

INTRODUCTION

Marie Aubrey Villaceran

The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted and made us hyper-aware of space.

Physical distancing, limiting how many bodies occupy an area, lessened mobility due to home confinement and restrictions on public transport, and avoiding touching surfaces and other people force us to be extremely sensitive to our physical surroundings and the danger posed by a virus indiscernible to the naked eye. To be physically distant is to be safe.

At the same time, social distancing has driven home the realization that space is more than just a physical area as developments in technology made “the organization of proximity ... fundamentally different” (Löw, 2016, p. 2), as the case with email and video calling, messaging, and conferencing platforms, where information can be transferred great distances in a matter of seconds, and people located in different parts of the world are able to communicate in real time and stave off some, if not all, of the loneliness brought about by enforced isolation. The internet further illustrates to us that space is not just about physical proximity but also relations among those moving within spaces, be it virtual or physical.

Relational spatial theory considers space as “the product of interrelations ... always under construction” (Massey, 2005, as cited in Fuller & Löw, 2017, p. 470), therefore “elements within space, space itself and multiple spaces are relationally constituted” (Fuller & Löw, 2017, p. 470). Examining how spaces are constructed, occupied, shaped, understood, and the consequences of these will reveal a society’s social structures and the relations embedded within them, including inherent hierarchies and

inequalities, as “divides of inequality are rendered physical in space, and space is made meaningful as it orders our ways of perceiving the social world” (Fuller & Löw, 2017, p. 470).

A discursive analysis of inclusive spaces is conducted by Chan and Pavo through data gathered from focus group discussions, followed through with site visits and further in-depth interviews with older/*tiguwang* lesbians in Davao. Their study explores what makes spaces exclusionary and what promotes inclusion through examining “the lived meaning of space [and] ... the meaning-filled context or reality of such spaces,” thus providing us a glimpse into the relations of space, sexual orientation, and aging. The study highlights how spaces that are considered inclusive have “mainstreamed ... [and] substantively acknowledged” non-normative gender identities and aging and are therefore frequented by older/*tiguwang* lesbians. With a firm view that its inhabitants have a right to shape the design of spaces, the study proposes several recommendations to improve the gendered mobilities of aging lesbians and marginalized members of the LGBT community.

The spaces where we work replicate social inequalities, and this, Espino states, is why Republic Act No. 7877 or the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995 was passed: “to fill a wide policy gap in addressing a form of gender-based violence prevalent in the workplace.” Espino revisits decided landmark sexual harassment cases to interrogate and challenge the frameworks on which complex decisions have been based.

Sexism continues to pervade spaces that 179 Filipino women ranging in age from 18 to 40 years occupy, according to the study by Torre. Experiences of everyday sexism, categorized under traditional gender role stereotypes, sexual objectification, demeaning/exclusionary comments or behaviors, and benevolent sexism were reported as experienced by 98% of the participants in the space of 2 weeks. The experiences were similar among heterosexual and sexual minority women, and they “expressed similar views that such events are negative and common, although not inescapable, experiences in their daily lives” despite enactment of progressive laws such as the Safe Spaces Act (Republic Act No. 11313) that “penalizes catcalling, wolf-whistling, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic slurs, unwanted sexual advances, and other forms of sexual

harassment.” Torre’s study shows that although mechanisms such as these are important in challenging cultural beliefs and norms, “interventions that aim to educate and engage the public on gender sensitivity” need to accompany these laws to help transform society.

An analysis of relations produced by the intersections of gender, nationality, socioeconomic class, religion, and region in Thailand and the Philippines and how they influenced the birth of two distinct women’s movements are in the study of Jose and Alfaro. Their study compares the differences between experiences of women in colonial and non-colonial spaces to further fill in the gap of comparative studies of women in the ASEAN region.

The Internet has opened spaces for marginalized identities to be visible. Disruptions and strict lockdowns due to the pandemic intensified the demand for and creation of more digital entertainment content. “Boy’s love” (BL) digital films, centered mainly on narratives about two men falling in love, is one genre that has expanded exponentially during this time. Abueg’s contribution to this issue analyzes Philippine-produced BL films that concluded in 2020 and their depictions of household affairs, family and personal relationships, and the professions of LGB folk. He asserts that an examination of BL genre films “may be of value to gender economics in particular and to gender studies literature in general.”

Finally, this journal features visual artist Amos Manlangit’s mandalas and images on capiz plates as an exploration of the spaces within ourselves where we reflect on our memories, identity, purpose, and aspirations.

Studying how spaces are constructed, perceived, and occupied, and the interactions occurring in these spaces can provide researchers with a useful lens to help understand and explain issues of inequality, socioeconomic class, gender, mobility, agency, and activism. The articles in this issue of the *Review of Women’s Studies* can help inspire research and creative work that creates, supports, and maintains more inclusive spaces.

Fuller, M., & Löw, M. (2017). Introduction: An invitation to spatial sociology. *Current Sociology*, 65(4), 469–491. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392117697461>

Löw, M. (2016). *The sociology of space: Materiality, social structures, and action* (D. Goodwin, Trans.; English ed.). Palgrave MacMillan.