SOLIDARITY IN THE BORDERLANDS OF GENDER, RACE, CLASS AND SEXUALITY: RACIALIZED TRANSGENDER MEN

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study uses multiple autobiographical narratives of racialized transgender men to examine the intersecting axes of oppression at work in the borderlands of identity. The research contributes more complex understandings of transgender lives by raising questions about how gender, race, class, and sexuality intersect in the lives of racialized transgender men, and how such identities negotiate their place in the various communities constituted by those particular social locations. In particular I look at the ways that solidarity works in the borderlands, the liminal space composed of intersecting subject positions. I ask what constitutes solidarity, and I discover the contingencies operating in the borderlands that facilitate or pose barriers to full participation and solidarity of racialized transgender men. Findings reveal the complex negotiations racialized transgender men must engage in, both within and outside of queer and feminist communities, and challenge us to think through the meanings of solidarity.
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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................... iii

CHAPTER 1 ............................................................................... 1
  Objectives and Scope .......................................................... 2
  Dominance of Medicalizing Discourses ............................... 6
  The Trouble with LGBT ....................................................... 12
    Power .............................................................................. 13
    Reclaiming Power ........................................................... 17
  Synopsis ............................................................................. 19

CHAPTER 2 ............................................................................. 21
  My Social Location ............................................................. 22
  Methods ............................................................................ 24
    Standpoint ........................................................................ 24
    Multiple Autobiographical Narratives ............................... 27

CHAPTER 3 ............................................................................. 34
  Transborder Solidarity ........................................................ 35
    Borderlands/Liminality .................................................... 35
    Contextualized Introductions ............................................. 39
    Solidarity ......................................................................... 45
    Contested Space ............................................................. 54
  Race, Racism, and Racialization .......................................... 56
  Class .................................................................................. 61
  Problematizing Solidarity .................................................... 64

CHAPTER 4 ............................................................................. 69
  Transgender Men ............................................................... 70
    Concretizing Power Relations .......................................... 71
    Solidarity? ........................................................................ 74
    Navigating Gender Boundaries ........................................ 76
    Questions of Stealth ....................................................... 80
    Navigating the Borderlands ............................................. 86
    Intersections at Play ......................................................... 89
    Queer Silencing of the Borderlands ................................. 98

CONCLUSION ......................................................................... 103
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>...........................................................................</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 1</td>
<td>Demographic Information</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 2</td>
<td>Glossary of Terms</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 3</td>
<td>Multiple Autobiographical Journal Guidelines</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 4</td>
<td>Solidarity Questions</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 5</td>
<td>Focus Group Questions</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
Objectives and Scope

The growing and diverse literature about transgender lives is dominated by a focus on gender identity and sexuality. I argue that intersecting axes of oppression, such as race and class, are given inadequate consideration in contemporary discussions of transgender experience. This thesis will contribute to more complex understandings of transgender lives by raising questions about how race, class, gender and sexuality intersect in the lives of racialized transgender men, and how racialized female-to-male (FTM) \(^1\) transgender people negotiate their place in the various communities constituted by those particular social locations. Where do they locate their communities of support? Where do they find solidarity?

Transgender Studies is an intellectual movement that partly grew out of an incident at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival in 1991. That year, a transgender woman was denied entrance to the lesbian/feminist-run festival (Califia, 2003; Devor and Matte, 2006). She came out about it in trans communities across North America. For some years following this incident, trans activists set up ‘Camp Trans’ outside the festival gates in protest. In recent years the festival organizers have allowed trans women to attend, albeit on a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ basis. The murder of Brandon Teena in 1994 after being discovered by police and his circle of friends to have been born female also galvanized trans activists to demand human rights protections for trans people in the US. Trans activists flew from all over the US to Nebraska to attend a vigil for Teena and to demand answers to the question of why the local police failed to protect him (Califia, 2003: 230-

\(^1\) Female-to-male; I will sometimes use FTM, transgender, trans, transman, as a way to convey the multiple and shifting identities of gender variant individuals.
Following these two high-profile incidents, trans people across the continent and in Europe began to organize themselves around human rights, and formed a prolific movement in and outside the academy (Stryker and Whittle, 2006).

Writings on trans lives and experience tend to address gender performance and performativity, bodies, physiology, sex, and sexuality. While trans identities do not occupy mainstream discourses, the transgender rights movement follows a similar trajectory to the queer rights movement, insofar as it focuses primarily on the politics of identity in terms of sex and gender. Postmodern trans theorists have contributed much to the discourse, offering radical writings from the margins, taking up space, and reclaiming transgender experience from medicalizing and juridical discourses (see Butler, 1990; Califia, 2003; Bornstein, 1994; Stryker, 2006; Whittle, 2006). Political organizing from within marginal communities is pivotal to solidarity across collectivities and social locations.

“Collective identities spoken through ‘race’, community and locality are, for all their spontaneity, powerful means to coordinate action and create solidarity” (Gilroy, 1991: 247). I will explore this assertion further by examining the multiple layers of subjectivity that can collude to produce social agency across lines of gender, sexuality, ‘race’ and class. Spontaneous events, like the incident at Michigan, and the murder of Brandon Teena (Califia, 2003) have sparked opportunities for trans organizing. These two events in particular were pivotal in laying the foundation for a more cohesive and sustained trans

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2 Although there are debates, the term, transgender emerged in the early 1990s to function as an umbrella term for the multiplicity of gender identities and practices that transgress normative gender categories (Lamble, 2008)
rights movement. I will argue in my thesis, however, that any movement towards transgender rights will only be substantial through recognition of the complex interweaving of multiple experiences, social locations and identities at work in each person and collectivity. Social movements emerge from the margins, and are produced by sub-cultures and counter-cultures (Gilroy, 1991). There are pockets of racialized trans people organizing out of their own experiences of marginality (e.g. Ziegler, 2008), but they are still marginalized within queer and transgender organizing, and within racialized communities. Solidarity might not be as simply achieved as Gilroy asserts when the racialized community member is also transgender, or, indeed, when the transgender community member is racialized.

True solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them...‘beings for another’...To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce (Freire, 1993: 49-50).

Racialized transgender men seek to build solidarity along multiple axes of identity, such as race, gender identity, class and sexuality. While solidarity of the oppressor with the oppressed is a goal worth pursuing, I would argue that solidarity among persons whose subject positions are marginalized could produce powerful challenges to hegemonic assumptions about who fits where in the social hierarchy.

In locating venues of solidarity among marginalized persons I examine the ways that gender, class, race and sex interweave in trans men. Such locations include workplaces, family, relationships, and social networks. While a study including transgender women has inarguably much to contribute to the questions I am raising, my own experience as a racialized transgender man who cut his teeth in a lesbian feminist community in Canada, has led me to the particular focus on FTMs. Transgender women come from a very
different standpoint and any discussion I offer would be deficient. I have asked questions about identity that peel back many of the layers of experience and subjectivity in trans men’s lives. The complexity of this task illuminates my contention that there are infinite avenues to traverse, and my claim that trans identity cannot be reduced to sexuality and gender alone is substantiated.

By examining the ways that gender, race, class and sexuality intersect in the lives of five racialized transgender men in Ontario, I argue in this thesis that solidarity is a contingent device that can at once be freeing and frustrating. For those living in the borderlands, the space designated at the margins for identities that are constituted by their ‘otherness’, relationships that could lead to solidarity are cut through with apprehension as well as anticipation. Is true solidarity possible given the energy transgender men have to put into protecting themselves from oppression both within and outside of their cultural and sexual communities? Do the borderlands provide sites of alliance across gender, sexuality, race and class? Or are they places where marginalized identities reinforce hierarchies of power?

In thinking through issues of solidarity with racialized trans men, it is important first to identify the major discourses operating in transgender lives. Medicalizing and juridical discourses function to maintain hegemonic expressions of gender in Europe and North America. Foucault argues that power and discourse are related in myriad ways, and that discourses can be used not only to dominate, but also to resist.
Dominance of Medicalizing Discourses

Transgender people are subjected to medicalizing discourses that find their origins in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). These discourses position transgenderism and transsexualism as medical and psychiatric anomalies in need of treatment. If we accept that discourse is a system that structures how we perceive reality (Mills, 2003: 55) we can quickly recognize the workings of power underlying the medicalizing discourses at work in transgender lives. Privileging the feminine/masculine binary, medicalizing discourses cast transgender individuals as ‘other’ through pathologizing language and procedures of regulation and control that place transgenderism in the realm of disease. People whose gender does not fit their biological sex become objects of medical inquiry, often have to undergo psychiatric interventions before obtaining treatment, and are forced to live within the parameters of a discourse that compels individuals to come down on one side of the binary or the other, thereby maintaining the status quo. Liminal beings, or those who exist in between those two genders, have to fight hard to resist the compulsion to choose one or the other of man or woman, and to alter their bodies accordingly. Power operates through these medicalizing discourses by putting constraints on individual freedoms. The medico-psychiatric establishment has taken ownership of gender variance. In concert with the law and social structures, the healthcare system strictly enforces the rules governing hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Although the existence of transgender individuals throws the notion of the gender binary into question, and exposes the constructed nature of gender, medicalizing discourses depend on the notion of biological determinism, and essentialized gender. There are few more entrenched and regulated sets of social relations
than those involving gender. Medicine reinforces power relations between men and women, physician and patient, and trans and non-trans people. Patriarchal society is invested in maintaining these power relations. The trans person not only challenges its legitimacy by asking the question, ‘what is gender?’ but also raises difficult questions about privilege, power and patriarchy by suggesting that gender is fluid, that some cisgender women can be men, some cisgender men are actually women, and some are neither and both at the same time. Suggesting that gender might not exist at all, that it is after all, a social construction, puts the medical establishment at a theoretical disadvantage. Medicalizing discourses are proliferated precisely because the presence of transgender people raises doubts about the legitimacy of the medical system’s incursions into trans lives. Foucault argues that discourse, while operating as an instrument of power, as with medicalizing and psychiatric discourses, also functions as “a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (1990: 101). For example, trans activists and theorists coined the term, ‘transgender’ to counter terms like ‘she-male’, ‘he/she’, and ‘gender dysphoria’. Now, it is commonly used in clinical settings by health care providers (Singer, 2006: 615), just as terms like ‘homosexual’ are being replaced by

3 Butler, among others, argues that the term “biological man” reinforces notions that transness is somehow not rooted in biology. (Where a dualistic biology stands as the privileged sine qua non). There are biological unknowns that obviously make some men women and some women men. Whether these biologies are located in the brain or elsewhere in the body, is yet to be determined. (Thank you to Richard Douglass-Chin for this help with this distinction).

Cisgender is a neologism, circulating primarily on the Internet, used as another term for non-trans people. It seems to have been appropriated from molecular biology where cis- is defined as, for example: “characterized by having certain atoms or groups of atoms on the same side of the longitudinal axis of a double bond or on the plane of a ring in a molecule.” (http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/ghr/glossary/cisconfiguration). Shotwell, A. and Trevor Sangrey. (2009). Resisting definition: Gendering through interaction and relational selfhood. Hypatia (24), 3, 56-76, (p74, n17).
words preferred by queer people themselves, e.g. ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ and ‘queer’. Such
discursive moves align with Foucault’s assertion that not only do discourses function as
tools of repression, but they can also be productive (Singer, 2006: 615). Medicalizing
discourses, in turn, by appropriating the terms coined by trans communities, essentially
push back and attempt to exert control over unstable genders and bodies. This push-pull
of discourse exposes a crack in the armour of medicalizing discourses, and provides
opportunities for solidarity movements that focus on the proliferation of multiple genders
that resist pathologizing discourses.

Medicine and psychiatry collude with the law to control trans bodies. Trans
individuals grow up in a society that dictates rules of appropriate gender roles and
performances to the extent that as soon as that person recognizes their gender does not fit
their biological sex, there is pressure to either conform to the gender assigned at birth, or
to change the body to more accurately resemble that of their actual gender. Most
transsexuals prefer the latter option; however, it poses several problems. First, in Ontario
sex reassignment surgery (SRS) and hormone treatment are only available covered by the
Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) after the candidate undergoes two years of living
full-time as the preferred gender without the assistance of hormone therapy or other
interventions. This poses a problem for people who do not easily pass in their preferred
gender. A pre-hormonal, pre-operative transgender individual opting for SRS faces
multiple barriers and potential danger in the workplace, on the street, and in social
settings. S/he also must convince a psychologist of his/her eligibility for sex-
reassignment surgery, an intimidating process that depends to a large extent on the
attitude of the psychologist.
Second, outside of Ontario there are many places in the world, including the US, where SRS is not covered by any health insurance plan. The prohibitive cost of surgery, running into the many thousands of dollars, makes it available only to people with means to pay. Discrimination, transphobia, sexism, workplace issues, mainstream attitudes towards the ‘other’, and social exclusion all impair the ability of a trans individual to pay.

If a trans person is working, transitioning on the job can be a stressful experience. For various reasons, including discrimination and transphobia, not everyone is able to keep their job once the transition begins. For those who do stay, access to washrooms, coming out to colleagues and customers/clients, etc. can pose challenges. Depending on the type of work, workplace policies, the employer, and whether or not the work is unionized, the transition can be painful, frustrating, or relatively supported, though often with contingencies. Heteronormative social relations occurring at the intersections of gender and sexuality are disrupted when a transgender person transitions at work. Narratives of workplace transition experiences help gauge society’s readiness to look beyond the binary. A casual search of Scholars Portal using the key words, transgender, workplace, and Ontario provides evidence that trans individuals face multiple barriers to social and workplace inclusion (see Bolger, 2005). The proliferation of counter discourses in the workplace, for example by compelling the union to organize against discriminatory policies can build solidarity among workers who have a vested interest in improving working conditions for all. A lone trans worker, however, might find the expenditure of emotional energy required to persuade non-trans union members to stand up for transgender workers too dear.
Despite attempts at counter-discourses, medico-legal discourses have real impacts on trans people’s lives. Many are unemployed, face homelessness, are living in poverty, and feel excluded from mainstream society (Feinberg, 2006). Transgender people are overrepresented in prisons, and in the sex industry (Andrews, 2007; Weinberg, Shaver & Williams, 1999). Street involvement and abuse are common, especially in cities where health coverage does not exist. In order to access hormones, a person must obtain a prescription from a physician, who would need to be supportive, and have grappled with the sociological question of the difference between sex and gender. Because gender is a social construction influenced by many factors that have nothing to do with medicine or psychology, we can begin to see where gaps in the health and wellbeing of transgender people lie. Even now there are few gender identity clinics in existence. There is little to no opportunity for medical students to learn about gender identity issues (Kelley, Chou, Dibble & Robertson, 2008). Societal attitudes privilege ‘woman’ and ‘man’ to the exclusion of all others. Anything outside this binary is considered deviant, anomalous, and psychiatrically unstable.

A third problem in the pursuit of sex reassignment surgery is that many people occupy the borderlands of gender. That is, they are neither male nor female, but a mix of both. For these people sex reassignment surgery is not the answer. The argument can be made, moreover, that SRS will neither erase a person’s life history nor their chromosomal composition. In this case de Beauvoir’s statement, ‘one is not born a woman, one becomes one’ is salient. Some transgender people choose to live in this liminal or hybrid

\[4\] And, indeed, the notion that not only gender, but also sex, exists on a continuum (Butler, 1993: 10)
place between genders, feeling no pressure to conform to society’s rules about women and men. In a later chapter we will examine liminality in more depth.

The reach of medicalizing, psychiatric and juridical discourses extends into the social sphere, producing unequal power relations in ways similar to those created through discourses of race, citizenship, class and sexuality. The medico-psychiatric hegemony that rules the power relationships operating through gender and sexuality, enforces taboos on behaviour and identity, so that bodies that do not conform to the dominant white, heterosexual, male/female, middle-class paradigm are aberrant, and are subject to moral and legal controls. Foucault provides us with insights into the ways that power circulates in transgender identity, producing counter-discourses where transgender people’s demands for hormone treatment and SRS converge with pathologizing discourses that declare the trans body to be in need of correction. Of those accessing hormone treatment and top surgery (breast reduction), the participants in my study chose physicians and surgeons willing to bypass the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, thereby engaging the medical system in a counter-discourse that locates more control in the hands of trans people themselves (Singer, 2006). This appropriation of medicalizing discourses to achieve sex reassignment constitutes a resistance whereby oppressive, pathologizing discourses are reclaimed by transgender people and used to achieve a desired outcome. Stepping outside the boundaries of Canada’s national healthcare system, and avoiding intrusive psychiatric interventions, transgender people have engaged in resistance and turned the medicalization of the social phenomenon of transgenderism to their advantage. It must be noted, though, that this right is contingent on ability to pay, a significant barrier to those with no job, or who are underemployed. Trans people are increasingly
organizing fundraising events to help maintain a measure of autonomy in health care access. And, postmodern attitudes towards identity ensure a proliferation of genders along a spectrum, where sex reassignment is not necessarily a goal.

Given the problems presented by medicine, psychiatry and the law’s responses to transgenderism, approaches that recognize gender as a social phenomenon, and that expose the power relations operating when social systems are subjected to these discourses, are needed to address the complexity of gender in a capitalist society. Where there is power there is resistance. The transgender men in this study differentially resist normative gender, race, sexuality and class by utilizing the medical system in their pursuit of gender expressions that fit their worldview, as opposed to heteronormative conceptions of reality. Medicalizing discourses hold sway in the mainstream and are very difficult to oppose. We have seen that there are ways that trans people build solidarity by engaging counter-discourses to achieve some control over their own lives. Ultimately, medicalizing and psychiatric discourses appropriate transgender cultural signs to achieve their goals of control and regulation of trans bodies. While medicalizing discourses can hardly be described as contingent, the ways that power operates in relation to discourse are contingent upon factors such as social relationships, time, and space.

**The Trouble with LGBT**

The term, ‘queer’, has become an umbrella term that signifies anyone who is not normatively heterosexual. It encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, kinky, transgender, transsexual, etc, etc. Used unwisely, it is a derogatory term for gay people, which has been reclaimed so as to weaken and transform its negative meaning into
something powerful. Lesbians and gay men who came out during the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s find it difficult to use the word, because of its violence in that era. Now, a generation of young people have grown up with the benefit of human rights protections and social acceptance that was not known previously. Queer has become a word to envelope transgender people, in similar ways to the insertion of ‘T’ into ‘LGBT’. While I use ‘queer’ to distinguish from the older, more liberal, ‘LGBT’ I wish to emphasize the marginal status of transsexuals and transgender people in many communities that call themselves queer, but who pay only lip service to trans inclusion.⁵

Power

Foucault challenges us to radically rethink popular conceptions of power as being wielded, possessed, and harnessed. Rather than focusing on this limited vision of power as fixed and controllable, he is more interested in the way power circulates (Foucault, 1980: 98). When we begin to think of power as a dynamic, circulating expression of complex social relations that is contingent upon time, place, and relationships, and we accept Foucault’s assertion that “individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (1980: 98) we uncover conceptions of identity that have always existed but which have been obscured by an adherence to narrow understandings of power as existing in a vacuum that separates people into discrete categories like racialized, white, trans, queer, heterosexual, woman, and so on. Identity is not specific and immutable; it shifts with context. It is, however, crucial to move beyond a simplistic acknowledgement that subjects are composed of multiple, interrelated identities, to an understanding that

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⁵ Bisexuals also feel this marginalization. Thanks to Shannon Lane for reminding me of this distinction.
identity exists in a matrix of power relations (Collins, 2000) that is never stable, but is constantly in a state of flux (Foucault, 1980).

This dynamism is produced in large part through the theory of relational positionality (Friedman, 1998). Power operates in different ways according to the situation, the people involved, the relative subject positions of the participants in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. Subaltern identities, moreover, occupying the margins, are frequently tempted to privilege their experiences with power by engaging in exclusionary practices so as to make themselves more viable (see Califia, 2003; Butler, 1993). Streams of feminism that fail to recognize the effects on gender of race, class and sexuality provide a salient example. As Butler notes, it is important for the marginalized subject to be able to claim space for itself, while acknowledging the interrelationships across gender, race, class and sexuality, and at the same time raising questions about its own exclusionary practices so as to produce more complex coalitions (Butler, 1993: 114-115).

The politics and procedures of power operate in subtle and overt ways in transgender lives. Mainstream discourses about gender disregard the trans body completely, so that when a trans individual appears, they are quickly treated as an aberration, an anomalous curio, ‘other’. Queer communities acknowledge transgender members by inserting the letter ‘T’ in the initialism naming the various subject positions comprising queer communities, i.e. LGBT. This method of naming queer communities encounters several problems. First, the use of initials to list the various subject positions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and others leads us down a path of homogeneity. Although the list of identities has expanded to include, for example, intersex individuals, and two-spirit people, in an effort to be more inclusive, the initialism has come to reify the queer
identities it signifies. More complex treatments of identity that take into account the interconnections and interactions of race and class, for example, are not accounted for here. The insistence of mainstream lesbian and gay individuals, organizations and groups on using the initialism precludes any depth of understanding or alliance across boundaries of race and class. ‘LGBT’ plays the dual role of lumping queer identities together under one homogeneous rainbow banner that ignores more complex differentials and interconnections, while simultaneously separating queers into distinct categories according to gender and sexuality, precluding opportunities for coalition-building and solidarity.

Second, because ‘transgender’ is not a category of sexuality, but of gender, and because of the serious problem of transphobia in queer communities, its presence in the initialism smacks of tokenism. Trans subjects constantly have to navigate the minefields of both heterosexual and queer communities. Lesbian feminists have spent years arguing about what constitutes a ‘woman’, engaging in exclusionary practices premised on essentialized notions of gender and sexuality (Califia, 2003). Transgender women who have not undergone SRS have been barred from the largest lesbian music festival in the world, the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (MWMF), because of refusal by the organizers to recognize the difference between sex and gender (Califia, 2003). The primary attendees at MWMF are lesbian feminists, although even so-called post-operative trans women expressed solidarity with the lesbian feminist organizers by declaring that women with penises are not ‘real’ women and therefore should not be allowed on to ‘The Land’ (Koyama, 2005). I say ‘solidarity’ because the main argument for the exclusion of ‘pre-operative’ transgender women was the sense that these women were actually men
who posed a threat to women at the festival. Using this logic, it is the penis that makes the man. Transgender women and lesbian feminists concerned themselves with policing gender across boundaries of class, race and gender by wholly dismissing issues of who is able to access health care, and SRS. Racialized and working-class trans women encounter barriers to SRS because of poverty and stigma, both in Canada and the US. Assuming all transgender people actually desire to travel to the other side of the binary eventually is erroneous, since in this postmodern age there is a proliferation of genders that exist along a continuum. So, there are women who choose not to go through with SRS, even if they had the means. While I will wait until the next chapter to discuss liminality, it is important to note the ways power circulates even in trans and lesbian communities. Some people, who seem to have little power in certain contexts, can exercise it in oppressive ways against others who are more marginalized in different contexts, thereby erasing the power of solidarity that is suggested by the inclusion of ‘T’ in the initialism.

At Michigan there are workshops on various aspects of feminism throughout the festival week, and while lesbians and bisexual women who live lives outside of the mainstream lesbian feminist milieu attend and often challenge the status quo at the festival, in the early- to mid-90s there was little room for a critical analysis of the narrow beliefs about gender circulating at the festival and in the larger lesbian feminist community. Even today very few queer people acknowledge, or even know, that transgender women of colour and butch lesbians led the Stonewall riots, sparking the queer rights movement (Allen, 2008). That history has been erased by a lesbian and gay community that, in the quest for equal rights, has co-opted Stonewall as an exclusively lesbian and gay event, providing the historical platform for demands for the right to
The rights of trans people to access free and effective healthcare, to live without discrimination and violence, to enjoy workplace protection, and freedom from police harassment have been, and are still being, fought by trans people themselves, many of whom are queer and have participated in queer rights organizing (see Gapka & Raj, 2003). So, inclusion in the LGBT list is problematic in that solidarity with trans people is not only missing from many queer contexts, but its power is actively being used by many who profess to be on the cutting edge of feminism, to oppress trans people along lines of gender, class, race, and sexuality.

A third problem with the notion of a cohesive LGBT community is the fact that gender and sexuality are discrete categories, which, while connected, are not the same. The concerns of trans individuals are very different from those of lesbians and gay men. An unfortunate by-product of the insistence on homogeneous classifications of non-heteronormative subjects into one category is that trans identities become marginalized and subsidiary to the dominant discourse of lesbian and gay experience.

Reclaiming Power

Approaches that more effectively address the issues transgender people face are those that have emerged from trans communities themselves. Rather than thinking of trans individuals separately from ‘experts’ in various fields, e.g. medicine, psychiatry, law, sociology, anthropology, it is useful to note that trans people are engaged in all occupations. A glance at contemporary literature reveals many transgender academics writing and theorizing about trans lives (see for example, Stryker & Whittle, 2006).
Transgender Studies is a growing academic field in North American universities. Trans people are occupied in work that spans the hierarchy from highly professional fields such as law and medicine, to working class jobs in factories and the restaurant industry, while there is a growing number of transgender workers in fields directly related to trans experience. The growing presence of outspoken transgender people in medicine, psychiatry and law challenges deeply held beliefs about gender, masculinity and femininity, sexuality, heteronormativity, and what constitutes ‘normal’ human development. When a transgender person with credentials in a respected field speaks about transgender experience, power relations shift slightly, opening up avenues of solidarity. Trans people are empowered to speak up to their physician, lawyer, union, or employer. While solidarity across class, race, and sexuality in transgender communities is becoming stronger, the question of coming out is more complex than simply having a trans activist with social and financial capital in one’s community. Class and racial disparities make it difficult for many trans people living in poverty to overcome barriers to employment, responsive healthcare, income, housing and social supports; however, the visibility of trans people working to improve access to effective health care and employment protections goes far in resisting pathologizing and criminalizing discourses that keep us in positions of vulnerability and disempowerment. Solidarity, built through coalitions of trans people working together across differences of race, class, and sexuality to demand human rights protections as well as access to social services, housing, and health care strengthens the movement to reconceptualize normative notions of gender.

6 E.g. Toronto’s Sherbourne Health Clinic focuses primarily on queer and transgender clients. Located at URL: http://www.sherbourne.on.ca/
Synopsis

Chapter two will outline my social location as a mixed-race transgender man. I am an insider, who will incorporate my own perspectives and standpoints into the analysis of solidarity and borderlands. While my experiences intersect with those of my participants, I endeavour to be aware of the power differential operating in the process of writing an academic thesis focused on people’s intimate experiences of racism, transphobia and sexism, as well as their moments of connection and solidarity. I will discuss methodological issues, specifically with regard to standpoint, autobiography and narrative.

In chapter three I explore the theories and meanings derived from the notions of borderlands and liminality so as to situate my analysis in the context of poststructuralist understandings of identity as fluid, unstable, and dependent on relationships, time and space. I take the opportunity to contextually introduce the participants, and move into a discussion of historical and contemporary meanings of solidarity. Queer communities ostensibly provide a niche for trans identities to flourish and feel safe, but this perception is not often operationalized within actual LGBT communities on the ground. I will discuss the contested meanings of community as defined in LGBT circles. From there I produce an overview of the debated meanings of race, racism and racialization, and offer a brief analysis of class, finally ending on the difficulties associated with building solidarity in and out of the borderlands.

Chapter four centres on the research I conducted with five participants, examining the ways solidarity does and does not work in their lives. I try to keep in mind the multiple,
shifting, and relational intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality and the ways these axes of power operate to facilitate or create barriers to solidarity.

An examination of some of the daily experiences of five racialized transgender men provides a platform for practical application of the notion of the contingencies of identity, the way power operates, and the possibilities for solidarity and community emerging out of the margins. It will be necessary first to present my standpoint as researcher and participant.
My Social Location

Race and class are just two, co-constituted, categories that intersect with gender and sexuality in the production of social actors. The ways they operate in our lives vary with time and context. Transgender people occupy the margins because of regulatory discourses that police gender (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1995). But it is important not to forget that these identities are also composed of other social categories that influence how they operate in the world. I am a racialized transgender person. While I refer to myself as ‘he’ in my social life, I am ‘she’ in my workplace. I have brown skin, and grew intimate with the sting of racism, in a small town in Scotland. My biological father is South Asian, although I have never met him. I was raised by a single white mother, a nurse whose salary after forty years was equal to mine after only a few years of working in social services. My sister and I shared a small bedroom until I left at eighteen. We lived in social housing, and received free school lunches, based on our relative poverty, for a time during high school. My mother was one of two divorced women I knew during my entire school career. My hometown is a popular day-trip destination due to its two attractive beaches and several golf courses within a five-mile radius. The majority of residents are upper middle class, and there are many large, old houses and several newer housing developments. The area where I lived was called ‘the housing scheme’, which carries a negative, class-based signifier. A typical social housing complex, all the houses are

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7 Nursing salaries in the UK at the time of my mother’s retirement ten years ago were relatively lower than nursing salaries in Canada, while the cost of living was then and is now higher in the UK compared to Canada.
grouped together far away from shops and services. The population of the ‘scheme’ is composed almost entirely of working-class, settled living families.\textsuperscript{8}

My mother was a professional and my father (non-biological), who sent a small amount of child support each month, was occupied in an elite occupation, although he did not live with us. While we were relatively poor, my grandparents lived in a big house by the beach and were quite well off. I spent many hours with my grandparents and even lived there for a time when my sister and I were having difficulties. So, although we had little money and lived in subsidized housing, I was raised middle class.

Being the only racialized person in the town cast me as ‘other’ from the first day of school. Whenever my sister and I were together there would inevitably be intrusive and presumptuous questions about our relationship: “Were you adopted?” “Why are you brown and your sister white?”\textsuperscript{9} Shortly after I started school, from age five, I experienced racist name-calling, violence and threats, along with the unabated curiosity about my origins. Because race played such a large part in my life, I thought little about class. Although I was not conscious of it at the time, my location in the borders of race – because of my mixed-race heritage and my status as the only brown-skinned person in my family – was where I felt most comfortable. From an early age it was clear that I did not easily fit into hegemonic subject positions. I was a mixed-race tomboy whose class identity was as fluid as those of gender and race. In primary school my best friend was a

\textsuperscript{8} See Bettie, 2003, p. 13 for a definition of ‘settled living’ and ‘hard living’.

\textsuperscript{9} My mother, although she always tried to protect me as much as possible, would have suffered from this ‘othering’ as well, since her supposed ‘transgression’ could not be hidden as it is for many women who have children with men they are not married to. Thank you to Elizabeth Beckett for drawing my attention to this connection.
tomboy like me, although by the time I entered high school I reluctantly (and temporarily) attempted to hide my masculine orientation so as to fit in. I had one friend whose mother was divorced and was remarried. She had a cousin who was black. In my tomboy friend and in the family of my high school friend I found some measure of solidarity; at least acceptance. It was only upon leaving the town, at eighteen, that I began the journey to discover my authentic self and travelled the meandering pathways to various havens of solidarity.

My childhood was constituted by contradictions: I was brown, yet I was living a life accompanied by little exposure to that part of my cultural heritage; I was middle class, yet I lived in a working-class neighbourhood, and at school I was surrounded by daughters and sons of wealthy businessmen; I was also, throughout my childhood, struggling with the feeling that I was a boy. I expressed this variously by avoiding feminine clothing as much as possible, and by occasionally risking exchanging the requisite school uniform for jeans; as a teen I developed crushes on women, but the then adolescent agents of the heterosexual regime strictly enforced the taboo against homosexuality, with the result that no one who was queer was out of the closet until years after graduation.

**Methods**

**Standpoint**

Racialized transgender people can observe the power relations at work in their immediate environments by means of an outsider-within standpoint. By using feminist standpoint theory and drawing on the ideas of poststructuralism I analyze ways gender,
race, class, and sexuality intersect in the lives of racialized transmen. Standpoint theory is a device in sociology that acknowledges individual agency and privileges the actual, everyday experiences of sociological subjects rather than analyzing experiences using objective criteria.

The fulcrum of a sociology for women is the standpoint of the subject. A sociology for women preserves the presence of subjects as knowers and as actors. It does not transform subjects into the objects of study or make use of conceptual devices for eliminating the active presence of subjects. Its methods of thinking and its analytic procedures must preserve the presence of the active and experiencing subject (Smith, 1987: 105).

The standpoint of racialized transgender men is critical to my research. Only by reading from and interpreting the standpoints of the participants can we gain insight into life in the borderlands, and learn about the multiple contingencies, contradictions, and negotiations that racialized transgender men must navigate to survive.

Outsiders-within occupy the margins, while simultaneously operating within mainstream spaces and disciplines (Collins, 1986: S15). Collins provides the example of the black domestic worker who is privy to the inner workings of the white family she works for, while maintaining her outsider status. From that standpoint, she is able to recognize the contradictions at play in the middle-class white woman’s lived reality relative to her husband (Collins, 2000: 15). Racialized trans men with an outsider-within standpoint can observe the workings of heteronormative, white, middle-class communities and notice patterns and trends that are invisible to group-members (Collins, 1986: S15). Adopting Smith’s definition, my research and analysis consistently refer back to the subject, whose unique standpoint on the margins, and in the space ‘in between’, provides a useful lens through which to view the intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality. Transgender men were raised as girls and, in most cases, lived much
of their adult lives as women, introducing a rich complex of standpoints from which the racialized trans man navigates the world. I hope my own social location in the borderlands of identity, along with those of my research participants help to shed light on a branch of discourse that has too often been overlooked in the clamour to theorize, from mainstream locations, trans subject positions vis-à-vis gender and sexuality.

It is poststructuralism from which ideas about the fragmentation and contingent nature of identity emerge. “‘[I]dentity’ is an effect of discursive practices” (Butler, 1990: 24) and is therefore socially constructed: a person is constituted by a collection of experiences, standpoints, relationships; there is no essential being prior to language and discourse (Butler, 1990). My approach to transgender subjectivity aligns with the claims of poststructuralism, which in turn aligns with the principles of standpoint theory.

Approaching my research through a lens of performativity will allow me to access the contingent, intersecting nature of identity. Performativity refers to the ways that certain identities do not exist independent of their outward expressions (Butler, 1990: 34). Nietzsche said: “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything” (1969, cited in Butler, 1990: 34). So, gender, race and class are socially constructed categories that are performed by social actors. Performance refers to agency (Bettie, 2003: 52), so a FTM might consciously perform masculinity in an attempt to pass. It enables us to see the ways that other social categories intersect with gender to form gender futures that may or may not be correlated with biological sex (Bettie, 2003: 192). Performance is strengthened by its relationship with performativity, which refers to the unconscious displays of gender (or
class) that are the consequence of hegemonic systems of inequality and hierarchy (Bettie, 2003: 52).

**Multiple Autobiographical Narratives**

My aim was to capture through multiple narratives the daily experiences of racialized transgender men in a way that would preserve some of the feelings aroused by a given experience. I asked participants to carry an audio recorder with them for a week, recording feelings, reactions, stories from their lived experience. I opted for this mode because I wanted something more emotionally immediate than interviews recalling events that happened some time before. Autobiography relays first-person accounts of personal events, while also providing the reader insight into the motivations, reactions, and feelings of the writer.

While science creates the paradigms that guide our construction of some version of nature…it is the culture in a more loosely defined sense that provides the formulae for the construction of lives. And one of the principal instruments by which the culture does so is through its narrative forms, its genres, its modes of ‘packaging’ forms of life. We can get away from science (somewhat) but there is no escaping the culture: it is us (Bruner, 1995).

Racialized transgender men’s lives are constituted by science and culture. Transgender people have a complex relationship with science, for, in many cases, science holds the key to our transition to our self, while at the same time it acts in response to cultural discourses of appropriate gender performances, acceptable bodies, and cultural prescriptions about masculinity and femininity. In many ways science and culture converge in transgender autobiography to produce narratives that belie the claim of Bruner’s statement. If the culture is us, as he claims, the cultural life of the racialized transgender man is cut through with scientific discourses that are produced by cultural mores. Trans narratives can get away from science (somewhat) by refusing to
scientifically conform our bodies to the gender binary, but in the end we cannot escape it, since in trans lives culture incorporates scientific constructions of reality.

“A life is created or constructed by the act of autobiography. It is a way of construing experience – and of reconstruing and of reconstruing it until our breath or our pen fails us… Like all forms of interpretation, life construal is subject to our intentions, to the interpretive conventions available to us, and to the meaning imposed upon us by the usages of our culture and language” (Bruner, 1995). By choosing multiple autobiographical narratives, I wanted to access the cultural histories of trans lives in a moment in time against a backdrop of pathologizing discourses that would write our histories in ways that do not resonate. The concept of relational positionality helps determine the content of the narratives at the moment of writing or speaking them, as well as in the reading and interpretation. To discover the meaning of any given interaction or narrative, it is useful to ask questions, such as, where did the moment occur? Who was involved in the interactions? What was the context? And, how do I relate this story to my own experience? What is my standpoint as the reader? What is the context? One participant relays the story of how he went to the funeral of a family friend in Barbados in December 2009. It occurred at his father’s church, next door to the girls’ school the participant, Sea Dog, attended as a child. He walks along the same route he took to school many years ago and reflects upon the strange path his life has taken. When he pays his condolences on behalf of his father, he feels more like a son than ever before, and he notes the power of ritual to impact his standpoint at this moment. He is the male

10 All participant names have been changed.
representative of the family at a funeral of a man he knew and last saw as a girl. His narrative is constructed in a particular moment in his life history and while he notes that he is standing in this church while memories of over thirty years come flooding back, he wonders if anyone who knew him as a young girl will recognize him now (Sea Dog, 2009). In attending the funeral, an unexpected event that returns him to his childhood school and church, and writing about it later that day, Sea Dog constructs his life in the act of writing his feelings and memories down (Bruner, 1995).

Of five participants, two carried the recorder and fulfilled the request. Three others decided they would prefer to write their journal entries, rather than speaking them into the recorder. I agreed to this suggestion, since the only change was the medium, not the method, although upon reflection, discussed below, I decided that speaking and writing are different and the written narratives were likely impacted by a lack of spontaneity. One participant did not write or record, but participated in the subsequent focus group.

After the journal entries and recordings were completed, I invited all the participants to a focus group to further explore and share with each other their experiences of being racialized and transgender. My intention with the focus group was to drill deeper into the autobiographies, asking the participants to explore and reflect upon their lived experiences, simultaneously finding connection and points of divergence. The focus group was split into three events. Because of scheduling and geographic difficulties, I hosted one focus group with three participants, including me. The conversation was useful, but because of the small number and my role as facilitator, it became more like an interview than a discussion. One participant answered the focus group questions in writing. Another chose not participate in the focus group, even after repeated phone calls
and emails. The last participant answered the focus group questions in a telephone conversation with me, which I recorded.

The methods did not unfold in the way I had hoped. While the participants expressed excitement about the project, and were very interested in participating, some of them were perhaps intimidated by the prospect of speaking into a recorder, or simply felt more comfortable writing journal entries. Journals are written regularly and record daily events, thoughts and reflections. They are also used as a way of sorting through difficult feelings, complicated relationships, and can be used as problem-solving devices (Bush, 1999). “The keeping of a journal provided the educator with an opportunity to connect thoughts, feeling and action and relate them to what was happening now, as opposed to writing about what has already happened” (Mesirow et al, 1991, cited in Bush, 1999). While I was primarily interested in opportunities for in-the-moment journalling through speaking, where pulling out a paper and pen might have posed a barrier in certain contexts, such as a bar, or on the street, writing in a journal later the same day ultimately achieved the desired outcome, while compelling me to be flexible.

Speaking into a recorder relays the spontaneous, authentic, unfiltered voice. A recording also conveys mood, tone, and the subtleties that disappear with the colder, more distant written word. Recordings cannot be easily edited, polished, or cleaned up to make them acceptable to the researcher. These issues are double-edged. On the one hand I recognized the potential for a richness of material I would get, precisely because of the raw, unfiltered, unedited quality of spoken word. I believed my analysis would benefit from the emotional edge achieved in speaking. On the other hand, the very prospect of speaking without an opportunity to reflect, edit and censor certain feelings and words
may have been too dangerous for these participants, who are used to the need to protect themselves from intrusive inquiries about their intimate lives. Vulnerability is no stranger to transgender people. The hyper-vigilance that accompanies a trans man’s daily life experience is difficult to let go of completely. The danger of being ‘discovered’ is a reality all trans people live with, even those who are out. Speaking about our lives and handing those raw, emotionally charged words over to a relative stranger, even one who is also transgender, does not sit well with everyone. It is also plausible that some people are simply not comfortable speaking outside of the context of a conversation. Who does not recall a moment in our lives when we first hear our own voice in a recording? It is unsettling. It somehow does not sound like us. And as soon as we are asked to speak without hearing a response to our words, we awkwardly cast around, wondering what to say, our mind blank, the listener judgmental.

I can only speculate about the reasons why four of my participants elected to write instead of record, but I believe the thesis is not impoverished by this turn of events. If I had an opportunity to do it over again, I would be more explicit in the recruitment stage about my intention of using the audio recorder, and would endeavour to elicit agreement from potential participants before embarking on the data collection. It should be emphasized that my participants were very eager to help and were very generous with their time and energy, and for that I am grateful. Although the means did not unfold the way I had originally envisioned, the end results are very useful and have provided a richness that I expected from the recordings.

Another possible limitation of the research is the small sample size. I wrote to an acquaintance, asking him if he would like to participate. He agreed and offered to help
with recruitment by sending emails among his friends. This snowball sampling method is useful when working with a population such as racialized transgender men, because of the hiddenness of many transgender people, and because racialized trans men are fewer in number than their white counterparts. I used participants from three cities in Southern Ontario. Three were recruited by means of the snowball sampling method. The sample is diverse in some ways and uniform in others. All the participants are mixed race. Four have one white parent; of those four, two have a black parent each, although one of these men was adopted by a white family. Another one of the four with white parents has also a Chinese parent, and the other has a South Asian parent. Of the remaining two participants, both are from the Antilles. One, from Trinidad, has a mixed-race Chinese parent and a black Trinidadian parent, and the other, who was born in Barbados, has parents whose race is a mix of many ethnicities that ended up in the Antilles because of slavery and colonialism. All are involved, or have been involved in some way in the queer community, as activists, former lesbians, gay men and to find solidarity. All the participants are working in professional occupations, except one who is completing a graduate degree. Because I am interested in the ways social positions intersect in individuals and communities, analysis around ethnicity, race and racism cannot be considered in isolation from other social categories, such as class. The small sample size, the size of the FTM community in Southern Ontario and the snowball sampling all have meant that there is little to no diversity in terms of social class in my sample. This is a deficit that needs to be addressed in future research. Taking this limitation into account, I will, however, provide some analysis regarding class based on the opinions of some of
the participants, and on my reading and analysis of the connections among class, race, gender and sexuality.

It is impossible to generalize to the entire racialized trans community based on this study, and that was never my intention. I wish to explore some of the ways racialized transgender men navigate the terrain that exists in the borderlands of gender, race, sexuality and class. What are the possibilities for solidarity in the borderlands? The small sample size and the vastness of the topic preclude a thorough analysis of the workings of power and solidarity in trans lives. Because of the dearth of writing on this topic in the literature, however, this thesis will give insight into some of the issues trans men face, while providing a basis for further research.
Transborder Solidarity

Racialized transgender men live in the borderlands where gender, race, sexuality and class are fluid categories crossing over and under each other to form non-fixed identities contingent upon relationships, time, and space. My participants are all mixed-race, have various ways of conceptualizing their gender, express their sexuality in fluid ways related, and unrelated, to gender, and recognize the links among class, race, gender and sexuality. In this chapter I explore what it means to occupy the borderlands, the marginal, othered space where questions of citizenship and belonging are contingent upon interconnections and solidarity.

Borderlands/Liminality

One way of perceiving hierarchies of power in people’s lives is to look at the borderlands, the liminal space, the in-between. The borderlands is a geographic space (commonly used to refer to the border between Mexico and the US) occupied by migrant workers and Chicanos working for low pay in a stolen land, a place “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 25). This description also evokes the emotional and political facets of the borderlands. Borders are lines set up to divide people. It is “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 25), populated by “los atravesados...: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead: in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’” (2007: 25).
The concept of borderlands is closely connected to the notion of liminality. The anthropologist, Victor Turner wrote in 1969 about his experiences conducting fieldwork with a tribal culture, the Ndembu in northern Zambia. His book, *The Ritual Process* (1969) outlined his particular interest in the religious rituals and practices of the Ndembu. He takes Arnold van Gennep’s (1909) definition of *rites de passage*: “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age” (van Gennep, 1909, cited in Turner, 1995). All rites of passage are constituted by three phases: “separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying ‘threshold’ in Latin), and aggregation” (Turner, 1995).

The first phase...comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual...either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions...or from both. During the intervening ‘liminal’ period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the ‘passenger) are ambiguous; he (*sic*) passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated (Turner, 1995: 94-95).

The ritual process provides a useful tool for thinking about racialized transgender subjects and for locating my participants in the social context. On the surface we can look at each phase in terms of the gender transition. The first phase, separation, locates the trans man outside of hegemonic gender norms, a female subject separate from other women and girls. Once the decision has been made to align one’s physiology and social location with the preferred gender, the trans man enters the liminal, or borderlands phase, where he may linger for a time, depending on his relationship to the binary conception of gender. The third phase theoretically places the transformed individual securely in masculinity, living as a man. By using the concept of liminality and the metaphor of ritual we can problematize the notion of binary gender, and extend the analysis to race, sexuality and class.
The essence of liminality is ambiguity (Turner, 1995: 95). “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, 1995: 95). The transitioning transgender man occupies this “betwixt and between” place, a space that Anzaldúa, characterizes as “vague and undetermined” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 25). During the first few months of the physical transition, the person literally becomes ambiguous. Physiological changes are taking place: facial hair growth, voice-deepening, increase in skeletal and muscle mass, genital changes, increased sex drive. More and more, people see the trans man as male, but confusion reigns. In my own experience, many people refer to me as ‘sir’ or ‘buddy’, while a few still call me ‘ma’am’ or refer to me with feminine pronouns. Transgender men must constantly negotiate their place in social space, never knowing how they will be regarded by the mainstream. Because gender is so policed in our culture, so tied up with power, and has therefore rendered transgressive gender expressions difficult to talk about, the transgender man’s experience is subject to the set of external exclusions that produce discourse: taboo; the distinction between the mad and the sane; and the distinction between true and false (Mills, 2003: 58). The hegemonic reign of the gender binary and the relationship of power to the subject positions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ make the liminal being a subject of taboo. He takes a risk living in the threshold, borderlands space that is liminality, raising unsettling questions about the stability of gender. The concept of taboo is an exclusionary device intended to maintain hegemony and to keep power in the hands of the powerful. Declaring the taboo, or perverse, nature of anything that lies outside of feminine and masculine, while disregarding the perspective of trans

11 Because my study focuses on transgender men, I will use male pronouns in this section.
subjects on their own gender identity, and maintaining the hegemony of medico-legal experts in deciding the truth of gender, produces a discourse that excludes those who challenge heteronormative conceptualizations of gender.

But the mere existence of liminal entities questions the legitimacy of the binary and allows us to view our social structure through a postmodern lens that imagines a plurality of subject positions in terms not only of gender, but also race, sexuality and class. Some trans men, like Nesta and me, occupy liminal space willingly. Nesta is trying to get pregnant and describes himself as transgender, rather than as a man per se, although of his sexual orientation he states he is a gay male. He is in the threshold space. He could choose to cross the threshold, into a new, masculine space, and once he has given birth he may well choose to do so, but he may also linger in the borderlands, a political choice, preferring to challenge people’s assumptions about gender. His identity as a mixed-race, black, trans, soon-to-be-pregnant, gay man forces those with whom he comes into contact to reassess their understandings of identity, the nature of being, and the way the world works. Of liminality Turner theorizes:

What is interesting about liminal phenomena…is the blend they offer of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship… It is as though there are here two major ‘models’ for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of a society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men (sic) in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’. The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured…and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals… (Turner, 1995: 96)

Nesta intentionally occupies this liminal, transitory space. It is not a concrete place where he will always be safe, like a cocoon, or a monastery, but rather it is a sacred state of being where the multiple, contingent and shifting nature of human existence is normative.
Contextualized Introductions

Sea Dog is Nesta’s partner. He works for a union as a grievance officer, and is attuned to the ways that race, class and gender intersect in his own and others’ lives. He, too, locates in the borderlands, although when asked, he identifies as male. He is gay, like Nesta, and is also mixed race. His family all maintain a code of silence around gender in their interactions with him. He is not stealth at his workplace, but he suggests that there are colleagues who are unaware of his transness. He points out that he is the only person of colour in the office, and this is surprising to him, especially since it is a union where there is much rhetoric about equity and human rights. On a recent trip to his hometown in Barbados, Nesta and he contended with confusion on the part of the local people they encountered. One day they were greeted by a man who said, ‘hey skipper’, and the next the same man addressed them by saying, ‘hey girls’. Sea Dog commented in his journal about the decisions he and Nesta made about swimming and being on the beach. Even though they have both had top surgery, they did not feel comfortable enough to swim without wearing tank tops. In Canada they feel more comfortable being out about their trans identity, even with its challenges, but Barbados is uncharted territory, and Sea Dog was aware of the local culture and mores prohibiting overt gender transgressions. Although Sea Dog did not comment on the fact that being away from Barbados for twenty years would make him appear more Canadian than Bajan, it can be assumed that he and Nesta would have been seen somewhat as outsiders, affiliated with whiteness. In-your-face non-normative gender performances, usually confined to the spectacle of ‘drag’ at a local nightclub, might have met with anger. As it was, they had a pleasant holiday, although there were times when the people’s confusion was worrying. Sea Dog’s gender
performance shifted according to the context, his subject position malleable to keep him safe.

Colin is a queer classical musician, who is out to the people who knew him pre-transition. Those people he has encountered in the intervening eight years since he started hormones all believe him to be a man. Working in the classical music world, which is dominated by white, middle and upper middle class players and audiences, Colin challenges people’s assumptions about class by wearing multiple tattoos, dressing uniformly in black and keeping his hair in a Mohawk style. He was raised by a Chinese mother and Hungarian father, in a middle class neighbourhood, and makes his living teaching and performing. Because he locates in the middle classes, he possesses the social capital and confidence to cause cognitive dissonance with audiences, raising questions about who gets to access European music. His class performance locates him in the borderlands. He does not consider race to have much bearing on his life in any negative way. Although he is clearly mixed race, he does not relate any experiences of racism in his interview with me. He is in a relationship with a woman, and finds his community among queers. His sexuality is fluid: he enjoys sexual encounters with men, but has relationships with women, many of whom identify as lesbians. Even though he is stealth to many people in the music world, he feels much support from those who knew him before he began transitioning. His gender identity, contingent upon relationships and context, and mixed with his queer sexuality and class transgressions, make the borderlands home for Colin.

My own experience in the world is constituted by liminality: my earliest memories have to do with being ‘other’, of growing up brown in a white context; my parents were
divorced and my mother, sister and I were relatively poor, while my father lived in Canada (an exotic place to my classmates and me) and was a surgeon. So my summers were spent ironically living an upper middle-class lifestyle; I experienced myself as a boy who looked like a girl; and my sexuality was oriented towards women. I have always occupied the liminal, threshold space and it is all I recognize as my own. I live however, in the first social structure defined by Turner above, with concrete differentiations and hierarchies of power. So, although Nesta and I may prefer the dynamism of liminality, and the potential for political transformation, we are very aware of the relative dangers lurking at the edges of such an unstable realm, where ‘misfits’ overtly challenge hegemonic power relations, and are duly punished for their transgressive behaviour and presentation.

Some of the participants locate, perhaps for this reason, in the binary. Jason and James in particular identify as men, and live stealth most of the time. Jason expressed several times in his journal his worry about being ‘discovered’. He says, “As a man I’m uncomfortable too. But it’s a different discomfort. It’s the fear of being busted.” He is a university professor. He used to wear a prosthesis all the time, but it was so uncomfortable, he rarely wears it now. So now he has the constant worry when he is teaching a class of being discovered without a penis. He would like to get ‘the operation’\textsuperscript{12} if only his partner would agree, which she will not. “I wouldn’t care if it meant I had to take a big chunk of my arm or calf to do it. I’d rather look like a guy with some kind of injury than a freak without a penis.” He is very aware of the ways society

\textsuperscript{12} phalloplasty – a penis fabricated from a swath of skin removed from elsewhere on his body.
polices gender. He does not want people to know he used to be a woman, and he is afraid of men. He works at blending in with other men, self-consciously regulating his emotions, and monitoring his reactions to situations. “It’s hard being a man among men. You have to be tougher, seem smarter, more glib, show your emotions less. Way less. Don’t laugh too much. Don’t be too gentle.” Even though Jason yearns to be a regular guy, he observes the binary from a certain distance, never being able to assimilate it completely because of his history growing up female and living the first twenty years of his adult life as a lesbian feminist. Like all my participants, he is mixed race. His mother is Chinese and his father black. He describes his mother as hating him when he was a child and before he transitioned. As a girl and young woman he presented as black. Jason thinks he reminded her of his father, whom she did not respect. As a man he looks more Asian. “’You look like a Chinese boy’”, his mother says to him now. “She looks into my eyes and I see a great love there that I never saw before.” He is unsure why his mother loves him so much now, when she hated him so vehemently before. He wonders if it is because he is now the son she thought he was before he was born, or perhaps it is because she believes he now looks Chinese like her. Whatever the reason, Jason occupies the borderlands. His racial presentation and his gender performance are tied together, operating in fluid and interconnected ways. Sometimes people see him as Black, sometimes as Asian. Racist stereotyping links black men with criminality. Jason has often been followed around late-night drug stores by security guards, a phenomenon that links race with class. He has been with the same female partner for over twenty years, so his sexuality (and hers) has transitioned also. Where once he was in a lesbian relationship, he
is now, on the surface at least, heterosexual. Succeed as he might at living within the binary, he will always at once occupy the borderlands.

James, too, is stealth. He is mixed race and was adopted by a white family. He dealt with racism growing up, defending himself against his bullies. He played with the boys, until, around puberty, when they discovered that girls are not the same as boys, they turned on him. The boys no longer wanted to play with him, and his bullies were suddenly bigger than him; he could no longer settle his own scores, nor could he run fast enough to get away from them. So he dropped out of school early. Race and gender worked together to locate James in the borderlands. He, like Jason, is constantly vigilant about his gender identity. In his journal he is preoccupied with the threat of discovery. He is a graduate student, and for several days in a row he wonders almost obsessively if any of his male classmates will notice he always uses the stall in the washroom. This refrain is jarring, forcing the reader to think about the constant negotiations and inordinate energy required to pass as a man in a world that is hostile to gender transgressors. So, while James is successfully passing at school, like Jason, he is constantly on guard, the threat of exposure never far away. He is a reluctant resident of the borderlands.

A graduate student, James, because of racism and struggles with gender identity at school, took twenty years to fulfil his academic aspirations. His premature exit from high school, and the fact he is black, located him in a working class context. Racism, policing of gender, and existential anxieties all colluded to determine his class position. I do not know what James’ working life was like until now, but experience tells me that his othered identity, compounded by his lack of a high school diploma, would have made it challenging to make ends meet. Now that he is in graduate school, his class location is
shifting, producing yet another layer in the complex web of interconnectedness, fluidity and liminality that comprise the idiosyncratic borderlands.

Nesta is a professional, working in the arts, and an activist, committed to helping improve the lives of people who are marginalized. He locates firmly in the borderlands, his race, gender, sexuality, and class interweaving in complex, fluid ways. His racialized identity, struggles at work and in the queer community, and political activism intersect in ways that are at once othering and liberating. He has chosen not to hide; indeed, he is outspoken about being transgender, plays with his gender performance in challenging ways (for example, by wearing his dreadlocked hair long, and going off hormones in order to get pregnant), and stands up for those with less social capital than him. But his struggles and the danger he faces as a trans man are the same as those experienced by Jason and James. Whether or not someone is stealth, makes no difference in a world that has very inflexible ideas about gender. Nesta’s experience in the borderlands is fraught with complexity and contradictions, aligning him with James and Jason, even though they manage their otherness from different vantage points.

It is not surprising that many transgender people choose to locate as much as possible in the binary. The stresses of constantly living in a state of hyper-vigilance for one’s safety and peace can take its toll. There is no point characterizing those who unreservedly live in the binary as weak or apolitical, because there is no fixed division between the binary and the borderlands. Transgender subjects travel along all axes according to context. My point is to simply highlight the multiple contingencies, considerations, fragilities and iterations at work in identity formation.
To occupy the borderlands is to discover and expose new ways of negotiating multiple subject positions. A transgender person who affiliates completely with neither gender in the binary, or a mixed race person who finds solidarity in the racial/ethnic community that is signified by their skin colour, might find creative potential in forging new sites of connection, interaction and politicization in the world (Friedman, 1998: 68). Some people living in the space in-between experience this sense of ‘no place’ in negative ways, almost like ‘falling through the cracks’ rather than standing on a bridge (Collins, 1986: S15). I hope to illuminate the possibilities for solidarity in hybridity, rather than dwelling on forces that will constrain it.

**Solidarity**

The notion of solidarity weaves a thread through this thesis. I am interested in ways that racialized trans men negotiate community, given their affiliations with diverse communities and identities that have demonstrated incapacity or unwillingness to recognize their multifarious subject positions. In other words, what kinds of concessions, sacrifices and negotiations does life in the borderlands demand of a black trans man? If he, for example, passes as a man of colour, what does this do to his conceptions of himself as a man? How does gender intersect with race in that scenario? What does male privilege look like in a racialized man who has a vagina? Who are his friends, his confidantes, and champions? What does male privilege look like in a racialized transman located in a racialized community?

These questions are complex, and while there are no hard and fast answers, they flag for us the multiple and interconnected factors a racialized transgender man must take into
account in locating solidarity in the borderlands. Navigating workplaces, relationships, family and social life, a trans man is constantly evaluating potential allies, and likely enemies.

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines solidarity thus: “n. unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest” (2008). Emile Durkheim’s definition of solidarity is layered according to history. Mechanical solidarity has to do with similarities of community members and homogeneity, and is most often associated with traditional, pre-industrial societies, whose smaller populations facilitated social cohesion (Durkheim, 1984: 84-85). Organic solidarity is what exists in industrial societies and has more to do with human interdependence and the division of labour, where societies only function effectively when everyone knows and performs their specific task while relying on each other (Durkheim, 1984: 85). Mechanical solidarity relies on the assumption that everyone is the same, is working towards the same goal and shares similar values. Organic solidarity does not so much require homogeneity, but rather recognition that each member of a community or a society is a cog in the machine; for the machine to function effectively, each person has a role (Durkheim, 1984: 84-85). In a society constituted by disparities in access to health care, income, and social capital, and which values its constituents according to their adherence to white, middle-class, heterosexual values, the achievement of solidarity is not as simple as this model suggests. In the borderlands, where identities that do not fit the hegemony collide and interconnect, it is plausible that organic solidarity might thrive in a space that is occupied by the ‘other’. As we will see, solidarity is a contingent state that is not fixed, and depends on such factors as relationships, time, and space to occur.
Lesley Gill commented recently that the concept of solidarity has been neglected in academia. Most anthropologists who have written about it have conceived of it in terms of ethics in research than on the political aspects, such as tactics and organizing (2009). She defines it in terms of class struggle, but extends her conception of it beyond Marxism to include other kinds of relationships and affiliations.

*Solidarity* refers to a horizontal, class-based relationship that extends beyond workers of one neighbourhood or one nationality to other working people…and it requires that these people recognize their common interests…under an exploitative, capitalist system…Solidarity is thus the basis of collective action…[T]he concept of “solidarity” may [also] encompass other kinds of relationships and alliances (Gill, 2009).

Relationships among members of the same group and among collectives are integral to building solidarity. Historical international worker solidarity movements gave rise to anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist organizing across borders and classes, especially amongst Cuban revolutionaries, Central American pro-democracy freedom fighters, and US leftists and anarchists, who developed strategies for organizing against racism at home (Gill, 2009). Enduring relationships across borders were formed, although social inequities in the US along axes of gender and sexuality were reinforced, raising difficult questions about organizing and building solidary relationships through intersections of identity and unequal power relations (Gill, 2009). This dilemma touches on an issue raised by my research, which exposes the contingent nature of solidarity in racialized transgender men’s lives. The achievement of solidarity is contingent upon a commitment to addressing unequal power relations exposed by acknowledging the complex constitution of identity, so that treatments of transgender people’s identities are not reduced to superficial and siloed analyses of gender and sexuality. The racialized transgender man experiences oppression related to the ways that race and class intersect
with each other, and with gender and sexuality to form an identity that is also constantly shifting in relation to others, time, and place. The concept of solidarity is a useful tool for challenging those living on the margins to look to each other, form relationships and address multiple, intersecting oppressions.

When I spoke with my participants about how they define solidarity they spoke about standing in unity with other racialized trans men, queer people, lesbians, women, racialized people and other marginalized communities and individuals. Problematizing homogeneity, the participants recognized the relational dimensions of solidarity. For example, one participant is volunteering at a deaf queer conference this year; another is active in the prison abolitionist movement; and another works to help facilitate inclusion of queers from diverse backgrounds in his local queer community. Standing with others on a similar platform of inclusion, respect for difference, and in the fight against racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia and heterosexism, the participants have aligned themselves with others who are not necessarily transgender, but who have similar concerns in an advanced capitalist society where equity and inclusion are based on material wealth and social capital. Taking Durkheim’s definition of organic solidarity into this context, we can consider solidarity to be something that occurs among individuals working towards a common goal of peace and unity. Hence, it is not a hierarchical relationship where some people in more powerful positions bestow solidarity and support onto others. It is also important to note the emphasis on interdependence across difference as opposed to solidarity based on sameness. In the borderlands, that liminal space in-between, reside transgender subjects dwelling with other marginalized entities, whose identities are constituted by multiplicity (Anzaldúa, 2007).
Relational positionality, borderlands/liminality and intersectionality find salience in this definition of solidarity. The notion of interdependence without a reliance on homogeneous affiliations provides us with a sense of the potential of solidarity. LGBT groups, specifically in schools and universities, have adopted the notion of ‘alliance’ in an effort to build solidarity amongst students, faculty and staff of all sexual orientations and gender identities, in the ongoing project of resisting homophobia. Non-queer ‘allies’ wear buttons or T-shirts identifying their solidarity with queer people (Meyer, 2009). It is a burgeoning movement that has given rise to ‘positive space’ organizing and education, an increase in positive depictions of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the media, and an overall acceptance of homosexuality. Gay/straight alliances have also helped garner support in Canada, and increasingly in the US and Europe, of the right of queer people to marry and enjoy other legal protections until recently reserved for heterosexuals. These are generalizations of course, and I do not wish to convey the impression that homophobia and heterosexism no longer exist. My point is that the existence and ‘coming out’ of heterosexual allies have helped in the quest for lesbian, gay and bisexual equal rights.

The transgender community, however, does not experience solidarity as easily. The incorporation of ‘T’ at the end of the initialism, rather than opening up the conversation about transgender rights and putting trans people on an equal footing with lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, has reduced transgender inclusion in the movement to tokenism, and has failed to address the unique challenges of trans individuals in a society that is so governed by the gender binary. Transgender people have to locate solidarity not only at work, in school, at home, in health care institutions, and in law, but also in queer
communities, in cultural communities and sometimes within relationships. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, moreover, do not find solidarity easily across culture, race, ethnicity, class, ability, or religion. Gay-straight alliances are useful in raising awareness about the right of queer people to enjoy the same privileges and responsibilities as heterosexuals, but their origins in universities and schools restrict their reach considerably, particularly in terms of class and race, because of the multiple axes of exclusion that exist in schools as well as anywhere else.

The Trans PULSE Survey in Ontario provides us with a useful example of how solidarity is precarious once the intersections are taken into account. This unique survey uses respondent-driven sampling, whereby trans people are conducting the survey themselves. Once a transgender person completes the survey, they are given three ‘tickets’, which they are asked to pass on to three trans people they know. The target is to survey one thousand trans individuals in Ontario about health-related issues associated with being transgender (Bauer, 2010). One of my participants, Nesta, problematizes the sampling strategy thus:

The thing that pisses me off about it is that it does seem that the respondent-driven research methodology runs the risk of once again only reaching out to white trans guys...It does seem also that a lot of...mainstream trans community organizing really is just for white trans people...They only have white people presenting their information, even though they have gone to some effort to try to get some trans people of colour to be part of the community information team, in part because...somebody told them they are all white and they need to change that...It’s fine to bring people of colour on the community investigation team, but not to have them as part of the public face of the research just reinforces the message to a lot of us that this isn’t for us. And I find that really frustrating.

The respondent-driven sampling strategy is a progressive means of conducting research, where trans people occupy the centre, and are accessed through social networks. The intent is to locate ‘hidden populations’, including those who do not work in clinical
settings and people who may not be involved in trans-specific organizations (Bauer, 2010). A possible problem with this strategy is the potential for homogeneity as a result of social networking. Each person who completes the survey passes on their three tickets to three friends or acquaintances, whose backgrounds and interests are likely similar to those of the ticket-holder. Nesta’s critique of the survey roll out and representation at conferences and in the media suggests a failure of the survey to reach out to people of colour. When racialized people do not find themselves reflected or represented in projects they are less likely to participate. Nesta comments later in this study that there was a time when he first transitioned that he was unaware of the existence of a vibrant black queer community in his city, which supports his claim of non-representation in mainstream trans projects. The fact of the existence of a large and dynamic black queer community that is not known outside of its own circle suggests a missed sampling opportunity that could only be redressed by more explicitly reaching out to racialized communities whose social networks are not evident in mainstream trans or queer communities. “[T]he goals for anti-oppressive research are very different [from positivist approaches] as involving people is done more for community building, empowerment, and a better understanding than for goals of representativeness or validity” (Potts and Brown, 2005: 269). Research like the Trans PULSE survey provides the potential not only for a deeper understanding of the specific health and social needs of a marginalized population, but also, crucially, for solidarity and community building amongst trans and queer people across difference. These opportunities are both seized and missed in an instance of social research, where the intersections are not adequately accounted for.
The trans men in my study speak about the multiple concessions and negotiations they have to engage in to get through the week. They have variously created and found solidarity among other trans people, and in their chosen communities, queer or otherwise. The following example serves as an illustration of solidarity across identity experienced by one of the participants.

Nesta works in a large arts organization. He is one of only three people of colour working there who are not maintenance or cleaning staff, and he is the only transgender person working for the organization. In the focus group he spoke of an incidence of transphobia he endured while using the washroom in his department, which I will discuss in a later chapter. He also shared that sometimes he witnesses racism among his white colleagues. When Nesta hears something offensive he often speaks up to challenge the offender, but it can be tiresome to be the only one always calling people on their inappropriate behaviour. When asked about solidarity at work, he mentioned that he works with a white woman who is very good at speaking up and holding people accountable for racist and homophobic comments. Her partner is Trinidadian, and Nesta attributes her awareness in part to this. One of the questions I posed to the participants was about what constitutes solidarity for them. Sea Dog and Joe were clear that solidarity occurs when someone stands up for you and ‘has your back’. Joe mentioned that he believes his friends would challenge transphobia and homophobia. Jason, too, defines solidarity as having people who will stand beside you in the face of racism or homophobia. He feels a lack of power, however, in his closetedness. On the one hand he believes that being stealth (passing) is most comfortable for him, since he believes very strongly that he is a man, not a trans person living in the borderlands. On the other hand,
he recognizes that not being out about being trans puts him at a disadvantage because he now lives with a secret. “The more you hide from people, the less powerful you really are” (Jason, 2010). Ideally, solidarity occurs because it’s right, not just because there is a marginalized person in the vicinity. Nesta’s white co-worker, while arguably more insightful because of her relationship with a person of colour, demonstrates solidarity across boundaries of race and gender. Her subject position as a white person standing up for racialized people is powerful. The power involved when a member of a privileged group speaks up in defence of a marginalized group, ensures that people listen. It is jarring, because the oppressor takes for granted that when she verbalizes her attitude or belief, this person with whom she shares social positioning will validate her. To be publicly challenged by a peer, then, is disconcerting and provides an opportunity for growth. Such opportunities are not always exploited, however; in fact, defensiveness and entrenchment of oppressive beliefs and practices often result when someone is challenged, especially in public. But when opportunities for transformation are embraced, both communities benefit, and solidarity forged.

Nesta, Sea Dog and Joe all perform solidarity with other marginalized identities. Joe volunteers with the deaf queer community in his city; Nesta and Sea Dog stand in solidarity with prisoners, both trans and non-trans; Sea Dog works in the labour movement, standing up for workers’ rights, and has worked with HIV+ racialized men. The borderlands offer a fertile breeding ground for solidarity across identity, where marginalized individuals can often find support and validation for their outsider status from others close by.
Queer spaces subject the border-dweller to myriad negotiations. Many of these spaces are essentially political, and also exist at the margins. Lesbian spaces and events, women’s bookstores, bathhouses (men’s and women’s), men’s sexual spaces, and committees are all sites of potential conflict or transformation for the trans person. They are also spaces where racialized groups and individuals face contestation and demands for justification. Transmen are often called upon to justify their gender identity and sexual orientation to, often unforgiving, members of queer communities. Many liberal lesbians and gay men, represented in the mainstream by stereotyped media images, no longer problematize heterosexual culture and, in fact, have erased affiliation with and become indifferent to those members of their communities who do not fit essentialized descriptions of who a ‘good’ lesbian or gay man is. So, queers of colour, Muslim queers, transsexuals, Aboriginal queers, working-class and poor queers, cross-dressers, prisoners, sex workers, sex-positive activists, among others do not easily fit in, and experience barriers to membership, while many actively reject opportunities to occupy the centre with its false consciousness of what constitutes ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘LGBT’ or even ‘queer’. In turn, many of these queers live in families and communities where being queer is a problem.

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13 ‘LGBT’ is used by mainstream organizations – gay and straight alike – but the actual incorporation of the rights and issues of trans individuals is arguable. ‘Queer’ is a reclaimed word describing all who are not ‘straight’. It is a value-laden word that is rejected by many older members of our communities as being perjorative. Many people who do not find themselves represented in mainstream lesbian and gay culture, including trans people and many who identify as bisexual use it.
Liberal queer spaces are constituted by a distinct lack of solidarity or affiliation with other identities existing on the margins. For example, ninety-five percent of the Pride Committee in Hamilton, Ontario last year was white and male. Conceptualizations of LGBT people in the media (straight and queer) are invariably white, middle-class, very often male, and coupled. Racialized subjects are usually tokens in anti-oppression training, or occupy the centre only during discussions about race and racism. In other words, they experience ‘othering’ within a space that is already ‘othered’. Race, class, gender and sexual identity are compartmentalized into discrete categories. The intersections, where social categories converge in individuals, are ignored, although they endure. Gender becomes subsumed under the banner of lesbian and gay, and there is an assumption that locating in the single category of ‘queer’ or ‘gay’ is to experience sorority. Even acknowledging that ‘sisterhood is powerful’, white lesbian feminists have historically ignored the reality that sisterhood needs authentic solidarity through the intersections of race and class, as well as gender to be meaningful (Friedman, 1998: 70).

An assumption embedded in this research study is that transgender men of colour call into question notions about solidarity in queer communities by challenging hegemonic notions of gender, race, class, and sexuality as they at once occupy and are abjected from the mainstream. By discovering evidence of on-the-ground experiences living in the borderlands of identity, we can begin to recognize the borderlands as sites of social change and solidarity in an increasingly hybridized world.

The lives of my participants are characterized by intersecting oppressions, such as racism, classism, transphobia, sexism, and homophobia. The lived experiences of people who exist at the margins are composed of complex power relations that are performed
across these lines. So, a racialized transgender person’s experience will be different from that of a white transgender person, just as a white working-class butch’s experience of homophobia will differ in some ways to the middle-class racialized trans man who passes as male, and achieves male privilege, his racialized status notwithstanding. A middle-class Black lesbian may be seen to possess more social capital than an unemployed white transgender woman who must submit herself to the regulatory practices of the psychiatric system in order to get hormones and sex reassignment surgery. In other words, reducing trans identity to gender and sexuality – or indeed, placing anti-racism at the top of the hierarchy of anti-oppressive organizing – without taking into account the complex web of subject positions in relation to others, limits the analysis considerably. I address this concern by examining the ways that relations of power intersect to produce multiple perspectives and realities (see Collins, 1986; 2000).

Race, Racism and Racialization

There is widespread agreement amongst theorists that race is a social construct. Debates arise, however, over how it should therefore be treated. Should we abandon it altogether, as Robert Miles (2003) suggests? Should we keep it but with inverted commas to signify its lack of salience and its ideological nature? Or do we recognize its prevalence in mainstream and everyday lived experiences in the wider culture, as Gilroy (1991) advocates? These questions have been debated since the 1980s and yet the notion of race still holds power in popular culture and mainstream discourses, so I will continue to use it in my thesis, albeit contingently. I am particularly interested in the ways that solidarity works, taking into account the intersectionality, relational positionality and fluidity that exist when we approach issues of power from a perspective originating in the
Male privilege is impacted by racism in the lives of racialized men, who find solidarity in their own cultural communities and among other racialized men. Recalling definitions outlined above, that shared experiences of oppression form the genesis of solidarity, allows us to think through relations of power to recognize that racism is a powerful motivator in the formation of solidarity movements. The power circulating between a white man and a racialized man is transformed when that same racialized man comes into contact, instead, with a racialized woman or trans person. Relative to the white man, he is at a disadvantage. In relation to the racialized woman or trans person, his social power increases and he becomes the dominant. The iterations of power and relationships can extend ad infinitum according to the relative subject positions of the actors in any given scenario. Race is one of the greatest signifiers of Foucault’s conceptions of the relations of power, and this example provides us with the framework with which to tease out the ways that power circulates, always changing direction and operating independent of any one factor or person. Solidarity is a function of power. It comes into being because of inequity and works by mobilizing communities against a common oppressor. Because of the relational nature of power, solidarity among racialized people is contingent upon other factors, such as gender, class and sexuality. Because my study focuses on racialized transgender men, I see utility in providing a brief overview of the major debates in critical race studies. In thinking about race it will be helpful to bear in mind the contingent workings of power and the ways that gender, class and sexuality interconnect to complicate understandings of solidarity.

Racism refers to use of the cultural, psychological and moralistic meanings attributed to race that ensure the domination of racialized groups by whites (Miles and Brown,
It encompasses internalized racism, where racialized people fail to realize their full potential because of hegemonic ideas about their own inferiority based on skin colour. Racism can be used against individuals, as in the case of racist name-calling and racially motivated hate crimes; more insidious is ‘institutional racism’, which broadly refers to practices whose purpose is to maintain the hierarchical power of the dominant group through exclusion of subordinate groups based on skin colour (Miles and Brown, 2003: 66; Gilroy, 1991: 116). Institutional racism perpetuates inequality and oppression through systems and structures that serve the state. It functions through such structures as social services, government, law, education, healthcare, housing provision and the justice system. People of colour experience inequitable access to services and state structures based on skin colour and its significations in a racist society. The language of institutional racism is coded, however, so as to deflect charges of racism. Hence, previously neutral, or less significant words have come to carry more cultural meaning, e.g. ‘immigrant’, ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ are code and have become coextensive with ‘colour’ or ‘black’ (Miles and Brown, 2003: 112), just as ‘Muslim’ has come to signify ‘terrorist’ in the public discourse.

Transgender people experience institutional barriers to equality because of transphobia. Access to adequate, responsive healthcare is a constant struggle, as is finding and keeping work, which means that trans people are disproportionately poor. Hormones and sex reassignment surgery are almost impossible to access without significant funds. In Ontario the psychiatric system is the gatekeeper to government-funded hormones and surgery. To gain access the trans person is subjected to invasive pathologizing discourses, and many would rather pay for medical interventions
themselves, a difficult task without a full-time job. Racialized trans people face compounded barriers and inequitable access to services based on racism, transphobia, and heterosexism.

Writing about trans lives – the barriers we face, and transphobic violence – often ignores the complex intersections at work in an effort to ensure the visibility of trans struggle. For example, race and racism are mentioned a total of thirteen times, and discussions of class occur only three times in the canonical work of the movement, *The Transgender Studies Reader*, a book of 732 pages and fifty articles (Stryker and Whittle, 2006). The result of this limitation is that race, class, and other aspects of a trans person’s identity become overdetermined and isolated in what becomes a hierarchy of oppression, with the most ‘innocent’ signifiers at the top and subject positions that might challenge notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ at the bottom (Razack and Fellows, 1998, cited in Lamble, 2008: 27). Such narrow conceptions of trans lives pose barriers to solidarity within trans communities.

Racialization is a more dynamic word than race. It has a relational aspect insofar as the terms of racialization depend on each other for their very definition. So, the category ‘black’ only has meaning when juxtaposed with its opposite, ‘white’. This is the dialectical, relational process to which Fanon referred in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008). He adopts an analysis of positionality with reference to colonized people in the colonizer’s land, contending that the more the colonized person adopts the language and mores of the colonizer, the whiter that person will become (2008: 3). Another problem occurs when that same racialized person arrives in his or her community of origin and is ridiculed for behaving like a white (2008: 8). The subject is caught in a dialectical
conundrum, where his positionality is defined differently according to which community he is interacting with. Fanon’s text gets at the core of racialization through an analysis of relational positionality where each person’s racialization is dependent on relationships with others at any given moment in time (Fanon, 2008).

Feminists suggest incorporation of multiple, local and relational discourses that take into account women’s positions relative to other women and to the larger context (Friedman, 1998, 65). Friedman calls for a decentring of whiteness and for a radical view from the margins (1998, 65). She picks up on Fanon and has been joined in her demand for a politics of race that explodes the static binaries of white/other (Friedman, 1998). She and others call for continued exploration of racialization as a discourse that more usefully reflects the realities of life in a globalized world (see Friedman, 1998; Barot and Bird, 2001; Murji and Solomos, 2005; Gupta, James, Maaka, Galabuzi, Andersen, 2007). Anne Phoenix (2005) takes the concept of positioning in her study of children’s first encounters with notions of ‘colour’, and uses it to emphasize the fluidity of the language of racialization. “According to positioning theory, what race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion mean for identity is not fixed, but flexible, shifting, and contested” (2005: 107). The discourse of racialization enables the racialized transgender subject to challenge the parameters of identity politics and more easily view the contested, multiple meanings of racial and gender identity at moments in time, in relation to others, in the eye of others and in relation to hegemonic race and gender discourses (2005: 107).

Racialization is a concept that mediates between the problematic meanings associated with race and its reification in popular discourse. Employing it in language attempts to divert sociology from the messiness of race (Barot and Bird, 2001: 608) towards the more
logical complexity of multiple positioned subjectivities. While there might seem to be utility in replacing the scientifically obsolete ‘race’ with the sociologically salient ‘racialization’, the contemporary lived realities of people experiencing racist oppression force us to acknowledge the ways that race is implicated in racialization and that the language of racialization be employed in practical ways that address racism (Barot and Bird, 2001: 614). Friedman’s (1998) concept of relational positioning subjects the ideological underpinnings of race to useful and effective resistance strategies through engagement with racialization discourses. At the same time, it allows us to navigate the processes through which class is performed in various contexts.

Class

From its early iterations in new industrial economies, to the realities of contemporary globalization, capitalism has played a key role in perpetuating racialized inequality. Slavery, colonialism and migration are all products of capitalist social relations, whereby goods and labour are traded in a market economy. In each case, capitalist social relations involve one group, the bourgeoisie, dominating another group, the working-class, for financial gain (Marx and Engels, 2002). Capitalist ideology emphasizes individualism and competition, and capital exists in a dialectical relationship with labour, where capital needs labour to function, and labour needs capital for its ongoing survival. The relationship becomes inevitably one of exploitation (Marx and Engels, 2002). Racialized people, especially slaves and their descendants, colonized peoples, and migrant workers, along with white working-class people, have always been the labour source for capital, which is owned and operated by the bourgeoisie. Colonialism was born of a racist ideology, which produced, in the European imagination, entire populations that were born
for the express purpose of providing cheap and free labour for Europe. In this way, class intersects with race (Miles and Brown, 2003: 124), providing lucid insight into the ways solidarity movements come into being, and inviting us to think about the limitations of solidarity across and through the intersections (Gill, 2009). Intersectionality and relational positionality are useful tools in thinking about oppression, identity and solidarity, but what the postmodern thinker soon discovers upon embarking on this approach are the contingencies, barriers, and limitations of such a project in the context of diverse and unequal power relations operating in similarly contingent ways according to context (Gill, 2009).

Class can be a consequence of the relations of production we have discussed above, and it can also be regarded in cultural terms, expressed in such arenas as the family and peer relationships, and popular culture (Bettie, 2003: 42). I have been told before that I perform working class in my relationship with money, the means of production, in my subcultural style and politically. I work with people experiencing homelessness and poverty. Through my work and lived experience of ‘otherness’ I have developed solidary relationships with people who are marginalized because of poverty, mental illness, or addiction. Growing up I experienced class-consciousness as a result of my location on the margins. My relative access to cultural, social and financial capital was impacted by my subaltern identity constituted by the intersections. Because of my brown skin, a childhood passed in relative poverty, and an orientation away from my biological sex, I encountered barriers to social inclusion and experienced a keen awareness of the hierarchies of power at work in capitalist society. Operating on many levels, any analysis of class must take into account the multiple and fluid signifiers of social position at work in identity. This
study examines iterations of class in relation to racialization in transgender men, keeping in mind the various ways that subject positions shift according to social, political and temporal contexts.

Examining the relational character of identity and solidarity elucidates the fragility of alliances built around common oppression. Because of the nature of oppression, designed to weaken the oppressed person in relation to the oppressor, the oppressed are forced to look for ways to exercise power in their own lives. This attitude provides opportunities for oppressed peoples to join together to overcome a common adversary; conversely, it risks reproducing hierarchical power relations among the oppressed, leaving those whose identities are formed in part by non-normative gender at the bottom of the hierarchy. A racialized transgender man, moreover, might find his subject position touching the floor. Efforts to raise an oppressed group’s social standing often sacrifices the issues of those within the group whose subject positions are more marginalized. A good example is the LGBT community, where the concerns of transgender people are systematically silenced and marginalized to enable the concerns of lesbians and gay men to hold centre stage. Transgender rights are not of central concern to lesbians and gay men. In fact, because of the hegemony of the gender binary, these deviant identities are seen to be troublemakers, as interlopers trying to wrest power from the hands of legitimate and deserving white, middle-class, coupled lesbians and gay men, whose concerns are often more about assimilation into mainstream heterosexual culture than about human rights. An in-depth analysis of an experience from my childhood will help illustrate the ways that power operates to regulate the movement of non-normative bodies.
Problematizing Solidarity

When I was six, my babysitter made me wear a flowered dress and high pigtails to Sunday school. I resisted, but since she was sixteen and was ‘in charge’ I ended up going to Sunday school wearing these signifiers of femininity. My peers at Sunday school were shocked to see me dressed this way. They laughed and exclaimed about how silly I looked in a dress and pigtails: the tomboy who had never before been seen wearing a dress. I do not remember any other details about that day. When I was being forced to wear these clothes I cried and screamed and fought. I resisted. I remember the emotions: the anger and frustration at being powerless, embarrassment in front of my peers, the confusion I felt at being seen as a girl.

My babysitter had exclaimed, ‘you’re going to dress like a proper little girl for once in your life!’ My memories are of these words, my tears of anger and the other children’s laughter. She was sixteen years old in 1974. My mother, a nurse, worked shifts and was often not home in the evenings or on weekends. My babysitter was aware I was a misfit, and she wanted me to better fit in with my peers. Sunday, in Scotland in the 1970s, was a day to dress in your best clothes, especially at church. To me, my best clothes were good-looking pants, a shirt and a bright blue jean jacket.

I was already an outsider because of my mixed race heritage, a problem compounded by my masculine gender performance. My babysitter’s attempt to bring me in alignment with hegemonic femininity served to more deeply entrench my sense that I should have been born a boy. Her age, her position of authority, her own identity as a teenage girl, and sense of appropriate gender roles combined to subjugate my own sense of personal
power. Her power over my appearance and behaviour came from our relationship to each other and to the world around us. She was young and naïve, living in an era before the explosion of theories about multiply positioned identities. Children, then as now, exercised very little power, and any ideas about solidarity were not on the radar. Her main concern was one of homogeneity. She needed for me to fit in, so that she would feel better about her own position in the context of our small, conservative town. She used her power to force me to conform. Rather than standing up for me, creating safety through solidarity, she elected to force me into a state of confusion and fear so that she would feel more at ease. It is an instance of the lack of solidarity.

The other children immediately recognized the cognitive dissonance created by my gender performance that day. They, like me, refused the suggestion that I was a girl like other girls. They recognized that gender is about more than clothes and outward appearances. Instead of joining with the masses and wondering in awe at the Emperor’s new clothes, they stood up for the truth of the matter as they saw it, and pointed out the Emperor’s nakedness. This truth, however, coming as it did from the mouths of children, was discounted. Contrary to the evidence before her, the adult ‘expert’ declared that truth lies in conformity, while the children’s standpoint was marginalized. The day I turned up in a dress was the day I noticed for the first time the ways of power operating in my life. I was a child who had no power. The other children had power to cause me discomfort, and I felt out of place. I found it impossible to resist the power of my babysitter in dressing me as a girl. I failed to convince her that I was better off dressing myself, and thus was subjected to an external exclusion of having my truth discounted.
Foucault’s external exclusions that constrain and produce discourse are helpful here. They are: taboo; the distinction between the speech of the ‘mentally ill’ and that of those who are not mentally ill; and the difference between truth and falsehood (Mills, 2003: 57-58). In the above scenario, the taboo is gender transgression. Power was being enacted on my body. In keeping with my age, I acquiesced; however, once I arrived at Sunday school, I recognized the confusion of my classmates and I adopted a counter-discourse by taking on my stigmatized identity and revelling in it (Mills, 2003: 91). A child’s relationship to power is similar to that of an adult who is stigmatized because of mental illness. Those in authority ignore what the child says, just as mentally healthy adults discount the words spoken by the mentally ill person. Closely aligned with this exclusion, the child’s gender identity and performance are regulated and constrained by the true ‘expert’, the one who can speak the truth about identity and gender, the person in authority (the babysitter). Even though the other children pointed out the absurdity of the dress, their opinions, too, were circumscribed by their age and lack of authority (Mills, 2003).

As we know, discourses are constituted by power, which operates in various ways on the body (Foucault, 1990). My babysitter’s concerns were about how the larger community was apparently responding to my aberrant gender identity. We engaged in a power struggle and she, of course, won. The children were concerned that I was presenting differently than usual. Their laughter might have signified their chagrin that I, the ‘other’, would dare to try to align my gender performance with their sense of normative gender. Fanon refers to the assimilated Antillean returning home from the United States and being ridiculed for displaying ‘airs’ of whiteness (1952: 8).
wearing of a dress might have been seen as an attempt to adopt the signifiers of femininity and normative gender expression, an effort to step beyond my ‘othered’ status. While I do not believe the laughter was mean, it hinted at an eagerness to return to a time and place where difficult questions about gender were not raised. Sensing this helped me engage a counter-discourse, which validated my own feelings of gender transgression (Foucault, 1980), which had, ironically, become the status quo. My mixed-race status, which became obvious to my schoolmates and me when I started school at age five, and experienced racism for the first time, had already established me as ‘different’. So I had been aware for some time of my marginalized status in the community, although my gender identity did not figure into this story until that Sunday. No one had ever questioned my gender performance before. This incident brought my gender identity into the foreground, raising the question, at least with me, of where in the world I fit. The children were presented for the first time with a peer whose gender identity was questionable and they quickly moved to return it to the ‘status quo’. The children and the babysitter took different paths to the same end. Rather than wondering what I wanted, they were each compelled by conformity. The attention drawn to my gender transgression that day was another incident contributing to the formation of my identity. Being six, I was developing a sense that the world was not straightforward. In subsequent years, my senses of safety, groundedness, and confidence would experience ebbs and flows. My subject position would change according to my age, social relationships, changes in my body, political considerations, and experiences. As a young adult I began to cultivate solidarity in my own life, and aligned myself with other marginalized entities.
The above scenario reinforces the argument that identity is not fixed, and is contingent upon context and relationships. Like everyone, my life experience living in the borderlands of gender, race, sexuality and class has its roots in my childhood. The above narrative describes one of my earliest experiences with the complexity and incoherence of identity. Cultural discourses of power, gender, femininity, and age all came into play. The babysitter, the children, the teachers and I all experienced my wearing of the dress differently, according to our own identities and positionalities.

In order to elicit knowledge of the role solidarity plays in the lives of a small group of racialized transgender men in Southern Ontario, it will be necessary to keep in mind the workings, practices and procedures of power, especially in the community that situates itself as the natural choice of transgender people, the LGBT community.
CHAPTER 4
Transgender Men

Solidarity does not just happen. Simply adding the letter ‘T’ to the end of LGBT does not facilitate solidarity. In fact, tokenistic inclusions function to confuse and silence. Critical voices are maligned, and those whose concerns are marginalized by the majority are characterized as whining and selfish. Analyzing some of the daily experiences of racialized trans men allows us to understand what does and does not constitute solidarity. This chapter will examine in some detail the narratives of five transgender men who agreed to participate in my research study. The purpose will be to discover the workings, boundaries and limits of solidarity in racialized trans lives. I argue that power operates in a multiplicity of ways in the borderlands of identity. Solidarity is contingent upon relationships and context, common understandings of the relations of power, and commitment to postmodern understandings of identity as unstable, flexible, and plural. The men in my study have always lived in the borderlands space, knowing intimately the sting of exclusion, the workings of power, and the contingent nature of solidarity. The search for belonging and community involves complex negotiations and a thick skin, for it is not easy. As we will see from the narratives in this chapter, solidarity, like power, is an unstable concept, relying on relationships, time, and space for its existence. Ultimately, solidarity might be understood as a contingent state that can only be birthed from within the borderlands, the instability of identity constantly leading people to fold in on themselves, excluding outsiders, marginalizing those whose politics do not align with the liberal, white, gay project of assimilation into mainstream heterosexual hegemony.

"Power must be analysed as something which circulates...Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation...Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its
points of application” (Foucault, 1980: 98). So, power is exercised, not owned. Individuals are the *effects* of power in that the discourses, gestures, desires and bodies that comprise the individual are all functions of power (1980: 98).

**Concretizing Power Relations**

The power relations at work in the following example are multifaceted. Nesta is out as trans at work; he mentioned it after he accepted the job offer. There is a certain power in coming out: the constant vigilance required to keep the closet door closed can be exhausting and diminishing of self-confidence. Coming out can be freeing, dispensing with the need to hide. It also has the effect of exposure, and vulnerability.

Nesta works at an arts organization. He describes an incident that occurred in the men’s washroom shortly after he started working there.

I would get harassed in the bathroom all the time, like almost every time I went…to the point I stopped going at work and would go all the way home in the middle of the day to pee… One time, a man was so irate, a co-worker, he was going to the bathroom at the same time. There is only one stall, and I had gone in just right before him, so I had gotten into the stall. He…came into it and was trying to look in, screaming at me at the top of his lungs saying I was obviously doing something disgustng in there, and he is going to have to give me some privacy because he doesn’t know what I was doing there. He was screaming, and I just curled up into a ball basically in the corner of the stall. I thought he was going to physically attack me when I got out, because he was screaming at me. It was so traumatic; after that I just never used the bathroom again.

Nowhere is the gender binary enforced more than in public washrooms. Nesta is the only known transsexual working in the organization. He gathered enough courage to speak with his supervisor about it a number of months later, who said he wished Nesta had told him about it at the time. He spoke to the co-worker and rather than disciplining the man for sexual harassment and threatening behaviour, he framed it as a learning opportunity, with the result that the man was not held accountable. Nesta expressed disappointment at
the outcome, although he was not surprised. He also said that this incident was just the most extreme example of ongoing harassment around his washroom use at the gallery. The employer eventually designated two single-person washrooms, one in the basement of the building, and one at the front door, ‘family’ washrooms. This was not ideal, as it is a large building and Nesta now has to travel across the building to use the washroom. He is unable to use the washroom in his department.

Nesta presents as quite a confident individual whose analysis of oppression is sophisticated, so his story of harassment and trauma hits the reader hard. He came out as trans at work, and at least one of his co-workers felt entitled to harass and threaten him. The organization’s failure to hold the man accountable legitimated his behaviour. The power Nesta exercised through coming out was not only used against him in the washroom, but also failed to build solidarity for him. In fact, the washroom incident and the subsequent inaction by his employer sent a strong signal to Nesta that coming out without fear is no guarantee of solidarity or that his rights will be respected.

Coming out exposed him to one of the more insidious aspects of power. If this black transsexual can use the men’s washroom, a place that admits no women, how sacred is male space? The prospect of a woman gaining access to male-only space is frightening. Homophobia and transphobia are closely connected to sexism. Underlying all acts of transphobia and homophobia is misogyny. Gay men are hated because of presumed effeminacy, lesbians are assumed to exist for the erotic fantasies of straight men. Male-to-female transsexuals are even more vulnerable to abuse than gay men, because there is no greater ‘freak’ than a man who wants to be a woman. The deep-seated hatred of women that is endemic to our society finds cold comfort in the existence of the male-to-
female transsexual. The female-to-male transsexual, in the other hand, has the audacity to strive for male privilege. Not only is this person viewed as a female interloper, but he also threatens the notion that masculinity is the exclusive domain of men.

Nesta is not only seen as a woman presenting as a man, but he is also black. He is one of only three black workers at the organization and he mentioned several times during my research the unchallenged racism circulating among many of his white colleagues. The silence around racism and racist stereotyping at the gallery provides tacit approval of the kind of harassment Nesta experienced in the washroom, and is yet another indication of the lack of solidarity in his workplace. He not only has to contend with unaddressed transphobic and misogynistic overtures towards him, but he also deals with unchallenged racism circulating among his co-workers. The co-worker took a chance that his male and white privilege would protect him from discipline in this case. He was correct in his assumption, and in fact his behaviour was rewarded by the fact that he was neither dismissed nor disciplined in any meaningful way. According to Nesta, his employer talked to the man and framed it in the rhetoric of education, rather than a human rights abuse. Instead of having the offender change his behaviour, Nesta was forced to change his by having to use a washroom not in his department. The onus is on Nesta to make everyone feel more comfortable about his gender identity. Speaking out about the inadequacy of the solution would further annex Nesta in an environment that has already shown itself to be hostile to his concerns.
**Solidarity?**

The harassing co-worker is a white male. His violent and threatening behaviour has been rewarded by the organization, which has half-heartedly accommodated Nesta’s need for safety by forcing him to travel outside of his department to use the washroom. The harasser was not held accountable for his actions and he still works in the same organization as Nesta. Art is supposed to challenge and make us think differently about the world. Stereotyped as bastions of liberalism, arts organizations can be fertile ground for alternative worldviews, and places for locating community and solidarity among those who do not fit neatly in to hegemonic categories. Nesta’s experiences at his place of work reinforce my contention that solidarity cannot come into being through liberal, tokenistic approaches to inequity.

Nesta said there are very few people at his work who stand in solidarity with him. The above incident is an example of a perfect opportunity for his employer and colleagues to oppose discrimination in the workplace. Instead, hegemonic power relations became more entrenched, and the status quo maintained. The co-worker escaped with a slap on the wrist, and Nesta’s productivity has lessened because he now has to travel to another part of the building to use the washroom. The reframing of the question of harassment and bullying in the insipid terms of misinformation and lack of education is dismissive of the very real barriers transgender people face at work and in the world.

In contrast, Nesta locates sites of solidarity with other racialized trans men.

It’s nice not being the only one and it’s nice being able to support each other and just, you know, sometimes to talk about the things that are difficult. So to me, I think…there is something very powerful and it doesn’t mean that I always feel solidarity with everybody all the time [laughs]…but the times when you do feel it, you’re like, oh, this is great.
After the story about the workplace harassment he experienced, this statement is poignant. He finds solidarity among other racialized transgender men, acknowledging that he will not necessarily connect with all racialized trans men, and hence refusing to homogenize solidarity. He recognizes the complex interactions of multiple subject positions in formulating power, but also in creating solidarity. He went to see Angela Davis do a talk earlier this year and mentioned how she spent a full twenty minutes of her fifty-minute allocation talking about the importance of women of colour creating solidarity with transgender prisoners.

I was like, oh, it just felt so, it was amazing. It was so good that she did that and that she made time and made that like of all the things you’re going to talk about in a fifty-minute talk, you know, to spend twenty minutes talking about that was pretty incredible. So that was like, I felt, I felt that was solidarity right there, you know, ‘cause, some of the most marginalized people in trans communities are people who are in prison, right?

Nesta said he and Sea Dog, his partner, were probably the only trans people in the audience. His words have an emotional resonance that gives us a sense of the power of solidarity when it occurs. Nesta is active around prison abolition and is involved in the black queer community. He stands in solidarity with racialized communities and with trans and non-trans prisoners. Trans people and racialized people are overrepresented in prisons because of social inequities like racism, poverty, and transphobia. Nesta aligns his politics with other marginalized subjectivities, and in so doing, locates himself in the borderlands. His co-workers possess an abundance of social capital, and yet, even though they work in the arts, where alternative views of the world should flourish, they fail to stand in solidarity with the oppressed.
Navigating Gender Boundaries

Another participant, James, wrote in his journal several days in a row, “Will any of these guys notice that I always sit down to pee?” The logical next question is, “And if they do, will they care?” Some cisgender men urinate while sitting down. There is no real reason, except convenience, for a man to stand up at the toilet. Sitting down, however, has become an essentialized feminine gesture. James’ anxious repetition of the question suggests that if he is caught sitting down to urinate, his male colleagues will find out he has a vagina. Not only would this present a problem and make James vulnerable to harassment or violence, but also a corollary fear is of being thought of as a man sitting down. In a sexist society, a person who sits down to urinate is either a woman or a man who is like a woman. Here we are presented with the issue of male misogyny, and the male aversion to being associated with femininity. James cannot afford to be associated in any way with being a woman, not because he does not like women, but because of transphobia, homophobia and sexism.

The washroom and locker room provide useful sites of analysis of the workings of power in gender. All of my participants, including me, expressed fear, anxiety and trepidation about using public washrooms. I have had many conversations with other trans men and cisgender male friends about washroom use strategies. Halberstam devotes a full nine pages to ‘the bathroom problem’ in her book, *Female Masculinity* (1998). She theorizes that the postmodern insistence on the fluidity of gender fails to open up the gender highway to more than two lanes. In fact, she argues, gender’s elasticity ensures that most people can be easily categorized as male or female. So, a trans man using the men’s washroom will be read as male since, after all, he dresses like a man and is in the
men’s washroom (1998: 21). Men do not generally study or scrutinize each other in the washroom. Taboos against homosexuality actually assist the trans man in getting in and out. Locker rooms can be more difficult to navigate, in many cases because of the possibility of gay cruising. Jason tells the story of once when he was showering, and a man cruised him. He was naked, facing the corner so as not to be observed with no penis, and this man was commenting on his buttocks and coming on quite strong. Jason managed to extricate himself, and left quickly. The fact of this man’s queerness was not the motivating factor for Jason’s worry. He was naked and was having unwelcome attention drawn to his body. If he had been discovered to be transsexual, the strict policing of gender that occurs hegemonically in our culture would have put him at an extreme disadvantage in the sacred realm of biological men. Even if he was not discovered, the anxiety of being checked out and commented on in public would have been enough to break a sweat on even the most secure of transmen. The threat of discovery overrides any other factor. Halberstam writes at length about the relative dangers in the women’s washroom (1998: 24). Until recently I used the women’s washroom as much as possible, mainly due to fear of men I do not know. I have not had top surgery (breast reduction surgery), but I inject testosterone and am routinely read as male in public settings, although my liminal status sometimes confuses and about thirty percent of the time I am read as female. Often when I would use the women’s washroom, even before taking testosterone, women would do a double take and reread the sign on the door. Women have told me that I am in the women’s washroom, and one woman last year, just after I first began taking testosterone, waited outside the washroom until I emerged. After that I plucked up the courage to use the men’s. Halberstam relates stories
of butches being ridiculed and women threatening to call security (1998: 24). Gender conditioning, the archaic but still salient reference to ‘the powder room’ for women reminds us that women’s washrooms are social spaces where men are not admitted. The presence of a man in the women’s washroom is cause for alarm. He might be a pervert, or a stalker. Women, for obvious reasons, must be vigilant against male interlopers. It is interesting to note that the problem lies not with transgender people per se, but with cisgender men or women using the other’s washroom. That is the threat to the ‘natural’ order of things. Trans people simply raise the question. The presence of a trans person diverts us from the causes of such a dilemma, allows us to circumscribe difficult questions about the gender binary, and provides a useful distraction from serious analyses of power. The answer to the question of public washrooms will not be easily accessed in the current paradigm of strictly enforced gender roles.

Because of James’ anxiety around the washroom and his closetedness amongst his peers (he is a graduate student) solidarity at school eludes him. In his journal he talks about his tendency to redirect questions about his personal life back to the speaker. Even at a queer-positive dinner party, he remains in the closet. He observes that when he speaks in gender-neutral ways in straight contexts, he is read as a man, who is possibly gay, while at the queer dinner party he is considered to be a man with a feminist and anti-oppression perspective. Because he is stealth (passing) in his school life he keeps himself at a distance from his colleagues. When he was young in school, he fought his own battles with other children who made fun of him for being black. Once, when he retaliated against a bully by beating him up, he was sent to the Principal’s office and told his behaviour was “not very ladylike”. He fought most of his own battles, and played
with the boys as much as he could, although once he got to high school he discovered that the boys did not want him around anymore. Eventually, halfway through high school he was expelled for skipping class, an act he said was precipitated by the stress of being constantly bullied and harassed. Although we were unable to talk about solidarity in any detail, the story of James’ school experiences leave the impression that he did not experience solidarity growing up. He recounted the story of his white (adoptive) mother going to the school to complain to the Principal about racist bullying, but James was not pleased with her action and elected never to share a concern with her again about problems he was encountering at school. James’ mother and the principal cast themselves as the experts in James’ life, while his own agency was discounted (Foucault, 1980). The Principal told him his behaviour was not fitting for a girl, the implication being that were he a boy, it would have been more acceptable for him to beat up his bully. His mother, against his wishes, trying to stand up for him, went to the school to complain about bullying, with the result that James felt compelled not to share with her his subsequent struggles and eventually was expelled.

As a child he needed champions who would stand up for him in ways that would make it easier for him to attend school. Neither his mother nor the principal were able to meet that challenge, and the ultimate loser was James. His mother, a white woman, a member of the oppressor group, adopted him and went to the school that day like a lioness defending her cub. James stated that she had an angry confrontation with the Principal, which sounds like solidarity. Because James was highly embarrassed by this act, and because it had the opposite effect of alienating him from her, it cannot be seen as an act of solidarity. She did the right thing by challenging the Principal, and had she done
nothing criticism would have been warranted, but because James, for his own reasons, asked her not to speak to the Principal and was upset when she chose to go ahead, we must consider that solidarity is contingent upon the oppressed person’s cooperation, otherwise it risks being paternalistic. “Rationalizing his [the oppressor’s] guilt [at being white] through paternalistic treatment of the oppressed, all the while holding them fast in a position of dependence, will not do. Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary” (Freire, 1993). A mother’s love of her child and her compulsion to protect him from society’s cruelties are not in question, but the complex interplay of oppression, power and solidarity in the lives of border-dwellers provides no easy solution.

Questions of Stealth

To questions about his ethnicity, James provides no easy answer. He is unimpressed by what he calls, ‘what are you?’ type of questions and transmits his chagrin by answering vaguely and enigmatically. His discomfort at being asked the question is put back onto the questioner, who is then forced to deal with feelings of awkwardness at having provoked such a response. It is one device that James has adopted to exercise some power in his own life. He locates solidarity amongst his peers and chosen communities. He allies himself with other trans people, people of colour and women. In his school life and even in some queer contexts, James has elected to remain stealth. Amongst all my participants the feeling of being at risk is never far away and choosing to pass is one way of deflecting danger.
James’ distaste for questions about race and his choice to be stealth have to do with self-protection. He finds solidarity in his personal life with a close circle of friends, but in the larger community he has chosen, perhaps because of a lifetime of disappointments devoid of solidarity, to remain stealth. Like Nesta, who became emotional when talking about solidarity, his experiences of solidarity are concentrated amongst his peers and supporters. It could be that his experiences over the course of his life have taught him that non-racialized, non-trans, non-feminist colleagues and community members are incapable of developing an analysis that will not damage him in some way. He is wary, and protects himself by wearing a coat of armour.

One reason for choosing to be stealth has to do with needing to be unambiguously male. At least two of the participants expressed this in their journals. Jason transitioned almost fifteen years ago. He spent the first ten years of his life in Trinidad with his parents, sister and grandmother. He is mixed race and always felt like a boy growing up. In his journal he talks about feeling awkward as a girl. He has photographs from his childhood. In one he describes himself thus:

I lean awkwardly across my mother’s lap like a heavy encumbrance she is merely tolerating. I look like I’m in drag. I’m wearing an ugly red dress with a huge crème collar that I secretly hated – more than my other dresses. I have big coke bottle glasses and my frizzy hair is pulled back in a tight little bun. Even as a girl I had a receding hairline. Really homely. A kid not at home in her body or her clothes, I make a much better man and would have been much better looking as a boy with a crew cut.

He spent the first twenty of his adult years living as a lesbian. He saw his parents, but his mother made it clear she did not like him very much. His sister would not allow him to see her children, and their relationship is still strained to this day, although they are on speaking terms. Recently her husband helped Jason in a traffic court case. In the courtroom his brother-in-law spoke about Jason using female pronouns. Jason
commented in his journal that the judge looked at this man incredulously and pointed out to him that Jason is obviously a man. He and his wife refused to speak to Jason when he was a lesbian. Once again we encounter a moment in a racialized transgender man’s history where solidarity is absent. Jason’s family locate their solidarity in Christianity. As people of colour, they have grown up knowing the sting of racism in a racist society. Strict taboos against homosexuality in the Catholic church had the effect of alienating Jason from his own family. Now that he is a man, they have slowly come around and have welcomed him, contingently back in to their lives. He is back in touch with them on their terms. He is not sure what made the difference, because arguably transgenderism is more taboo than homosexuality. It is plausible that his relationship with a woman is more palatable now that he is living full-time as a man. He is now, in their eyes, heterosexual. The effect of his brother-in-law’s insistence on referring to Jason as ‘she’, is to raise questions about his own eyesight, and has the ironic effect of deflecting attention away from questions of Jason’s gender identity. Jason does not like to think of himself as transgender. He is a man, and he passes very effectively. If we consider that part of what motivates a person to homophobia or transphobia has to do with shame and embarrassment, we are confounded in the face of this man who would rather raise questions about his own perceptions of reality than acknowledge that which is obvious to all in that room: that Jason is a man.

The acceptance that Jason now experiences from his parents is not solidarity. They have exerted power in his life by withholding love and acceptance, by refusing to advocate for him with his sister to allow him to spend time with their grandchildren, and by allowing him into their lives now that he is no longer a lesbian. In their eyes he has
become the hegemonic male. He prefers this identity, but he is aware, too, that his relationship with his parents is conditional and contingent upon him not stepping outside of the borders.

Jason vigorously expresses his contention that he does not like being trans. He prefers to be thought of as a man. Stealth is his *modus operandi*, not just when he chooses, but all the time. He shuns the borderlands, although he will never be able to escape them completely.

As a man I’m uncomfortable too. But it’s a different discomfort. It’s the fear of being busted...But when I don’t wear the prosthe[tic penis], I worry that I’ll be discovered; someone will say, ‘Hell, that guy has no dick in his pants!’ or ‘Hell, that’s really a woman!’ In the locker rooms at the pool, and in the showers, I worry about the same thing…I think I’d get the [lower surgery] operation tomorrow if my partner would be all right with it, which she is not. I wouldn’t care if it meant I had to take a big chunk of my arm or calf to do it. I’d rather look like a guy with some sort of injury than a freak without a penis.

The tension between biology and social reality is palpable for trans people. Every move has to be calculated, and the threat of danger is always with us. Like Nesta and James, Jason conveys the constant negotiations he does with himself and the rest of the world each day. He wants to be a man, to be able to not think twice about whether he’s acting like a man, if he’s laughing too much, being tough enough, glib enough, emotionally hard enough. He’s scared of other guys. “It’s hard being a man among men.” Being a woman posed great problems for Jason. Being a man presents unique challenges. Being trans is worst of all. Gender, with its regulatory practices and procedures, policing strategies, stratifications, and the ways it imbricates with race, class and sexuality are very powerful effects of hegemony (Butler, 1990). Jason, Nesta and James all related stories of anxiety, fear and trauma in the men’s washroom. In Nesta’s case, he is out as a transgender man who is not currently using hormones and was subjected to violence and threats. James has
yet to be confronted with questions about his legitimacy and operates stealth at his place of learning. Jason is stealth except with his family and closest friends. Neither being out nor being stealth has garnered opportunities for solidarity among Nesta, James and Jason. The common thread weaving its way through their stories is that non-trans, non-queer spaces are not sites of solidarity for racialized transgender men. There are always exceptions who keep us from giving up entirely, but in the main, it is becoming clear that subject positions that are not oppressed or experience oppression along fewer axes of identity, rarely step outside of their comfort zones to stand up to challenge oppression based on gender, sexuality, race, or class. Solidarity is found among similarly oppressed peoples. The borderlands are a fertile breeding ground for radical alliances.

Thinking about solidarity and the instances where it does not materialize recall for me an instance of racism from my childhood. I was away on a school camping trip. I was about eleven. There were children from other schools on the trip and we slept in gender-segregated dorms. One morning as I was waking up I heard the other girls talking about me. They were commenting on my brown skin and used obscenities to describe its shade. It became a game where they were laughing and joking about what to names to call me. I was rigid with shame and fear, and kept my eyes tightly closed until they got up and left the dorm. I do not remember anything else about that trip.

I do remember another incident that occurred when I was five, where I was cornered by two children in school and interrogated about whether I was a ‘Paki’ or not. Not knowing what a Paki was, but suspecting from their aggression that it was not a good thing to be, I denied it. Like James, who was regularly asked if he was a ‘nigger’ at school, and bullied accordingly, I became familiar at an early age with otherness, and
quickly developed a sense that I was essentially alone in the world. James and I were raised in white families. James says that growing up in white culture, he has adopted some of the assumptions white people hold about their place in the world. He carries on as if the dominant culture is his culture, and while race-based incidents still occur, he does not necessarily notice them until he has had a chance to reflect. In his journal he talks about his approach to intrusive questions by white people about his race. He engages in play with his interrogators, refusing to straightforwardly answer their questions about his ethnicity, and leaving them with more questions than they had before. Such a strategy serves to even out the power imbalance set out by such an unreflective question that could only have been asked in such a way by a white person. Constantly growing up, and still sometimes today, I would be asked questions about why my skin is brown and my sister’s is white. White people were endlessly curious about my origins. The children were the ones who asked, doubtlessly reporting their findings to their parents. The curiosity was not innocent. The children were well educated in racism, and they taunted, threatened and bullied me relentlessly, constantly reinforcing with me my lack of community, or solidarity. Upon discovering that I was gender variant my experiences with racism provided me with enough insight to keep that piece of information to myself. In fact, I was so eager to fit in that I was not even fully conscious of my trans identity until well into adulthood and after living many years as a lesbian. As a child I was not always comfortable occupying the borderlands. I was like any other young person, trying to discover myself in a sea of regulations, procedures, rewards and punishments for certain identities. I was naïve to the workings of power, but felt its influence everywhere. My tormentors were similarly naïve, but we all participated in the
hegemonic procedures of power. Before I started school I had friends who accepted me unconditionally. I was very young, but I remember being happy and carefree. As soon as I started school my sense of belonging began to erode. I no longer could count on unconditional acceptance. I became aware of my difference, and I started to understand the power of solidarity, elusive as it was in my life.

*Navigating the Borderlands*

In school James behaved like a boy and defended his honour by beating up his transgressors. Once the boys reached puberty and outgrew him, he had to find other ways of protecting himself. He ended up escaping the school system and paid for that by putting off post-secondary education until twenty years later. He was a mixed-race boygirl, navigating the borderlands of identity. Now he is a man. He is still in the borderlands of gender and race, but his gender performance locates him in masculinity. He comments that his use of humour to smooth things over in difficult conversations is all he has available to him as a man.

Any irritation or anger which might be considered justified or socially acceptable when expressed by a woman (because women are to some degree considered harmless), that same irritation or anger is interpreted as irascibility or to have the potential to lead to various forms of violence [when expressed by a man].

This observation highlights the borderlands perspective of a man who grew up female. As a transman who stands in solidarity with women, James is acutely aware of the ways of men in the world. He, like other FTMs, has observed, even studied, men’s behaviour in relation to women and other men. His feminist affiliation and female biology have enabled him to be conscious of the workings of gender, and the subtle and obvious ways that masculinity and femininity operate in our culture. Gendering discourses attribute certain traits to bodies that are read as male or female. Anyone stepping outside of their
role is scrutinized, policed and impelled to step back in line by actors who uphold hegemonic masculinity and femininity by automatically enforcing the separation of gender roles. For example, when I, as a young woman, once expressed an opinion with vigour, I was told by a white feminist friend of mine that I was too angry, that I was opinionated and I should tone it down. It struck me at the time that a strong opinion expressed by a man speaks favourably about his character and his ability to lead others; a woman is angry, uptight and inflexible. That a white woman criticized my non-normative gender transgression raises for me the issue of, sometimes brittle, alliances that exist among women who participate in gender-normative surveillance of other women in service to hegemonic masculinity that insists on traditional conceptions of the passive role of women in North American society. I came into adulthood with a strong sense of solidarity among women, especially feminists. I found, for the first time in my life, solidarity among leftists, racialized people, feminists and lesbians once I entered my twenties. So, to experience the cognitive dissonance of being told to ‘shut up’ by a white feminist friend caused me to understand the contingent nature of solidarity.

A trans man who has been involved in feminist organizing and who is racialized must be hyper-vigilant about ways he is perceived by the mainstream. Although he may be read as a man, he does not ‘pass’ as white. Race and gender, while both operating in binary power relations, are not the same. James’ stealth approach to masculinity is desired and brings with it protection, relative comfort and privilege. Because of his history as a woman, he is aware of the complex negotiations and concessions he makes when passing. As a black man, James’ behaviour, and that of the rest of the participants, is subjected to much closer scrutiny, and anything gendered is overdetermined because of
his race. Despite the complex negotiations that a racialized trans man has to undergo to relate to women, men, feminists, queer people, etc., the social capital that passing affords him can be used to create solidarity with women of colour, who experience oppression along multiple axes of power.

A similar connection between race and gender is made when Jason talks about going to the pharmacy late at night. Since he transitioned he has found he is followed around stores by security much more often. He is forty-eight years old and middle class, a tenured university professor. A white colleague in the same store does not have to endure being treated like a potential criminal. Note that Jason implies he was scrutinized in stores before his transition. It is just that now he is read as male, it happens more often. His wearing of a hooded sweatshirt reinforces the stereotype of the gangster ready to shoot anyone who crosses him. Race, class, gender and sexuality intersect effectively in this scenario. The young black male enters a store. The discourse is already written and is entrenched in a white supremacist patriarchal culture. He is angry, disenfranchised, poor, hypersexual, hypermasculine, and dangerous. In the hierarchy of social relations Jason’s masculinity and blackness intersect to disempower him. Male privilege is essentially used against him, as his blackness conflates his masculinity with criminality. Black men who challenge this stereotype must work harder to overcome it. One of the reasons for the critical success of the HBO series, *The Wire* is that one of the gang leaders, Omar, is queer and is variously depicted kissing his black male lover. Omar challenges this stereotype, even as he unapologetically portrays a gang leader in Baltimore’s tough, poor and racialized inner city. The gay gangster, who lives by a strict code, never swears, never kills anyone who is not involved in the gang life, and accompanies his grandmother
to church every Sunday, raises our hopes of a more complex treatment of North America’s ongoing and very real problems engendered by a white, patriarchal culture.

**Intersections at Play**

Colin, a mixed-race transgender classical musician teaches with the School Board and performs concerts all over Canada and Europe. He started transitioning eight years ago and he affiliates most strongly with the queer community, where he experiences solidarity in many ways. Like the other participants Colin does not experience political solidarity outside of queers and trans people. In his work life he is stealth to those who did not know him pre-transition. Fellow musicians with whom he has worked since before he transitioned know about his trans identity and he has experienced very few problems in that context, although the question of solidarity does not factor since he is adept at separating his work life from his social life. As a person and a musician, he challenges stereotypes and assumptions about classical musicians. He is part of an ensemble that takes early European music and transports it to the present postmodernist context, referencing such themes as madness, sexuality, gender, and youth. Colin has a Mohawk haircut, several visible tattoos, piercings, and wears only black. He spoke about how he is perceived by audiences who see him for the first time performing with an ensemble or an orchestra:

> There is a lot of doubt. They just see me walking out onto the stage, and then you know, some people look horrified and then I play and I think that’s the part I like when they start to challenge their own idea of what people look like and what they do. Like making up preconceived ideas, like judgment, just from the way I look and noticing like, *oh my god this person looks like this and plays the music that I like and respect*...So I am hoping that they see someone like me walking down the street…and not assume anything about that person.

While the audience as a whole is not a site of solidarity, Colin’s friends and allies come to his concerts, volunteer at the door, and commit themselves to standing in solidarity
with him, his gender identity, and his transgressive approach to traditional music. His friends are queer and trans, located in the borderlands alongside Colin. He teaches for the school board and relates a story of when he was walking in the hall of a high school where he teaches and was stopped by a teacher he hadn’t met before. When she saw him she remarked, “Oh great, you’re here. The photocopier is in the teachers’ lounge and it isn’t working right.” He believes the class-based assumptions of the teacher originated in his subcultural style (Gilroy, 1991). He commented to me, “I’m glad you’re questioning people that you don’t recognize but…what are the stats you know [about] child molesters…that look…different? No, they’re all the ones who blended in.” Colin’s class performance sets him apart from other people in his profession, and his audience. He works within an elite stratum of society that reveres European music, and he is also a teacher who has today’s young minds and spirits in his hands. His trans queer orientation, his mixed-race heritage (Chinese/Hungarian), and subcultural style can all be signifiers of class, and place him in contrast to most of his peers in the music world.

Subcultures grow out of multiple structures of inequality…and are generally understood as simultaneously resistances to and reproductions of those inequities. As creative responses to the injuries of inequality and attempts to maintain dignity, they are often ‘intentionally confrontational and disturbing styles’, which pose a ‘perceived threat to civil order and morality’… (Ferrell and Sanders, 1995: 8, 16, cited in Bettie, 2003: 45).

British punk was a movement that brought white working-class and Rastafarian music together in an era when racism and nationalism were phenomena that were producing tension in a country where borders between classes, and ethnicities were clearly delineated. Punk politicized young blacks and whites, who banded together in solidarity to engage in anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-nationalist organizing. The two-tone music they produced brought these previously polarized groups together to challenge the
legitimacy of the state-supported monarchy, to contest equations of ‘Britishness’ and ‘whiteness’ and brought the explosive issues of nationalism and racism to the foreground (Gilroy, 1991: 123). Colin’s punk style references this enduring political subculture as he resolutely insists upon challenging his audiences to think about the contradictions embedded in the act of listening to early European music in the contemporary context of globalization, capitalism and racism.

Colin raises questions about ownership of classical music – who gets to play it, and who listens to it. The audience goes home having had their assumptions challenged. Until punk emerged on the scene in the late 1970s in Britain, class identity had to do with family background and history and was quite fixed (Wark, 2008). Diversification, immigration, and proliferation of new media have reconfigured and complicated class boundaries by recognizing the imbrication of such axes of identity as race and class (Miles and Brown, 2003). North American definitions of class are contested, more fluid. Class status is more dependent on individual success than on family history (Bettie, 2003). A racialized transman in Canada faces barriers to employment, education, family support, and adequate health care, all of which can impact a person’s class status. Colin is fortunate to have been able to make a living through his passion for music, and although he wears the signifiers of punk and working-class solidarity, enjoys a middle-class lifestyle. His family is very supportive of his transition, and he has a large community of friends. His subcultural style signifies class-consciousness and an attempt to challenge unequal power relations in and out of the music world. He allies himself with the youth he teaches through his style, evening out the power imbalances inherent in the teacher-student relationship, while at the same time challenging colleagues and those in authority.
to rethink their assumptions about the way power operates in the classroom and the orchestra pit. His insistence on unapologetically refusing to conform marks a reluctance to be co-opted by the elite world in which he works.

The LGBT community has its own class conundrums due to intersections of gender, race and sexuality. Arguably, white gay men have higher socioeconomic statuses, and hence, more access to power, than most others in the queer community. Race, gender and sexuality are axes of identity that help determine a person’s social position. So, a racialized transgender man has to work harder to access the kind of privilege accorded someone whose only ‘othered’ social position is queer sexuality.

Colin identifies as a ‘queer boy’ and affiliates most strongly with other queers, especially lesbians and trans people. His in-your-face style causes cognitive dissonance amongst his audience and work colleagues. He unapologetically references punk, and declares an anti-racist and anti-capitalist solidarity in a world dominated by those who are not often challenged to think about their class location or whiteness. “An aspect of whiteness is that whites often do not immediately experience themselves as members of the racial/ethnic category ‘white’, but as individuals, and, without a cultural discourse of class identity, they do not readily experience themselves as members of a class community either” (Bettie, 2003). His style provokes a response, and causes audiences to think about their own location with respect to his. Colin’s subcultural style, his working class and anti-racist solidarity, and his affiliation with the Other are resistance strategies that situate him in the borderlands of identity. He is not easily defined, and resists attempts to do so.
Sea Dog works for a union, and notes the class inequity that occurs even in that context. He comments,

We have jobs in our union...that people are making over a hundred grand. Then we have people...who are making thirty grand, right? And then we have people who are casual workers, who...pay union dues...but they don’t...really have as much benefits as the people who are full-time...so already...there’s a whole separation around class.

He notices a hierarchy exists within the union, an organization that strives to stand up for workers and to address workplace inequities.

If there’s someone who’s having a whatever kind of issue...involving management and then they come to the union...some people in the union will be like, ‘oh this guy is really high up, like we should really take it seriously.’ Why should we take this guy really seriously when somebody else just came to us last week and they’re a part-time worker and they’re...getting the wrong deal? I, you know, I personally try to take both cases at the same level of seriousness. I can’t say that for everybody involved, you know?

As the grievance officer, his job entails standing in solidarity with workers experiencing inequitable treatment at work. It is clear from the passages above that Sea Dog has a nuanced understanding of social hierarchies. His union work and political activism created bonds of solidarity with others living in the borderlands. Paradoxically, Sea Dog sometimes feels that he is not taken seriously at work. He mentions how, because he has some knowledge of IT, he is called upon to take care of IT and administrative issues, but when it comes to committee and project work, his usefulness is confined to administration, even though his job description encompasses more than that.

Some people treated me accordingly, like, well...you’re just going to take care of this stuff, right? We’re having a really important meeting and you don’t really need to be there. And I mean some of those people knew also...I was trans...It was very interesting to see it play out and then I thought, hmmm, I think I’m being shafted here.

Inequity in the workplace for Sea Dog, as with the other men in this study, has to do with class, race and gender identity. He takes his job seriously, and makes a point of creating solidarity with workers, yet he himself experiences racism, classism and transphobia in
the union, a space that prides itself on its commitment to equity and solidarity among workers. There are women in his office who are not well educated about trans issues, but they have taken the time to listen to him and call him by his chosen name. On the other hand, there is another person he works with who constantly stumbles over pronouns. Sea Dog identifies this person as someone who does not take him seriously in the office. The people he works with are primarily white women in their fifties and sixties. He said that sometimes they use outdated and racist terminology, like ‘coloured’. He comments, “[A]nd I was like, ‘where are you from? Like, what year are we in?’ You know?” When he challenged a woman about this, she became defensive and cited her age as an excuse for her ignorance.

In the course of this research it became clear that queer communities often fail to achieve solidarity across intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality. For example, Sea Dog’s boss is a queer woman of colour whom he considers to be in his corner around racism, and around homophobia and lesbophobia, but he is not sure he can count on her loyalty around transphobia. He worries, based on evidence from past interactions, that when he presents a document produced by the Canadian Labour Congress about transitioning in the workplace, a document that reinforces the union’s purported commitment to solidarity across difference, she will not be very strong in her support because the membership might not feel comfortable. He terms her anti-racist stance as solidarity, but I argue that her weak response to trans issues situates her solidarity in a liminal, contingent context. She is a black lesbian in a powerful position, and she has the power to effect change, but she chooses to use that power in ways that make her feel more comfortable, rather than for the greater good. Contingent solidarity weakens the
entire structure of a union or organization claiming worker solidarity. Sea Dog, marginalized along multiple axes, is more effective at building solidarity than those around him who are paid more than he is to forge such alliances. Sea Dog’s boss perhaps feels that her power is contingent upon her ability to keep the union bosses happy, rather than challenging hegemony. Leadership in a workplace built on the principles of solidarity and equity needs to challenge majority opinions that marginalize people based on race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity. Sea Dog challenges his boss and co-workers to re-evaluate their biases and erase their transphobia. He stands up, not just for himself, but for other trans workers represented by his union. The question he may well ask himself is, ‘who is standing up for me?’

Nesta and Sea Dog are partners. They are both black transmen who have been together for about six years. Nesta started hormones before Sea Dog, who started injecting testosterone shortly after they got together. They have both had top surgery (breast reduction surgery), and both identify as gay men. Nesta is currently off testosterone because he is trying to get pregnant. In thinking about solidarity and the way power circulates, Nesta talked about what happens when he and Sea Dog go to ‘bear’ clubs together. Bears are predominantly white gay men who have hairy bodies and faces, and are often heavy set. They are seen as very masculine and many bears identify as working-class. They form a subculture within the gay community and do not normally interact with women (Suresha, 2002). Sea Dog and Nesta are increasingly becoming disillusioned with the bear scene. They often go with a Chinese trans queer man, who is slight, smooth-skinned and always expresses how uncomfortable he feels in the bear bars. He comments on how racist the scene seems, and no one is interested in him because he is
not hairy. He, Nesta and Sea Dog are the only people of colour in the bar usually. Nesta comments,

So you know this ability to blend in and to pass, and to be seen as just a gay man has more to do with passing as non-transgender, but also necessarily being white…I…think the whole assimilation thing into the gay male community, at least the _________ gay male community, I think it has also to do with whiteness.

There is a commonly held misconception about the Stonewall riots, which heralded the beginning of the gay rights movement in June of 1969, that they were started by liberal white, middle-class gay people. Much of the historical writings about queer life in the 1950s and ‘60s more accurately refer to the butch/femme phenomenon amongst lesbians, and male-to-female cross-dressers, but the lesbian and gay rights movement that emerged from Stonewall quickly erased much of that history (Allen, 2008). The people who were routinely abused and harassed by the police were transsexuals of colour and working class butch lesbians (Gan, 2007). Men dressed as women and ‘mannish’-looking lesbians were beaten, arrested, humiliated and sometimes raped by the police who were never held accountable (Duberman, 1994). On a June evening in 1969, the end of the decade of love and civil rights, it was clear no one was going to stand up for queer rights, so queer people decided to fight back themselves (Duberman, 1994). The riots lasted for three nights, and marked a turn in events, but not without a cost. Until about ten or fifteen years ago, Pride events were labelled ‘Gay and Lesbian Pride’, using language excluding transgender people and bisexuals. The controversial bisexual was grudgingly admitted to the ranks in the late ‘90s, and only recently has transgenderism been recognized as a legitimate queer identity. Last year saw the very first Trans March in Toronto.

When a queer Trinidadian man led an anti-oppression workshop I attended at a queer health conference a few years ago, he spoke about the fact that many queer people do not
feel that achieving the right to marry is the most important issue facing our community. He cited the invisibility and discrimination in employment, housing, the law and healthcare that transsexuals face, as well as issues of discrimination many working class, poor, and racialized queers are dealing with, both within and outside of the queer community. A middle-aged white woman scolded this man for being anti-marriage, ignoring his argument about intersections of oppression.

The above scenarios support a prominent theme pervading this research. That is, that solidarity based on sexual orientation is undermined by a concerted lack of attention to the intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality in LGBT communities. Pride slogans, such as ‘Unity’ and ‘You Belong’\textsuperscript{14} are cold comfort in a context where voices of international solidarity are silenced,\textsuperscript{15} and issues of racism, classism and transphobia are allowed to proliferate unchallenged. The bears have created a subculture based on white, working-class masculinity, and anyone who is outside of that definition finds it difficult to find community. Nesta’s belief that assimilation into the bear community has as much to do with whiteness as it has to do with being a gay man, is legitimated by evidence of the historical marginalization of racialized queers and trans people in queer communities. Default LGBT communities valorize whiteness and gender normativity, so much so that identities that do not conform to these hegemonic subject positions are not only delegitimized through systematic exclusions, but also are silenced through tactics

\textsuperscript{14} Toronto Pride’s theme for 2010.

\textsuperscript{15} This year, the Toronto Pride Committee has banned the use of the words ‘Israeli Apartheid’ and therefore the presence of the solidarity group, Queers Against Israeli Apartheid, from the Pride parade.
that serve to maintain the dominance of liberal, palatable gay rights agendas. Solidarity cannot be sustained in such an environment of hierarchy and exclusion. The bears encountered by Sea Dog and Nesta do not like women, and exclude racialized people and transgender men from their parties. Arguably they build solidarity along class lines among themselves, but the exclusions they facilitate are antithetical to the notion of solidarity.

**Queer Silencing of the Borderlands**

In his interview with me, Sea Dog expressed anger and frustration at the contemporary queer community for its ignorance of its own history. He feels strongly that racism exists in the queer community. Fanon’s assertion that a black man is a black man, whereas a white man is a man (Fanon, 2008) resonates in contemporary queer society, where mainstream lesbian and gay organizations ignore, or pay lip service to intersections of race and class with queer identity. This single-issue politics is endemic to queer communities. The concerns of those with the most power, white gay men, are valorized to the marginalization of others. The transgender person of colour is disadvantaged along several axes of power. Sea Dog is a DJ, and has been aware for quite a number of years of a separate and thriving black queer community in the city where he lives. Nesta commented that when he first started dating Sea Dog, he encountered someone who asked him what he thought of the black queer community.

I remember thinking, *what is she talking about?* I had no idea what she was talking about and I was like, the black queer community, eh? I mean I guess I see people from time to time. I didn’t know what she meant. Now I do know what she meant because there is quite a huge community, you can choose to only hang out with black queer people in _________ and still go to a party every single day…Before, I certainly surrounded myself by a lot of racialized people, but not necessarily black gay people.
Both Sea Dog and Nesta find solidarity in the Black queer community, where they are friends with artists, prison abolitionists and trans people. There are many trans activists working in the prison abolition movement, since transgender people and black people are still over-policed and are overrepresented in prisons (Nesta, personal communication, 2010). Sea Dog and Nesta find solidarity amongst other marginalized queer identities. There is a paucity of organizing around the intersections of race, class and gender within mainstream queer communities today, and so trans people of colour have to find others in a hostile landscape that not only denies our existence, but also contributes to ongoing oppression and lack of support for our issues. The story of Sylvia Rivera, the trans person of colour whose bravery ignited the lesbian and gay rights movement has been buried in the closet and ignored by all but those who feel the chill of the mainstream, white appropriation of queer history, and who are facing similar problems today.

Nesta aligns himself in solidarity with other trans people of colour by insisting on being openly transgender. He is out in most areas of his life, has long dreadlocks, is currently not on testosterone, has had top surgery, and identifies as a gay man. “I am not interested in being trans in order to fit into a gay male community, like I have to not be myself in order to be accepted. I am not interested in that.” His choice to be unapologetically out about who he is has the potential to cause his contemporaries to pay attention and interrogate their own positions on racism, transphobia and misogyny within queer communities.

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Colin experienced transphobia at a lesbian and trans-positive dance recently. The group that supports the dance is concerned about hosting events that attract people who are marginalized in mainstream queer communities. They have hosted Muslim queer events, community discussions about such issues as police violence, racism and transphobia, and challenge their local community to think beyond the hegemonic white, middle class lesbian and gay male. Colin describes his experience at the last dance thus:

I just felt like women…two in particular, were staring me down in not a nice way. They were looking at me as if it was like looking at a fucking freak, looking at me and trying to suss me out…looking at me with contempt…not in a curious, flirty, hey, best of both worlds kind of deal, or like how curious, there are only three of them here like that kind of way…It was in a negative way and it really bugged me.

A group that is trying to build solidarity with groups who have been traditionally marginalized within queer communities advertises in overt ways that its dance is trans positive, and, still, a trans man experiences transphobia in the space. In recent transgender history, lesbians have been responsible for some of the more insidious transphobia levelled at trans women and men (Califia, 2003). Entrenched misogyny inside and outside of queer communities partly explains women’s suspicion of men, and hierarchies of power make it easy to scapegoat less powerful subject positions; however in a postmodern arena of multiple, contingent identities, intersecting subject positions and the increasing visibility of trans bodies, this kind of situation is clearly frustrating.

Nesta relates a story about how frequently when he is in the company of gay men one of them makes a comment about how disgusting female body parts are, knowing that Nesta and Sea Dog are trans men. He said that happens often and the men do not seem to understand that what they are saying is offensive. Their misogyny stings their friends, who are men with vaginas. There is a sense that the gay men forget that the men they are
with have female body parts. While this lack of respect for women suggests the men see Nesta and Sea Dog as men, important for Sea Dog and Nesta is the issue of misogyny. Identifying as gay men, Sea Dog and Nesta are aware of a lack of solidarity from their gay male contemporaries. Not only do they encounter sexism, but also we know from other accounts that they also run into racism and the uniform whiteness of mainstream queer spaces. They want to interact with men in social and sexual ways, but they run into barriers to connection because of race, gender and sexuality. Nesta and Sea Dog do not locate solidarity in this community. Just because there is a shared interest in bears, and relationships or sex with gay men, does not mean that affiliations are easy to form. The men, by discussing their disgust at women’s bodies with Sea Dog and Nesta, are trying to create affiliations, with the embedded assumption that all gay men think the same way about women. Nesta and Sea Dog are unimpressed by the misogyny, and feel alienated from this community. Even in absent-mindedly inviting Nesta and Sea Dog into their exclusively masculine domain, there is no hint of solidarity. Not only are their comments, actions and affiliations problematic on many levels, but also solidarity needs a shared struggle against injustice to come into being. Simply affiliating with a person or group because of the perception of shared interests – in this case attraction to men – is not solidarity; it is an attempt at homogeneity and functions to alienate outsiders, as Sea Dog and Nesta have discovered.

Solidarity in the borderlands of identity is not easily built. The trans men in this study have encountered homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism, misogyny, racism and classism from all spheres of life, queer and otherwise. They have also experienced profound moments of solidarity, and have built their lives with intimate knowledge of the
contingent nature of community. The challenges are complex, the barriers often seeming insurmountable; at the same time, though, they present opportunities for transformation, especially of queer communities, which, in order to flourish, need to take responsibility for their role in the marginalization of racialized transgender identities.
CONCLUSION
For some, the achievement of solidarity in the borderlands of identity is a complex undertaking. Queer spaces are populated with women, men, trans people, FTMs, MTFs, and others, whose identities are also defined by race, sexuality, and class. Depending on the relationships among the various actors in a given situation, the performance of identity will take on meaning that is contingent upon the intersections of identity within each person and among individuals. In this respect, identity is fluid and constantly shifting. Put another way, superficial understandings of queer communities locates us in one large melting pot of identity where queerness is the defining property. Affiliations of queer people simply on the basis of shared homosexuality produces a false consciousness of solidarity that quickly disintegrates as soon as a racialized, transgender, bisexual and/or other marginalized identity enters the scenario. Mainstream LGBT spaces and communities are in some ways hostile to views and identities that challenge the status quo, and the relationship that racialized or trans people have with these communities is one where their issues, concerns, life experiences and contributions are marginalized and erased. The fight for LGBT rights often circumscribes difficult questions about solidarity across differences of race, class, gender and sexuality, and the movement is hegemonically white, middle class, gendered in the binary, and sexually unambiguous. The struggle for queer rights cannot be considered to facilitate solidarity as long as some queers are marginalized within, and alienated from, queer movements.

The participants in this research study shared the complex considerations they must constantly think about to get through the week. The racialized trans person imbues activities that the white non-trans person takes for granted, with meaning, negotiation, navigation, reflection, and assessment. Depending on where in the transition process
someone is, a summer swim in a public pool or lake is fraught with potential danger or embarrassment. Using a public washroom can be a stressful, even dangerous, undertaking. Life within one’s family of origin can be a lonely, isolating experience. Reductionist, single-issue politics can further marginalize lives that experience oppression on a number of axes.

My participants all possess a modicum of social capital because of education, employment, involvement in political activism, and supportive families, etc. They are each working to some degree to help better the lives of racialized trans people who do not have the resources to stand up for themselves. Some of them are activists in and outside the transgender rights movement. Some are standing up for other queer and trans people by being out as trans. Some have chosen stealth and have allied themselves with queer people and women. Some prefer to be considered transgender, or liminal, while others identify as men. Some have used their social capital to produce solidarity with communities that struggle to have their voices heard and their needs met in a society that criminalizes and pathologizes otherness. Medicalizing and psychiatric discourses contribute to characterizations of trans bodies and lives as anomalous, aberrant, and in need of correction. Many of the participants in this study have followed a path that is increasingly being travelled by other trans people, wherein hormones and surgery are paid for out of pocket and funded in many cases through grassroots fundraising activities. The medico-legal system, while not bypassed altogether in this scenario, plays a utilitarian role identified by the trans person himself. Thus, the power circulating and produced by medicalizing and juridical discourses on the topic of trans bodies is harnessed to produce a discourse that locates the power to decide on courses of treatment
more firmly with the trans person. Other participants have elected to exploit medicine in smaller ways, for example by taking hormones, but deciding against sex-reassignment surgery for the time being, or for good. Such a decision produces a counter-discourse that stresses new ways of looking at gender outside of the gender binary.

The physicians working with the research participants are, to some extent, collaborators in these counter-discourses. In Ontario, health care is covered by a universal health insurance plan, although hormones and sex-reassignment surgery are not. There are surgeons who will perform surgery for a fee, which is expensive and therefore prohibitive for most trans people, but for those who can raise the funds, it is preferable to the alternative, which is to endure scrutiny, surveillance and pathologization by the psychiatric system. My family physician, I believe, has never had a FTM under her care before. I provided her with educational materials and shared with her my own research into hormone therapy. Her patient-centred care, the proliferation of education about trans bodies and lives, trans organizing around the politics of identity, health care and legislation, and our collaborative, working relationship have all facilitated my transition on my terms. She sends me for blood work, inquires about my progress, asks me about any psychosocial issues I may be experiencing, and even wrote me a note to take to the airport since the gender designation on my passport is still ‘F’. While there are still gaps in her knowledge, she is very supportive, is willing to take my lead and learn from me, and is committed to patient-centred care. Her willingness to collaborate with me in flouting traditional rules around gender performance, passing without hormones, and psychiatric intervention make a world of difference to my quality of life in the borderlands of identity.
Collaborative relationships with health providers, trans and trans-positive queer and non-queer people, family, partners, employers, and colleagues create solidarity across borders of difference. Remembering that identity does not fix a subject position, but rather is a dynamic state that relies on relationships, timing and other contextual issues to function, allows us to note the contingent, fluctuating and unstable processes of power and solidarity. The racialized transgender men in my study have variously discovered ways of using power to lessen the harmful effects of marginalization. They have created solidarity in their own lives by constantly considering their subject position relative to the people they encounter on a daily basis. They offer solidarity to others in various ways: one is helping to raise a teenage boy who has no father and is a recent immigrant from Korea; another organizes around sex workers’ and prisoners’ rights; another works with prisoners and speaks publicly about issues related to identity; one assisted with organizing a deaf queers conference; one is helping to create an alternative Pride that builds coalitions across race, gender identity, class, sexuality and ability; and another identifies himself as an ally to women and queer people. In turn they build solidarity in their own lives by reaching out to marginalized identities and experiencing reciprocity.

In an environment where some identities are seen to be more legitimate than others, however, solidarity becomes a scarce commodity. Affiliation with a certain community because of sexuality, race, class, or gender does not guarantee solidarity. As we saw from Nesta’s and Sea Dog’s experiences with white gay men, James’ experiences with colleagues, and Jason’s worries about the locker room and interactions with family, tolerance and solidarity are distant relatives. Racialized trans men need to be able to distinguish between the two, and feel the power to build true solidarity in their own lives.
Because the logical choice of queer and feminist communities can nevertheless be sites of transphobia, and are still dominated in Canada by an assumption of whiteness and middle-class social standing, and because our cultural communities, be they racialized or white, are not always places where trans people can locate strong allies, the importance of out, powerful and proud trans identities that span the continuum of difference and make contributions that improve the lives of other trans people, cannot be overstated. I suspect there will always be debates about the relative benefits of transitioning within the binary, whether or not to have sex-reassignment surgery, and whether it is better to come out or remain stealth. But as long as the debates are conducted in ways that challenge us into new ways of thinking about marginal identities, and whose voice is legitimate, as long as we foster positive change, and create solidarity among trans people across differences to stand up to fear, and respect each others’ journeys, the possibilities for a strong, vibrant and powerful trans presence in our communities, homes and workplaces are endless.

The concept of relational positionality provides us with a tool for discovering the ways that identity, co-constituted as it is by gender, race, class and sexuality, is contingent upon context. The procedures of power cause us to constantly define and redefine ourselves relative to our situation. The notion of borderlands evokes the actual border, fences that we build to separate ourselves from others at different times according to the context, or which are built to exclude us. To some extent we all need that border to define us, and to, paradoxically, keep our ever-shifting identities somehow intact and un-invaded. When we encounter a situation or a person who challenges us to see things differently, or someone who forces us to the borderlands by means of discrimination or fear, or when we find ourselves at the periphery because of our non-hegemonic identity,
there is a pull back to the centre, for the borderlands are an uncomfortable place to be. Most of us want to belong. Pride events across North America use slogans that emphasize belonging and inclusion year after year. The identities residing in the borderlands are often compelled to move back to the centre, in many cases by conceding to pressure to alter some aspect of themselves that sets them apart, bringing them back in line with hegemonic identity. Those who are caught at the border, as in a web, struggle the most because they are responsible for breaking ground and challenging society to rethink its assumptions about what does and does not constitute a legitimate identity. Stigma, discrimination and abuse flourish in this scenario because in the act of challenging hegemonic identity, those who are different are made to suffer so that the centre remains intact and hierarchies of power are not contested.17

This study was very limited and only provided a small window into the daily experiences and passages to solidarity of racialized transgender men. A larger and longer study would yield more opportunities to gain insight into the immediate and longer-term challenges and resolutions of this often-dismissed population. My hope is that this research helps to shape how we think about the ways individuals operate in the postmodern landscape, where identity is fluid and constantly shifting. Marginalized identities are not always safe among hegemonic subject positions, where whiteness, heterosexuality and the gender binary are taken for granted and occupy the centre. Legislation and policy that exert undue control over the movements of the ‘other’ exist so that the dominant culture will maintain its authority and privilege. Because of the

17 Many thanks go to Valine Vaillancourt for this insight.
circulatory and unfettered nature of power (Foucault, 1980), the dominant culture must always be vigilant and suspicious of outsiders, whom they see as threatening to this hegemony. Because the dominant group has committed discriminatory acts against marginalized subjects, the threat of backlash is felt even more acutely. In this way, the dominant culture has created a circular conundrum where the exertion of power over others produces the need for more power to maintain its dominance. This group polices its borders assiduously, preventing those on the margins to gain access to the same privileges. The group occupying the borderlands is marginalized precisely because of this situation and so, to experience less stigma and to feel a sense of belonging, find strategies to connect with others who are marginalized. Such a situation builds solidarity and has the potential to transform the borderlands into sites of powerful challenge to hegemonic subject positions. On the other hand, the stress of living at the margins often entrenches hierarchies of power based on identity, and creates social inequities that are very difficult to overcome in a culture where otherness and difference are overdetermined and viewed with suspicion. The borderlands can give rise to victimhood, where the small victories of one marginalized group, for example white lesbians and gay men, can be used against members whose subject positions are further marginalized, for example, racialized and non-racialized trans people or queers, and whose concerns are considered to pose a threat to the precarious and hard-won status quo.

Future research would benefit border-dwellers by meaningfully taking into account the intersections of identity, creating political platforms and direction that are informed by members of marginalized communities themselves, and that look at the broader picture of inclusion, acceptance and solidarity. Policies that keep transgender people fearful and
marginalized serve those who would cut off their noses to spite their faces. People who are fearful and excluded in society spend so much time navigating and negotiating their space in the world that these otherwise productive and contributing citizens are unable to participate fully without support. It could be argued that mainstream inclusion is not a cure-all, since there are countless flaws with hierarchical distributions of power, of which we have explored a few. For society to be transformed so that it operates on the basis of equity, human rights, justice and horizontal power relations, there have to be commitments by legislators, policy-makers and educators to practices that entail recognizing that the comforts and privileges they enjoy come at the expense of others with little or no power.

I stated early in this thesis that, despite its challenges, I am more comfortable in the borderlands, where the mainstream dare not venture. It can be argued that eliminating the borderlands completely entails simply bringing trans people, and others who do not fit, into the mainstream, where the complex issues of difference, liminality, and intersectionality will disappear. It would entail co-optation of the marginalized by the mainstream, while problematic procedures and practices of power and identity enacted at the centre would continue unchallenged. It seems to me to be an indefensible solution. I occupy the borderlands, but I also enjoy full-time employment, will soon hold a Master’s degree, want for no material possessions, sleep in the safety of my own home, and have a supportive circle of friends and family. I have also chosen to resist gender conformity, am defined by my queer, mixed-race identity and have the power to stand up against injustice in my own life and in others’, preferring to challenge society’s assumptions about whose identity is legitimate and whose is not. In this sense, too, I am liminal. Because of my
social capital, job security and supports, I can afford to raise challenges and questions, and be heard. Not everyone can say the same. For some, assimilation into mainstream culture is a question of life or death. Racialized transgender men have multiple challenges, and it is not surprising that adding an extra layer of otherness onto an already marginalized body is disagreeable to many. Passing or going stealth is often the only viable option. Acknowledging the contradictions at work, however, the attainment of male privilege by the racialized trans man is tempered by recognition of the decades of misogyny and sexism that come to the queer woman of colour.

Positive change that addresses all the historical misdeeds levelled at transgender people, and especially those who are racialized, might not come quickly enough, if at all. In the meantime, recognition by queer communities of the historical legacy of trans activists, and solidarity movements forged in the name of Sylvia Rivera and others who put their lives at risk to spark the gay rights movement at the Stonewall Inn in 1969, and who challenged lesbian feminist activists to stand up and recognize their own transphobia and complicity in gender oppression, would go a long way in helping those in the borderlands to move to a place of mutual understanding and solidarity.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1 – Demographic Information

Nesta

Was on [testosterone] from 2002-2006 now off to try to get pregnant.
[Been transitioning for] ten years, actively.
I do prison activism and black queer & trans organizing mostly. Also work on HIV prevention, especially with bi queer trans men! I want to live in a world where we all have access to the right of self-determination, love, food etc.
I identify as a trans man! Or sometimes as a transsexual, as well as gay & queer
I am partnered.
I am a twin. I'm black.

Sea Dog

I’ve been on T for about 6 years now. I think of transitioning as an ongoing thing but some times I do not think of it at all. I would say I started transitioning about two years before I went on T.

I do consider myself an activist. I concentrate my activism around rights for Trans people, prison abolition, fight around immigration rights, and rights of sex workers. I identify as male and trans.

I am queer. I am in a relationship. I am first generation Canadian of African-Caribbean heritage.

Working full-time as a grievance officer in a union; DJ

James

On T and transitioning since 2004
Not an activist
Identify as Male
Single (and interested in remaining so)

Colin

Officially, transitioning about 9 years, but really it feels like it's always been there inside me. So, transitioning the outer (and hormonally inside) me for 8 years.

I sort of feel like an activist. I choose my moments, of course, like any trans person I think, but I don't wear shirts that flag me as such (like one guy I know who wears a shirt that says, I sit to pee…that sort of thing. but I do wear my Trans Am shirt every now and then, sort of an inside joke to those who 'know'.) But recently I modelled for the Trans Pap campaign. So that was super outing myself. Felt like that was a big step.
I identify as male… and trans if asked on a survey for demographic purposes. But rarely would I offer that piece of information to the regular person.

I'm definitely queer.

I am in a relationship.

**Jason**

Jason transitioned in 1998 and has been on T since that time.

He is not a trans activist.

He is not out about being trans, and passes as hetero male.

He is married.

He is of mixed racial heritage.

As an educator and writer, he works to dispel heterosexism and racism through his writing, and his facilitation in the classroom.

**Cole**

On testosterone for 1.5 years, but transitioning for several years

Mixed-race, transgender, queer, dates mostly women

Activist (queer, feminism, anti-racism, sex-positive)
Appendix 2: Glossary of Terms

A **transgender** person is someone who does not conform to society’s gender norms of masculine/feminine.

A **transsexual** is a person who has an intense and sometimes long-term experience of being the sex opposite to his or her birth-assigned sex.

Specifically, a **female-to-male transsexual (transman)** is assigned a female sex at birth, but feels like a male and identifies as a (transsexual) boy/man.

A **male-to-female transsexual (transwoman)** is assigned a male sex at birth, but feels like a female and identifies as a (transsexual) girl/woman.

**Trans and transpeople** are non-clinical terms that usually include transsexual, transgendered and other gender-variant people.

**Intersex** is the term that has recently replaced “hermaphrodite.” Intersex people possess some blend of male and female physical sex characteristics (see also www.isna.org).

**Queer** is a term that has traditionally been used as a derogatory and offensive word for LGBT people. Many have reclaimed this word and use it proudly to describe their identity.

**Genderism** is the assumption that all people must conform to society’s gender norms and, specifically, the binary construct of only two genders (male and female). Genderism does not include or allow for people to be intersex, transgendered, transsexual, or genderqueer (see Gender identity for a discussion of gender).

**Gender identity**, which does not always correspond to biological sex, is a person’s self-image or belief about being female or male. For example, some people with male biology may feel themselves to be female.

**Gender roles** are the arbitrary rules, assigned by society, that define what clothing, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc. are considered appropriate and inappropriate for members of each sex.

**Gender transition** is the period during which transsexual persons begin changing their appearance and bodies to match their internal identity.

**Stealth** is the state of passing in the gender of preference.
Appendix 3: Multiple Autobiographical Journal Guidelines

Excerpt from Ethics Application - 2009

- You will be asked to carry a digital audio recorder with you for a week
- During the week you will record your own voice, talking about any experiences you’re having throughout the week that is related to your identity as a trans man of colour. You are free to record as few or as many comments as you choose
- The aim is that you will relate anything that happened, or anything you’ve been thinking about, and your responses to things that have been happening during the week
- After the week is over, I will ask you to participate in a follow-up focus group with other participants in the study.

I will ask you to consider the following questions as you go about your week with the audio recorder:

“Please carry the digital recorder with you for the week.

“Try to be aware of your surroundings, your interactions with others, your everyday experiences navigating the city, your workplace, your grocery-shopping, visits to the doctor, participation in queer events and queer spaces, your relationship(s), your family, your sexual life.

“At your convenience, speak about your experiences, reactions, and emotions into the recorder.

“Questions to consider:

“Was that interaction notable in terms of my gender identity and/or race/class/sexuality?

“What happened?

“Was it a positive or negative experience?

“How do I feel about it? (e.g. angry, excited, sad, happy, indignant, afraid)

“Where do I find my strength?

“Do I have friends with whom I discuss these kinds of experiences? Are they trans friends? Racialized?

“Have I discussed experiences of being racialized and trans with others who are also racialized and/or trans? Did I do that this week?

“Have I found solidarity with other trans people? Other racialized people? If so, how so? If not, in what ways?

“Return the recorder to me at the end of the week and we will book a time for a follow-up interview and/or a focus group.”
Appendix 4: Solidarity Questions

1. Do you think solidarity is important, given our marginalized status re: gender identity, race, sexuality, etc? If so, why? If not, why not?

2. Do you find solidarity in your peer groups only, or outside, and if so, where?

3. What could be considered solidarity? What would not be considered solidarity?

4. Do you stand in solidarity with other oppressed groups/people? E.g. queer youth, racialized people, sex workers, etc.?
Appendix 5: Focus Group Questions

1. Work
   a. Are you out at work?
   b. What are the dynamics around race?
   c. Gender identity? Sexuality?
   d. Does class figure at all?
   e. Do you find solidarity at work?

2. Relationships
   a. Are your relationships affected by being trans?
   b. How about your sexuality?
   c. Have you noticed changes in your sexual interests?
   d. Do you play with men?
   e. Are you poly?
   f. Have any of you transitioned within a relationship? What was that like? What kinds of negotiations have you encountered?

3. Family
   a. I know at least one of you was visiting family in your country of origin. What was it like?
   b. Are you out to your families?
   c. How is it?
   d. How does race intersect with gender identity in your families?

4. Communities
   a. What is it like for you in your racialized communities?
   b. What is it like in your other communities?
   c. Do you hang out in queer communities?
   d. What is that like? What kinds of experiences have you had in your communities?

5. General
   a. Anything of note?
   b. How does class affect your gender identity?
   c. Are you working class, middle class?
   d. Race and class intersect in various ways. Are you aware of the different ways they intersect with each other and with race and sexuality?