Shadows and Light
Pursuing Gender Justice through Students' Photovoice Projects of the Washroom Space

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YOUNG PEOPLE REGULARLY INHABIT THE UNREGULATED SPACE OF THE SCHOOL WASHROOM, which has consequences for their gendered subjectivities that often go unexamined. Asking students to express their experiences and understandings of what occurs in this gendered space is the first step to achieving gender justice in schools, or what Martino (2012) calls, "a transgender imaginary", one that denaturalizes gender as derived from biological sex, and that honors the local and specific knowledge of "'sissy-boys', 'feminized fags', and gender-variant individuals" and so on, to gain insight into "the embodied experience and dynamics of gender expression" (p. 223). A school that makes room for various gendered subjectivities and identities, that allows students to question the gender binary, is aligned with anti-transphobic and anti-oppressive pedagogies (Kumashiro, 2000). In this paper, I showcase and analyze students' photovoice projects commenting on the school washroom and other school spaces to access their subjugated knowledge (Foucault, 1980), those knowledges "that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (p. 82). In pursuit of a socially just project, I access student voice through photovoice, which I conceive as having the possibility to be a queer (if not genderqueer) methodology because of its ability to destabilize "the spaces it flags" (Noble, 2005, p. 165). This paper will take the form of a photo essay derived from a larger project on secondary school students' understanding of gender expression and its intersections with the gendered and social space of the school washroom. The photographs are the works of two particular students under the pseudonyms, Callie E. and Trina D., who explicate their understandings of their school space through photovoice (Thomson & Gunter, 2007).

Thematically, I divided the students' photographs into two categories according to both the photographic content, as well as the students' own explanations of their pictures. These categories are, light, or, what was visible, and dark, or, what was shadowed. Callie specifically stated that the light and the shadows were important to her; in her photography class held at the school, she had learned how to capitalize on these elements through the development process.

Trina was not explicit about these design elements, but was more concerned with the feelings of vulnerability through exposure and enclosures in the washroom space. I have extrapolated from these concerns and linked them to the visual and textual meanings in Callie's photographic series. The ambivalence between light and shadow is significant in that the nature of the washroom as public facility is exposed and yet paradoxically intended to enclose private acts, in closeted units of space. In this way, the washroom is a heterotopia, an ambiguous yet real space housing a variety of acts or signifying different meanings for various users (see Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). The heterotopia also frames the paradox of a space that can be both safe and unsafe, refuge and place of discomfort, open and closeted. These dichotomies represent the divide between the experiences of gender conforming and nonconforming individuals using sex-segregated public washrooms, often termed the bathroom problem for those gender nonconforming individuals who find discomfort in the design (see Browne, 2004; Halberstam, 1998; Munt, 1998; Rasmussen, 2009). Indeed the notion of the closet can itself be a heterotopia because it both shields and consequently hides its occupant from the world at large. It offers protection and alternatively, it can become a trap. Brown's (2000) analytics of the closet for queer subjectivities figure significantly in the analysis here.

Through their photovoice images, I investigate how these two students revealed the heterotopic nature of the washroom space. How they see and are seen by others points to the visuality of the space, or the way vision is "culturally constructed" (Rose, 2007, p. 2). Aligned with a visual methodology—or a visual way of investigating the space—visuality permits a study of the panoptic operations of Foucault's (1975) disciplinary power. And in the gendered space of the single-sex washroom, Foucaultian surveillance tactics (i.e. the tacit techniques of seeing and responding to gendered dress and other gendered markers through relations of power) ultimately shape what it means to be a gendered person in public schools in North America today. Through an examination of the mirrors and the stall doors, this paper features the photovoices of two students who share their fears, vulnerabilities, and uncertainties about using the school washroom, thereby telling us some of the details of the process of gender normalization in schools.

Situating the Project

In the larger project I interviewed 25 secondary school students who self-selected after an open recruitment in Grade 11 and 12 Visual Arts, English, and Social Sciences classroom talks. Because I did not require students to disclose their gender identity in order to participate, I was only privy to what they revealed to me in the interviews. I interviewed each student at least once; the two students featured in this paper accepted my invitation to be interviewed at least one more time and agreed to contribute their own artistic responses (for both they elected photography), which I highlight in this paper. Their responses emerged from some of the concerns they expressed in their initial interview(s). Trina D. and Callie E. provided photographs that both they and I deemed to be aesthetically important and discursively complex, especially when combined with the text from their interviews.

I was inspired by Linville's (2009) visual methodology of school mapping; her project asked genderqueer students to draw their school in terms of safe and unsafe zones. I adapted this activity to the space of the washroom only, and tailored the type of artistic response to each student. I also looked to O'Donoghue's (2007) arts-based research, known as a/r/tography

(Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), primarily for its coupling of methodology and theory: his participants, in a single-sex boys' school in Ireland, used photography to express "how certain masculinities are shaped, played out, and performed in particular places in school" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 64). Along with other studies asking youth to engage in photovoice (see Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001; Hurworth, Clark, Martin, & Thomsen, 2005; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004), Thomson and Gunter (2007) wanted "the voices of those with subjugated knowledges to be heard in and through research" (p. 334). Photovoice can provide insight into how gendered spaces impact students' understandings of themselves as gendered beings.

Disciplinary Space in Schools and Self-Regulation

According to Shilling (1991), space is "implicit or only partially acknowledged in most studies of classrooms, schools and the educaton [sic] system" (p. 23). I am following the spatial turn in sociological and educational studies in an attempt to access the dually subjugated knowledges of space and student voice, both in terms of their implications on legitimated and illegitimated gender identities. Shilling emphasized that, "spatial settings…serve to *produce* social relations and personal identities, and are in turn *produced* by the practices of individuals located within them" (p. 27). This dual action, producing and being produced by, mirrors the logic of Foucault's (1975, 1980) disciplinary power. In neither case is power or space a static entity, nor a container within which subjects may act out their fates. Each is a part of a dynamic process that allows subjects to act and be acted upon, otherwise described as a "double directionality" (Davies, 2006). Subjects are produced by the relations of power (and the space within which these relations occur); simultaneously, these subjects participate in relations of power, thereby perpetuating the dynamics of power (again, all within the space that also implicates the relations of power). Space and power are linked, behaving in similar ways, in the process of subjectivation: "space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 252) and through "spatial techniques" (p. 254) certain subjects are produced.

The space of the washroom is a way to bound a study of gender identities and expressions in schools; Foucault (1980) insisted, "one needs to investigate historically, and beginning from the lowest level, how mechanisms of power have been able to function" (p. 100) through various techniques, procedures and technologies. Isolating the photographic responses of students provides access to some of these technologies of power and self (Foucault, 1988), which in turn, provide insight into how students affect and are affected by the gendered space of the washroom. These technologies can also be understood using Foucault's (1975) framework of the panopticon, a particular feature of disciplinary power. Derived from Jeremy Bentham's prison design, Foucault uses the panopticon as a metaphor to explain the process of self-regulation and complicity in power relations. Shifting to the regulation of gender, panoptic practices can explain how culturally dominant forms of gender identity and expression are encouraged, policed and maintained, especially in the context of schools. Complicity in gender relations does not necessarily mean students are without resistance, as Renold and Ringrose (2008) remind us. From their study of femininity, the subject is capable of resistance even within regulatory frames: it is the responsibility of the ethical researcher to notice the "lines of flight", and "the ruptures" from the heterosexual matrix of what counts as intelligible gender (see Butler, 1990).

In this paper, I outline the ways these students view the structural features of the school washroom and describe their interactions with them as a way to inquire *how* the technologies of power and self operate in such a space that is paradoxically regulated (by students themselves) and unregulated (by teachers or other figures of authority). Not only does attention of this sort impact how a school may rethink gender relations overall, it also seeks to valorize the process of gendered subjecthood, noting that both gender and the making of a subject are continually negotiated (see Butler, 1990). Students have an opportunity to understand their own gendered expressions within a school context, and may be invited to expect these are always open to new interpretations in inclusionary and equitable ways.

The Washroom as Closeted Space

The paradoxical themes of lightness and dark, or exposure and concealment, that emerge from these two participants' photovoice responses are better understood with a brief overview of the metaphor of the closet (Brown, 2000). Through literary analysis, Sedgwick's (2008) *Epistemology of the Closet* provides the seminal work outlining the queerness of the closet as a construct of secrecy and self-disclosure. I imagine the public washroom to be one of these new sorts of closets, one arising spontaneously, for certain youth who must navigate the sexual and gender surveillance of their peers each time they choose to use this public space. The washroom as closet, or 'water closet' (see Sedgwick, 2008, p. 65), is about concealment and confinement: it is a space that segregates its occupants from the environment, and it confines the regulatory actions enacted between gendered bodies, with consequences for any body that cannot measure up. It is a double exclusion: isolating bodies from each other through disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975), and then separating out those abject bodies that fail to matter (see Butler, 1993). These student photographs point to the segregation and the isolation, through the use of shadows and light. Metaphorically, these visual themes represent the actual operations of gendered surveillance that these students and others witness in this space.

Certainly deriving from Sedgwick (2008), Brown (2000) theorizes the closet "at the intersection of materiality and its metaphor" and hopes to move beyond the closet as a metaphor only of oppression, because "whereness enables and constrains social relations" (p. 3). Brown describes this metaphoric/material closet as a place whose "*location* and *distance* suggests proximity to some wider (more important, more immediate, more central) room, but it's a certain kind of proximity: one that limits *accessibility* and *interaction*" [emphases in original](2000, p. 7). The closet interacts with the room in which it is located. It is *related* to its environment and may be thought of as a heterotopic space, specifically because of this relation to the norms of that exterior space and its ability to contain contradictory meanings for various users (see Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). Both the closet and the washroom can perform as spatialized metaphors for the purpose of a poststructural analysis of gender relations and regulation. Through these student photovoice projects, the notion of the closet emerges because of what both Callie and Trina name as exposing and concealing elements of the washroom space.

Photo Methodology

The photovoice projects from Trina and Callie developed from the discussion in the second interview, forming participant-created data (Glesne, 2011). In these two cases, because of the nature of the photography, the projects resemble a type of mapping, or *ethnocartography* whereby participants engage in "mapping … some material aspect of their lives…to discuss what works well and where problems lie" (p. 84). I see mapping as a queer reading practice (Britzman, 1998), a sort of "imaginary site for multiplying alternative forms of identifications and pleasures" (p. 85), a way to think "against one's thoughts" (p. 85) that are so much the product of a certain "gender regime" (Connell, 2009) defining what is possible and what is abnormal. Indeed, photovoice is also a queer method, because I have used it to upset and shed light on the normalizing processes of gender subjectivation in schools. Holliday (2000) aligns queer methodology with visual research "since the visual dimension has close associations with queer identities and is one in which queer subjects have particular skill" (p. 518).

Wang and Burris (1994) "use people's photographic documentation of their everyday lives as an educational tool to record and to reflect their needs, promote dialogue, encourage action, and inform policy" (pp. 171-2). In this way, photovoice accesses subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980). Photovoice can contribute "valuable input from teachers, pupils, and others who actually inhabit the built environments" (Prosser, 2007, p. 16). Photovoice methodology is also commensurable with the theoretical framework of gender performativity (Butler, 1990). O'Donoghue (2007) explains that just as the photograph is "endlessly produced and reproduced by all those who come in contact with it" (p. 64), so too is the process of gender a repeated, reiterated act, continually in process for others (Butler, 1990). Seeing a photograph is as much a social process as is the performance of one's gender. As an "alternative form of data representation" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 63), visual methodology exceeds the mere illustrative property of an image; rather, it can allow "us to inquire more deeply" (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004, p. 31), especially regarding the processes of gender expression and regulation.

I arrived at the thematic categories of light and shadow in part, from Callie's discussion in her interview about her photographs, especially her interest in the interplay of shadows and light in the development process. Furthermore, through Collier and Collier's (1986) advice on visual analysis of photography, I followed an "intuitive discovery" (p. 172) that these themes captured what was significant to the students, which ties into Seidman's (2013) suggestion that a researcher should be able to "affirm [one's] own ability to recognize" (p. 121) what is essential information in data.

Shadows and Light Through Photovoice

Trina D., grade 10, and Callie E., grade 11, attended the same high school, but whether they knew of each other's participation in this project or not, I was unaware, and so coincidentally to me, their photographs shared similar elements that allowed them both to be featured in this paper. In each I had observed a sense of composition, a deliberate use of focus, and, especially in Callie's black and white photographs, an interesting balance of light and dark, that was matched only by the saturation of colour in Trina's images. I noticed these qualities especially because they were foregrounded by our discussion about design principles in the interviews I had conducted with each student prior to these photography responses. But of more import for my concerns about gendered subjectivation in the space of the school washroom, both of these photography projects reiterated the girls' anxieties they felt was perpetuated by the very design of certain elements in the space.

For one, Trina named the gap between the stall door and the stall wall especially concerning because in "some of the washrooms like the crack is so big, it's a little uncomfortable" to be exposed like that. She noticed a mirror was positioned immediately in front of the stalls which only emphasized this discomfort: "you could be looking in the mirror but still see through that crack, I don't know, it just makes me really uncomfortable sometimes". Doubly exposed, by the potential of a passerby peering into the crack, or someone standing in front of the mirror and able to hide their voyeurism, were fears Trina was not alone in expressing. Some of the stalls also had broken locks, which perpetuated this fear of being invaded or not properly protected when in a vulnerable state. The design of the public washroom, with gaps in the shield between private and public space, fed into her fears of being watched. She claimed: "like if you're using the washroom? I feel like I usually watch that, like just 'cause, I don't know, it would just be so weird". Choosing particular stalls, avoiding others, and deciding when to use the mirror all become forms of self-regulation, that impact the kind of gendered understanding Trina has of herself, but also derive from a fear of peer-regulation, the panoptic operations Foucault (1975) argued create us as certain sorts of subjects.

She named the mirror as a site of further regulation:

T:…that's why I try to avoid looking at it, like the mirror…like I don't make eye contact or like look at anyone… you wait 'til someone's done and then you use the mirror…
J: what's awkward about it?
T: for me it would be like awkward making eye contact with someone. It's like looking in the mirror at the same time, I don't know….standing beside, I could find that a little awkward, but I think it's mostly the making eye contact through the mirror…but then again, with friends, it's ok, I don't find it a big deal…
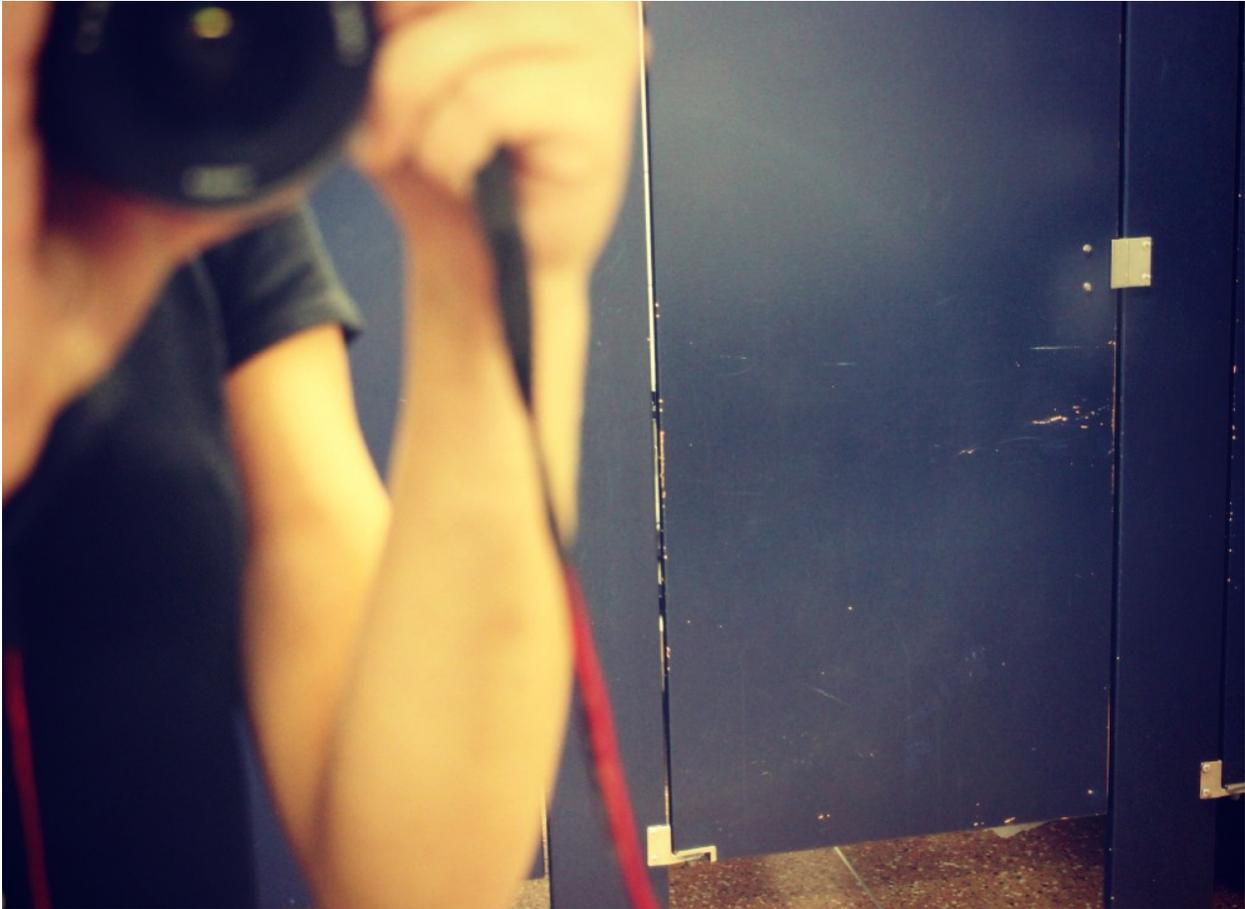
Cavanagh (2010) uses psychoanalytic theory (namely, Lacan's Mirror stage) to suggest how the reflective surface of a mirror becomes an intimate space: it is a place where one confronts oneself, where one sees one's public image. Although it is a very private act, it is particularly jarring when it occurs in a public space, and when in this self-encounter, someone else is engaging in the same private process. According to Hubbard, Kitchin, Bartley, and Fuller (2002), the Mirror phase is the beginning of "the desire for completeness and self-identity [which] drives people to seek identification with certain people and things in the world outside the self" (p. 119). Cavanagh (2010) suggests the mirror creates an opportunity for one to notice how one measures up to another, and in the public washroom that is sex-segregated, one's gender is the thing that is offered up for public examination. Martino and Palotta-Chiarolli (2005) frame it as "a whole regime of self-regulatory practices involving girls' surveillance of their bodies" (p. 104). Although Cavanagh (2010) is writing about the repercussions for transgender individuals not measuring up in a cisgendered space, I think the anxieties of self-analysis and regulation can have relevance for all gendered bodies because it is about the pressure to measure up to a fictitious norm (Butler, 1990). Girls seem to suffer "a lot of anxiety…about the almost obsessive focus on body fashioning" (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2005, p. 104). By the very definition of gendered regulation, this is a constant process that all gendered subjects participate in, with unique consequences for youth in their formative stages, especially through the operations of transphobia. The boundaries of normative gender are not innately present, but must be monitored and guarded by those who are gender privileged (see Butler, 1990). Even as Cavanagh (2010) admits, "there is no transparent or linear relationship

between an idealizing norm, its deployment, and the way one assumes a relation to it". I do not mean to undermine the unique anxieties that transgendered people are forced to endure in a cisgendered society, but suggest instead there might be room to account for the negotiations of gendered reality for all gendered youth, especially as it is impacted by the space of the school washroom that claims a definition of gender as monolithic, bifurcated and static.

For Trina, to make eye contact is to acknowledge someone else as a witness to her private (and gendered) self-confrontation, as well as to notice how one measures up (or not) to the other's external self and self-confrontation. The mirrors in the girls' washrooms in this school were larger and more centrally positioned than what the boys' washrooms contained suggesting a normalized view that girls prefer to self-examine, at least of their outward appearance, to primp and preen more than boys do. But the implications for such preening, in the company of other girls engaging in the same process, means each is reminded of the norms of being a girl and which practices are endorsed by the very structural design of this gendered space.
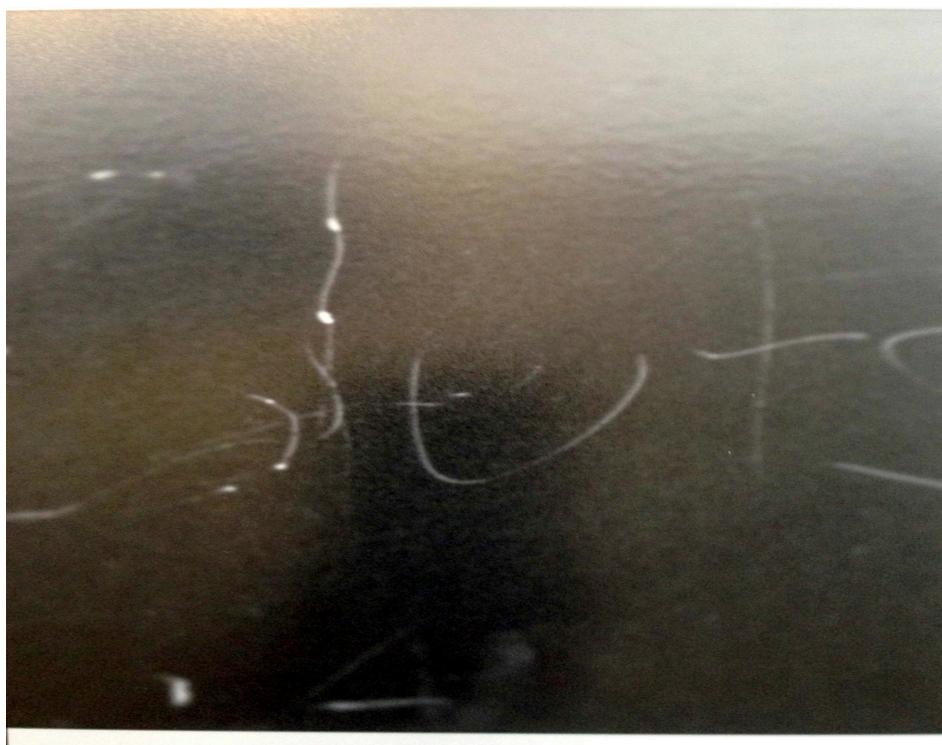
Providing insight into her fears of exposure and peer regulation, Trina told a story about graffiti in the washroom that she had only heard about recently but that had supposedly occurred last year:

> T: someone wrote, 'Trina's bi' in it and that's me, so I don't know, there's two other Trinas so like I don't know... I just don't want people to be like, oh my god, she's bi, like look at her... if a girl comes out as a lesbian, I feel like there's more pressure, like people would be like, oh look at her, she's looking at that girl like she...you know?
> J: like there'd be more monitoring of your behavior?
> T: yeah, like, oh did she just look at her chest? ...I know that if you don't like a girl, like usually if you catch her staring, sometimes some girls they wear shirts that are really low cut and like ... it's hard not to like notice or see and so if you get caught looking you're

going to be called a lesbian, … it's like whether they like you or not…it's hard not to look when a girl's chest is like out there, like when she's wearing a triple push-up bra, or …when girls are wearing pants that are really tight, it's hard not to notice…

Callie had also recounted her knowledge about washroom graffiti from her photograph of 'sluts' carved into the inside stall wall. Although not naming any person in particular, this example stems from internalized misogyny, because it was in the girls' room. Martino and Palotta-Chiarolli (2005) found the labels, 'dykes, sluts and butch' were social consequences for girls who crossed the line from acceptable to unacceptable forms of "transgressive femininity" (p. 100). Both examples of graffiti, and Trina's reaction to it, are borne from a culture of surveillance of gender expressions, not to mention, one grounded in homophobia, biphobia and ultimately heteronormativity. Homophobic and biphobic slurs are rampantly hurled in high school hallways, washrooms and elsewhere (Wyss, 2004) and are exclusionary tactics used to regulate behavior. To achieve a certain gendered identity, Pascoe (2007) argues, especially in terms of masculinity in her study, is to entail "the repeated repudiation of the specter of failed masculinity" (p. 5) or femininity thereby creating a paranoia or a hyper-vigilance about the minutia of body movements. The policing of one's sexuality through an examination of one's gender expression perpetuates and derives from heteronormativity. Trina points to the fears of watching and being watched; in Foucaultian (1975) terms, this is the essence of panoptic surveillance, the operation of disciplinary power.

Trina's photographs focus on the vulnerability of being visible in washrooms; Callie's photographs elaborate upon the visual through an exploration of shadows and light. In one photograph, she had intended to photograph the mirror ledge and the mirror itself to highlight the unsanitary conditions in the washrooms: "like you walk into the bathroom and you feel dirty. It's dirty; it's pretty gross". (see *Figure 6)* But, of course, we also can see the reflection of stalls in the mirror, which is significant if we consider Trina's fears of exposure. The mirror locates a place of light, where one is in the open, supposedly holding the power of surveillance over the user in the shadowy depths of the enclosures (the stalls). But the stalls also permit high visibility of said user; a person is not concealed, but revealed, made vulnerable in a space the size of a closet. Forced to inhabit the cellular space of the washroom stall, and then confronting the self with the other in the mirror space, are acts inciting anxiety, even for the non-transgendered person because no one is exempt from gendered regulation.
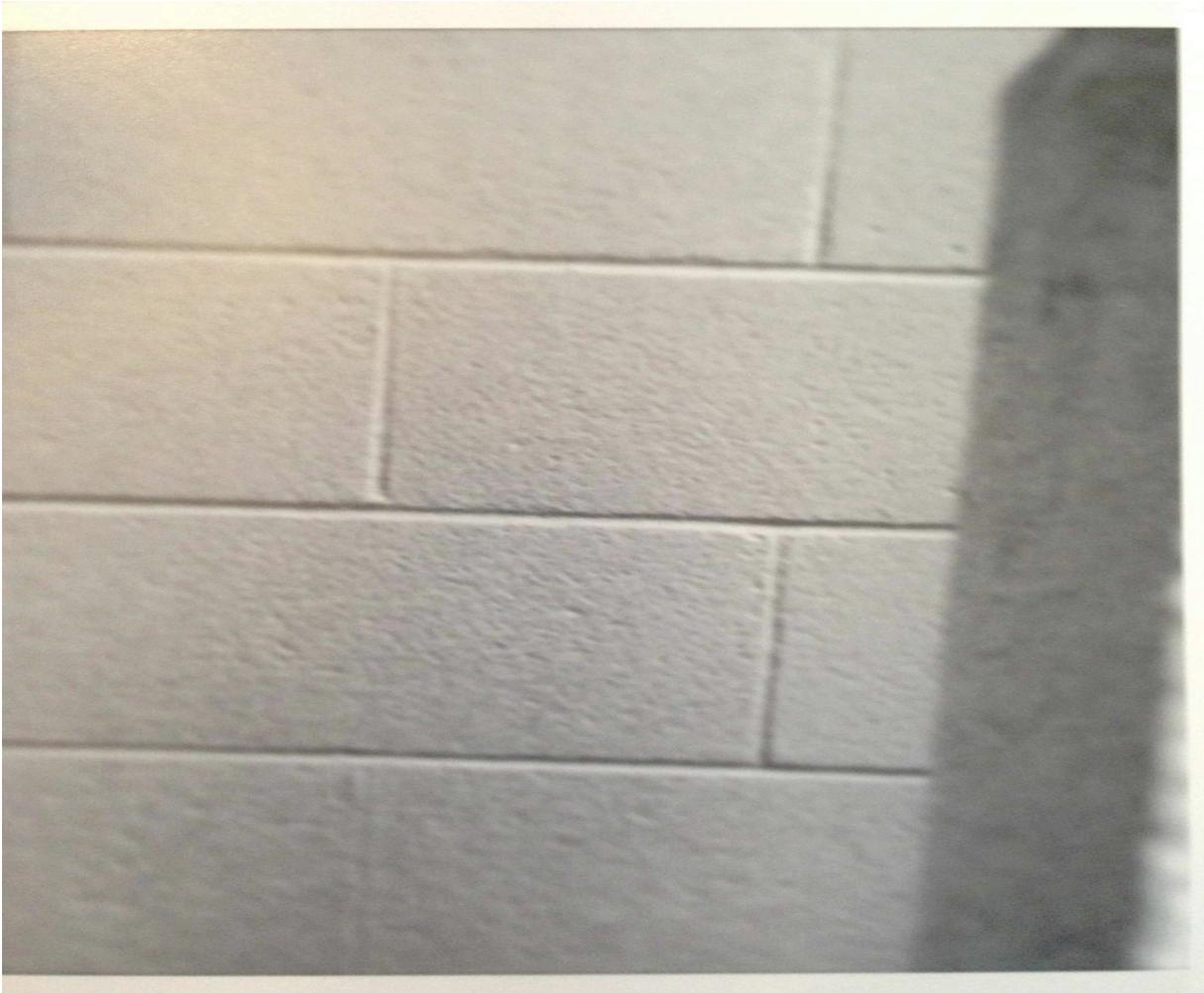
Callie's photograph of the wall signaled another form of paranoia based on visibility, or its lack: "like you can't see what's on the other side. So like I guess it's kind of like a hazard for bullying because you can't see what's on the other side." To be able to see one's surroundings is to be able to anticipate threats of either a physical or verbal nature. The lack of visibility presented itself as an obstacle to safety for Callie, whether she had experienced it

herself or not. Her photographic eye focused on the looming, invasive structures of the washroom space. Ironically, these walls were intended to provide privacy from the public hallway, but presented an unanticipated danger for the girls using the space.

Callie reiterated that the anxiety of hidden places in the washroom is important from "a bullying perspective" as she described the shadows haunting each stall in the row: "Like you can't really see …anybody in the stalls or anything like that…". Callie intentionally emphasized the "ominous light" and the lack of light above each stall because she was remembering a story her soccer team had circulated about a girl "being jumped" from someone waiting for her in a darkened stall. Whether it was her artistic eye fuelling her imagination, or exactly how much anxiety this washroom space provoked in her are both unknown, but the images remain powerful. Although I do not assume that the photographs will invoke the same reactions in all viewers, it is in my estimation as the researcher that each photograph presents a lonely, institutionalized, almost abandoned sensibility, which I argue could signal the systemic silence around anything that happens in this washroom space.

Brown (2000) uses the closet metaphor to explicate the performativity of gender in gay men's lives; in the sex-segregated girls' washroom in public schools, the operation of gender may not be all that dissimilar. Highly regulated, highly policed, this space moves people to confront each other's own self-confrontations, to measure one's self up against another, and to fear the physical or social punishments that may lie in wait behind every darkened corner.

Implications to Gender Justice and Art Education

How students maintain gender norms within the unsupervised space of the school washroom speaks to panoptic operations. Further, the regulation of legitimated forms of gender are not practiced for the exercise of power itself, but under the dominant cultural belief that society as a whole can benefit through the eradication of othered genders and sexualities. The system of heternormativity and transphobia directs such practices: a maintenance of heterosexual unions, a coherence between sex and gender, and a demonization of non-heterosexual behaviours are misconceptions that survive under the guise of promoting a population's growth and prosperity. Following Foucault's genealogy of disciplinary power, we can analyze schools and their design in terms of their techniques of power on bodies, through spatial arrangement, temporal organization, and facilitation of exercise (1975, p. 167). Through this paper, I hope to provide insight into the gendered striations at work in the disciplinary space

of the school washroom to build a deeper, more nuanced understanding of power relations, gender embodiment and gender expression in schools. Further research should examine how such knowledge might inform equity and social justice practices in schools and at the school board level in terms of a "responsive curriculum" (Fisher and Kennedy, 2012) and policy reform in education. Arts education that is aligned with social justice theorizing (Collanus & Heinonen, 2012) is also a field implicated by the marriage of gender issues and visual methodology or pedagogy.

The photovoice projects from students-'as-researchers' (Thomson & Gunter, 2007) value and authorize student voices for their unique contributions to school knowledge (Cook-Sather, 2002). Advocating for student voice is primarily a practical move, according to Rudduck (2007), because it allows educators "insight into what learning and the conditions of learning look like from the perspective of different students" (p. 587).   I position the school washroom as a site within the school environment that comprises the conditions of learning. The knowledge students have of their experiences in this space, and its repercussions on their gendered subjectivities, should be legitimated alongside all other curricular knowledge.

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