three interviews focused on her political activities across different situated contexts, we used all of the interviews and observations in our analysis in order to achieve a more robust understanding of Claire's lived experiences and contextual negotiations of her transgender embodiment and politics. Because of this, the case below is not presented chronologically (and the logistical information about quotations is omitted) so as to offer a more holistic, heuristic representation of Claire's story organized by her situated contexts and transgressiveness. Although Claire has not directly commented on the specific findings of this study, we acknowledge the mutual influence the study has had on Claire's and our own self-understandings during this project (Eastland, 1993). In the end, we see this analysis and the resulting case as part of a trans political agenda aimed at giving voice to queer bodies across contexts.

The case of Claire

Our case follows Claire[1], a non-operative MTF transgender IT manager for BigStore, the headquarters of a large international food retailer. She[2] is in her late 50's. At 52 she 'came out' as transgender and started dressing as a woman at work.

Claire was born a biological boy—John—yet she knew from a very young age that she wanted to wear women's clothing. Despite her growing desires and burgeoning comfort level dressing and living as a woman, Claire's childhood, adolescence, and much of her early adult life was spent in the closet. From early on Claire understood her body as 'different' and controllable, in the sense that hiding her transgender body was an option, albeit not ideal or humane. As time went by, masking her desires became too much for Claire, and she decided to 'come out' as transgender. The decision to live openly as a woman enabled Claire to become a public political activist for LGBT rights and it brought her private life into her workplace. Her story was of interest to both media and other organizations working with diversity issues. In her public life, she allows her body and transgender appearance to bolster her claims that everybody has a right to exist outside of the constraints of gender binaries, without needing to fit in. However, Claire's story is more complex and contradictory, especially her desire to be transgressive, when she talks about how her gender is negotiated and lived differently at work or in her professional roles.

Transgression in the situated context of the media and public sphere

For several years Claire has been an invited speaker for the media and at public events. Her messages and advocacy work typically center on acceptance, diversity, pride, and inclusion in the workplace. Although her engagements started through her affiliations with LGBT and gender-related groups, they quickly broadened to include appearances and interviews with several national TV shows and newspapers, where she shares her experiences of coming out in the workplace.

Through her public engagements, Claire entered the world of politics as an advocate, arguing that transgender people should be able to gender-identify as they wish rather than

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[1] Both Claire and John are pseudonyms, John being Claire's birth name.
[2] We refer to Claire as 'she,' even when we refer to the time when she was called John. This is done out of respect for Claire's wish to be perceived as a woman and to not confuse the reader.

the way their biological body dictates. Specifically, she has lobbied on two issues of public policy. The first advocated that one should be allowed to choose a name not related to their biological sex, and the second advocated for one's right to formally change their gender without surgery.

Claire's speaking engagements and her political aims are strengthened by her willingness to invoke her embodied experiences. Living in a society that accounts for only two genders, Claire has always felt the need to stand up for her queer body's right to exist outside of the normative values of the heterosexual matrix. Instead of taking measures or steps to mask her queer body (i.e., by attempting to 'pass' as non-trans), she openly speaks about why it is important that her body appears trans:

> If no one can see the difference between a born woman and a post-op transwoman, then it doesn't matter, then we don't have to work for inclusiveness and acceptance, then we just all need an operation! I think we should work for inclusiveness and to make room for everyone.

Claire's desire to stand up for the body's right to exist without conforming is something she faces even in the LGBT circles, where she is a long-time member. Claire is quick to note that from within this community she first found and embraced her queer identity. Without the LGBT network, Claire would not have had the strength to come out.

> I owe the LGBT community a lot. This was the only place in which I, for a long time, could be Claire without being judged. It was here I got a network that supported my coming out. In that sense LGBT has helped define who I am.

However, she also notes that she now struggles within LGBT circles because of differences of opinion surrounding transgender identity. Specifically, she condemns messages that suggest that the only option to transgender individuals is surgical reassignment:

> Paradoxically, I actually meet the most resistance within our own circles [talking particularly about the trans community]. First of all because there are very different opinions of what it means to be trans: from people who think you need to be operated on in order to be a *real* trans and not just acting it out, to transvestites, or someone like me, who feels like a woman, but stays in a man's body. And these different opinions make it very difficult for us to agree on a common message or a common political agenda.

She speaks passionately about her work for the right for others to be openly transgender without surgical interventions:

> Most of us [trans people] generally feel like underdogs in the society, and that apparently results in a need to find even lower dogs to step on. So for some it seems 'better' to want a sex-change operation compared to not wanting one—like me. Because if you don't want a sex change operation, you're 'just' a transvestite, and 'those' it is ok to talk badly about [she says ironically].

Perhaps because Claire has felt like and sees how others are treated as underdogs, she makes her own body and personal experiences public and seeks to help others through telling her story.

> But it does matter to me that we work on these issues on a broader scale. And I feel that I can help by putting myself out there, by opening up and by making my story available. As I usually say every time I speak to an audience: 'you can ask any question, and I'll probably answer most of them.' And I've not yet said no to answering a question, no matter how personal.

As noted above, Claire is a non-operative transwoman, and this particular embodiment of both male features—such as height, voice, facial, and body hair—and female features—such as dress, make-up, and bodily movements/positions—adds important context to her experiences. Given her commitment to being visibly transgender, Claire's public engagement and political activism, as well as her body, can be understood as queer challenges to the dominant heterosexual matrix by illuminating gender's fluidity or "in-betweenness" (Nordmarken, 2014, p. 38; see also Nagoshi, Brzuzzy, and Terrell, 2012; Preves, 2000). At the broadest level of her media and public performances, Claire's commitment to the visibility of her trans body has powerful disruptive potential (see also Muhr and Sullivan, 2013).

Claire articulates this disruptive potential when she notes that her speaking engagements before diverse, non-LGBTQ groups can change the way others perceive 'queer bodies.' For example, Claire made the following comment after addressing human resource management students at a business school:

> I am more than happy to do this. It makes me incredibly happy to be taken seriously in these circles. That people take me seriously because of my political statement and my person. I almost get tears in my eyes when people come up to me after a speech and tell me how I change the way they see the world—how my story made them think differently.

Within the situated context of her public engagements and political activism, Claire experiences her trans body as a source of political agency and personal satisfaction. She is

open about her personal life, invites questions and seeks to educate others who might not understand what it means to be transgender. Claire is active and purposeful in the message she desires to communicate to public audiences—namely that the heteronormative binaries of man/woman, male/female, and hetero/homosexual are social constructions. In this way, Claire is purposefully transgressive in her efforts to create greater acceptance of and inclusivity for gender diversity, both within the media and public as well as within the LGBT community. However, while Claire foregrounds transgender and queer issues in public, she foregrounds her professionalism and a 'business as usual' stance in her workplace. This difference in emphasis draws attention to the importance of how situated contexts shape the experience of being transgressive.

Transgression in the situated context of BigStore

Claire has been dressing as a woman at work consistently since 2009. Overall, she notes that her transition has been a success, and she often speaks of the positive support she has received. At the time our study began, Claire felt that her gender change was generally accepted. Despite the fact that she is noticed as transgender, her queer presence in the company no longer seems novel. One result of this is that Claire says she no longer worries as much about how her appearance will be received at work:

> I don't think so much about my appearance and the way I dress anymore. I mean in relation to whether I'm viewed professionally or not. Of course I think about the way I dress. That I do every morning—and still enjoy my female appearance. But I don't think anymore about how my colleagues perceive it.

In Claire's opinion this is because her female appearance has become part of everyday life in BigStore, perhaps making it less salient to others and reducing its need to be explained:

> I don't have to answer that many questions anymore. Everyone knows me—or knows of me—which of course can be a little odd, especially when it is people I don't know, but its mainly in a nice way as people greeting me in the morning, saying 'hi Claire' when we meet in the lobby. But I don't need to explain myself anymore or worry about what people will think. And that is nice. That means I can focus on work.

What Claire describes is, arguably, a degree of gender acceptance and legitimacy within her

workplace. Achieving this level of acceptance underscores Claire's feeling that her gender should not matter and signifies a subtle shift between how Claire speaks as an advocate, where she foregrounds her trans identity and the disruptive potential of her visibly trans body, and how she speaks as a manager and organizational member, where she appreciates the ability to focus on work without disruption. Reflecting on the latter, Claire notes:

> And really, it shouldn't matter whether I'm John or Claire. I know some people might think so, but it really doesn't. I'm still the same. And I think people are beginning to see that.

These quotations reveal tensions in Claire's statements about whether gender should matter or not—and whether there is a difference or not. Given that Claire brings this up, we can assume that it matters to her.

> Of course it helps to focus on work. By focusing on work and being 100 % professional, I can avoid awkwardness, and I sense that it also makes people relax more. They know now that I am still the same professional, goal-driven manager who expects results from them. And when we focus on that, my gender becomes less important.

Although there is no reason to suspect by this quotation that Claire downplays being transgender, her desire to "focus on work" and be "100% professional" signals a shift to foregrounding a role more generally accepted—or at least less contested—in the workplace. Claire also acknowledges that foregrounding professionalism allows her to avoid personally awkward encounters, which appears counter to (or shifts or provides nuance to) her advocacy messages above, where no question was off limits. Importantly, this highlights the subtle influence of situated context: being a transgender worker may require being highly attuned to others' expectations as well as the potential discrepancies between politics, such as lobbying for ideal inclusion and acceptance at work, and the realities and demands of organizational life, such as fitting in and getting work done. Here Claire appears to foreground professionalism as a means to manage these contextual influences and appears not to engage in the transgressive politics of her transgender body and identity.

There are also times when Claire's political goals for advocacy and educating non-LGBT audiences seem to disappear. Whereas above she notes that she invites personal questions from public audiences, in her organization, she appears to foster a more private stance. One

key difference between a public audience and one's own workplace is certainly the degree to which statements are experienced as offensive and provocative. For instance, in the quotation that follows, Claire takes offence that HR should provide support for workers who are struggling to understand transgenderism or who might think it is 'weird,' despite the fact that she seeks opportunities to change people's perceptions when she speaks publicly. She explains this by referring to one of BigStore's core values, which is respect for difference:

> There was once one of my colleagues who said to me that she thought HR should supply greater support for people who thought this [transgender] was weird. I stopped her quite quickly, and told her that before she got herself further out in that argument, she needed to think hard about what she said. As we have certain values in BigStore and one of them is to respect difference. And HR can obviously not then suddenly communicate that it is OK to think it is weird that I am trans. That wouldn't be respect, would it? It took some time before she understood what I meant, but I think she finally did.

This quotation and its accompanying sentiments show a certain level of advocacy. Claire continues to promote diversity as an aim. However, instead of inviting questions and fostering openness, being located in her organization seems to subdue the advocacy Claire adopts in the public sphere. Sometimes, as the quotation below shows, Claire lets go of her desire to transgress public perceptions and instead relies on organizational values or policies to at least dictate public, if not private, behaviors:

> Of course privately people can think of me what they like, but in the organization we have certain values to follow, and in that case it would be directly against our values if HR officially communicated that it was OK to have a problem with me.

We begin to see that situated contexts, such as Claire's role, locale, and interactions, shape the intersections of her professional and trans identities and her stated desires to be transgressive. Claire embodies a transgender identity at work, and she appears to have achieved a form of tenuous gendered acceptance and legitimacy at BigStore, where her body is no longer as salient as it once was. Yet part of this acceptance appears to rest on Claire's ability and desire to continuously deemphasize the transgressive potential of her body while focusing on professionalism and work. The culture of BigStore, most notably its documented policies upholding the acceptance of difference, as well as her interactions

with coworkers affords Claire the ability to adopt a different political stance—a more regulated politics. In this way, Claire can be seen to achieve a professional identity that 'works,' although not without contradiction, alongside the material realities of heteronormative organizational life.

The complex nature of Claire's situated negotiation of being professional and transgender is further seen when Claire works with clients or performs professional activities outside of BigStore. In these instances, she monitors and controls her appearance and how she communicates her gender.

Transgression in the situated context of external client organizations

As the sections above connote, public advocacy and opportunities for and desires around transgressiveness shift for and around Claire, depending on her role, locale, and with whom she interacts. When Claire speaks about visiting BigStore's clients, engaging in IT problem-solving for large organizations, or attending professional events—something she is often called to do in her managerial role—she expresses concern that her appearance might interrupt work, rather than provide opportunities for advocacy:

> When I meet with external work relations, I am often a little nervous. But I try not to think about what they might think, as I would go paranoid if I had to think about that constantly.

These concerns are similar to the ones she experienced transitioning from MTF at BigStore. Despite her desires to place her fears aside, Claire experiences her body as more salient in situations where people might not know her or when she believes her body will make others take notice. In the following example, Claire recalls discomfort while attending a crowded professional seminar with her colleagues.

> I was going to this seminar together with a few of my colleagues. And for some reason, I was a little late that day, so I didn't arrive together with my colleagues, but entered the room as the seminar had already started. And of course people stared at me—and there was some uncomfortable periods of silence—but I had to make the best of it and take part as if I hadn't noticed. And after a while, people began to relax and listened to what I said and engaged with me like with anyone else.

Claire paints a picture where her body is, at first, stared at, making her feel different for

being trans. Whereas in her public advocacy work, Claire takes such opportunities to educate and change people's perceptions, at BigStore and especially in external work settings, Claire becomes particularly mindful of her body and aesthetic and seeks to shift the focus to professional matters. This was also the case when she was called into a large organization to support their management group with an IT-related problem for the first time:

> I did think about how I would be perceived on the way out there because it is a big, well-recognized organization, and I was to meet people I hadn't met before. But I had to focus on that I am there because I have a message and a knowledge they need. And I probably don't look insecure when I walk in a door [laughs], so I think I have the personal authority it takes. Then people might think, wow, that's a tall trans lady in high heels. But yes, that's right, that is me. But there was no doubt about who set the agenda, that was me, and they were very interested, asked a lot of questions and at the end I got three bottles of red wine as thank you. So all the standard norms for how such a meeting should be held was respected.

Here, Claire codes the professional encounter a success, in part, because attention shifted away from the fact that she is "a tall trans lady in high heels" and 'became business as usual'. In reality Claire is confronted with fears that her transgender body might disrupt her professional performance. Unlike her presence in BigStore in which her transgender body is less salient, although still regulated, her body's movement into external organizational locales holds the potential to be novel and disruptive, particularly given how her transgender body may be at odds with others' expectations of professionalism (Connell, 2010; Hines, 2010; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009; Thanem, 2011). Indeed Claire's recollections of this event also suggest that her embodied anxieties about being a professional and a transwoman remain:

> Even though I know I appeared cool and professional, I was still nervous ... [and] afterwards, I still didn't know what they thought about me or whether they had noticed ... or they must have, but then whether someone else had prepared them. But maybe they were just professional too.

These findings have important implications for our understandings of transgression. Claire seems attuned to the potential disruption that her transgender body might have, yet she deemphasizes her body and gender and foregrounds professionalism that demonstrates competence, authority, and control. For instance, tacitly, on days she visits clients or

participates in professional events she puts extra thought into her appearance and dresses more conservatively:

> When I have external meetings, I often think a little extra about how I dress and try to look professional. Maybe wear trousers instead of a skirt, or at least a longer skirt, and not the most tight t-shirt.

This heightened care may be Claire's way of handling the reactions she receives about her body in situations where people do not know her—or about her—in advance. Downplaying the body might also be a way to engage professionalism in the IT business, a locale that does not appear to leave much room for gender advocacy or transgressions. So when she engages in client relations, she is always mindful of her queer body and ready to react, should she have to:

> I always have it in mind [the risk that people might react to her] and I often think about how people will react. But I think that I by now can handle almost any reaction to me—also the most perfidious.

Regardless, Claire believes that by focusing on work, her queerness becomes less salient over time:

> I have learned that if I focus on work then people usually follow suit, then it doesn't really matter what they think about the way I look. As long as they respect me as a professional and a co-worker, and to get that respect I need to be professional and not emotional about this.

This quotation also highlights that for Claire, part of being a professional is adopting the ability to separate herself from her emotions. As she explains it, doing so is part of developing a persona where her embodied differences are managed via a depersonalized, professional affect.

Compared to the public sphere, where she deliberately foregrounds her political transgressiveness, and BigStore, where her political message is much more regulated yet still attuned to the politics of difference, Claire's role as manager servicing clients or participating in professional events outside of BigStore exacerbates tensions around professionalism, embodiment, and politics. In this configuration of situated contexts Claire takes extra care to manage her body and embodied interactions. In particular, she negotiates these situated contexts by foregrounding a traditional form of professionalism that is competent and in control as a means to mitigate the potential disruptiveness of her

body. Even still, as much as she may wish to foreground her role as a professional and deemphasize her trans body, this is contingent on others' interpretations and reactions as well as the specific organizational locale, including its cultural norms and values surrounding professionalism and gender diversity. In these ways, Claire's transgressiveness rests on a negotiated contradiction surrounding her desires to be controlled and professional (and not necessarily transgressive in these moments) and others' perceptions and understandings of her body and gender.

Discussion

In this article, we examine the political potential of transgender bodies by exploring the lived experiences of Claire, a transwoman, advocate and manager living and working in Denmark. We seek to add to the queer, transgender, and organizational literatures by showing how Claire's reflections on her trans body and her political transgressiveness shift depending on her lived experiences, focusing on shifting moments of transgression across three different roles, locales, and interactions with others: 1) a trans advocate in the public sphere interacting with the general public, 2) a manager at BigStore interacting with colleagues and co-workers, and 3) client services at external organizations with clients and other professionals. Reflecting on how these three configurations of situated contexts influence Claire's lived experiences, we address our research questions below by exploring how one transgender manager's lived experience of political and professional life shift across situated contexts, enabling and constraining political transgressiveness.

What is striking about this case is how each configuration of situated contexts enables very different kinds of transgressions/politics. Our analysis of how Claire experiences moving across roles, locales, and interactions suggests that trans experiences of emotions and embodiment depend on a variety of factors that impact political potential. At certain times, Claire is actively political and transgressive, and at other times, namely in professional contexts, she seeks to fit in and deemphasize gendered differences. In these ways, Claire's movement through her varying contexts produces differing conditions for the enactment of situated transgressiveness.

In the public sphere, Claire is purposefully political and transgressive, engaging in formal political advocacy for transgender rights as well as educating various public audiences on what it means to be transgender through personal stories and answering questions. In this role and with public audiences, Claire makes no attempts to mask or downplay her trans body, regardless of audience resistance. In fact she believes that audiences who are unfamiliar with queer politics are especially important because she has the opportunity to change people's minds. It is here that Claire's transgressiveness is perhaps most consistent with queer political agendas (Deutsch, 2007; Garber, 1992; Risman, 2009), especially those that erect transgender bodies as ideal forms of gender transgression (e.g., Brewis et al., 1997; Davis, 2008; Connell, 2010; Hines, 2010): she advocates for and embodies a gender fluidity that defies heteronormative constructions of sex and gender.

Compared to her public advocacy, Claire embodies a different, more regulated form of situated transgression at BigStore. Although she wears make-up and earrings, dresses in skirts and high heels, and appears comfortable with her colleagues and their support, she also communicates that work is not her preferred locale to be an advocate. Indeed Claire's experiences of being transgender at BigStore perhaps rest on her careful negotiation of organizational materialities, such as her managerial role and work demands. In fact, at times she discursively downplays gender and the political potentials of her body by suggesting that gender does not matter. Instead she appears to seek a form of gender normalcy or naturalness where she desires support for diversity but eschews advocacy in favor of foregrounding professionalism. Here Claire's transgressiveness is regulated because she and her organizational contexts are mutually implicated in enabling and constraining what it means to be professional and transgender. For instance, when Claire's gender identity is framed as "weird" by a coworker, she relies on BigStore's value of respecting difference as a way to manage this interaction rather than engaging in an open dialogue more characteristic of her public advocacy. Through this lens, Claire's situated transgressiveness is regulated—both through her strategic choices to foreground professionalism as well as her organizational contexts, including her managerial role, co-coordinated interactions with others, and her organization's cultural values.

Finally in the third context of client organizations, Claire's discomfort around interacting with others is intensified, and she seeks to manage and professionalize her gendered body by dressing in shirts rather than tight t-shirts, pants, rather than skirts, or by wearing less colorful make-up. Although her body still transgresses the boundaries of the heterosexual matrix, she is less discursively and materially active in this pursuit. Claire loses her explicit advocacy zeal in external organizational and professional settings where she believes her body might be salient and professionally disruptive or where others' reactions might cause her discomfort. Put differently, Claire's unique negotiation of transgender and professionalism is contradictory because her body's politics are never fully her own but rather heavily contingent on a variety of contextual factors. Although she manages her transgender body with greater care and forwards an expert, in-control professionalism to mitigate her potential transgressiveness, the politics of her queer body are salient. She is an organizational outsider and not fully in control of how she is perceived in these spaces (each with their own cultural norm of gender diversity and professionalism).

Ultimately, Claire's case illustrates the complicated and often fluid, overlapping and multiple nature of situated transgressiveness, which must be understood as emergent performances uniquely negotiated within situated contexts.

Conclusion

This study both aligns with and complicates existing queer theories of 'trans'gression. On the one hand, our findings support queer theories' assertion that transgender bodies and embodiment hold political potential. In Claire's role as a public advocate, her disruption of the heterosexual matrix appears to be consistent with queer theories that envision transgression as actions that signify activism and resistance (e.g., Brewis et al., 1997; Goltz and Zingsheim, 2010; Slagle, 1995; West, 2010). Yet, our study paints a more complex picture of 'trans'gression. Consistent with theories that argue for greater attention to the lived experiences of being transgender (Hines, 2006; Pitts, 2000; Thanem, 2011; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2014), our findings show the possibilities for transgender bodies to be transgressive are heavily situated within material contexts. Therefore, our results are in line with Schilt and Connell (2007), who show that binary gender norms at the workplace

tend to reestablish after transition and therefore limit the transgressive possibilities of the professional trans bodies. However, compared to Schilt and Connell (2007) who examine transgressiveness only at the workplace, our results show how transgressive possibilities shift across different contexts. Against this backdrop, our study adds to organizational studies of transgenderism by examining the nuances of the transgressive possibilities of these contexts via the term situated transgressiveness, which implies that the potential for transgressiveness within work and professional contexts is heavily nuanced, fluid, and contingent to a variety of situated contexts, such as roles, locales, and interactions with others.

In line with recent work by Thanem and Wallenberg (2014), we seek to complicate ideas surrounding the disruptive potential of a transgender body by showing that Claire holds multiple desires around transgression, advocacy, gender congruency and, at times, for others to pay her body and embodiment no attention. Studying the lived experiences of being transgender across situated contexts challenges the idea that simply being transgender is transgressive (as argued already by Brewis et al., 1997): not only can this transgression be experienced as constraining in some contexts, but it also obscures recognizing the multiple possibilities and challenges of embodied politics within work and organizational contexts. Indeed, Claire's experiences raise important questions regarding the very nature of transgression: to what extent do queer theories imagine coherence within transgression and politics itself? Put differently, in exaggerating the relationship between "trans and transgressive" (Hines, 2010), to what extent is the situatedness of transgression and its multiplicity eclipsed in favor of a singularly abstracted vision of transgender politics?

By conducting an in-depth analysis of the lived experience of one person instead of mapping several people's trans experiences (e.g., Hines, 2010; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2014; Schilt and Connell, 2007), our study shows that being transgressive must be understood as a matter of degrees as well as a shifting phenomenon rather than as a stable state of being. For instance, Thanem and Wallenberg's (2014) study of several transvestites argues that participants' experiences can be either more or less positive or negative depending on how much attention they pay to the gender binary. They note that for those who seek to conform, greater suffering may ensue whereas those who pay less attention to

the gender binary had more positive experiences. This finding provides great insight into the power of the gender binary and the plethora of experiences and responses surrounding it. However, it does not focus on how various situated contexts influence gender performances. In contrast, our study argues that one's orientation and responses to the gender binary shift across contexts. For instance, Claire's belief that the 'newness' or saliency of her transbody will disrupt the expectations of others is something she embraces in her role as an advocate and shies away from in her role as a manager servicing clients. As Claire negotiates the situated contexts surrounding her work, she strives to embody a modern workplace professionalism while lessening her transgressive advocacy. In line with Schilt and Connell (2007) we show how the workplace can constrain transgressive potential. Going beyond the workplace, we add to their findings by showing how active negotiation of different situated contexts both enables and constrains how transgressive a transgender body can be. This highlights how one's experiences of gender and transgression are co-constructed and interactive, and should not be solely treated as at the discretion of transpeople. Claire shows the most discomfort and manages her gendered identity to a greater extent when she senses that other professionals might question her professionalism, something she does not worry about as much in the public sphere. Therefore to understand the multiplicity and situatedness of transgression, queer theories of organization must engage the material navigation of situated contexts, including professional roles, the liminal locales of work across organizations, and interactions with organizational actors who may have different expectations for professional norms.

As the case study of Claire suggests, the shifting of transgression and constraining of transgender identity may be more symptomatic of the organizational situated contexts in which transgender identity is not fully consistent or integrated with reigning notions of modern professionalism. Therefore, our primary contribution is centered on how situated contexts both enable and constrain the political potential of queer bodies at work. This is interrelated with our second central contribution that advocates more nuanced, situated understandings of transgressiveness. In particular, this contribution challenges the notion of trans as wholly transgressive as well as pushes our understandings of transgression to value its multiplicity and contradictoriness—especially when grounded in lived, material

life. As Claire's case demonstrates, multiple forms of transgression and politics are enabled and constrained, as bodies exist within, move through, and work in situated contexts.

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