Queer Encounters: Exploring Experiences of (Gender)queers in Women's Public Washroom Spaces

by

Meredith Danielle Pilling

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

MA Program in Social Justice and Equity Studies
BROCK UNIVERSITY
St. Catharines, Ontario

June 2006

© Meredith Pilling, 2006
ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on 13 qualitative interviews conducted with 12 individuals whom I refer to as (gender)queers in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and St. Catharines, Ontario. Drawing on queer theory and the literature of sexuality and space, I explore how (gender)queers experience women’s public washrooms as gendered and heterosexualized spaces. I examine the degree to which a simultaneous heterosexing and female gendering of women’s public washrooms is linked to the marginalization and sometimes violent exclusion of (gender)queers within these particular spaces. I also discuss the ways in which (gender)queers may use a variety of strategies aimed at navigating heterosexualized and gendered public washrooms. Finally, I explore alternatives to conventional washrooms spaces, including the gender-neutral washrooms, multi-stall non-gendered public washrooms, and public washrooms in queer spaces.