Research Paper

Women-Only Carriages: How Sites of "Protection" Construct Gender[1]

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Abstract

Current East Asian studies literature and Japanese public discourse addressing women-only carriages, hereon referred to as WOCs, primarily problematize the inefficacy of WOCs in promoting the safety of female passengers. Yet there presently exists little inquiry into the mechanisms by which WOCs spatially construct and constrain feminine identity. Instead, East Asian studies literature generally assumes feminine identity in public spaces as constituted by victimhood, treating the institutionalization of minoritized women as a predicate rather than anterior. One might then turn to feminist research on how spatial arrangements construct gender. The subject of this literature has been confined to primary spaces such as the dwelling or workplace. Yet WOCs occupy the interstice between these spaces; they do not function in precisely the same way. In other words, the construction and subsequent constraint of feminine identity in WOCs are not fully explicable by current East Asian studies or feminist research.

Instead, this paper draws on gender studies literature on public restrooms to explain the normative social understanding that is fundamental to the "protection" constructed. Through analyzing online posts documenting the lived experiences of women in these spaces and a collection of videos documenting the forced integration of WOCs—termed anti-cooperative ridings—I examine how gendered spatial construction encodes female identity

[1] This paper deals with sexual assault which some readers may find distressing. この論文では性暴力被害の詳細が記載されています。ご留意ください。

into WOCs.

Despite railway companies purporting that WOCs serve the interests of women, their implementation centers around the convenience of "other" passengers. Their concern for the convenience of other passengers during the WOC trial period attests to this. Yet if WOCs spatially center women, what is implied in "other passengers" is maleness. Securing women's "safety" occurs inasmuch as it converges with male interest. What is more, I find that simply by way of their physical construction WOCs place the onus of redressal on women, causing women's ability to receive protection to be contingent on their encoding as subjects warranting protection. Belongingness in that space hinges on performing according to the rigid contours of what the train carriage has encoded as feminine. The framing that women must actively vie for their own protection—as opposed to groping being framed as a societal issue—allows the absence of actively seeking protection to be conflated with inviting assault. This paper complicates the current discourse by scrutinizing how feminine identity becomes interlocked with victimhood in these spaces, calling for further scholarly inquiry into the social mechanisms underlying the functionality of WOCs that reify, constrain, and institutionalize the female subject.

Keywords:
gendered space, women-only carriages, gender construction, normative protection, public transportation

「満員電車で体を触られ、恐怖で動けなくなりました。
『なぜその車両に乗ったのか』いまでも自分を責めてしまうんです。
『そんな必要はない』とこれまで被害者に言い続けてきたはずなのに…」

— 青木千恵子

"I was groped, and I couldn't move. I was paralyzed with fear.
To this day I blame "myself: 'Why did I get on that carriage?'

Even though I've told countless victims that 'There's no need to…'"

— Chieko Aoki

Chieko Aoki is a lawyer, and she is also a woman (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2022). On October 6 of 2019, she was a woman in an *integrated* carriage—not a women-only carriage. It was there that she was groped by multiple men before confronting one of them, only to be violently thrown down a flight of stairs at the next station. In 2001, women-only carriages, hereon referred to as WOCs, were introduced and gradually spread across all major railways in Japan (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism [MLIT], 2003a). These carriages socially, not legally, construct a space that male-identifying passengers are barred from entering (Osaka Metro, "Are Women-only Carriages Discriminatory," n.d.), and are advertised as spaces that protect women (Japan Private Railway Association, n.d.). Yet without WOCs, Aoki's question, "Why was I riding on *that* carriage?" becomes unintelligible. The WOC became the tangible object through which Aoki rationalized—and continues to rationalize—self-blame.

Aoki herself maintains she should have known better. A practicing lawyer who had advised countless sex-crime victims *should*, she reasons, have known better. Yet she continued rationalizing the irrational. Aoki's experience is by no means novel. A study conducted in 2018 by #WeToo Japan found that 70% of women have experienced some kind of harassment on either the train or street with almost 48% reporting that they have been touched inappropriately—of which 50% reported they could not retaliate (Buzzfeed Japan, 2019).[2] It is a statistic that becomes even more glaring in light of the fact that in 2018 there was a cumulative total of over 18.7 billion commutes, of which over 11 billion were made by regular-basis commuters (MLIT, 2023). A 2017 census further found the average commute among regular-basis commuters in the Greater

[2] The original findings posted on #WeToo Japan's website were inaccessible due to the website being inactive, given #WeToo Japan is largely funded through donations.

Tokyo area to be over 67 minutes per day (MLIT, 2018, p. 34). The temporal significance that the train occupies in day-to-day activities cannot be ignored. Where Aoki diverges, however, is her experience and positionality as a lawyer who had been advising the very victims whose unenviable ranks she had joined. How did a space simply by way of its existence deconstruct Aoki from lawyer to victim? How did it assemble and then rationalize such an irrational logic, that she was to blame?

East Asian studies and Japanese discourse would situate Aoki's experience as yet another instance of the existing scholarship on the inefficacy of WOCs (Horii & Burgess, 2012, pp. 41-55; Shibata, 2020a, pp. 293-305; Shibata, 2020b, pp. 160-175). Public discourse in Japan often problematizes whether WOCs enhance safety and whether these spaces discriminate against men (Saito & Takeda, 2019; The Sankei News, 2017, "男性専用に男女から賛意 [Men and Women Express Support for 'Men-Only Carriages']" section). In both cases, WOCs are treated as a transit *policy* rather than a *space* that constructs gender.

What feminist scholars like Daphne Spain (2000) have termed "gendered space"—the inquiry into how spatial arrangements influence the construction of gender (p. 3)—has so far been limited in East Asian studies and Japanese public discourse at large. Feminist scholars outside of East Asian studies, however, have studied how we interact with the physical arrangements of the world around us—scholars known as feminist geographers (McDowell, 1993; Valentine, 1989; Valentine, 1993).[3] They have traced how we experience space and have demonstrated how space is both constituted by and constitutes social relations (Massey, 1994; Massey, 2005; Valentine, 1993). This literature is interscalar in its inquiry, studying immigration (Silvey, 2004; Staeheli et al., 2004),[4] to dwellings (Spain, 2000), down to the female body (Kato & Sleeboom-Faulkner, 2012). More recently feminist geographers have documented how

[3] For an early review of feminist geography and the different schools of theoretical thought that occupy it see McDowell (1993).

[4] For a review of feminist migration studies see Silvey (2004).

women in Japan negotiate and experience space (Kato & Sleeboom-Faulkner, 2012; Nakano & Ronald, 2012; Steger, 2013).[5] This paper builds on this literature while extending spacial construction and gender as a subject to be studied further in Japanese public spaces.

This paper, therefore, both complicates the mainstream narratives that hyper-fixate on the efficacy of WOCs as a policy and introduces spacial configurations as a framework to analyze the co-constitution of public space and gender relations. The paper examines Aoki's experience through three online blog posts documenting the lived experiences of women in transit, as well as a video documenting the interactions of an anti-WOC group that forcefully integrated a WOC. It begins by tracing the lineage of WOCs, then discusses the frameworks that currently exist in scholarly discourse of gendered and public spaces, synthesizing the work of largely disparate scholarly disciplines to construct a new apparatus from which WOCs can be fully analyzed. Dissecting how WOCs as a gendered space "...[reproduce] gender differences in power and privilege" (Spain, 2000, p. 233), this paper makes explicit the covert mechanisms by which WOCs disempower and simultaneously reconstruct the female subject.

A Look Backward: Constructing the "Victim"

> 「周りの人々は、性暴力を無視できても、被害にあっている女性はその苦しさから目をそむけることができません。その意味では、被害者を孤立させ"見て見ぬふり"をした周囲も（駅員も含めて）加害者だと言えるのではないでしょうか。」 — 性暴力を許さない女の会一同
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> "Bystanders can ignore sexual violence, but the violated woman is incapable of ignoring her own pain. In this sense, are not those who isolate women by 'turning a blind eye' (including station personnel) also

[5] For a review on gender and geography in Japan see Yoshida (2019).

perpetrators?" — Women Against Sexual Violence

One of the earliest mobilizations of Japanese feminists concerning transportation can be traced back to this letter written by Women Against Sexual Violence, addressed to the Japanese Bureau of Transportation and several Kansai railway companies (Women Against Sexual Violence, n.d.). Founded in 1988 by virtue of these letters—predating the WOC by over a decade—Women Against Sexual Violence was mobilized in response to the *Midosuji* Incident. The *Midosuji* Incident concerned a female passenger who confronted two men groping another woman on the *Midosuji* train line, only to be forced off the train by the two men who then paraded her around downtown Osaka while making extremely descriptive threats, eventually taking her to a cafe then back onto the train and finally to an abandoned construction site where they beat and raped her (Women Against Sexual Violence, 1990 as cited in Yamamoto, 2017). While the woman—herself having been groped a few weeks prior—acted in the faith that if she spoke up others around her would also defend the woman being assaulted, she was instead met with indifference and fear from bystanders in the train carriages, at the cafe, and on the street. When asked by the police why she did not simply ask for help, she replied, "I thought, if I ask again and no one responds then I don't know what they're going to do to me" (Women Against Sexual Violence, 1990 as cited in Yamamoto, 2017). As Women Against Sexual Violence writes, her fellow passengers in the train, the customers in the cafe, passersby, and the station master were complicit in their choice not to intervene. The letter goes on to declare that the object of transportation safety should not be to "not to create victims" but instead to "not create perpetrators," making several policy demands (Women Against Sexual Violence, 1988 as cited in Yamamoto, 2017). In none of these demands appear the words "women-only carriage."

The few railway companies that did respond to the letters remarked, "In an effort to limit gender-targetted language in our campaigns, we ask

customers to 'refrain from bothersome behaviors' more generally" (Women Against Sexual Violence, n.d.). Concerns with acknowledging gender continued as the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism began implementing WOCs on a trial basis just over a decade later (MLIT, 2003a). During this period, the Ministry was particularly concerned with whether WOCs would be a nuisance to the average commuter and disrupt day-to-day operations (MLIT, 2003b). Indeed, the Ministry's report specifically notes that many railway companies were apprehensive about introducing WOCs due to concerns regarding the crowding of integrated carriages, disrupted train schedules, and the lengthening of travel time. The Ministry and railway companies at large, were operating by the logic that the safety of women passengers was a subordinate priority to the convenience of the other—implicitly male—passengers. They isolated the female "victim" and physically removed her, and by extension the issue of sexual assault, from public sight. In essence, the construction of WOCs is in direct contradiction to the demands made by Women Against Sexual Violence; WOCs center the "victims"—not the "perpetrators"—as subjects to be redressed. WOCs were fundamentally a policy created *by* men, *for* men.

Today, the lineage of the latter half of this claim—that the WOC is a policy *for* men—is allegorized in how the Osaka Metro System publicizes WOCs, advertising that the carriage's physical location is intentionally positioned to have "relatively little impact" on the safety and transfers made by other passengers (Osaka Metro, "How Did You Decide," n.d.). Implicit in the phrase "other passengers" is maleness. If WOCs are constructed to "protect women" as the Osaka Metro System states (Osaka Metro, "Are Women-only Carriages Discriminatory," n.d.), then the otherness that is constructed by extension is the contrapositive of that gender binary: maleness. Borrowing from Derrick Bell's (1980) interest convergence—that Black racial equality is only achieved when it converges with white interests (p. 523)—we see that the protection of women is only achieved insofar as it converges with the interest of male

commuters. The convenience of the male commuter is paramount to the safety of the female commuter.

Gender Configuration in *Transited* Spaces

The intersection between spaces of public transportation—what this paper terms *transited* space—and gender has been problematized by urban planning scholars, with significant emphasis on how perceptions of safety might be tied to masculine and feminine identity. Most often this literature finds that the feminine is characterized by an abundance of fear that perceives the public space to be more dangerous than it actually is (Valentine, 1989, pp. 385-386; Yavuz & Welch, 2010, p. 2508). Masculinity, on the other hand, is found to be constituted by this female vulnerability in public space (Day, 2001, p. 123; Valentine, 1989, pp. 388-389). The natural implication of this body of work, then, is that it problematizes the discrepancy between the *actual* degree of public safety and women's perceptions of safety—and by extension makes the claim that urban planning should focus on mitigating this discrepancy (Roy et al., 2022, p. 17; Yavuz & Welch, 2010, p. 2508). Yet this literature makes little inquiry into *why* this discrepancy exists, even failing to evaluate this discrepancy outside the heteronormative gender framework.

We might, then, turn to feminist research on how spatial arrangements influence gender, what Daphne Spain (2000) terms gendered space (p. 3). This literature has largely established that certain spaces both reproduce and construct societal understandings of gender (Massey, 1994, p. 345; Massey, 2005; Spain, 2000, p. 234; Valentine, 1993). These issues have further been complicated by scholars, like Dolores Hayden (2022), who have problematized the privatization of spaces encoded as female—the detachment of the feminine domicile, such as the kitchen or nursery, from the community (p. 174)—by arguing that the privatization of space causes the work in those spaces to be fulfilled individually (p. 176). This, Hayden contends, leads to the perception that women's issues within these spaces ought to be resolved privately, as

opposed to communally. In other words, the physical detachment of the space frames the way we conceptualize women's problems and their modes of redressal. The literature derives these conclusions from spaces such as dwellings and the workplace (Hayden, 2022, p. 174; Massey, 1994, p. 234; Spain, 2000, p. 243). Yet these gendered spaces do not function in precisely the same ways as *publicly* gendered spaces. For instance, if we attempt to apply to WOCs Spain's (2000) conclusion that spatial segregation limits women's access to socially valued knowledge (p. 233), it is unclear whether or even *what* socially valued knowledge the WOC limits women's access to. Spain's conclusion only makes sense in the context of primary spaces like the workplace where socially-valued experiential knowledge of a trade, for instance, is developed and exchanged. The train carriage, however, is not a primary site in which knowledge of a trade or skill is exercised or exchanged in the same way that knowledge exchange occurs in dwellings and workplaces. Rather, WOCs lie in between those architectures; they occupy the interstices between primary spaces and thus are, at least partially, inexplicable by current feminist geographers.

Gender studies literature on gender-segregated public bathrooms then, insofar as public bathrooms are neither privatized nor "primary" in the way that dwellings or workplaces are, might prove useful in refining a framework that describes the underlying spatial mechanisms by which WOCs interact with gender identity. While public bathrooms are legally bound in their gender segregation, as opposed to socially bound as is the case with WOCs, there nevertheless exist social barriers, beyond the physical barriers of a stall, that are erected between a stall's occupants and those outside of it (Cahill et al., 1985, p. 36). For instance, Cahill et al. found that people who accidentally entered an occupied stall would often apologize, reaffirming the occupants' social claim to the stall, beyond the physical claim of locking a door. This phenomenon, termed normative protection, is presented in this literature as a dualistic relationship established between the protected and the bystander that

is reinforced by both parties (Cahill et al., 1985). In praxis, however, normative protection places a greater burden on the protected individual to initiate that protection by necessitating some affirmative act—locking a bathroom door—on their part. In trains too, an affirmative act—stepping into the WOC—is a prerequisite for women to access its spacial protections. In this respect, the way that normative protection functions in a bathroom stall might be similar to how it functions in WOCs.

Furthermore, interest convergence similarly seems to pervade the lineage of gender-segregated public bathrooms. Much of the scholarly work, in some form, situates the emergence of gender-segregated public bathrooms in the context of male interests. In the expansion of the physical space afforded to women's public bathrooms, legislation was often spearheaded by men who were simply tired of waiting for their female counterparts (Plaskow, 2008, p. 55). The extension of workplace bathrooms to women, and the segregatory legislation that enabled the said extension, emerged from resentment towards working women (Kogan, 2007, p. 12). Similar to how railway companies prioritized the convenience of "other" passengers in implementing WOCs (MLIT, 2003b), female-centered progress in access to bathrooms only occurred with the caveat that there be some kind of material benefit for their male counterparts.[6]

When put into conversation with one another, these disparate scholarly fields appear to signal that perceptions of gender are shaped by how WOCs

[6] Here, I do not mean to ignore the experiences of transpersons and genderqueer persons. Scholars have studied how transpersons and genderqueer persons negotiate bathroom stalls in the workplace (Connell, 2011) and public space (Herman, 2013), problematized the tension between emerging public bathroom laws and social norms (Davis, A. K., 2020; Platt & Milam, 2018), and theorized the tensions that emerge within transgender politics (Roen, 2002). They have also looked at how binary constructions of gender are reasserted upon transpersons, masculine-appearing ciswomen, and feminine-appearing cismen in public bathrooms (Davis, F. G., 2017; Mathers, 2017). While studying how transpersons experience WOCs fall outside the scope of this paper, inquiry into people's experiences of WOCs outside the heteronormative framework is nonetheless a topic that should be studied further.

as a segregated space rely on social norms and understandings. Synthesizing scholarly conversations on urban planning, geography, and public bathrooms then, might reveal how gendered spatial construction encodes female identity into WOCs and what *kind* of female identity is being constructed.

Yet both current East Asian studies literature and Japanese public discourse addressing WOCs often neglect the mechanisms by which women are constructed as victims, and instead focus more broadly on the efficacy of WOCs (Horii & Burgess, 2012; Shibata, 2020a, pp. 293-305; Shibata, 2020b, pp. 160-175). Women who ride in integrated spaces—like Aoki—are valorized for pioneering the desegregation of gendered spaces (Horii & Burgess, 2012, p. 53; The Sankei News, 2017, "男性専用に男女から賛意 [Men and Women Express Support for 'Men-Only Carriages']" section). In other words, this discourse conveniently ignores the temporal *before* and instead fixates on the *after*, and in so doing, treats the institutionalization of women as victims as a predicate rather than anterior. In ignoring how women have spatially become labeled as victims, scholarly discourse in East Asian studies and public discourse in Japan cannot sufficiently address how WOCs affect women's internalized perception of themselves as dangerously vulnerable and the accompanying external perception of them as victims.

Women as the Arbiters of their *Own* Protection

> 「たまに寝坊して通常の車両に乗ってしまうと焦る。『女性専用車両に乗らないということは、触っても気にしないのか』と勘違いする男性がたまにいるからだ。」
>
> — ブロガー @moonshiney
>
> "I sometimes panic if I oversleep and have to ride on the integrated carriage.
>
> I panic because there are men who mistakenly think, 'She's not on the women-only carriage so she won't care if I touch her.'"
>
> — Online Blogger @moonshiney

Normative protection in WOCs is established between the women occupying the WOC and the male-identifying passengers that occupy the integrated carriage. Yet WOCs and public bathrooms diverge in that while in gender-segregated public bathrooms normative protection occurs between the "same" gender, in WOCs, it functions between two heteronormative genders. In other words, in WOCs normative protection is being established between two social groups *already* viewed as unequal beyond the confines of the train. This skew is compounded by the fact that normative protection necessitates an affirmative act from the recipient; in this case, not the locking of a bathroom door, but stepping into the WOC. Normative protection only functions insofar as the female subject occupies the gendered space and the male subject respects that physical boundary.

Yet the disproportionate burdening of women for the sake of their safety occurs even before a woman sets foot on a train. @moonshiney (2021), an online blogger and female commuter, confesses that she becomes anxious if she oversleeps and cannot make it to the WOC ("職場上司の発言 [My Boss's Remark]" section). Her anxiety stems from the physical inaccessibility of the carriage, an inaccessibility that is the result of railroad companies' concern with the well-being and convenience of their "other" customers when implementing WOCs (MLIT, 2003a; Osaka Metro, "How Did You Decide," n.d.). If the "other" is prioritized, then the implication is that women's needs become secondary. Simply by way of their physical construction WOCs are burdensome to the people that they purport to protect (Japan Private Railway Association, n.d.).

To this, some may argue that because WOCs create a space where women are specifically centered—in ways that other identities are not—it justifies some sort of burden on the women's part (The Sankei News, 2017, "男性専用に男女から賛意 [Men and Women Express Support for 'Men-Only Carriages']" section). It is important to note here that the "centering" of the female subject does not function in the same empowering ways that "centering" might function in an affinity group; riding in the WOC is not an agential choice by

any means. It is not a choice for women like Aoki who suffers from PTSD (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2022) or for women like @moonshiney who gets anxious if she oversleeps and cannot make it to the WOC (moonshiney, 2021, "職場上司の発言 [My Boss's Remark]" section); it is a mode of survival.

If the foregrounding of the victimized female subject is the issue then, might the integration of WOCs resolve the burdening of women by getting rid of normative protection? While this might be the expectation for some, women continue to be placed in the position of being the arbiters of their protection even among activist movements—namely the so-called "anti-cooperative ridings" of the Anti-WOC Organization—that attempt to desegregate WOCs. During many of these interactions, men participating in the "anti-cooperative riding" will raise their voices against women who actively tell them that they are in a WOC, the men asking them to justify why they need a WOC and reminding these women that WOC are not legal policy but one that functions simply on the basis of normative protection (Anti-Cooperative Riding Channel, 2018). The forceful integration is further problematized when we turn to the experiences of women who ride on integrated carriages. @moonshiney feels anxious riding the integrated carriage for fear of men who will misconstrue her presence in an integrated space as an invitation to violate her (moonshiney, 2021, "職場上司の発言 [My Boss's Remark]" section). She recalls, "I was so happy when WOCs were introduced. It meant I wouldn't have to feel stressed in the mornings" (para. 2). Beyond the sentiments of this commuter, however, what is perhaps most disturbing is her male superior's perception of women in integrated spaces. He appears overjoyed as he remarks, "A high school girl was pushed up against me for *free* this morning." In establishing normative protection within WOCs *exclusively*, women are constructed as "assaultable" subjects outside WOCs. The absence of actively seeking protection is conflated as a woman inviting assault. In short, by this account, the WOC functions as an apparatus through which the sexualization of women in integrated spaces is justified.

Gender Construction

「すみません、女性です。」— Aju
"I'm sorry, I'm a woman." — Aju

When the female subject is constructed based on the exclusion of individuals that "fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements," the construction of the subject itself becomes "coercive and regulatory" (Butler, 1999, p. 9). So, too, in WOCs does belongingness hinge on outwardly feminine performativity. This is encapsulated in Aju's (2023) experience as a woman often mistaken for a man (para. 1-2):

I always feel anxious when I ride the women-only carriage. I'm anxious because I'm often mistaken for a man and asked to go to the other carriage. My hair is short and my shoulders, broad from swimming. I wear a hoodie and pants; my shoes are sneakers. I often carry a black knapsack when I go out (para. 1-2).

Yet Aju (2023) never corrects the behavior of the women who confront her beyond apologizing: "Sorry, I'm a woman" (para. 6). She explains, "If I get mad at someone who had the courage to confront me, they might decide not to confront the next man that occupies a WOC. It would reduce the number of people protected" (Aju, 2023, para. 10). Here, it is not an individual responsibility to establish normative protection that is felt, but a *collective* one; Aju's own advocacy for *her* gender expression is superseded by the need to protect the women she shares the space with. In other words, the *collective* responsibility necessitated by normative protection to maintain a social partition between men and women commuters marginalizes women who fall beyond the rigid contours of femininity constructed by WOCs.

Aju's interactions illustrate that an individual's "worthiness" of receiving normative protection is entirely contingent on conforming to a particular set of feminine expressions. It was because Aju was not performing according to

what the WOC had encoded as being "female" that her belonging in the space, and by extension whether or not she *deserved* to be protected, was questioned. This revelation, however, becomes even more problematic when scrutinizing the *type* of female subject that is institutionalized by WOCs. To the extent that the advertised intent of WOC is to protect women (Japan Private Railway Association, n.d.), the female subject being institutionalized is constituted by victimhood. Women's ability to *receive* protection is contingent on their encoding as subjects *warranting* protection.

Here, one might argue that any policy that is designed to be equitable inherently requires the recipient of that equity to be encoded as marginalized; that an administration of equity fundamentally requires acknowledging a particular group as marginalized. Yet WOCs are distinguished from more general equity policies in that they require a public display of marginalization. Identifying as a woman is not enough; you must perform as what the space has encoded as "woman." Moreover, because WOC as a space only functions insofar as women perform, for the physical boundary to exist it requires women to constantly critique each other's performances—or more simply put, appearances. To maintain a "women-only" space filled with strangers means making impulsive judgments based on the masculine or feminine performances of individuals. In short, the space encodes a gender identity that is constituted by victimhood and then relies on women to check and maintain one another's conformity to that identity.

Online blogger Sakura (2018) in describing her experience in the WOC notes, "If I ride in the WOC, I'm told I'm overly self-conscious; if I ride in the integrated carriage, I'm told I'm in the way" (para. 8). While the direct translation of the term she uses, *jishikikajou*, is overly self-conscious, it carries connotations of egocentrism in Japanese (Weblio, n.d.). What is being implied, therefore, is that women who use WOCs are perceived as viewing themselves as "assaultable" subjects—attractive to male audiences. Sakura (2018) continues, "[WOC] were supposed to protect me, but they don't at all" (para.

10). For WOCs to be maintained, these spaces require conforming to a particular gender performance, which in turn defines both Aju's self-expression and Sakura's self-perception. The WOC is constituted by the female "victim" but simultaneously overwrites the identities of women who occupy its boundaries as "assaultable." In short, space and gender are co-constitutive (Massey, 2005).

The Gender Aftermath

The logic that women ought to secure their own safety can be traced back to the excuses Women Against Sexual Violence received in response to their letter, that railway companies did not want to explicitly address gender (Women Against Sexual Violence, n.d.). In the year that followed, the Osaka Police and Kansai Railway Organization would create posters with the message, "If you are groped, be courageous and speak up" (Women Against Sexual Violence, n.d.). Such messages unashamedly embody the very victim-focused approach that Women Against Sexual Violence (1988) explicitly advocated against (as cited in Yamamoto, 2017). The notion that women ought to be the arbiters of their own protection, that they must be their own redressers, was woven into the fabric of Japanese trains over a decade before WOCs were introduced. The promulgation of WOCs was merely an institutionalization of the legacy that predated them. The onus to redress and safeguard one's security within transited space has always been placed on these women. It is the woman on the *Midosuji* Line who was punished for confronting the two men groping another woman (Women Against Sexual Violence, 1990 as cited in Yamamoto, 2017). It is @moonshiney (2021) who, before WOCs, was groped repeatedly by the same man every morning for twenty minutes, eventually having to ride on a different train at a different time to get to work ("痴漢する奴はしつこい [The Persistence of Gropers]" section); who must ensure she does not oversleep so that she makes it on the WOC; and who has to worry about whether her presence in an integrated carriage might be

misconstrued as an invitation to be assaulted ("職場上司の発言 [My Boss's Remark]" section). It is the women who occupy the WOCs who have to defend their space against anti-cooperative ridings (Anti-Cooperative Riding Channel, 2018). It is Aju (2023) who has to apologize for not conforming to what the WOC has encoded as "woman," so that the safety of other women continues to be actively safeguarded (para. 6). It is Aoki who continues to rationalize self-blame because she failed to board a WOC (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2022).

Even before WOCs were introduced, assault in transited spaces has been framed as an issue whose solution lies with the redressal of women, and women *exclusively*. WOCs, by operationalizing normative protection, simply made this reality more covert by leveraging the fact that normative protection hinges on the involvement and cooperation of two parties. In other words, the fact that men are socially compelled to respect the boundaries of the WOC placates accusations of inaction. In as much as normative protection relies on all parties that occupy the train, the WOC pretends to treat groping as a societal issue, despite its still placing a greater burden on women to establish and maintain that protection.

Today, this lineage continues. The projection of responsibility onto women can be seen in the public discourse surrounding the #GropingFestival trending in Japan (Nichi-tele News, 2023). The hashtag was created in reference to the fact that because students cannot be late to the national college admissions test, they—particularly female students—often do not report being groped for fear of missing their exam. Yet rather than address the issue through reform at the institutional level such as allowing students to delay or make up the exam, online discourse centered around preventative measures that female students should be actively taking themselves. Online forums were of the popular opinion that girls avoid wearing their often-fetishized school uniforms and instead wear unalluring "sweatpants" (sumisumico, 2022), while news segments highlighted what women should do to prevent assault (Nichi-tele

News, 2023). The focus on women as opposed to institutions as the subject of redressal, however, should not come as a surprise; normative protection in WOCs had already operationalized the precedent of a women-centered discourse. What could otherwise be dealt with at the institutional level was then altered to frame women, exclusively, as needing to be active in establishing their protection. Any progress that has been made on the institutional front has thus far been limited. It was only in March of 2023 that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2023) requested that public schools excuse students who file a police report and are subsequently tardy (pp. 5-6). In this way, the spacially encoded relationship between safety and gendered responsibilities inside the WOC is reproduced in public discourse that focuses on preventative measures that women can take. WOCs reproduce gender configurations (Spain, 2000, p. 6) outside the WOC by becoming logical precedent to frame *societal* issues as exclusively *women's* issues.

Yet, as we have seen, current scholarly discourse on urban planning and gendered perceptions of safety are predicated on the assumption that women are inherently more vulnerable—or are perceived as more vulnerable—than men (Valentine, 1989, pp. 385-386; Yavuz & Welch, 2010, p. 2508). Their analysis often departs from the presupposition that society is neatly bifurcated into women and men, and that these categorizations influence how we experience safety in public spaces. It hyper-fixates on the gender aftermath without considering how women's perception of heightened vulnerability and neat categorizations of a binary gender in public spaces are constructed (Roy et al., 2022, p.17; Yvuz & Welch, 2010, p. 2508). Synthesizing the frameworks applied by scholars studying gendered space and gender-segregated bathrooms, then, extends existing urban planning literature to consider the *before* of how public spaces construct gender, not simply the *after*. It is in scrutinizing how identity becomes constituted by victimhood in public spaces that historical continuities—for instance, that victim-focused methods of redressal predate

the WOC—emerge, thus compelling us not to relinquish our concept of redressal to the assumptions of urban studies literature.

A Path Forward

In tracing the legacy of WOCs, it becomes clear they frame groping as a women's issue rather than a societal issue, burdening them with the redressal of an issue that extends well beyond trains. Revisiting Aoki's experience, her failure to establish normative protection—that is, actively stepping into a space where it is maintained—is fundamental to her rationalization of self-blame: "Why did I ride on *that* train carriage?" The gender expectation inside the space—that women take initiative to step into WOCs and be the arbiters of their own protection—extended outside WOCs. In other words, the gendered expectations inside WOCs are spacially reproduced outside of the train carriage to function as a tool used by society to blame the victim.

In employing normative protection, WOCs task women with the maintenance of their own protection, placing that onus on women *exclusively*, thereby framing groping as an issue women ought to deal with privately. Because WOCs occupy an interstice between dwelling and workplace, one cannot expect to fully redress gender configuration within dwellings and workplaces without addressing the spaces women occupy in between those architectures. One cannot expect to address workplace equity if women like @ moonshiney (2021) feel anxious about their modes of transportation *to* work ("職場上司の発言 [My Boss's Remark]" section). One cannot expect to address gender equity in higher education if female students are regularly targeted on their way to their college admissions exams (Nichi-tele News, 2023). One cannot expect to address equal pay if women like Aoki have to quit their jobs because of chronic and debilitating PTSD (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2022). It is thus imperative that feminist geography be extended to encompass Japanese transited spaces as well.

Today, there is movement to have WOCs become a "multipurpose

carriage" in which marginalized identities such as same-sex couples and members of the LGBT community can occupy as a "safe space" (Omori, 2021, para. 1). Yet to include other marginalized groups into WOCs without reevaluating the type of expectations and gender configurations that constitute the WOC and are then reproduced outside of the WOC would be tantamount to replicating the above subjugation of women among other marginalized identities. Moreover, as we have seen through the accounts of online bloggers, WOCs serve as respite from an environment where women would otherwise have to endure the continuity of changing trains until their next assault.

Throughout this paper, I have intentionally avoided subscribing to the binarism that the current discourse evaluating WOCs as a *policy* rather than a gendered space constructs; to be for or against WOCs? This discourse is simplistic, and ignores the spacial mechanisms at play. Women like Aoki who suffer from chronic PTSD depend on these spaces to feel safe (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2022), even if that safety is burdensome, constraining, and essentializing. In buying into a discourse that focuses on the efficacy of WOCs, I merely reproduce a hyper-fixation that overlooks the complexity of the lived experiences of women like Aoki. The question of whether one is for or against WOCs subverts the notion that there might be a solution outside normative protection. In this sense, this paper does not provide an answer.

Yet what I have sought to and hopefully succeeded in providing is a path forward. The debate around WOCs as a policy is not as black-and-white as East Asian scholarship frames it to be. In engaging feminist geographers and urban planning scholars this paper has revealed the way the WOC interacts with gender. First, WOC are constituted by assumptions of inherent female vulnerability in public spaces. Second, because this space is maintained by evaluating gender performances, to gain spacial belongingness women have to conform to the feminine identity encoded by the space. These performances are a reproduction of encoded gender. Finally, the identities of its occupants

WOCs are overwritten as "assaultable" subjects because the space is constituted by female vulnerability. It is significant, now more than ever, that East Asian studies scholars—and particularly scholars in Japan—who write about WOCs are put in conversation with feminist geographers to make explicit the ways in which gender and space interact with one another to construct and then reproduce gender.

In demonstrating the way the WOC's physical arrangement interacts with gender, my hope is that we recognize the self-defeating nature of a discourse whose only objective seems to be determining whether WOCs are effective or not. Shifting mainstream discourse to look at WOCs as a *gendered space* allows us to at least begin to recognize that the woman commuter should not exclusively be tasked with her own redressal.

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Abstract

女性専用車両：保護空間におけるジェンダー構築

小川幸姫

現在の東アジア学や日本メディアは、主に女性専用車両が効果的であるかどうかを疑問視している。しかし、女性専用車両がどのように女性像を構築しているかについての研究はほとんど存在しない。東アジア学は概して公共空間における女性像は被害者意識によって構成されることを前提としている。それではジェンダー学はどうだろうか。空間形成のジェンダー化における研究は、主に住まいや職場といった主要な空間を研究の対象としている。しかし、交通機関である以上女性専用車両は主要な空間と同じように機能していない。つまり、これらの学問分野は女性専用車両における女性像のマイノリティ化の要因を説明するのには不十分である。

この論文は、公衆トイレに関するジェンダー学の研究を活用することで「女性保護」の根底にある規範的保護を説明する。女性乗客の日常を記録した投稿と女性専用車両の非協力乗車動画の分析を通してジェンダー化された空間がどのように女性像を構築しているかを考察する。

女性専用車両は女性を保護するものと称しているにも関わらず、鉄道会社は一般乗客の利便性に配慮している。専用車両が女性を隔離しているのであれば「一般乗客」に含意されるのは男性である。つまり、女性の安全確保は男性乗客に不便でない領域内で行われている。更に女性専用車両はその構造によって痴漢対策の責任を女性のみに負わせ、女性の安全を社会問題ではなく女性問題として扱っている。従って一般車両に乗車することが痴漢行為を誘うことと混同されることを可能にしている。この論文は女性像がどのように被害者意識と連動するのかを考察することで女性像を定義し、束縛し、制度化する女性専用車両のメカニズムについて更なる探求を呼びかけている。

キーワード:
空間形成のジェンダー化、女性専用車両、ジェンダー構築、ノーマティブプロテクション（規範的保護）、公共交通機関