

THE GENDERED RIGHT TO PUBLIC SPACES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A case study of university of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: The study explores the gendering of public spaces within universities, and its effect on women's right to the space in terms of access and use and particularly, gendered agency as a collective response toward restrictions imposed. Grounded in a feminist perspective, it examines how power dynamics of gender are embedded in space, often reinforcing public-private divisions and sustaining spatial inequalities. Historically, universities were male-only domains, where spatial segregation denied women both education and access to public space. The study questions the extent of spatial equality in educational spaces, particularly in contexts shaped by masculinist notions. Using a conceptual framework based on social and spatial attributes of public space, the study assesses how these characteristics contribute to gendering. Accessibility was inquired as a measure of gendered effects while, women's gendered agency as a retaliation towards posed restrictions, were studied with embodied agency and strategies that they employ. A mixed-method approach was utilized in order to understand the experiential perspective of students and their validity. The findings reveal that gendering of space reinforces systemic oppression of women within societal structures, limiting their freedom. However, rather than yielding to such restrictions, women actively and strategically navigate these obstacles, employing adaptive behaviours and subtle resistance to assert their presence and agency.

Keywords: *Gendered right space, Public space, Socio-spatial attributes, Accessibility, Agency*

1. Introduction

Public space should be open to everyone and should have equal rights to it. Yet, the right to space is constantly contested due to various social dynamics. Our rights are embodied and form the sites where assumptions are made about our subject positions. (Beebeejaun, 2017) Not everyone has the freedom to be in public space unrestrained, even though they are entitled to be there. Such dynamic is Gender. Space itself can be considered gendered rather than neutral. (Siwach, 2020) When a certain space is gendered, it reinforces the gender roles and dynamics back, creating a strong interrelationship in-between. In gendered spaces one gender dominates the space, marginalizing other minorities resulting them to feel oppressed and alienated. Study mainly focuses on women as a gender minority, to study the subordinate position forced upon them by societal norms. Women have been excluded from the public sphere and have been associated solely with the domestic/ private sphere throughout history. Feminist discourse started as a resistance challenging these assigned spatial restrictions. **Gendering of space affects people's right to the space negatively, restricting access to them, excluding certain genders, impacting their right to use the space. This study explores these restrictions and women's gendered agency as a form of response.**

Studies focusing on the gendered use of spaces in educational environments, especially in higher education institutions, remain somewhat limited. Consequently, a distinct research gap has emerged within this subject area, highlighting issues related to the right to space in gendered public spaces. Therefore, this study examines how the gendered nature of public space in universities affects the right to use these spaces, restricts accessibility to them, and shapes women's agency in response to these spatial constraints

2. Literature Review

2.1. GENDER IN PUBLIC-PRIVATE SPHERES

The continuous struggle for space throughout history has caused divisions of space with tangible and intangible boundaries. In ancient civilizations space were divided as sacred/ non-sacred with religious connotations, with urbanization, spaces were divided as urban/ rural and then "public/ private Paradigm was used to promote political agendas and interpret history." (Hansen, 1987) Arendt (1998) examined the public/ private dichotomy, with public spaces as realms of collective action and private spaces as sites for personal life and refuge. Essentially, public space is an area that is open to everyone and is frequently intended and designed for social interaction, democratic participation, and community living while private space is owned, controlled and accessed by certain people or groups.

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Spaces and places, and our senses of those are gendered through and through. Moreover, they are gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time. (Massey, 1994) Gendered spaces reinforce existing gender roles and power dynamics, allowing one gender to dominate while marginalizing others. This creates structural barriers, such as patriarchy and cultural norms that restrict access, exclude certain user groups, and limit mobility, safety, and self-expression. Traditional gender roles have women confined to private/domestic sphere labeling them as home-makers while naming men as providers. The 'public' is perceived by some feminist critiques as the white middle-upper class, heterosexual male domain. (Fenster, 2005) Female presence was disregarded during designing and producing public spaces resulting in exclusion of women in public sphere, making it harder to access, navigate and even spend time. However, Rendell et al., (2000) states that women's interaction with the public sphere often highlights unequal opportunities, where systemic barriers limit their access and participation rather than portraying them solely as passive victims.

2.2. GENDERED RIGHT TO SPACE

The right to space refers to the fundamental principle that all individuals, regardless of their gender, class, race, or other identities, have the freedom and opportunity to access, use, and participate in public and private spaces equitably. Men and women have unequal spatial experiences making it apparent that space is not impartial and right to space is not the same for both genders. The study questions the gendered right to public space, in terms of accessibility and agency of space. Accessibility is a fundamental component of the gendered right to space, as it directly impacts individuals' ability to navigate, occupy, and utilize public spaces equitably. men's differential control over private and public space affects women's behavior when using public spaces. (McDowell, 1993)

Koskela (1997) says that women are not merely objects in space where they experience restrictions and obligations; they also actively produce, define and reclaim space. Women must challenge structural systems, such as patriarchy, that limit their agency and right to exist, express, represent, and occupy space. As per Panelli et al. (2005)'s studies, women's situated agency works in a nuanced way, based upon their,

- Personal biography
- Social contexts
- Spatial relations
- Cultural discourse

2.3. UNIVERSITY AS A GENDERED SPACE

Socially constructed inequalities between boys and girls are often reproduced through social institutions, including educational institutions, in ways that do not challenge prevailing discriminatory norms and practices. (Subrahmanian, 2005) In higher educational institutions such as universities, spaces are not only shaped by architectural and spatial features but also by the social practices and power relations that occur within these environments in different scales. Public universities in Sri Lanka functions as a collective public space welcoming individuals beyond their primary academic community. Concurrently, Universities have specific spaces for shared use and communal activities. Such as academic public spaces like libraries, social and recreational spaces such as cafeterias, courtyards, and common rooms and outdoor spaces such as open-air theaters, gardens etc. Historically spatial segregation was a key mechanism by a group with more power can maintain its advantage over groups with less power. Thus, it was used to deny women the right to educational spaces. **As a result, universities have become masculinist spaces as they were initially designed for men. Masculine spaces can be organized in ways that can render women's participation invisible and ultimately result in erasure.** (Abeyasekera, 2020) Therefore the university becomes a gendered space, physically and symbolically reproducing spatial inequalities.

2.4. ASSESSING THE GENDERED NATURE OF SPACE

When navigating the gendered space, Men and women's experience of space can be quite different. This difference is an outcome of both social and spatial attributes of space which users belong or use. (Massey, 1994; Mumcu & Duzenli, 2009) Gender roles and societal expectations often dictate behavior, movement, and access to spaces, with women frequently subjected to greater scrutiny and regulation. Franck (1985) identifies a set of parameters that helps to understand the social aspect of a gendered space. They are,

- Activity Setting
- Creation of social systems and networks
- Self-identity

Burgess (1998) presents a set of parameters that gendered space can be identified in its spatial characteristics. They are,

- Enclosure
- Entrapment
- Visual permeability
- Encounter with strangers

Enclosure is a physically framed space with limited permeability, poor escape routes, and disorientation, while entrapment refers to areas that feel inescapable and foster undesirable activities (Burgess, 1998). Low visual permeability, through blocked sightlines and unclear pathways, is linked to perceptions of unsafety, whereas clear, legible routes provide reassurance. Women frequently face harassment in public spaces, such as verbal abuse and invasion of personal space, which often induces fear or disgust but is commonly dismissed when no physical violence occurs.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is **empirical**, gathering primary data from the author's observations, mapping, and interviews to analyze gendered dynamics in university public spaces. It utilized a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative research and data in a distinct way. Upon conducting a more in-depth examination and refinement of the methodology, the author expanded it towards a **mixed-method social justice design**, focusing on an **exploratory sequential strand** (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)

The study explored the socio-spatial dynamics that produced the gendered experience in space and how it contested the right to use public space that should be egalitarian. It focused on the restrictions on accessibility to space and the gendered agency of space as a form of subtle retaliation by users of that space. The study was approached through a gendered lens as the larger framework, and following the exploratory sequence, qualitative data were collected first through semi-structured interviews. After analyzing the findings, a questionnaire was built as a research instrument. This was utilized in conducting the survey, collecting quantitative data from a larger sample. What remained was to analyze the quantitative data and converge it with the qualitative findings to interpret and discuss further. Figure 1 illustrated the process of the research design under the gendered social justice lens.

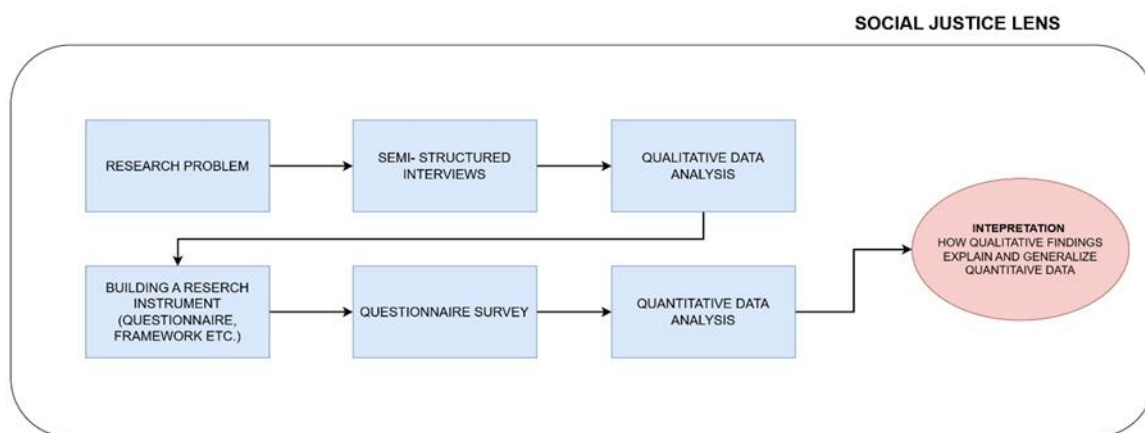


Figure 1: Mixed method social justice design
(Source: Creswell & Creswell, 2017)

3.2. CASE STUDY SELECTION

The study was narrowed down to a single case study in order to study the gendered right to space in depth, across multiple typologies of publicness within the university context. Universities, reflect gendered dynamics in both academia and campus spaces, yet policies often overlook these effects by equating numerical access with equity. At the University of Moratuwa, a traditionally male-dominated technical institution, the growing number of female undergraduates offers a lens to examine how such norms are being challenged. The university's distinct subcultures significantly shape user behavior, making it a compelling context to study how students assert their right to space.

In the preliminary study, a selected set of public spaces of the university premises were further assessed for its publicness based on a theoretical framework, assuring the relevancy of selected spaces. When conducting the in-depth study, six public spaces out of initial group were chosen as case studies to assess their gendered nature based on qualitative data collected. Table 1 depicts the case studies and their user perception.

Table 1: Selected case studies- public spaces in university
(Source- Author)

Case study	Type of space	perception	Frequency of visits
(1) Sentra food court	Gathering area with food outlets	favorable	High
(2) Lagan theatre	Open-air theatre	favorable	High

(3) Goda canteen	Canteen	favorable	High
(4) Boatyard	Edge space overlooking a waterbody	Least- favorable	Low
(5) Playground	Large open playground	Least- favorable	Low
(6) Bhawana-Rooftop	A rooftop gathering area	Least- favorable	Low

The case studies will hereafter be referred by the names assigned to them by student body for the ease of identification and clarity.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

Data for the study was collected under three phases. Phase one as a preliminary study and phase two and three as in-depth studies. Phase two and Phase three spans over qualitative and quantitative data collection respectively. In addition to primary data collected as above, secondary data was collected through various websites, reports and other publications as an additional support to conduct the data collection and analysis. Table below depicts a summarization of data collection with its desired intent.

Table 2: Phases of Data collection
(Source- Author)

	Phase	Data collection method	Intent
Preliminary study	Phase 01	Personal Observation Photographic Survey	identifying a range of public spaces within university and user behavior within
In-depth study	Phase 02	Qualitative data collection 1. Semi-structured interviews 2. Mapping study	one on one interviews were conducted among voluntary participants to get insights on their spatial experience in university and on selected range of spaces. explore the navigability and accessibility through university encompassing selected public spaces.
	Phase 03	Quantitative data collection Questionnaire survey	further validation of spatial behavior patterns identified from the interviews. Participants were given chance to rate their experience.

3.4. SAMPLING METHOD

Students of the university were the main user category for the study, ranging from 1st year to 5th year depending on the faculty. Both genders were selected to observe variation of experience in selected public spaces. The sample of students was selected mainly on non-probability sampling basis, where participants were selected on author's subjective judgment and convenience due to the research's exploratory nature. For the Semi structured interview, 12 participants from the target population were selected by purpose and convenience, followed by the questionnaire survey which utilized snowball sampling method plus random selections across university student body. But the sample managed to maintain the female vs. male ratio of the university students. (60% female: 40% male)

Table 3: sample selection
(Source- author)

Data collection method	No. of participants	Selection criteria		
		Familiarity with context	Age	Gender
Phase 01- Personal study	-	-	-	-
Phase 02- Interviews	12	Students of university	18-30	Female-7 Male-5
Phase 03- Questionnaire survey	45	Students of university	18-30	Female- 28 Male- 17

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Phase 01 data will be analyzed through framework built from literature while the Main data body collected from interviews will be thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns. The findings and analysis of the study are structured into three distinct phases.

As the figure 2 illustrates, at the end of the phase A of the analysis, six case studies were selected for in-depth study as stated above. Phase B investigate the gendered nature of selected public spaces based on its socio spatial attributes, as well as patterns of usage and how they contribute to gendered dynamics. It incorporates qualitative insights to illustrate nuanced experiences while employing quantitative data to validate and expand these findings. Phase C inquire into effects of

gendering of public spaces towards its accessibility and women's gendered agency and resistance in contested spaces. This is also done by integrating qualitative narratives and quantitative patterns.

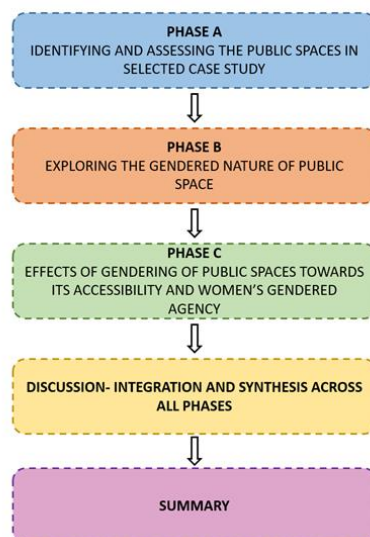


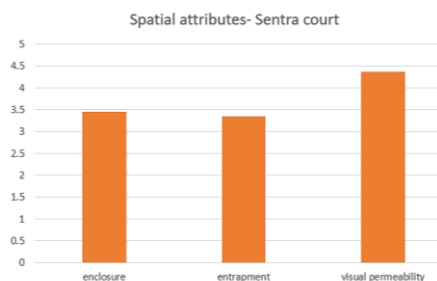
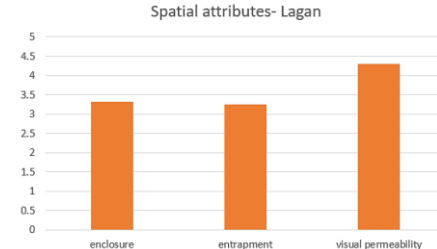
Figure 2: Phases of case study analysis
(Source- Author)

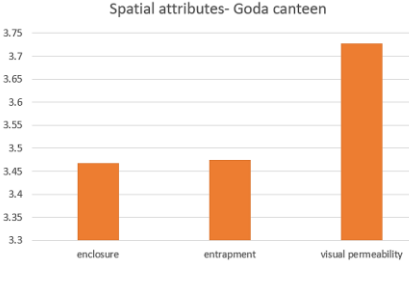
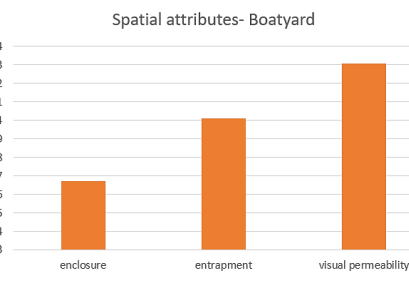
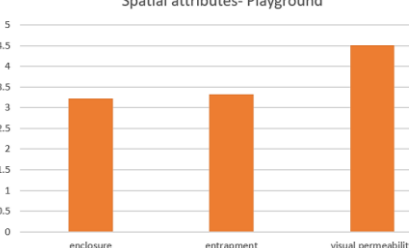
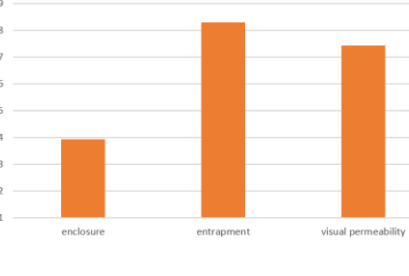
4. Analysis and Results

4.1 EXPLORING THE GENDERED NATURE OF SELECTED PUBLIC SPACES

This section explores the social attributes of gendered spaces, focusing on the activities, social systems, and identity formation that emerge (Franck, 1985) within the 6 spaces and their contribution towards gendering. Simultaneously, the spatial attributes, such as enclosure, entrapment, visual permeability which were identified by Burgess (1998) are analyzed to understand how the physical environment contributes to the gendered nature of each space.

Table 4: Assessment of gendered nature of selected public spaces
(Source- author)

Case No.	Social attributes of a gendered experience	Spatial attributes of a gendered experience								
(1) Sentra food court 	Open layout with eating spaces fosters socialization among students. However, openness may lead to feeling of overexposure and intimidation by crowds. female students may feel some restriction on self-expression compared to male students.	<table><caption>Spatial attributes- Sentra court</caption><thead><tr><th>Attribute</th><th>Score</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>enclosure</td><td>3.5</td></tr><tr><td>entrapment</td><td>3.5</td></tr><tr><td>visual permeability</td><td>4.5</td></tr></tbody></table>	Attribute	Score	enclosure	3.5	entrapment	3.5	visual permeability	4.5
Attribute	Score									
enclosure	3.5									
entrapment	3.5									
visual permeability	4.5									
(2) Lagan 	Circular layout encourages gatherings, performances as well as greenery provides passive recreation for students Female students tend to prefer quieter or peripheral areas for less exposure, unlike male students.	<table><caption>Spatial attributes- Lagan</caption><thead><tr><th>Attribute</th><th>Score</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>enclosure</td><td>3.5</td></tr><tr><td>entrapment</td><td>3.5</td></tr><tr><td>visual permeability</td><td>4.5</td></tr></tbody></table>	Attribute	Score	enclosure	3.5	entrapment	3.5	visual permeability	4.5
Attribute	Score									
enclosure	3.5									
entrapment	3.5									
visual permeability	4.5									

(3) Goda canteen 	Open layout invites people for hangout but peak hours lead to quick functional use of space-eating. Study shows women feel bit restricted in self-expression when crowded, but does not specifically contribute towards gendering.	Spatial attributes- Goda canteen  <table><tr><th>Spatial Attribute</th><th>Value</th></tr><tr><td>enclosure</td><td>3.45</td></tr><tr><td>entrapment</td><td>3.45</td></tr><tr><td>visual permeability</td><td>3.7</td></tr></table>	Spatial Attribute	Value	enclosure	3.45	entrapment	3.45	visual permeability	3.7
Spatial Attribute	Value									
enclosure	3.45									
entrapment	3.45									
visual permeability	3.7									
(4) Boatyard 	primary appeal is its natural setting and scenic views which encourage relaxation, contemplation, and informal gatherings. When occupied by male students, they become dominant user group because of limited space, discouraging women from accessing it or staying for prolonged periods.	Spatial attributes- Boatyard  <table><tr><th>Spatial Attribute</th><th>Value</th></tr><tr><td>enclosure</td><td>3.65</td></tr><tr><td>entrapment</td><td>4.0</td></tr><tr><td>visual permeability</td><td>4.3</td></tr></table>	Spatial Attribute	Value	enclosure	3.65	entrapment	4.0	visual permeability	4.3
Spatial Attribute	Value									
enclosure	3.65									
entrapment	4.0									
visual permeability	4.3									
(5) Playground 	Designed for outdoor sports, it mainly attracts male students, who participate more in such activities than female students statistically. This may form an informal dominance of space, resulting in women feel as outsiders or discriminated against.	Spatial attributes- Playground  <table><tr><th>Spatial Attribute</th><th>Value</th></tr><tr><td>enclosure</td><td>3.2</td></tr><tr><td>entrapment</td><td>3.3</td></tr><tr><td>visual permeability</td><td>4.5</td></tr></table>	Spatial Attribute	Value	enclosure	3.2	entrapment	3.3	visual permeability	4.5
Spatial Attribute	Value									
enclosure	3.2									
entrapment	3.3									
visual permeability	4.5									
(6) Bhawana roof top 	A bit secluded open rooftop space with arranged seating spaces used for hangouts, individually as a quiet reflection space. The isolated location and lack of diverse user groups might make the space uncomfortable for women, limiting their independency in space.	Spatial attributes- Bhawana  <table><tr><th>Spatial Attribute</th><th>Value</th></tr><tr><td>enclosure</td><td>3.4</td></tr><tr><td>entrapment</td><td>3.8</td></tr><tr><td>visual permeability</td><td>3.75</td></tr></table>	Spatial Attribute	Value	enclosure	3.4	entrapment	3.8	visual permeability	3.75
Spatial Attribute	Value									
enclosure	3.4									
entrapment	3.8									
visual permeability	3.75									

The above analysis of public spaces in the university highlights significant gendered dynamics that shape how men and women navigate and experience these environments. Women's experiences are heavily influenced by a combination of social and spatial attributes that often reinforce constraints and limitations. Social expectations, such as maintaining modesty and avoiding visibility in certain settings, intersect with spatial designs that amplify feelings of exposure, entrapment, or discomfort. Spaces like Sentra and Bhawana illustrate how societal norms and spatial configurations, such as high visibility or limited escape routes, lead women to self-regulate their behavior and seating choices. Similarly, poor accessibility in areas like the Boatyard discourages women from frequenting these spaces, particularly during less populated times. It is apparent that spaces such as Sentra court, Goda canteen illustrates low level of gendering while the boatyard, Bhawana rooftop shows high levels of gendering compared to rest.

It is to be noted that gendered nature of space is based upon the interplay of social and spatial attributes within the space. Additionally, time and other regulations might contribute to the gendering of university public sphere.

4.2 EFFECTS OF GENDERING OF PUBLIC SPACES TOWARDS IT'S ACCESSIBILITY

Space must be accessible in order for an individual to exist in it. Current section of the analysis examines how gendered

spatiality at University of Moratuwa affects female students' accessibility to public spaces compared to male students. Accessibility to selected public spaces is studied as a yardstick to gauge the impact of gendering of public spaces in university context.

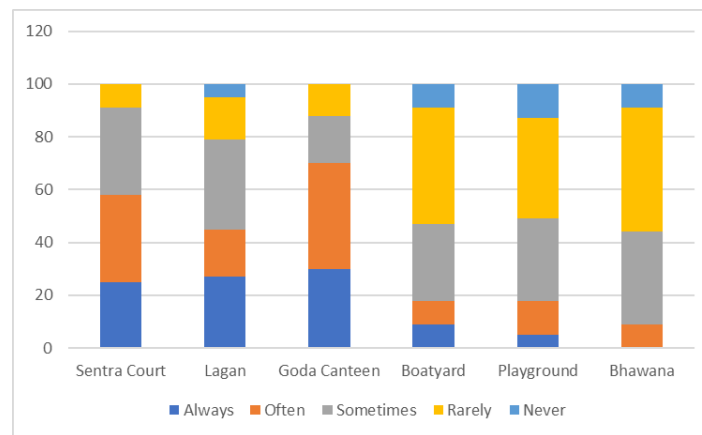


Figure 3: Access rate across selected case studies
(Source- Author)

Above figure illustrates the percentages of accessibility in selected case studies. It is apparent that public space such as Sentra court, Goda canteen has higher positive access rates while Bhawana Rooftop, Boatyard have lowest positive access. It's confirmed from the study that spaces with lowest positive access are predominantly frequented by male students.

From the analysis it's apparent that the gendered nature of space caused by its socio-spatial attributes plays a significant role in accessibility. They alter their access time or frequency as fit or avoid such spaces completely. People, women in particular are often hesitant of highly gendered spaces as they do not want to be discriminated against. At university of Moratuwa, gendering of certain public space limits accessibility to them by reinforcing male-dominated usage patterns and creating socio-spatial conditions that discourages women's presence.

4.3 GENDERED AGENCY OF WOMEN AS A RESPONSE

Gendered nature of public spaces poses many restrictions towards women affecting their right to use the democratic space that they are entitled to. But with gendered dynamics leading to male domination of public sphere, women in their own ways respond to it in a subtle form of retaliation trying to reclaim their rights. This process of navigating, negotiating and asserting their presence on public spaces that are saturated with power structures is studied under "Gendered agency"

Koskela (1997) declares that women's agency differs from person to person. It depends on their own embodied spatial knowledge and personal identity. Figure 4 illustrates the gendered agency and how it works.

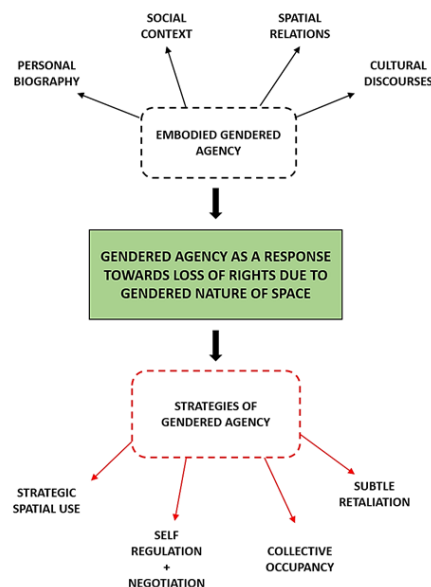


Figure 4: Thematic components and flow of Gendered agency
(Source- Author)

4.3.1 Embodied gendered agency

Different women possess different capabilities of agency in the face of gendered discriminations. This sense of agency depends on individual's personality, cultural contexts and spatial dimensions. This their embodied knowledge, which contributes to their gendered agency.

According to Panelli et al.,(2005) these four elements influence women's agency. They are,

- Personal biography of the individual
- Their social context
- Relationship with space
- Cultural discourse

A women's personality and their biography; the way they have brought up, the way they have lived over a period of time will always have an effect on their sense of agency. In contested public spaces, a female student who's very outgoing and confident in herself reacts differently, compared to a timid, shy female student, their sense of agency differs according to their personality. Social contexts provide women both constraints and possibilities from which to generate a sense of agency. Women's position in their social formations such as her family, friend groups, community and their experience of different social relations as well as understandings has an imminent effect on her capability of boldness or defiance.

A person gains experience of a space by frequency of association. The spaces can be tamed through routinization of continued use thus, building relationships with surrounding space. The agency of a first-year student towards a certain space is much lower than the gendered agency of a final year student, who has gained experience of space through every day/constant use of it. Culture often plays a role in reinforcing gender norms and behaviors, and place certain expectations upon women to behave in a space in a certain way. This is a predominant factor that restrict/enable women's embodied agency as it's how they have been conditioned. University subcultures significantly shape gendered agency by influencing how spaces are used, how social norms are enforced, and how inclusive the campus environment is.

4.3.2 Strategies of gendered agency

Strategies of gendered agency are the ways that embodied gendered agency of women translates into in contested public spaces. This is a form of reclaiming their rights taken away due to the gendered nature of space. From the thematic analysis, four different strategies of gendered agency utilized by female students were identified by the author.

- A. Strategic spatial use
- B. Self-regulation and negotiation
- C. Collective occupancy
- D. Subtle retaliation

A. Strategic spatial use

Participants after assessing the behavior of space according its socio-spatial attributes, employ strategies to navigate gendered spaces, particularly the public spaces of the university premises, to maximize their comfort levels, feeling of safety and presence accordingly. Female students observe the spatial layouts of the spaces they have to occupy and select specific places that they feel less exposed and more comfortable. Time is also a crucial factor as discussed earlier in accessing and navigating public spaces in university. Hence women employ temporal navigation tactics choosing comfortable times to occupy the public spaces.

B. Self-regulation and negotiation

Regulation and negotiation include conscious behavioral adjustments to exist within gendered spaces than avoiding it altogether. Female students have to consciously alter their behavioral patterns, restrict posture or clothing as a form of self-regulation to avoid judgment and unwanted attention. As Young (1980) describes women restrict their posture more within public spaces compared to men.

Negotiation in gendered spaces is fostered in subtle interactions with space such as occupying neutral areas, limiting oneself to peripherals of a space etc. this is a form of accommodating to the space rather than challenging restrictions.

C. Collective occupancy

Women employ the strategy of gaining strength from numbers, when reclaiming contested public spaces by accessing it in groups rather than alone. Women access highly gendered spaces in groups in order to feel comfortable, secure and safe in said space. This collective presence deters harassment and creates a shared sense of community. When the sense of community is heightened, women tend to be freer, and unrestricted in spaces otherwise they have to regulate themselves to occupy. Study revealed that female students prefer the presence of others, particularly other women and they tend to be more comfortable and reassured in a public space in such a circumstance.

D. Subtle retaliation

Subtle retaliation takes form of small but intentional acts done in gendered public spaces to challenge existing gender norms to assert their presence and autonomy. This can be intentional use of male dominated spaces such as playground, center spaces in courts, areas like Bhawana to represent a quiet form of retaliation. These could be mundane acts such as visiting these spaces alone, being loud and unrestrictive etc. Findings from the study indicate that a significant impact on gendered nature of public spaces can be made from collective subtle forms of retaliation as way of claiming power, exercising women's agency in space.

5. Discussion

In response to limited existing research, this study shed light to the right to use space by examining how the gendered nature of space affects women's equal access and their collective responses to such constraints. Within the context of higher educational institutions, unique characteristics shape gendered dynamics in public spaces, influencing women's right to space and their forms of agency. Although the university has not imposed explicit physical barriers on women, their spatial democracy is implicitly challenged. University public spaces such as canteens, assembly areas, common spaces, and recreational areas often host multiple overlapping activities. The spatial design of a space influences the activities that occur within it, shaping patterns of use over time. These usage patterns, in turn, contribute to the formation of the space's gender dynamics by defining its primary users, peak times, and associated behaviors. Over time, these dynamics reinforce and reproduce gendered patterns of use, perpetuating established norms and practices within the space, ultimately reproducing norms that make certain spaces in university feel masculine or exclusionary.

In this study, it became apparent that women's right to space is constrained through these dynamics. According to Young (1980) women regulate themselves, restricting their behavior and movement. It can be considered as a way of limiting their presence in order to access these spaces otherwise they have to avoid. These spatial inequalities serve as indicators of broader gendered power relations. As a response, women employ various forms of gendered agency, including temporal strategies, collective presence, and subtle forms of resistance. However, the expression of agency varies depending on factors such as upbringing, cultural background, and community norms.

Despite these challenges, the university is not an entirely male-dominated environment; female student numbers have steadily increased. Nevertheless, masculinist notions continue to shape the spatial culture, making it a space woman continually negotiate. As (Quinn, 2003) suggests, women are not merely victims but active reformers who adapt to and challenge contested spaces.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that gendered spatial dynamics significantly affect women's right to use public spaces within the institutional context. While no formal restrictions exist, the interaction between spatial design and social behaviours creates implicit barriers that limit women's accessibility and comfort within certain areas. The study offers a conceptual framework to explore these intersections. Conducted in phased stages, the research enabled a layered analysis. A framework was developed from literature to assess public space, the socio-spatial factors that contribute to its gendering, the resulting restrictions on accessibility, and women's agency as main components. This framework offers a scalable model that can be applied to analyze gendered spaces beyond the university context with minor adaptations. Women respond to these constraints through diverse forms of gendered agency, revealing both their resilience and their capacity to reshape contested spaces. The findings highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing subtle gendered practices that influence everyday spatial experiences. Future research should examine how institutional policies, spatial design interventions, and collective social initiatives can promote more equitable spatial practices and strengthen women's right to space. This underscores the need to revitalize studies on gender and its architectural implications within the local context, where such inquiry remains overdue.

7. Citations and References

7.1. REFERENCES

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