

Gendered as (Un)usual: Critical Trans Politics and Routine Police Violence

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Abstract:

Using the critical trans politics framework outlined by Dean Spade in *Normal Life*, this paper expands on existing research on broken windows theory (BWT) of policing. BWT relies on the premise that crime can be stopped by policing disorder. In practice, departments use surveillance of poor people, people of color, and gender nonconforming people to increase their interactions with the police and criminalize their existence. Because BWT relies on police to address social problems such as poverty, addiction, and homelessness, they also take an administrative position. For transgender people, these two roles collide at the moment that one's non-normative gender is revealed, whether this be through visual "clocking" on the part of a police officer, invasive searching, or, most simply, the moment that they are asked to show an ID with an incorrect gender marker. In this routine activity, one is gendered by the state either as usual or unusual (i.e., cis or trans, or normal or abnormal). Because trans people exist outside of the essentialist gender binary, they are not administratively recognized, and yet they have become hypervisible to the state as a result of this impossible gender. Despite the ways that it impacts us, there is little academic scholarship that seeks to reconcile this trans paradox of impossibility and hypervisibility. My paper aims to fill that gap in research by naming the unique violence that administrative criminalization creates and examining the way that these two simultaneous realities impact trans organizing and politics.

Keywords: Police brutality, gender markers, broken windows theory, violence against trans and non-binary people, trans organizing and resistance, trans politics