Trans/formative Identities: Narrations of Decolonization in Mixed-Race and Transgender Lives

by

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary research paper explores story and metaphor of "trans/formative identities" as a basis for challenging normative racial and gender categories. Autoethnography is used as a method for weaving the author's own experience as a mixed-race Indigenous person with academic research and theory. The discussion is contextualized by an analysis of institutionalized colonial relationships framing Indigenous knowledge in academia and the role of Indian status in defining Indigenous identity. Six mixed-race and transgender or genderqueer people in Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia are interviewed and the themes from their shared experiences are used as the basis for further understanding trans/formative identities. These themes are: irony; contradiction and impossibility; stories of home and family; naming and language; embodied negotiations, contextual selves, and; artistic visions.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated in memory of my cousin Melissa (Malidi) Sedgemore.

Section One: Introduction

> Whenever I glimpse the arch of this bridge my breath catches. Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Nuhuatl word meaning tierra entre medio. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla es tierra desconocida, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in nepantla so much of the time it's become a sort of "home." (Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We Call Home* 1)

For many years now I have seen myself as a bridge, situated between various ideologies, historical lineages, and identity-based communities. This metaphor of a bridge was introduced to me through the landmark anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: writings by radical women of color* (1981). Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa powerfully articulated what so many people have felt as we have worked to translate knowledges of academe and to negotiate communities of color, Indigenous communities, dominant society, our families, and our communities of sexual preference. Most significantly, many activists and academics have worked to negotiate among our fractured selves--the parts of our histories, families, and identities which did not map neatly on to one another's shores. As a mixed-race Indigenous woman this metaphor of a bridge provided me a way of seeing my role between worlds, always one foot within and one foot outside of belonging.

Slowly the bridge metaphor began to take a new form for me, as I saw that there were not two sides being touched upon but many. These sides were always shifting as the socio-political climate changed and as new identity labels were introduced in academic and

activist circles. The follow-up publication of *This Bridge We Call Home: radical visions for transformation* (2002) mirrored the change in my own consciousness away from identity politics to a belief in developing a worldview founded on expanding or dissolving the borders of identity categories. During the nineteen-year span between the publications of these two anthologies, feminist discourses shifted away from identity politics toward a more intersectional approach to challenging regimes of power. Feminist communities experienced challenges which called upon them to re-envision and re-articulate what was considered "radical" in the face of socio-political struggles that called for "loosening our borders, not closing off to others" (Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We Call Home* 3), broadening conversations to include bio boys,[1] transgendered people, and others previously thought to be located outside of (or in opposition to) feminist discourses. With the terrains of difference shifting, I still embody split selves but am no longer envisioned as split into two – I see myself fractured into many smaller pieces. I, and many other people with mixed identities (whether of class, race, gender or other), bridge not two shores but the many crevasses of ever-shifting terrain. As we move beyond the bridge, new metaphors are needed.

In my early twenties, as I developed a greater self-awareness as an activist, writer, mixed-blood woman, straight woman, queer woman, Indigenous woman and other imaginings of my identity, I was performing in Victoria and Vancouver at cabarets and community events on a regular basis. Taking the stage with sparkly drag queens, macho kings, tough

[1] The term "bio boys" is used to distinguish biological males from transsexual males, trans men and other male-identified individuals. It can be used by males who wish to distinguish themselves from dominant meanings attached to male biology, along with transsexual males, trans men and other male-identified individuals.

femmes and other spoken word artists, I found myself to be one of the few voices for dynamics of colonization, racism and other issues that moved beyond the queer kingdom[2] (or challenged what that kingdom included). As I performed on stages with an almost exclusively white cast of characters, the streets outside were made up of 40% First Nations people negotiating life and death on Vancouver's East Side. Vancouver is a large urban centre with a long history of being home to a racially diverse urban population, and yet a naturalized culture of whiteness can be found in even the most radical social justice movements. Victoria, a smaller coastal city and the capital of British Columbia, is ingrained with a more overt kind of whiteness, as seen in the proud markers of a colonial past with roots deep in the culture of England.

In both cities, while I performed with drag queens playing with the "whore" stereotype, people in "animal drag," performers who called themselves gymps because of physical challenges, and a wealth of people crossing other socially constructed boundaries around what bodies should look like and what identities were available to us, a racial analysis was severely lacking. Within the queer performance circles in Vancouver and Victoria, bodies were primarily seen as gendered and sexed (and highly sexualized), not racialized or colonized bodies. The dialogue that was being read into the performances of gender and sexuality at those queer cabarets was not meant to challenge the predominantly white audiences, but provide them with objects of desire. Hence, it was acceptable for the few invited people of color to perform exoticized roles or sexy stereotypes, but little else.

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[2] The term "queer kingdom" is used here to gesture toward the masculinized nature of the queer community during the time that I was living in Vancouver and performing at cabarets.

This served as a constant reminder as to why I needed to stand on stage and rant at these queer events. While events were held specifically for women of color, I found it frustrating that the popular performance spaces lacked much connection among white and racialized communities. Scholars, filmmakers and creative writers such as Audre Lorde, Beth Brant, Alice Walker, Lee Maracle, and bell hooks had been working for many years to challenge feminists, lesbians and activists to rethink their concepts of community. Within the context of the University, this rich history, theory and story contributed to classroom discussions and Women's Centre debates on the ways that people of color and Aboriginal people were being excluded from dialogue with and participation in "women's" and "queer" communities. Unfortunately, the acknowledgement that was being called for in scholarly and creative works did not bridge the white and racialized communities that I was a part of at the time, especially in non-academic contexts.

At the same time, texts were being produced in the form of zines and, in some cases, books, such as *Boys Like Her: transfictions* (1998), which emerged out of the Vancouver spoken word scene. For many of us, this book brought together our favorite local performers and writers, and enabled us to read stories of gender transgression and sexual perversities in the privacy of our own homes. It also legitimized the voices we heard on stage in small Vancouver theatres, the ones that we couldn't find in any bookstore at the time.

Boys Like Her starts as the authors cross the US/Canada border, hinting at the borders of gender and sexuality that are crossed in the chapters that follow. The voices in *Boys Like*

Her, as with the voices in queer cabarets at that time (and into the present), like so many other spaces of cultural production, represented the voice of a community without an awareness of racial privilege. As the authors write, "the world where our stories exist does not have hard and fast boundaries. It is a place defined by our own queries, where genre, gender and generations are malleable, and where transgression is often the way to transformation—transfictions" (14). As the authors of the book successfully crossed the US/Canadian border, I wondered if they would have been allowed through had they not been white. Unquestioningly claiming Canadian identities, these voices, like so many others in our community at the time, lacked any analysis of colonization and other issues beyond those of gender and sexuality. Not seeing that their movement was facilitated by their whiteness, these "four queers crossing the border in a borrowed car" (18) represented for me the narrow vision of community that was formed by identity politics.

At this time, I was also performing in Indigenous cabarets and other events that prioritized social justice, which centered around activist identities and Indigenous politics. These spaces were largely male-dominated and lacked a discussion of sexuality and gender. While there were Aboriginal women claiming space as women, talking about gendered violence and gendered realities within our communities, the boundaries around the category "woman" went unchecked. Within my family and at potlatches in our traditional territories, I began to notice a growing presence of visibly butch women and other genderqueers, and wondered at the lack of discussion around their presence in the bighouse and in ceremony. One of my female cousins, for example, was openly lesbian and took up male roles in ceremonial spaces. The fact that she was accepted as a

"man" within those ceremonies signaled for me the need to investigate the connection between colonization and gender roles within our Kwakwaka'wakw[3] history. The significance of her masculine identity was different in mainstream society than in ceremonial contexts, as her role within the potlatch was connected to a status system that preceded colonial gender categorization. The relationship between contemporary and traditional gender roles is something that is not recognized either in most trans communities or in trans scholarship, as whiteness is usually assumed within these frameworks.[4]

My experiences in the various community contexts that I worked within and among ran parallel to my personal relationships in which gender and sexuality were prioritized as the only axes of identity that mattered. Attempts to show how race, class and other markers of socio-economic location empowered gender were squashed under the newly-emerging trans identities of my partners and friends--even those who were not white. In my experience, it was the naming and the self-perception that changed, not necessarily the ways they moved through the world or took up masculinity. I knew people who had previously identified as stone butch, boi, drag king, and butch, and who shifted into a

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[3] There are many ways to spell the name of the people from which my ancestors come, including the phonetic Kwak'wa̲ka̲'wakw. Here I use Kwakwaka'wakw, as this is the form that I am most familiar with (also used by the U'mista Cultural Centre, a community-driven cultural revival initiative). Our people are made up of many smaller communities, and my ancestors are from the Kwagu'l tribe, also spelled Kwagiulth and Kwa-Gulth.

[4] For example, I attended the Trans/Action Justice and Equality Summit in Vancouver (1999) during which a two-spirit woman asked that the discussion be tabled until we had refined the definitions of transgender to include Indigenous gender categories. The woman was told this was irrelevant and people left the room as she called out "where are all the brown faces?" This overt silencing demonstrated the ways in which whiteness dominates and determines the category "trans" in many contexts.

trans identity fairly seamlessly. I was in a series of relationships with people whose gender identities were beginning to take different shapes around the growing awareness of trans issues and I was intimately connected to the processes of self-discovery and self-naming that they were going through. In fact one of my partners told me at the beginning of our dating relationship that she had been warned by one of her friends that I would try to turn her into a man, that I would "turn her trans" if she wasn't careful. It was only a matter of months before s/he said that s/he had been afraid to admit that my intimate knowledge of gender transition was one of the reasons s/he was attracted to me to begin with.

My own identity was strangely solid, as I never claimed an identity based on sexual desire, even as my partners' identifications shifted from "woman" to "trans" to "FTM." Many of my femme[5] friends had identity crises in the face of their female partners' shifts to masculine-identified labels, as they felt they could no longer call themselves lesbian. However, I felt comfortable with these shifts, as my desire had always been for masculinity, regardless of the many ways that masculinity can be embodied. What I continued to struggle with in these relationships was not my own sexual identity but the fact that many of the white trans bois/boys and men around me (as well as trans women) could not see that their discussions of safety, naming, identity and community were formed through a normalized culture of whiteness.

[5] "Femme" identity has been called "femininity that is transgressive, disruptive, and chosen" (Harris and Crocker 3). For more information, see Brushwood Rose and Camilleri (2002), Gibson and Meem (2002), and Nestle (1992).

It is the accumulation of these moments of negotiating and translating mixed-race and transgender realities which has brought me to my current understanding of trans/formative identities. These personal and community experiences have come together to create a research project in which mixed race and transgender people talk about their/our identities, their/our stories and their/our experiences of moving between worlds.

I now write from the periphery of these communities, as I have been in heterosexual relationships in recent years with biologically born men, able to walk through the world without anyone questioning my partner's gender identity. I am also no longer performing, no longer speaking out in activist circles in the same way, but rather using my voice in academic and more mainstream community contexts. However, the queer in my worldview remains central to my understanding of gender, sexuality and identity, and I hope that this research will allow me to integrate both my hetero and my queer experiences through the development of a worldview that is "queerly heterosexual."

"Queer" is a contentious term that was once seen exclusively as derogatory slang for gay and lesbian people, but has "become a way of renaming and re-appropriating a historically negative concept and affirming same-sex identifications" (Crichlow 74). Queer was first officially used as a marker of pride by a New York-based group of activists called Queer Nation, as they took to the streets in 1990 shouting, "We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!" (Goldie 8). The term is not used without controversy, however, as "many gays and lesbians find the oppositional energy of the term off-

putting" (Goldie 8). Additionally, queer has emerged largely out of white western (American) activism and academia (Crichlow 74), and does not account for the experiences of many people of color and non-western cultures. "Queer theory" was first introduced to academia by Teresa de Lauretis at a conference in 1990,[6] where her intention was "both *to make theory queer,* and *to queer theory* to call attention to everything that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure" (Halperin par. 12). De Lauretis' notion of queer theory also sought to "introduce a problematic of multiple differences into what had tended to be a comparatively monolithic, homogenizing discourse of (homo)sexual difference, to offer a way out of the hegemony of white, male, middle-class models of analysis, and to resist intellectual domination by the empirical social sciences" (qtd. in Halperin par. 12). It is worth noting that the radical roots of the term "queer" have all but been lost in the walls of academe, with de Lauretis herself seeing the term as "devoid of the political or critical acumen she once thought it promised" (Jagose par.5).

Queer has come to be taken up more broadly by those who would like to align themselves with the rejection of mainstream culture. Thomas Piontek writes "the queer questions the taken-for-granted assumptions we make about categories and the supposedly stable relations among them, the dichotomies and reifications that characterize a great deal of gay and lesbian work" (Piontek 2). Queer can be used, then, to signal "a questioning stance, a cluster of methodologies that let us explore the taken for granted and the

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[6] Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities: An Introduction," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3.2 (1991) iii-xvii.

familiar from new vantage points" (Piontek 2). In this way, to queer something is to question or trouble dominant cultural norms and narratives of belonging.

I see things from a position of multiple truths – often conflictual, seemingly impossible, never assumed. Many people walk through the world able to assume a set of general truths about themselves, the world, and their community. But some of us have come to know better. We know that the things we are meant to see as natural and normal are in fact those that are the most deeply ingrained fictions of our society and culture. As a mixed-race person, I am aware of the contextual nature of identity, the overwhelming force of racial (and gender) categories, and the multi-layered pressure to remain securely within the walls of visibly marked identities. The people whose voices form the basis for this thesis are trickster figures, shapeshifters, people walking between worlds. We move through the world with a sense of the unfolding performances we display through our bodies, of the ways we bridge places of understanding and misunderstanding or confusion. At the same time, our identities are necessarily formed through the process of negotiating the taken-for-granted elements of a culture of hegemonic whiteness. Our mixed identities, then, emerge within the paradoxical "third space"[7] which is a negotiation of dominant narratives of truth and resistance to that constructed truth.

Because I move among many homes and communities within the historical and socio-cultural context of colonial relations in Canada, my use of the word "community" and my

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[7] In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha first coined the term "third space of enunciations" as a discursive site in which new forms of articulation transform "the meanings of colonial inheritance into the liberatory signs of a free people of the future" (38).

identification with any collective voice is tentative at best. As I move through the world, I often feel only a partial sense of belonging, whether in an Aboriginal community, an academic setting, at work in a government office, amongst a community of artists or otherwise. Therefore, although I can claim membership in numerous community contexts, that membership is partial and tentative. My varied use of the term "community" and identification with a collective "us" is reflective of this shifting sense of self. This feeling of being situated in-between or of not belonging solely in any given context is not unique to myself, nor is it to mixed-race people. However, my experiences are specific in their rootedness in this colonized territory, and in my position of being a mixed-race Indigenous person negotiating spaces marked by colonial relations.

In this thesis I have set out to explore themes of trans/formative identities beyond the bridges that we, as mixed-race and/or transgender and genderqueer people, have called our homes for these many years. In talking to artists, activists and writers in my circle of friends about their trans/formative identities, I am seeking to tease out a body of stories and images that re-signify the markers of identity normally taken for granted. It is a move to de-naturalize the lines drawn within ourselves, between "us" and "them"--the lines we border-dwellers have been exposed to for so long.

In the following chapters, I explore themes of trans/formative identities using a writing style that blends my academic research, community-based dialogue, and personal understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw history and culture. Rather than attempting to fit within any one discourse on subjects of racialization, gender identity or colonization, I

am layering the teachings of my Indigenous cultural practices, the experiences I have had in various community contexts, and the academic texts which are cited here. While these components may not always weave together smoothly, I negotiate these diverse ways of seeing the world in my daily life and hope to reflect some of that hybridity in the patchwork textual format that follows.

Section Two: Impacts of Colonial Deconstruction of Indigenous Knowledge and Emerging Indigenous Research Methods

While some may argue that rigorous and objective research methodologies can eliminate bias in research, it is more useful in this project to see the production of knowledge as inherently subjective. As I will show, objectivity is a constructed ideal that emerges out of a larger colonial system of knowledge production, one which has historically positioned Indigenous people in the role of "object" of study, excluding us from positions of researcher or expert. In this section, I will outline the significance of troubling my position as "researcher" in relation to the participants in this project, as well as the knowledge we are producing through dialogue, storytelling, and analysis. The interdisciplinary methodologies employed here are strategically murky, as I have worked to create a fluid research process that builds on my own relationship as both "insider" and "outsider" to the issue of trans/formative identities and the communities in which I have conducted this research.

As Sherene H. Razack explains, "To unmap means to historicize, a process that begins by asking about the relationship between identity and space" (Razack 128). Here I will "unmap" or denaturalize the role of the researcher through investigating my personal experiences within academia as a Kwakwaka'wakw student coming from a community which has been documented within academic study and representation, particularly through ethnographic research. These personal experiences are further contextualized within the historical position of Indigenous people and knowledge within the Canadian educational system, as one significant site of power in a larger colonial relationship. I will

then discuss the ways in which my research has incorporated methodologies that situate myself within the knowledge I am producing as a strategy of decolonization.

Indigenous knowledge in academia: historical and personal contexts

In North America, the settlers' education systems have functioned as sites of colonial control embedded within larger power relations. Historically, the arrival of Europeans brought the means for replacing Indigenous worldviews and education methods with those of the colonizers: "Christian missionaries and the federal government developed a policy of eradicating Indian cultures through their children's schooling into the dominant society" (Barman, Hébert and McCaskill 1). In Canada, the education of Indigenous children and youth has been managed by the Indian Act since its establishment in 1876. Although attendance at federally-run schools was optional at first, the Indian Act was changed in 1920 making attendance mandatory. Superintendent General Duncan Campbell Scott stated the justification for these changes in the House of Commons: "Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, no Indian department, that is the whole object of this Bill" (qtd. in Haig-Brown 27). Indeed, Aboriginal education was initiated in Canada as a means to ensure the successful erasure of Indigenous cultures: "Formal education imposed European values, beliefs, and roles in order to 'civilize' Indians who were to be provided with the skills necessary to survive in the dominant society. Education became an agent of assimilation" (Barman, Hébert and McCaskill 4). With the establishment of the residential school system, Indigenous frameworks and methods of passing down knowledge through the generations were

displaced and forcibly replaced by western frameworks. In 1849, a report on Native Education in B.C. stated these goals outright: "Their education must consist not merely of the training of the mind, but of a weaning from the habits and feelings of their ancestors, and the acquirement of the language, arts and customs of a civilized life" (Prentice and Houston as quoted in Haig-Brown 25). Some Indigenous people have said that the residential school has played a central role in the colonization of Indigenous people internationally: "Colonization works the same way everywhere, its policies geared toward displacement and elimination of Indigenous culture: genocide. The residential school, wherever it has appeared, has been part of that policy" (Fred 11).

Inherent in this history of colonization is the resistance of Indigenous people who have struggled against the implementation of the residential school system and other aspects of the Indian Act. In her interviews with people who attended residential schools, Celia Haig-Brown found that "two main concepts, cultural invasion and resistance, are of paramount importance" (21). Indigenous resistance has affected the policies of the federal government through their determination not to give in to assimilationist policies: "it was only with the growth of organized aboriginal self-determination, both in Canada and more generally across the world, that assimilation through education ceased to be official government policy" (Barman, Hébert and McCaskill 1).

Colonization has also included processes by which Indigenous knowledge has been brought into academic contexts through pre-established academic frameworks and analyses. On its own, Indigenous knowledge and culture has been seen as invalid; only

through interpretation and rearrangement by academic "experts" has Indigenous knowledge been made a viable topic of analysis and study. This process has been dependant upon established positions of academic insider/researcher/expert and its relative outsider/subject/Indigenous informant as the source of "raw data." Scholars Marie Battiste and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson write:

> Eurocentric thought demands universal definitions of Indigenous knowledge, even through Indigenous scholars have established no common usage of the term. The quest for precision and certainty is a typical Eurocentric strategy....Using their artificial tools of classification, the colonizers attempt to Europeanize all knowledge and heritage, even when they are extending beyond their knowledge into the unknown. (36)

In recent years, much work has been done to expose the false nature of "objective" research, and scholars from across various disciplines have called for an acknowledgement of "situated knowledges" (Haraway 189-193) which take into account the cultural, political and disciplinary frameworks of the researchers, relative to those they are studying. For example, within anthropology, such reflexive approaches stand in contrast to scientific-realist theories: "this means abandoning the possibility of a purely objective social science and rejecting the idea that the written word is essentially a superior medium of ethnographic representation" (Pink 4). As stated in the *Protocols and Principles For Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context,* produced by the Indigenous Governance program at the University of Victoria, "Researchers are knowledge brokers, people who have the power to construct legitimating arguments for or against ideas, theories or practices. They are collectors of information and producers of meaning, which can be used for, or against Indigenous interests" (1).

The university, then, is inherently marked as a non-Indigenous space, producing and utilizing non-Indigenous methods of knowledge production and dissemination. "Academics" and "natives" have been positioned very differently within these power structures: "[h]owever sensitive they might be, academics must always remain observers, not participants, in our history and in our efforts to define our future. Their methodologies were developed to serve the needs of a culture and society that has neither treated us well nor been sympathetic to our needs" (Shortt vii).

While the last federally-run residential school in Canada closed in 1988 (Dickason 335)--indeed my mother worked as a child care worker at a residential school before I was born--the contemporary position of Indigenous people and knowledge in academic contexts remains in the shadow of this colonial legacy. This history is reflected in the small number of Indigenous students who graduate from high school, and the handful that make their way through university. Although this situation has improved in recent years, Statistics Canada figures from 2001 show that only 8% of First Nations people ages 25 to 64 have a university education, compared to 20% of the general population. In the same year, 39% of First Nations people ages 25 to 64 did not have a high school diploma, and of the on-reserve students who were enrolled in grade 12 or 13 in 2000-2001, only 30% graduated (Gour 34). Underlying these statistics is the reality that "mainstream education has been a continuation of colonization—at least as it has been experienced by most Aboriginal people" (Shortt vii-viii).

This colonial legacy can be seen more directly within academic disciplines such as anthropology where courses on Indigenous culture, art and history are taught by non-Indigenous experts. In my experience, theory and methodology courses assume that students who are working with "others" are not from these groups, but are coming from a mainstream (white, middle-class) academic position. Thus it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find methodology courses which speak to the particular needs of students who are conducting research in their own communities of difference, and which address the nuances of power and ethics emerging out of these situations.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* provides an overview of the history of research within international Indigenous communities and the ways in which research methodologies should be redesigned with an awareness of this history. She writes: "it is surely difficult to discuss research methodology and Indigenous peoples together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices" (2).

As an Indigenous person, and specifically as a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation, my view of academic research has thus developed into one of suspicion. When I was a youth, I read many books written by anthropologists and art historians to learn more about my own Kwakwaka'wakw culture, as I grew up away from the reserve where my father's extended family lives. Although I visited them for potlatches through the years,

and was able to watch my father carve whenever I visited him, books were the most readily available type of information about the Kwakwaka'wakw people (erroneously called Kwakiutl by anthropologists).[8] I soaked up the photos of our masks and ceremonies, our totem poles and button blankets, not realizing that the information contained in those pages were not "true facts" about us but were being filtered through the individual ethnographers or historians, their academic training, and the framework of the disciplines in which they worked. It was only when I began studying at University at the age of 17 that I began to understand the possibilities for misrepresentation, Eurocentrism, and embedded colonialism in research and writing on Indigenous people and knowledge in general.

During my first year at the University of Victoria, I read a book written by an Aboriginal woman for the very first time. Reading *I am Woman* by Lee Maracle was life-changing for me because I saw that our lives as Indigenous people could take on textual voices that truly represent our experiences and worldviews. I began to see that challenging the institutional authorities' representations of Indigenous and otherwise marginalized experiences was important for the survival of our communities. In 1995, in an introductory anthropology class at the University of Victoria, I came upon a chapter in our textbook called "The Origins of the Destructive Potlatch."[9] It contained information about the potlatch tradition which I thought was untrue from an experiential perspective,

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[8] From *U'mista Cultural Society:* "Ever since the white people first came to our lands, we have been known as the Kwakkewlths by Indian Affairs or as the Kwakiutl by anthropologists. In fact we are the Kwakwaka'wakw, people who speak Kwak'wala, but who live in different places and have different names for our separate groups."

[9] Every effort has been made to find the reference for this chapter title, but I have been unable to locate it.

and I took it upon myself to tell the professor that the information he was teaching about Kwakwaka'wakw traditions was simply not true. I told him about the teachings I had received from my family members about the history and purpose of potlatching and I talked about my personal experiences learning to dance within a contemporary context. While this is not surprising to me in hindsight, it was quite a shock to me as an undergraduate student at the age of 18, when my experiential knowledge was brushed off as unimportant. My voice as a Kwakwaka'wakw person was rendered silent and insignificant within that class, as the professor used his power to assert authority over the subject of our cultural practices. More significantly, he continued to teach those untruths to his students (not me though, as I dropped the class and went running over to the Women's Studies Department).

My voice as an Indigenous student began to emerge in response to these types of experiences, as I saw the traditions of my Kwakwaka'wakw ancestors being turned into subjects of class discussion, analysis and debate amongst predominantly white students who had no first-hand experiences in the cultural spaces in which potlatch traditions have emerged. In a history class which focused on the role of anthropologists in British Columbia from 1880 to 1940, my great-grandfather was discussed as a central "Native informant" who worked with Franz Boas to document the lives of Northwest Coast Indigenous people and who also secured many "artifacts" which are still held in private collections and museums around the world. In this classroom, the white teacher acted as the expert on the role of Indigenous people within anthropological work, while I

struggled to find a way to come to terms with my position as a student studying my own family history.

In the socio-political space of that classroom, clear lines were drawn among the roles of the teacher, myself as a mixed-race Indigenous student, and the white students in the class who were writing papers and doing presentations on this history in which I was personally bound up. Once the professor found out that I was from the same family we were studying, she took it upon herself to put me in the position of a generalized "other," asking me how to pronounce words in coastal languages such as Coast Salish, which I do not speak. I was positioned apart from other students as well as from herself, but my voice was not one of valued experiential knowledge but, again, that of a generalized "Native informant."

As I listened to students talk about Kwakwaka'wakw regalia as "artifact" and Indigenous people as a "dying race" during the historical period we were studying, I found myself writing poems in the margins of my notebooks. This was the only blank space in which I could write back to the dialogue unfolding in the classroom, as I could not come to terms with the language being used and the position I was forced into. I wrote a poem called *Smiling At Me* in response to the process of silencing which developed in that classroom setting, as a Kwakwaka'wakw person sitting in a classroom hearing a white professor tell white students about my family history, my cultural practices, and the relationship of my ancestors to academic disciplines of anthropology and history.

smiling at me
through teeth well flossed
she chatters on
about the so-called experts
who invaded the smoky salt-filled world of my ancestors
who came and offered buttons for baskets
the clothes of the colonizers
for the faces of our spirit guides

she smiles as she talks about the ideology
she speaks:
        artifacts
                fascinating
                        ethnographer   collecting
the words wash over me
numb already from being in this culture too long
I no longer feel the sharp edges of their meaning
no longer break down
        my knees buckling   bones crumbling
as I become immobilized within their ranks

talking about collecting skulls
the bones of my foremothers
gifts to our gods our mothers our guides
quickly and nonchalantly she allows
these words
to pour out of her mouth
joining the pool of language
which fills my lungs already

        and   I   hear
the songs
coming from the aged mouth
of my grandmother
her eyes closed head tilted upward
toward the smoke hole
as I allow my mind to retreat
to the safe spaces of stillness
        and silence
where the walls I have built
                                protect me
                from the rush
        of her attempts
to educate
me

With this personal and collective history in mind, I have been able to work as an interdisciplinary graduate student, taking on a series of negotiations within myself, the departments in which I work, and the methodologies with which I intend to carry out this project. These negotiations emerge from the tension between the university as an institution of colonization rooted in maintaining dominant ideologies, and my own role as an Indigenous person attempting to not only bridge traditionally marginalized communities with academia, but also to make critical interventions into the disciplines and departments in which I work as a graduate student. This work is situated within a larger tradition of Indigenous scholarship which seeks to challenge the work of colonization in cataloguing Indigenous knowledge and reshaping it into Eurocentric truths. "Our intellectual journey is…an intercultural and interdisciplinary journey into the conflicted heart of Eurocentric and Indigenous thought. It is a challenging journey through unquestioned acquiescence to Eurocentric thought and law, a journey into humanity, and a journey into the unchartered options of a postcolonial world" (Battiste and Henderson 16).

Although I experience being mixed-race, Indigenous and "queerly heterosexual" simultaneously, the written word often calls for them to be treated separately. In a linear, written text, it is difficult to explore the intersectionality of our experiences that go beyond individual identifications. I am therefore aware that my ability to use text as trans/formative space is limited. Rather than seeking to re-instill categories of difference, it is more useful to look to notions of hybridity within the texts that I am producing.

Hybridity within texts is "writing that depicts authors as minimally bicultural in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life" (Narayan 24). Rather than writing from a fixed position as a woman, an Indigenous person, a graduate student or a researcher, I write from the shifting places within the various roles I hold in community and academic contexts. This form of knowledge production uses both experiential and analytical lenses in creating a text that undermines the traditional role of the objective researcher and instead calls for truths that are contextual and in-flux. Trinh T. Minh Ha writes: "I'd rather make of writing a site where opposites lose their essential differences and are restored to the void by their own interchangability" (Trinh, *Woman Native Other* 48). Escaping essentialist notions of identity, where "woman" and "Native" are equated with a set of naturalized characteristics, Trinh looks to challenge this within her very position as a scholar and writer: "constantly changing my point of departure or arrival, I trace, void, and retrace with the desire to baffle rather than bring out contours" (48). This writing process parallels the themes of trans/formative identities which emerge throughout this text, and provides a useful map for the methodologies employed here.

Methodological approaches to thesis research

The research for this project involved a series of interviews with mixed-race and transgender or genderqueer people in my circle of friends and acquaintances which allow for a dialogue with my own notions of trans/formative identities as rooted in my cultural

teachings and life experience.[10] My written thesis and video focus on themes of trans/formative identities that emerged out of research interviews. Metaphors of transformation have worked to shape not only the contents of my dialogue with the participants, but also the methodologies that I have used, as I have worked among various methodologies, the main aspects of which I discuss here in order to frame my research. These include: situating myself as an Indigenous researcher with an awareness of the colonial legacy of institutionalized knowledge; conducting research in my own community of friends and acquaintances; using collaboration and dialogue as research methods; using film as a tool of representation; and, using autoethnography as a form of reporting back to the community and of "talking back" to historical and institutional authority. Building on bell hooks' concept of writing, speaking out and standing side-by-side in struggle, "talking back" "is no mere gesture of empty words, [but] is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice" (hooks 9).

Situating myself as an Indigenous researcher

It has been a challenge to implement a hybrid approach to research which takes into account the power relations embedded in the roles of researcher and participant within communities which span Indigenous nations and specific ties to identity. My research has worked across community differences and individual identities, rather than within one Indigenous or community context. Rather than positioning myself in the role of researcher/expert to the participants, I have paid close attention to the role that I play in representing their voices in dialogue with my own. Kirin Narayan writes:

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[10] More details about the research methods used for this thesis are outlined in Section Four.

> What we must focus our attention on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views and dilemmas—people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise? (Narayan 23)

One strategy I have used to clarify my role is to look to traditional forms of knowledge production within Kwakwaka'wakw contexts. Within my Kwakwaka'wakw heritage, witnessing is one essential means of maintaining traditional knowledge and cultural practice within the potlatch system. Potlatch practices vary between Indigenous coastal communities, and not all coastal First Nations are part of the potlatch tradition. Historian Aldona Jonaitis writes about their general historical meaning amongst the Kwakwaka'wakw:

> [Potlatch ceremonies] were occasions for families to display their inherited privileges, and to initiate those who had inherited the privilege to participate in such events. Their hosts distributed piles of blankets, silver bracelets, and other items that constituted their wealth; by accepting those gifts, the guests who served as witnesses to these displays were acknowledging the hosts' claims and thus validating their rank. (Jonaitis, *Art of the Northwest Coast* 120)

At potlatches, people who attend are given gifts in exchange for witnessing the ceremonies and for validating the rights of the host family, which can only be passed on through this public format. Anderson and Halpin write of Tsimshian potlatch practices: "The unity of the chief's authority and his House ownership of its territory are witnessed and thus affirmed by the other chiefs in the feast" (Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw qtd. in Anderson and Halpin 31). If there is ever a dispute as to what has unfolded at any given potlatch, including names that were given, or rights to dances or songs, those who attended can be called upon to give validation: "the management of this complex system

of rights and privileges depends on its presentation to and validation by an informed public at feasts" (Anderson and Halpin 20).

Working from this understanding of witnessing as validation, I have come to see the importance of my role as someone who is able to bring shape to the stories that I have witnessed. Given the silencing or marginalizing of trans and mixed-race voices in the academy, and the preference to "speak for" rather than "speak with" or "speak beside," I see witnessing as a powerful tool for gathering stories and being responsible for taking those stories into account in my writing and worldview.

Beth Brant, a two-spirit Mohawk writer, sees her role as a writer to be one of taking responsibility for witnessing the truths unfolding around her. It is a responsibility she has to the spirits that guide her, the grandmothers who gave her life, and the generations yet to come. She writes, "As an Indigenous writer, I feel that the gift of writing and the *privilege* of writing holds a responsibility to be a witness to my people" (Brant 70). She goes on to root this experience in our physical presence as well as our stories and language of truthtelling: "Who we are is written on our bodies, our hearts, our souls. This is what it means to be Native in the dawn of the twenty-first century. Witness to what has been and what is to be. Knowing what has transpired and dreaming what will come. Listening to the stories brought to us by other beings. Renewing ourselves in the midst of chaos" (Brant 74). Witnessing and recalling what we have witnessed is located in this renewal, paying tribute to the truths that we have uncovered about the world

around us, especially those that are made invisible by the norms of dominant hegemonic thinking about race, gender and the "bodies that matter" (Butler 1993).

One further aspect of working within a hybrid Indigenous research framework has been to develop methodologies which are informed by a desire to challenge dichotomies of informant-expert, observer-observed and the assumption that researchers are necessarily experts on their subject matter. Students in universities and colleges all over the world are writing reports about Indigenous ceremonial practices or traditions, and are then giving paper presentations at conferences in which their voices are taken as those of authority or expert over the lives of the people they have written about. Rather than seeing myself as the knower of any particular truth, I prefer to see myself facilitating a process of dialogue in which themes of my life and the lives of the research participants can emerge in relation to one another. Critical scholars in areas such as anthropology have begun to create similar disruptions, such that a concerted effort has been made toward "writing ethnography through the framework of dialogue" (Lassiter 5). In recent years, many ethnographers have worked to develop collaborative research methods in order to shift the power and politics of representation, questioning who has the right to represent whom and how academic discourses will be privileged in the resulting texts.

In this vein, I have attempted to shift the research power dynamics by using the interview as an opportunity for dialogue rather than one-way questioning, seeing it as a space where the participants and I can learn in relation to one another. All of the participants in this research asked questions about my own experiences and knowledge, using this as an

opportunity for dialogue. Participants were also able to withdraw information after the interviews were done, and two people did contact me to take out portions of the discussion because they felt uncomfortable about sharing what they had said with a larger audience. Interestingly, the parts that were taken out were the pieces that I saw as some of the most critical illustrations of trans/formative identities and embodied experiences, but I respected their requests as I want to stay true to the ethical principles and relationships of trust that I had established. I have sought to rework the power relationships among myself and the people who participated in this project, but ultimately I feel it is most important to name the power I have in shaping their stories on the page and the screen. I cannot deny that this is a research project for which I will receive a degree, something that will affect my status in dominant social power grids. My name will be in the position of author and I will be granted "authority" over the subject no matter how collaborative the research process has been. The participants will remain in a position external to the university system while I will be set within academic frameworks as author and expert of this work.

Working in my own community contexts

Several years ago I began pursuing an interdisciplinary Masters degree at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) in Prince George, with a focus on issues of violence in the lives of aboriginal sex workers in Vancouver's East Side. While I saw this as an important issue which needed to be given a voice within academic and community contexts, I found that I could not reconcile the power struggles of working outside of my own experience. In turning to the topic of this research project on

trans/formative identities, I have been able to find a working space within the power relations of the university. Even though I am asking people to share stories about experiences which are not my own, I feel that the risks of exploitation are fewer as the gap between my socio-economic position and those of the participants is far less than those between myself and survival sex workers. I see myself as an informant in this project, as it began with my own story and experience as a starting place for investigating these emerging narratives. In this process, then, I have moved in various roles as a researcher, a participant, an informant, and one who witnesses the process unfolding. As Deborah E. Reed-Danahay writes in the anthology *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*, "Double identity and insider / outsider are constructs too simplistic for an adequate understanding of the processes of representation and power" (4).

Working within my circle of friends and acquaintances has involved rethinking the boundaries around "community" – who exactly does that include and who does it exclude? In this case, community includes queer people, mixed-race people, artists and activists in Victoria and Vancouver, within communities in which I have a history. I invited friends and acquaintances to participate in this project in dialogue with my own story, using the formal, distanced ethics procedures to do so. This is a somewhat alienating process (sending a formal invitation to a friend rather than calling them up and asking them informally), which serves to reinforce those roles of researcher/participant and although I complied, I resisted all along. There are few resources available to guide people doing research within their own community, peer group or family, and the

university guidelines for research should be challenged to allow flexibility for these hybrid processes.

Orality and narrative: collaboration and dialogue

As Stó:lô author Lee Maracle writes, "stories about women of colour written by white women are riddled with bias, stereotype and intellectual dishonesty. What is more important is that women of colour are entitled to author their own stories" (Maracle 31). While I agree with Maracle in her call for women of colour to write their own stories, I would argue that Indigenous women's stories about ourselves are embedded with biases as well. Rather than looking for any absolute truths about our lives, it is important to expose the ways in which our self-knowledge is formed in relation to other types of knowledge, and to host a dialogue between the two. Within this project, my role as a researcher is to create a space where dialogue is possible, where individual voices can emerge in relation to one another, and where I can be positioned as an unobjective witness and facilitator.

Film as a tool of representation

In addition to oral narratives, this project engages with visual representations of trans/formative identities and the stories unfolding in our bodies and geographies. Film has historically been used by Hollywood filmmakers, ethnographers and other mainstream institutions to tell stories about the lives of Indigenous people, creating stereotyped images of "Indians" which emerge in relation to dominant white society. Film and other visual media such as photography have been used to erase the presence of trans and mixed-race bodies from our set of cultural norms, visually fixing racial and

gender codes onscreen. Informed by the work of Indigenous filmmakers and experimental and autoethnographic filmmakers, I am looking to create a visual platform for resignifying markers of race and gender on screen, exposing the multiple meanings held within our identities and markers of difference. Film allows the metaphors of trans/formative identities to unfold differently than in the form of text or a written document, working to manipulate the set of visual markers that we come to assign to various racial and gender roles. Autoethnographic approaches are used in both this written thesis and in the creation of a video, providing a thread that runs across the two sites of representation. As Katherine Russell explains, Michael Renov describes autobiographical filmmaking as "essayistic." Russell sees the essay as a useful category because "it incorporates the 'I' of the writer into a commentary on the world that makes no grand scientific or totalizing claims but is uncertain, tentative and speculative" (277).

Given the monopoly that mainstream or dominant culture has on the tools of representation, including film and other visual media, I see the use of film as an important contribution to a growing body of visual culture being produced within queer, trans, Indigenous and mixed-race contexts. Film works to bridge the community and academia, as it allows the dialogue to move beyond texts which are inaccessible to most people outside the academy due to the academic language and format. Most of my family members, on my First Nations, English and Ukrainian sides, are simply not going to sit down and read a thesis, but they may be willing to watch a short film. The use of mixed media also works to mirror themes of working beyond individual identities based in fixed subject positions, working "from embodied perspectives to produce 'situated

knowledges'" (Bloom 5). The creation of a film works to visually disrupt normative constructions of identity based on racial and gender signifiers, to visually intervene, confuse, and displace normalized assumptions. The images, sounds and dialogue in the film emerge from the gap between recognition and identification, where trans and mixed-race bodies can be at once misread and self-identified on different planes of belonging. Autoethnographic and experimental film situates the filmmaker within the story unfolding on screen, as the role of identity in the films "demands an expanded notion of 'ethnicity' as a cultural formation of the subject. Indeed, what unites these diverse texts is the articulation of identities that are split, insecure, and plural" (Russell 279).

Autoethnography and identity in relation

> I will take my place with other 'halfie' ethnographers, who know what it is like to be placed in situations of being "other," of being the represented rather than the representer, and who therefore are unable 'to comfortably assume the self of anthropology…the self is split, caught at the intersection of systems of difference'. Under these circumstances, you become an ethnographer but refuse to speak from a position of unsituated authority; instead, you try to speak from that very ajiaco de contradicciones that makes you a halfie, a mestiza, a Norte Mexicana, almost a gringa, but not quite. (Behar 339)

The term "autoethnography" has been used across disciplines of literary criticism, sociology and anthropology, first written about by Karl Heider in 1975 and later by David Hayano in 1979 (Reed-Danahay 4). The use and meaning of the term has varied across discipline, time and intention, with general agreement that it is a type of methodology used by people who are studying or working amongst their own people or community. Autoethnography has been taken up by such authors as Mary Louise Pratt in reference to "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in

ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" (Pratt 7). In keeping with Pratt's notion of autoethnography, I use the concept of working in collaboration or dialogue with dominant institutional methodologies while simultaneously attempting to undermine them. As Katherine Russell writes, "autoethnography produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze, under the sign of one identity" (Russell 312). By writing myself into the stories which have unfolded in the interviews with my friends and acquaintances, I demonstrate that knowledge about trans/formative identities necessarily comes from a process of researching the self as much as researching others, particularly where the lines between self and other are blurred. This is essential in autoethnography because we know that the knowledge we produce within any academic context is shaped by our experiences, agendas, and disciplinary frameworks.

This work began with my own story and experience, and this story has emerged in dialogue with those of the participants in this project. Rather than attempting to speak for anyone or represent another's experience, I develop my own voice in relation to those of others with trans/formative identities. This is an important step toward taking responsibility for my work, for the research process and its impact on those who participated and on the communities I work within and among. Seeing my identity formed in relation to those with whom I have lived and worked, I seek to paint a picture

of community that extends beyond markers of identities based in maintaining boundaries of difference.

Section Three: Representations of Indigenous Identity and Emerging Discussions of Trans/formative Subjectivities

Assigned identities and their representations

To call myself an Indigenous woman is to situate myself within an available set of cultural codes and to call upon the markers of difference that distinguish me from others who sit outside of these identity categories. Labels such as "Indian," First Nations and Indigenous are chosen from the limited options that are made available to us, establishing a common language for the categories that matter. The naturalization of racial and gender categories can be undermined and reshaped through using technologies of representation to put a spotlight on hybrid or third-space realities—those which are situated among and across the norms that are usually represented and fixed through the use of those same technologies. Within my own family, categories of identity and belonging are complicated by the relationship of Indian status to Indigenous blood and heritage, as negotiated through mechanisms of colonial control such as the Indian Act.

In 1850, legislation was passed in Lower Canada which established the precedent that non-Indigenous people "would determine who was an Indian and that Indians would have no say in the matter" (Tobias 129). This early definition included "all persons of Indian ancestry and all persons married to such persons, belonging to or recognized as belonging to an Indian band, and living with that band" (Tobias 129). The Indian Act of 1876 revised this definition by requiring that ancestry and membership would have to be traced through the male line, and marriage would only grant such status if a non-Indian woman married an Indian (Tobias 129). The Act also stated that Indian women who married

non-status men would lose their status since membership would be traced by the male line. As outlined in the Indian Act, status and band membership (which is kept through registration with individual bands) is linked with a whole host of rights and "promises" made by the federal government as outlined in the Indian Act. These include access to federally-run programs such as health care and dental benefits, as well as band-managed assets such as access to on-reserve housing, educational funding, and band-sponsored child care. The 1985 version of the Indian Act outlined new rules for band membership, including blood quantum and the membership of an individual's parents. Because of these changes, "classes of citizens with differing rights and entitlements are expected to become the norm in most First Nations communities" (Clatworthy sec.4).

With this powerful combination of factors determining Indian rights, the reserve system and status, "the Indian Act is something of a 'total institution'; with the treaties, it touches on almost all aspects of the lives of status Indians, placing them in a separate category from other Canadians" (Dickason 286). Today the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) website states that the Indian Act defines an Indian as "a person who, pursuant to this *Act,* is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian" (*Status: Most Often Asked Questions).* To be eligible to receive benefits under the *Indian Act,* individuals must be listed in the Indian Register, which is maintained by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). The website also clarifies that while the majority of Registered Indians are members of a First Nation, not all Registered Indians are members of a First Nation, as some nations control their own membership. In all, these rules of Indian status, which have a great impact on the

identities, rights and resources available to Indigenous people, remain defined by government rather than by Indigenous people themselves.

In 1985, Bill C-31 was passed in Canadian Parliament to remove the gender discrimination inherent in the Indian Act:

> Bill C-31 removed sex discrimination clauses from the *Indian Act* and abolished the concept of enfranchisement. Bill C-31 also provided for the restoration of Indian status and band membership to the individuals who had lost them as a result of the discriminatory clauses. Bill C-31 allowed for their children to be recognized as status Indians. In addition, Bill C-31 enabled bands to determine their own membership rules and thus take an important step toward self-government (*Report to Parliament: Implementation of the 1985 Changes to the Indian Act* 1).

Prior to these changes, my parents got married and my mother became a card-carrying status Indian. Although her heritage was Ukrainian and English and her experience in Aboriginal communities had been that of a friend and an ally in social justice struggles, she was given the same legal standing and claims to Indigenous rights as my full-blood Kwakwaka'wakw aunties. Despite the fact that my parents divorced less than ten years later, to this day my mother is considered a status Indian in the eyes of the federal government and the First Nation to which I belong. This has little bearing on her identity but does impact her position in society—she has the same dental and medical health benefits that other status Indians have, she doesn't pay tax on reserve, and she has the right to vote in our band elections.

I have often wondered what the connection is between individual Indigenous identity and our legal standing as status Indians, when non-Aboriginal people can be counted as "one

of us." The boundaries between colonial categories of belonging are not clear-cut—surely there was a flaw in the system. As a citizen-subject, my mother is a status Indian, but on the street, she is constructed as a white woman and lives without the reality of racism on any level. She lives on a reserve, more due to the financial reality of being a single mom living on a limited income, than out of a sense of belonging there. Although she does not identify as Native, she remains a status Indian. Clearly there is a fundamental problem in the categories of racialization established and upheld by colonial institutions in Canada.

The system of categorizing status Indians was established along with other forms of institutionalizing colonial ideologies, power grids and relations of difference. My mother's case is one example of ways in which racial, gender, class and other categories of difference have been instituted through colonizing processes in Canada and remain in effect today. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a self-described third-world scholar, writes of the variety of phenomena which the term *colonization* has come to denote, stating that "colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" (Mohanty 52). Institutions such as the Indian Act, residential schools, and reserve systems, were needed in order to uproot Indigenous ways of forming individual and community identities. Although attempts have been made to get rid of the Indian Act, it is now seen as the only way for Indigenous people's identity and rights to be upheld. For example in 1969, the federal government's *White Paper* proposed to abolish the Indian Act and replace it with, what it termed, equality: "First Nations people were unanimous in their

rejection. They saw this imposed form of 'equality' as a coffin for their collective identities – the end of their existence as distinct peoples" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, sec.13). For many of us, federally-determined status has erased our own ways of coming to know ourselves within our families and communities, and our voices have been silenced, misrepresented, discounted or erased altogether within hierarchies of knowledge production. As Lee Maracle writes, "the result of being colonized is the internalization of the need to remain invisible. The colonizers erase you, not easily, but with shame and brutality. Eventually you want to stay that way" (8).

Today, Indian status is one sign of an Indigenous identity, while family history, inherited ceremonial rights and other traditional systems provide parallel guidelines for belonging within First Nations communities. Traditionally, Kwakwaka'wakw identity was developed and passed on through dynamics of spirituality, kinship, cultural and political rights and one's role within the potlatch system.[11] Described as "an occasion on which a noble family invites guests who witness the display of the host's status" (Jonaitis, *Chiefly Feasts* 11), potlatches were, and are, held in times of birth, death, marriage and other significant times. The function of the potlatch is to recall the host's wealth of dances, songs and other ceremonial rights, as well as to give gifts to all who gather to witness. Within our ceremonial and cultural practices, an individual's name is linked to his or her role within a complex set of family and community dynamics. Markers of a person's role are shown through crests, which tell stories not only about their lineage but their status in

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[11] Personal conversation with elders and family members, and personal experience of participating in potlatches (1987 to present day). For more information, see Jonaitis (1991 and 1991), and Anderson & Halpin (2000).

the community. Traditionally, totem poles stood in front of houses facing the beach in order to tell visitors who lived there as they approached the shore.[12] Contrary to contemporary practices of commercializing our artistic depictions of community history and spiritual legacy, a family only had permission to display certain crests that they had been given the rights to in ceremony. My father is a carver, as were his father and grandfather before him, and he does not have the right to carve anything he wants; he is bound by the rules of his teachers and elders within a Kwakwaka'wakw system of symbols which operate quite differently from Western norms.

The potlatch system, as with many other Indigenous practices and belief systems, was seen as a threat to colonial ideologies and institutions and was banned within the Indian Act of 1884 (becoming legal again in 1951) (Cole 249). The complex set of controlling forces established through colonization ensured that a multi-level assault was waged on our worldviews, our ideologies and our practices of personal identity formation:

> In 1884 the elaborate feasts of the Northwest Coast Amerindians, known under the general label 'potlatch,' were banned, along with dances associated with Tamanamous (religious, supernatural) rituals. This was done under pressure from missionaries (and government agents as well)….Toward the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, missionaries were also campaigning to remove totem poles as symbols of an undesirable belief system and way of life. Not only was their continued presence regarded as encouraging resistance to the adoption of Christianity, but the 'give-away' aspect of potlatches was held to be incompatable with Western economic practices and inimical to the concept of private property. (Dickason 286)

At the same time, the Canadian government forcibly imposed British models of education, capitalist systems of trade and ideologies of racialization that divided

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[12] Personal conversation with family members (Victoria, BC. December 2006.)

colonizer from colonized. Within these systems, an "Indian" could only live on reserve, have access to food, clothing and other rights if they were counted within the band and status system. In order to have status, to be married, to be counted at all, people had to take on Western last names which were often arbitrarily given out according to who was around (such as taking on the Indian Agent's first name, hence the current prevalence of last names such as George and John).[13] "Indian" then is a legal category that was constructed to loosely relate to personal identity, lineage or heritage – it was, first and foremost, a tool whereby hegemonic culture obtained control through imposing racial divisions which corresponded with systems of racialized power.

As I have previously established, residential schools were a key component of replacing the Kwakwa'la language with English, the strategy by which dominant groups attempted to impose colonial belief systems on "the Indians." When children attended residential schools, they were simultaneously racialized as "Indians" and divided within the two-gender, two-sex system. In many first-hand accounts, boys and girls were separated, their dress and hair strictly shaping them into model subjects, turning "savages" into "third-class citizens" (Paul 1) under British colonial rule. Randy Fred writes of his experience at residential school, "At Alberni the boys wore grey prison-style shirts, denim overall pants, grey work socks and heavy army-style boots. The boots were supposed to make it difficult for us to run away. We were each assigned a number, which had to be written on everything we wore" (13). For those who attended, ideas of what it meant to be Indigenous, to be a member of a certain clan, and to be connected to a

[13] Personal conversation with members of my extended family (Victoria, BC. January 1999 and on numerous other occasions).

spiritual community with ancestral ties to the land, the sea and the spirit worlds, were replaced with hard rules about what it meant to be "an Indian" and a boy or a girl. Within this process, systems of race and gender were mutually articulated, enforcing and creating one another. Individual accounts of residential school students clearly show the gender uniforms as one colonizing tool—boys had their hair cut short, girls wore bobs and bangs, and they were physically separated from one another in the schools, kept in different dorms in order to ingrain distinct gender roles into them.[14] Our Indigenous grandparents turned from one colonial idea of the Indian—the savage—to another already constructed idea of what Indians were, and in both formulations they were seen as far from counting as human subjects, citizens, individuals.

Anthropological practices of the colonial period worked to mobilize markers of Indigineity, constructed in contrast to markers of a culture of white supremacy, through objectifying and utilizing the bodies and cultural works of the Indigenous people themselves. In 1893, a group of Kwakwaka'wakw (called Kwakiutl) people, a collection of masks and other regalia, and an entire bighouse structure were sent to Chicago to be put on display at the World's Fair (Freed, Freed and Williamson 8-9). Accompanied by anthropologist Franz Boas, my ancestors were positioned as specimens of a dying race. They were marked as Indians should be marked, as the anthropologist/expert helped them in adopting pre-existing notions of "the red race," racial roles and symbols of power (or submission). In the Royal British Columbia Museum today, visitors still watch the film *In the Land of the Head Hunters,* made by photographer Edward S. Curtis in the early

[14] For more information on the history and practices of residential schools in Canada, see Furniss (1995) and Miller (1996).

twentieth century. The film, originally shot as a new take on a Hollywood love story, has come to be seen as a "true" representation of post-contact life on the North West Coast and is viewed by many as early ethnographic work. When Curtis released the film to popular audiences in 1914, he represented his work as "a glimpse of the primitive Americans as they lived in the Stone Age and as they still were living when…explorers…touched the shores of the Pacific between 1774 and 1791" (qtd. In Daniels par. 3). The film remains one of the most blatant attempts to represent Indians as seen in the eye of European experts. Not only did Curtis have the actors shave off their moustaches to look more "authentic," "word has it that he became so frustrated with these Kwakwaka'wakw 'actors' for not performing one scene 'properly' that he actually 'dressed up' in costume and performed the scene himself" (Frank 167-8). The ideologies behind these practices of constructing and reading race onto our bodies can still be seen today in museum practices around the world.

At the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM) in Victoria British Columbia, Aboriginal artists still carve "on display" as part of an educational exhibit on the grounds of the museum—my great-grandfather began working there in 1952, followed by many of my relatives up to and including the present day. While most Aboriginal artists currently have a greater degree of agency in choosing to work in these venues than in the past, the history of positioning Aboriginal people as objects within museum exhibits predetermines the meaning read into their presence by tourists and other onlookers. Gloria Jean Frank writes of her experience working at the RBCM as a guide to non-native visitors: "Museums impart strong impressions of First Nations people to the

outside world. Ironically, for many people, this will be their only contact with First Nations cultures" (171). She goes on to say, "I felt impassioned in the museum setting. I wanted to argue that First Nations people are not dead but still live in the here and now" (164), as museum exhibits fix Indigenous peoples lives in the historical pre-contact periods. The complex historical relationship between museums and Indigenous people results in a mixed reading of Indigenous people carving and dancing for tourists; rather than visiting the local reserves to see the real life experiences of Indigenous people, they visit the museum for an experience that has been created for public consumption. Tourists may not know, for example, that the bighouse at the museum and many of the artists who carve there, are not indigenous to Victoria at all, but are from the northern part of the island. My father has been advocating for years that the Kwakwaka'wakw bighouse be returned to Fort Rupert and that a Coast Salish bighouse be built to replace it, since the museum is located on Coast Salish territory.

As a mixed-race person, I am constantly read as white, and people feel free to tell me why it is that I can't possibly be Native, why I am a failed Indian: but you don't look Native, you don't speak your language, but you're not like "them"—you're different. Rather than challenging their notions of the category "Indian" or "Indigenous," people make me an exception to the rule, which suggests to me that they don't wish to rethink their set of racial markers and symbols. This disavowal of my mixed Indigenous identity is dependant upon visual reading practices that are rooted in disciplines of anthropology and other systems of representation operating within a dominant culture of whiteness. The World Fair, and more contemporary examples such as museum exhibits featuring

Indigenous artists carving "on display" at Victoria's Royal British Columbia Museum establish a set of racial markers which do not translate well to the lived realities of Indigenous people.

Indigenous people across Canada and the world have endured various manifestations of these processes in which ideologies of the colonizers been enforced through institutions of power. These institutions are themselves guilty of claiming to produce objective facts while ignoring and denying the naturalized colonial roots of their systems of knowledge production. Indigenous traditions are varied in their ways of passing on a sense of identity and community belonging, including ways of categorizing gender and developing gender roles. Colonization has worked to take meaning away from Indigenous systems of identity formation, but these systems are still alive in many parts of Canada. Although the racial and gender categories of Western cultures have become common sense norms for many Indigenous people, if we look to the parallel narratives of our traditional teachings, we may find frameworks that undermine current systems.

Discussions of race, gender and identity must unfold with an awareness of the fictional nature of racial categories and other articulations of the colonial legacy in Canada. An analysis of the material reality of colonial relations and the force they have on the lives of people in Aboriginal communities and society at large are an essential part of any discussion of contemporary Indigenous identity.

The writing and analysis in this thesis are productive only because they are situated in theoretical and disciplinary hybridity. Trinh T. Minh-Ha writes, "when binaries no longer organize, the difficulty then becomes speaking from no clearly defined place. This shifting multi-place of resistance differs in that it no longer simply thrives on alternate, homogenized strategies of rejection, affirmation, confrontation, and opposition well-rooted in a tradition of contestation" (Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red* 229). Speaking across theoretical disciplines prioritizes a framework of decolonization while exposing and unraveling the systems through which we have come to know ourselves and one another as subjects and as human beings. In doing so, "trans" can be seen as a gesture toward rethinking hybrid identities or subject positions which fail to fit neatly within constructed categorical norms. Trans/formative identities are not limited to racial and gender positionalities, but these are the two main areas which will be explored here, as I focus on the ways they empower and inform one another. Trans/formative identities can be rethought in relation to theoretical understandings of gender, race, and technologies of the body, as well as across narratives of our lived experience.

Empowering subjects: emerging discussions of racial and gender identities

> [A]rticulating one's self as a subject (engendered, racialized, sexed, nationed, classed, etc.) is the process through which we learn to identify our "I" relative to bodies, power grids, as well as culturally available categories, like pronouns, and then always already attempt to become that configuration. (Noble 23)

Personhood: becoming a viable subject. Historical factors, such as those outlined in the previous section, have denied subjectivity on the part of individuals and entire communities. For Indigenous people, the reality of not being considered citizens,

subjects, and people with rights has very concrete meanings which stem from a troubled history. We were not granted the vote in federal and provincial elections until 1960, and even now are considered somewhat less than capable of making decisions about our lives, our communities and our futures. Indigenous people are struggling for self-determination, self-governance and the rights to raise our own children as they continue to be vastly over-represented in government care. Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, "much of what I have read has said that we do not exist, that if we do exist it is in terms which I cannot recognize, that we are no good and that what we think is not valid" (35).

Creating a subject position, or an identity, for oneself is a task that all of us are caught up in. This process is naturalized for some, and problematic for those of us who fail to find subject positions that fit for our lived reality or who cannot fully fit into any of the available categories no matter how many attempts we make. The assignment of gender identities has been controlled in a similar way to the colonial framing of Indigenous categories of belonging outlined in the chapter thus far. Riki Wilchins writes in *GenderQueer:* "The problem is not that we don't know the gender system well enough but that we know it all too well and can't envision any alternative" (13). Joan Nestle goes on to call for "a deeper critique of gender both as a means of social control and as a promise of greater global freedom of gender and sexual expression" ("Genders on my mind" 9). Transgender and genderqueer scholars and writers have begun creating new ways of articulating gender identities which fall outside the categories of "man" and "woman," stretching the English language in new ways in order to better represent their identities. Leslie Feinberg writes: "Being a masculine female means I am uni-gendered,

not bi-gendered. So I have been 'out' all my life. That places me – like millions of other masculine females and feminine males – in the social category of 'pronoun-challenged'" (Feinberg 19). Writers such as Feinberg, amongst many others, have challenged the two-gender, two-sex model around which our gender subjectivities are formed by using new pronouns such as "sie" and "hir." Additionally the production of books such as Minnie Bruce Pratt's *S/he,* in which she explores her relationship with Leslie Feinberg has moved dialogues about gender to a place in which we are all implicated in rethinking our subject positions in terms of what they are constructed *in relation to*. Pratt has outlined the responsibility we all have in rethinking our gendered positions, as she traces her movement from being a femme lesbian to having a sexuality that is difficult to name, given the shifting gender identity of her partner:

> I had no language to talk about her or us together. I had to learn to say that I had fallen in love with a woman so transgendered, with such perceived contradictions between her birth sex and her gender expression, that someone at one end of the city block could call her "Ma'am" and someone at the other end would call her "Sir". I was learning that I was more complicated than I'd had any idea. (14)

Racialized subjectivities are similarly undermined and remade by mixed-race scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, who has created a body of "border theory" articulating the experiences of those who are situated in the "third space" between colonizer and colonized in the complex political economy of globalization. Mixed-race scholars and artists have worked from identity positions which refuse to be split in half by labels that reduce them to their marginalized racial background, instead claiming a space that is critical of dualistic systems. Torika Bolatagici, a multiracial Australian artist, writes: "Culturally, the most common way to deal with hybridity is to hyphenate (e.g.

Australian-Fijian). But the hyphen does little to reveal the complexities of mixed race identity. Instead, it simplifies and reduces the individual to the sum of their parts and the hyphen stands to represent a juncture; a chasm that cannot be united" (75). Rather than submitting to the incompatibility of her diverse cultural background, Bolatagici seeks to create art that draws on the creative potential of the 'third-space', "as a positive transgression that questions and challenges rigid racial categories and, essentially, the relevancy of race as a category at all" (78).

Speaking from hybrid spaces, where binaries of colonial racial categories such as white and Indigenous fall apart, mixed-race authors have created new names for their identity positions in relation to dominant subjectivities of race and ethnicity. Significantly, although Anzaldúa seeks to create new racialized subject positions for border dwellers such as herself, she resorts to relying on dualistic notions of gender when talking about her queer identity. She writes: "I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 41). Her naming of this identity in Greek signals the inability of the English language to account for two-spirit traditions, as she resorts to using "male" and "female" to name the parts making up her queer gender identity. Anzaldúa conflates male with masculine and female with feminine, and conflates the body with socially constructed markers of gender. This is an important connection, as it serves to clarify her intention of naming herself "two in one" rather than a pluralistic notion of gender identity and expression.

In *Gender in the 1990s: images, realities and issues,* E.D. Nelson and B.W. Robinson write:

> Western societies including Canada are characterized by a belief system decreeing that not only are there (and should there be) only two biological sexes and two genders, but also that everyone must be identified as belonging to *either* one *or* the other. This rigid mind-set precludes the possibility for multitudinous and multifaceted sex and genders, and requires the entire social world to be permeated with this "essential" dichotomy. (1)

Hence, normative notions of biological sex (male, female, transsexual, intersex) and socially assigned gender categories (man, woman, trans) are disrupted and challenged by discussions of transsexual, intersex, and genderqueer peoples' experiences, as they do not fit within the two-gender, two-sex model. Despite the lived realities of so many people which indicate that these rules fail to work in most peoples' embodied identities, we are still socialized to adhere to the dichotomy outlined above.

Bobby Noble's article "Sons of the Movement: Feminism, Female Masculinity and Female to Male (FTM) Transsexual Men" traces the ways in which transgender expression can unravel the naturalized conflation of masculinity with the category "man." Masculinity and femininity are qualities or signifiers of gender roles which pre-existed colonial systems of categorizing men and women, and which can be reestablished in two-spirit traditions if separated from the naturalized categorical referents. Noble writes that by divorcing masculinity from "men," "both trans and female masculinity are each non-derivative forms of manhood where that subject is no longer secured or privileged by a referent" (Noble 24). He goes on to say that "masculinity simultaneously needs to be reconfigured as a deconstructive fiction as well. Such deconstructions must be predicated

upon two things: an intersectional model of thinking identity and a permanent rupture or distinction between "masculinity' and 'men,' and also a strategic necessity of that rupture" (25). By reading this distinction into Anzaldúa's definition of the two-spirited tradition, the potentially disruptive force of Indigenous gender systems can be made more powerful. Divorcing masculinity and femininity from their normative categorical referents (man and woman), gender markers can be redefined in relation to two-spirit traditions and other Indigenous gender systems. Coast Salish traditions, for example, recognize six genders;[15] these categories necessarily depend on a more complex system of gender codes than the normalized binary within which we currently work. Two-spirit identities can be seen as hybrid sites where binaries no longer hold power as a set of opposing forces but are part of a broad range of identity markers in which masculinity and femininity are no longer the only points of reference for gender expression. Representations of two-spirit worldviews undermine naturalized gender and racial codes through Indigenous frameworks which have their own set of categories of belonging.

Trans/formative representations of the symbolic domain

In seeking to move beyond specific theorizing of hybrid racial and gender identities, I now turn to the work of Stuart Hall and his discussion of the processes of representation. It is through the representation of seemingly fixed categories of race and gender, as well as other colonial ideological systems that we come to normalize our worldviews and see ourselves within these frameworks. Rather than adhering to Audre Lorde's assertion that

[15] As told to me both in personal conversation (at UVic, 1999) by Gordon DeFrane, a two-spirit person and member of the Coast Salish Nation. Gordon was speaking from his personal experience and traditional teachings. Although a basic literature search has been conducted, no academic references to traditional Coast Salish gender systems could be found.

"the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (112), I would suggest that the master's tools may be an essential part of dismantling the master's house (in combination with other strategies). In this way, it is useful to look to technologies of representation to rework the markers of racial and gender categories, to give them new meaning or interrupt the normalized formations of subject positions. Hall writes about the technologies of racism, which "[operate] by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness" ("New Ethnicities" 255). In using technologies of representation to create new cultural signs and tell new stories about the meaning attached to those signs, trans identities can be further developed as possible subject positions. As Hall writes, "meanings can only be shared through our common access to language. So language is central to meaning and culture has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meaning" (*Representation* 1). Hall is speaking not only of written and oral languages but all systems of meaning-making, such as cultural practices of dance, music and the use of objects. The potlatch ceremony is one example of Indigenous cultural practices which utilize representational forms that challenge dualistic systems of identity in which boundaries between one world and another, or one body and another, are fixed.

The potlatch provides a set of Indigenous cultural practices which can be called upon in my own worldview as a mixed-race person, as this alternate system works to disrupt the categorical distinctions made among categories of belonging. Many of our dances and

ceremonies are based on embodying and performing transformation, year after year telling the same stories of moving between worlds, changing shape and transgressing boundaries. My understanding of the stories has come through participating in potlatches and reading about our people in books written by anthropologists, a further set of ironies in my self-understanding. Even though I don't know the Kwakwa'la language, and therefore can't understand the words of our songs and dances, I understand the metaphors being enacted through our dances and the images represented on masks and carvings. One Kwakwaka'wakw story of a transformative being is that of the *sisiutl,* a supernatural creature who holds the dual powers of being able to bestow either death or wealth upon anyone who witnesses her.[16] She can also turn into a canoe in times of conflict or battle, passing between the spirit world and that of mortal humans. Our ceremonies involve embodying the sacred stories of our ancestors that have been passed on to us and are indicative of Indigenous worldviews that challenge colonial dualisms and strict dichotomous thinking. These metaphors--which are alive in the bodies of Kwakwaka'wakw people, and are articulated through images of transformative beings which have survived the onslaught of colonization, the imposition of the English language and non-Indigenous religious and spiritual practices--hold within them the basis for my particular notion of trans/formative identity.

This reading of the potlatch maps neatly on to Hall's reworking of cultural signs, using a body of metaphors to move beyond the limitations of the English language and disrupt normative, fixed categories of belonging. In this context, "trans" can be mobilized

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[16] Based on oral histories and my own participation in potlatches (1987 to present).

effectively to talk about the process of mixing cultural codes and systems of meaning in developing a hybrid perspective. Trans realities can be situated in the place of unhinging markers of difference as the referents change shape and form—the ability to recognize the subtle movement from one world to the next and remain unattached to meaning-making from one moment to the next.

Theories of hybridity have contributed a significant rethinking of identity formation, particularly through the work of Homi K. Bhabha. In *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha names the "Third Space of enunciation" (37) as a site of cultural production coming from the hybridity of processes of colonial contestation. He sees this as a "liminal" or in-between space in which cultural differences produce imagined identities, calling into question the basis of national and ethnic identities in exposing their construction (36-39). Bhabha is often difficult to understand, with his use of various philosophical and psychoanalytical frameworks, and has been accused of reproducing the very notions of power and privilege that he is claiming to dismantle. While Bhabha's work may not be accessible to the average person attempting to articulate their place of being "in-between," his notions of liminality and third space offer metaphors for trans/formative identities. He writes that theory is an event, negotiating contradictory instances that "open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle" (25).

Engagement with Bhabha's theories of liminality, third space and interstitial spaces open up possibilities for naming subject positions comprised of seemingly contradictory or impossible markers of identity. Bhabha is useful in thinking through colonization

because he examines the ambivalence of colonial rule (the constructedness of our ideologies and identities, as seen earlier in the category "Indian"), and suggests that it enables a capacity for resistance in performing or mimicking Western literary and cultural traditions. He also points out that colonizer and colonized are categories that are formed in relation to one another and are defined by one another, and that identity is not fixed in natural categories but should be seen as a process of ongoing negotiation (34-39).

Judith Butler also works with this notion that identity is a process of constantly becoming an idea of oneself which is pre-established through dominant ideologies and cultural practices. She writes:

> There is no subject prior to its constructions and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the nonspace of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms that constitute the "we" cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is the space of this ambivalence that opens up the possibility of reworking of the very terms by with subjectivation proceeds—and fails to proceed. ("Gender Is Burning" 383)

Butler says that gender identification is always an ambivalent process, and that being a man and being a woman are unstable affairs: "they are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, a loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but that we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely" (385). She goes on to say that gender performance works to the extent that it cannot be read, for reading means exposing what fails to work at the level of performance. In line with Hall's arguments, Butler sees that language is able to

stabilize or naturalize gendered positions dependant on the fixity of the symbolic domain: "a crisis in the symbolic will entail a crisis in this identity-conferring function of the name and in the stabilizing of the bodily contours" (393). It is this space of crisis in the realm of the symbolic where trans identities can best be situated, particularly in relation to gender and racial norms. Looking to the construction of the category "Indian," and its relationship to individual Indigenous or Native identities, one can see the similar processes of attempting to fix racial positions and the failure to successfully do so. As I have suggested through the example of acts of transformation embodied in potlatch ceremonies, the realm of metaphor may be useful in creating this crisis in the symbolic and exposing the fictional nature of categories of belonging.

In unmapping our relationship to categories of difference, it is essential to rethink our positionalities in relation to complex systems of power in a world that tries, and fails, to demand fixed identities. This requires thinking about the relationship among individual identities or subjectivities, normative reading practices of racial and gender markers, and institutionalized systems of power related to these categories of race and gender. Processes of colonization have not only involved normalizing systems of categorizing Indians ("the red race") and other racial categories; the gaps in racial categories are mirrored in ideologies of gender as well. For example, a friend of mine identifies as a queer, Métis transgendered person. Legally s/he is understood to be a status Indian female, and, on the street, is most often read as a white male. The gaps among the institutionalized categorization of race and gender, individual subject positions, and normalized readings are essential points from which to develop notions of living with

trans/formative identities. While I may personally identify as a mixed-race Indigenous woman, I strive to simultaneously acknowledge and take responsibility for the privilege that comes with being read as white and straight. Paraphrasing a lecture by Audre Lorde, Linda Garber writes, "…privilege is not neutral. If you do not pick it up and use it in the service of justice, if you leave it lying in the street, someone will pick it up and use it against you" (3). Strategically moving within the gap between my identity and the ways that I am read in society, I can challenge naturalized notions of whiteness, heterosexuality and the category "woman." In the section that follows, I hope to map out some nuances of trans/formative identities through dialogue with mixed-race and trans people in the local community in order to bring greater meaning to locating oneself within these gaps between symbols or markers of difference and our multiply-situated identities.

Section Four: Themes of Trans/formative Identities

In this section, I will outline the themes that emerged during the interviews I held with trans-gender and mixed-race people during this research project. Over several months, I interviewed six people with mixed racial backgrounds and gender identities, engaging in conversations in which we both learned about ourselves as people with trans/formative identities. While I have brought to this process my own understanding of what it means to have a mixed identity, I hope to have gained a sense of the metaphors and stories that might emerge in listening to how other people articulated their shifting positionalities. Although metaphors were sometimes talked about directly, for the most part, they were integrated into underlying narratives about self-perception, family, home, naming, and community. It is my hope that in the following section, underlying themes of trans/formative identities take shape in the conversations I had with the research participants, and, through this shared meaning-making, expand the available metaphors that frame trans identities.

The six participants in this research live in Victoria or Vancouver, and are all social activists who use their creative expression in their social justice work. Two of the participants are visual artists, one is a photographer, two are performance artists (including one drag king), and two of the participants are writers of poetry and prose (one writer is also a visual artist). While one of the participants did not finish high school, the other five have some post-secondary education and four of them have completed a B.A. Childhood poverty is part of four of the participants' histories, and two of them still struggle with poverty. Two of the participants are both mixed-race and trans or

genderqueer, one of the participants is white, and five of the six participants are queer.[17] I will introduce the participants more thoroughly as their narratives emerge in the themes outlined below.

The initial tape-recorded interviews took place in Victoria and Vancouver at a location of the participants' choosing, including their home, my home and one individual's workplace. The question guide (see Appendix A) was developed to get a sense of the participants' family backgrounds, experiences of shifts in identification, and relationship to identity labels or individual naming. I asked the participants about their own stories and symbols of transformation, and, in return, many participants asked me about my own personal transformation stories. While the question guides were used to frame the interviews, the discussions were fluid and both myself and the participants asked questions of each other as they emerged. The interviews ranged from half an hour to close to two hours, and follow-up interviews were scheduled so that some key questions could be asked on film for the production of the short video.[18]

All of the people who participated in this research (including myself) have histories of living in various parts of Canada, sometimes moving between rural and urban communities, and we are all now living in either Vancouver or Victoria, B. C. These experiences of moving among various communities with specific class, racial, and gender dynamics, have affected all of our identities in some way, as we have formed our

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[17] Queer here is meant to include a range of non-heterosexual identities including gay, dyke, lesbian, two-spirit and bisexual.

[18] One participant did not want to be interviewed on film due to concerns about confidentiality, so only five of the six participants were interviewed on film.

racialized and gendered identities within these diverse contexts. For example, Naomi N.[19] talked about living in Montreal as a child, saying "I lived in a racially tense setting as a youth, as a child. Going to elementary school I was in downtown Montreal…[where] the kinds of discrimination that happens between racialized groups is very, very intense and hateful. And that's where I started my life." Naomi's identity as a mixed-race black woman has been informed by her movement from this racially tense setting with a visible black population, to Victoria which has much less of a visible black community.

All of the participants have been mistakenly identified as belonging to a racial or gender group that they do not identify with. Mixed-race participants spoke about the ways in which racial categories are framed differently within different community contexts, and the impact this has on the way they are read. Tara grew up in Prince George as one of the few Japanese Canadian people in the city, and found that she was constantly read as being First Nations. The stereotyping that she faced was based on this misreading of her background, which eventually lead to her being offered a scholarship for Indigenous students when she was in grade 12. Despite her best efforts to intervene by saying, "…but I'm not…," the socio-political reality in Prince George denied the existence of a Japanese community and therefore the only non-white community to which she could possibly belong in the minds of her teachers was Native. Now living in Vancouver, Tara continues to be misread but within a more diverse urban context; the possibilities have been expanded and she is misread as having a number of racial backgrounds, depending

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[19] Real first names of the research participants are used throughout the thesis.

on the context. The way we are read depends, then, on the racial dynamics within the communities we are in, and creates an awareness that, as we walk through the world, we may be read in any number of ways. Naomi G. is of mixed Samoan and Caucasian ancestry, but has been read as Chinese, Hispanic or Malaysian, hinting at the myth that races have distinct markers with clear boundaries, and perhaps the ignorance of dominant white culture in not knowing the differences among non-white groups. This theme of misrecognition was an element of producing a fluid sense of self along lines of both race and gender.

Although stories of misread gender identities were similar to those of misread racial backgrounds, the consequences of these misreadings were often very different. The trans and genderqueer people I interviewed are female bodied, and only one of them is white (though another is often read as white). They talked about being aware of the consequences of violence that may come from being misread as male or female, depending on the climate of the community in which they are moving. Within conservative communities such as the North end of Edmonton where Naomi G. grew up, for example, the consequences of being read as male can provide a certain degree of protection as a masculine-identified person of color. In an email, Naomi writes, "Yesterday I felt like an open target. Again that's speaking to the neighbourhood that I'm in, which is the headquarters for the Alliance. I noticed that I became more masculine, actually I wanted to be read as a guy." Being read as a man of color provided Naomi with a greater degree of safety than being read as a queer butch of color, or a queer man of color. The critical difference was that Naomi G. was unable to escape the

consequences of racism in this conservative community, but she could manipulate her masculinity according to the levels of safety that she read into the situation. She writes, "I know that the Dodge Ram truck behind me hates 'fags' and because I was driving slow he would give me the finger and mouth 'fuck off.' I also know that as he drove by he was thinking fuckin immigrant or fuckin dyke or maybe fuckin fag." The intersecting elements of racism and homophobia compound the potential for violence in this setting where white masculinity is dependant upon violent opposition to all "others." Naomi's ability to manipulate her masculinity according to these norms, then, is a life-saving skill, but one that may engender racist violence. While she may be able to gain male status by embodying heterosexual masculinity successfully, she can never rest back on white privilege as other mixed-race people may be able to do (myself included) and may face heightened threat of violence by being read as a man of color. Here we can see that, through whiteness, masculinity is mobilized as a privilege in dominant society, masculinity itself is not enough.

All of the participants talked about feeling "othered" or outside of the various communities they moved among throughout their entire lives. The generalized "other" category, lacking in specific racial or gender labels, was familiar to the participants as they had grown up with a sense that they never completely fit in, regardless of the context. For some, moving to a diverse urban setting provided an ability to blend in and to be an "other" in a sea of "others" rather than one of few. Within urban contexts, diversity can become a home for people who move within fringe communities, activist and artistic circles where everyone feels set apart from mainstream society. Here, people

with intersecting identifications of difference may queer the boundaries of belonging within these circles where difference is "the norm."

Out of these experiences emerged an awareness of the construction of racial and gender categories, or the falseness of their boundaries. Being constantly misread, mislabeled, and even mis-stereotyped, gave the participants an intimate knowledge of racial and gender markers and the processes of socially constructing categories of difference. Through dialogue, the participants found that we carry with us the knowledge that the degree of our belonging depends on the situation and socio-political climate of the community in which we are moving.

Devin talked about how shifts in their[20] knowledge of queer and gender issues have resulted in parallel shifts in the use of pronouns. Devin initially came out as a dyke and was comfortable with the pronoun "she," but after arriving at an understanding of themself as trans, Devin felt more comfortable being called "he." In the past few years, Devin has gone from presenting as very masculine on a day-to-day basis to presenting as more feminine. Devin said that as soon as they started growing their hair and adhering less and less to dominant markers of masculinity and manliness, people automatically reverted to calling Devin "she," "nobody has asked, they have just reverted to female pronouns. I think [people] should ask everyone what pronoun they prefer because people think they can just peg the tranny [based on visual markers]."

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[20] Devin prefers to go by "they," as a reflection of the multiple gender identifications that Devin embodies, rather than any one easy pronoun. I will be using "they" and "their" to talk about Devin through the rest of this thesis.

Along with the knowledge that arose out of moving between geographic locations, the participants' identities were informed by experiences of going to university, taking women's studies classes, and being part of social justice or feminist circles. Identity politics played a big part in several peoples' lives as they negotiated the identity categories that were made available in their specific activist, academic or social communities. Naomi N. talked about being labeled a "woman of color" by classmates in the Women's Studies Department and negotiating the weight of that label against her own identity as a black woman, and later a mixed-race woman. She said, "as I became more aware, there were some questions as to who a woman of color might be and the dynamic of being a light-skinned person of color, a light skinned black person in particular, has some pretty big diasporic discussions behind it." As Naomi deepened her own understanding of what it means to be a light-skinned black person, she began to use the term "mixed-race" to describe herself in order to claim her complex racial background and the privilege held within the white side of her family. However, these complex relations were erased by being labeled a "woman of color" by her classmates, as the term does not allow for variations of racial privilege and oppression.

Naomi's story mirrors my own experience of identifying strongly as an Indigenous woman within women's studies classes, as one of few Indigenous people in that environment. As racially marked people within these contexts, our identities were part of a larger political struggle being fought within activist and feminist circles, and, despite our best attempts to distance ourselves from them, we were necessarily seen as either white or of color. The struggle for me was acknowledging the unique position of

Indigenous people while also acknowledging my privilege as a light skinned/white person. The complexities of a mixed identity were erased in these discourses--there was no easy in-between. For trans people in these highly politicized spaces, the struggle to be seen and acknowledged is a daily project. Devin had been taking women's studies classes and was not acknowledged by the instructor as trans, but was rather grouped with the women in the class. Devin said, "I'm obviously female because I'm in a women's studies class and I'm obviously not a guy because there are only two guys in the class. So I can't fit." The instructor placed the two male students in the position of being the "men" in the classroom, with the women opposite to them, so Devin's gender identity was erased in this duality. Devin said that this dynamic "made me feel I have to perform my gender very masculine in the class in order to be seen [as trans]."

For many of the participants, not only have race and gender intersected within specific socio-political climates, but class has played a large part of identity-formation as well. Kym grew up in the North end of Winnipeg, a working-class, largely Métis neighborhood, which informed her gender presentation and definitions of masculinity. Kym talked about the ways in which her particular working-class version of masculinity has been mis-read in the queer community, in which many markers of working-class masculinity have taken on new meaning within queer culture and history. Kym said that because she wears a leather jacket, "they mislabel me as a big bad SM leatherdyke, but it's part of my culture, my Métis culture."

Understanding metaphor: themes and stories

Emerging from the lack of easy identifications with most communities has been a sense of "moving between worlds" for myself and many of the other participants. During the interviews, I asked participants if they identified with this expression, and if they felt it accurately reflected their experience of being situated between, across or outside of identity categories. I also asked the participants for examples of their own expressions for being situated in this shifting space, where our conversations were taking place, and where this research is situated. All of the participants identified with this expression, though they articulated it slightly differently, as "moving between worlds," or moving "in between the worlds." Tara said that her relationship to the Japanese and white worlds is unequal because of the dominance of white culture. She said, "I don't think I really move between worlds very well….I think the one that I can move into best is the white world. Like I can behave or perform like I'm white. I can go to university, I can speak the language, I can dress like an appropriate white person at work. I find it harder moving into the Japanese world. Like I'm too big. I am physically too big to be Japanese….So I have one toe in the world but I'm still very outside." Whatever our relationship to the various worlds we negotiate, it is from this space between that this dialogue has emerged, and that the following themes move as we negotiate our shifting identifications and self-expression.

This vision of moving between worlds is one of several metaphors that I brought to the interview process with participants in this research. Metaphor provides a powerful tool for reshaping gender and racial categories, and I pull out further metaphors as I work

through the major themes of the interviews in the pages that follow. Moving beyond the bridge imagery that was used at the beginning of this thesis, I hope that through dialogue and storytelling we can open up the possibilities for bringing voice and shape to trans/formative experiences. Metaphor is useful here because "it allows us to describe entities for which we have no name in a way that (1) fits the entity in to an already existing framework and (2) conveys a great deal of information about the entity, which aspects of it are important and which are not. Metaphor also allows us to recategorize existing entities" (Nogales 216). Metaphor is also useful because it "involves a certain amount of abstraction and construction of new categories" (Nogales 218). One metaphor I spoke about in the interviews is that of the shoreline, a symbol which has had a strong presence in much of my own writing and understanding of my mixed identity. As I explained to Tara in our conversation, "It's where all of the elements meet and it's always shifting and it's always been there. I go to the ocean and I can't comprehend how vast the ocean is and I can't really imagine how deeply the earth goes, and the sky. Everything is so much bigger than me and it's all these different elements meeting at this one place and moving." Metaphors such as these provide visual images for our shifting selves that, through dialogue, seem to resonate with other people with trans/formative identities.

Additionally, "in processing most metaphors the audience must actively participate in the creation of content in a way that is not required in the case of literal utterances" (Nogales 218). Metaphors cause people to evaluate what they learn critically and remember it later on. They can be emotive, and can paint a long-lasting picture. But understanding a

metaphor also requires knowledge of the cultural context in which it is used or created. Therefore, certain metaphors may work in Indigenous contexts or queer contexts but not necessarily in dominant culture. The work here, then, is to resignify the markers of race and gender through metaphors that can be understood by bringing new meaning to the stories of mixed-race and trans people.

Thematic exploration of interview dialogue

There are several main themes that emerged in the dialogues I held with the six participants, out of which some rich metaphors of transformation emerged. These themes are: irony; contradiction and impossibility; stories of home and family; naming and language; and embodied negotiations.

Irony

Irony and metaphor serve linguistically similar functions, in that what is intended is different from what is actually said. Irony and metaphor can be used to disrupt dominant narratives of identity formation by reworking cultural signs and giving them new meaning. Irony is also useful in exposing the false nature of constructed gender and racial categories, playing on the tenuous relationship between categories of identity and the lived reality of people with trans/formative identities. In the context of the interviews for this research, irony was a central attribute of identities which emerge out of colonial histories. Many of the mixed-race people talked about their own family histories which are marked with colonial ironies. For example, Naomi N. talked about the extreme white supremacy of her father's family lineage and the difficulty of negotiating a mixed black identity emerging within the context of this history. My own

history has been similarly marked with these ironies, as my white mother worked in a residential school while my father was taken from his family as part of that same child welfare system and lived with a white Mormon family in Alberta.

As well, participants discussed the irony inherent in identifying with a group or community that may reject them/us or draw a line that denies their/our membership. This was true for both racial and gender communities, particularly because of what is perceived to be at stake for the members of marginalized groups. Kym talked about her experiences of being Métis, and trying to negotiate a space within the Indigenous community where status cards are often used as a marker of authenticity. For Kym, claiming an identity as a Métis person was complicated by her lack of knowledge about who her father is and what community her ancestors come from. Traditionally, First Nations and Métis identities were connected to belonging to a specific nation and traditional territories, which are lacking for so many people today as a result of colonial systems of erasure and displacement. These identities rooted in not-knowing are seen within many diasporic communities of color, perhaps particularly within mixed families where some degree of racism and silencing is at work among the generations.

Similarly, within local trans communities, boundaries are constantly drawn around who can be an "authentic" member of the community. Devin talked about their own struggle with claiming a trans identity as someone who is not physically transitioning and whose gender identity is fluid, changing on a daily basis. Devin used the word "trans" because it described most closely how they felt internally and also because it carried more weight

than the term "genderqueer" or other terms. Devin said "if I went to a gender clinic they would think I was joking," because they aren't interested in trying to pass as male and take on attributes that are more feminine. By using "they" as a pronoun, Devin is actively refusing to fit within the male/man-female/woman dichotomy, which is upheld by the medical model used at most gender clinics. Clinics are gatekeepers for surgeries and hormone treatment that will change a person's physical sex to better match their gender identity. The Vancouver Gender Clinic, run out of the Vancouver General Hospital, "was the sole gatekeeper for public health coverage for transition-related surgeries" (Vancouver Coastal Health sec. 1) before its closure in May 2002. The Clinic "focused on the assessment and treatment of people who met psychiatric criteria for 'Gender Identity Disorder'" (Vancouver Coastal Health sec. 1). According to numerous friends who were clients of the Vancouver Gender Clinic, rarely was the goal of the clinic staff to allow clients to sit comfortably in-between; their perceived role was to help clients to make a successful integration into the gender role opposite to the one normatively associated with birth sex. In this process, clinicians may ask transsexuals to perform gender in such a way that attempts to maintain normative assumptions about gender roles for "men" and "women." For example, I recall a friend telling me about fighting for hormone treatment, surgeries and other procedures related to her male-to-female transition, after talking to the specialist about her refusal to dress in a feminine way, to date men, and to generally adhere to the expectations placed on normative gender roles for women.[21] She had to fight for the right to be a male-to-female transsexual who

[21] Personal conversation with a friend named Myriam (Vancouver, BC. Summer 2000.)

was a dyke, a masculine woman, and someone who generally disrupted the relationship between sex, gender identity and her gender role or self-expression.

For Devin, this dynamic creates an ironic use of the term "trans" as they know that many trans people and the official mechanisms of determining who is trans would similarly fail to read Devin as "trans enough." Although the term trans is meant to be indicative of a range of possible gender identities that sit outside, beyond or across dualities of "man and woman," it too has its borders. In addition to opening up a space for more gender fluidity, it can also serve to erect yet another wall between "us" and "them."

Tania talked about the ironies inherent in her own mixed-race First Nations identity, which have emerged from growing up among traditional and modern cultures. Tania is a painter and multi-media artist, and some of her artwork uses symbols from pop culture in contrast with traditional Indigenous symbols and stories. She consciously juxtaposes these images to express the irony of her mixed identity. Tania said, "it's an ironic thing—I know so many stupid commercials whereas I know very few words in my own language." She uses these symbols of commercial culture in her art reflect the irony or paradox in her relationship to them as an Indigenous person.

Additionally, irony can be seen in identifying with labels or markers which have been appropriated by others for their misuse. As I asked in a previous chapter in relation to my mother being a status Indian, what is the point in claiming an identity if anyone can use it? Naomi G.'s mother is white but she very much identifies as Samoan. While Naomi's

mom easily takes on the identity of a Samoan person, Naomi, who is of Samoan blood and heritage, finds her identity more tentative. Naomi G. said that it was easy for her to identify as Samoan in Edmonton or Vancouver because there was a small or invisible Samoan community. In this way, her identity went unchallenged, but in the South Pacific, she couldn't call herself Samoan as easily because there was a greater understanding of what that identity signifies. Certainly, her white mother would have more trouble claiming a Samoan identity outside of the dominant white culture as well. For Naomi, then, there was an irony in claiming an identity as a Samoan person along with her mom. Her mother was also the person who supported and encouraged her Samoan identity and knowledge of her history. Irony can be found in a mixed Indigenous identity taught to a Native person by her white mother. What does "Native" signify, then, in relation to the constructions coming from white society and normative cultural codes? Both Naomi and myself grew up with several versions of our racialized identity, aware of the insignificance of notions of authenticity when identity was always informed by our relationship to whiteness. Simultaneously, as mixed-race people, we were able to create our own sense of what it means to be mixed-race in relation and resistance to whiteness and to dominant notions of "other." Although our complex family dynamics may have laid the groundwork for our mixed identities, they have failed to completely determine who we are and how we are in the world.

Contradiction and impossibility

For both the mixed-race and trans people that I interviewed, contradiction and impossibility were inherent in identifying with two or more groups that were normatively constructed in opposition to one another. These elements were reflected in the stories of

the participants and the way they chose to name themselves and their experiences. The use of the term "impossibility" is used here to speak to the disparate and seemingly conflictual elements that make up individual identities, while simultaneously acknowledging that the lived realities of the people with trans/formative identities indicates that the coexistence of elements which are normatively constructed as opposing identities is indeed possible. The language used to talk about mixed identities is ripe with seemingly contradictory statements, which signifies the possibility of using these elements together as a productive failure. Several strategies for negotiating these contradictory elements of identity can be seen in the conversations I had with the participants, including constructing an identity in relation to, but apart from, normative categories. Devin talked about their current feminine gender presentation and the "'masculine-esque' and 'femme-ish' parts inside." While Devin identified with both being a boy and a girl, and believed in the fluidity of gender, they felt that it was impossible to embody both at the same time, at least in their body. Devin is familiar with the markers for both hegemonic white masculinity and femininity, and negotiates their identity in relationship to them. However, Devin has had moments when gender markers have intersected with racial or class markers, exposing the fiction of a naturalized whiteness which has gone unchallenged by their existing analysis. Realizing that although they want to "not be racist," the dominant society within which Devin lives has allowed the norms of whiteness to remain largely invisible.

Devin shared a story of being in Chicago for the International Drag King Extravaganza, walking around trying to find a queer hip hop club. Devin and their partner went into a

gay bar and talked to two white men, asking them where there was a hip hop club for "people like us," meaning queers. The men responded "like…European?" and Devin said yes, thinking that European meant cool, trendy, snappy dressers. After leaving, Devin's partner asked "Do you know what you just said? You said you were looking for a white hip hop club." In that moment, Devin realized how unconsciously racial norms are embedded in dominant ideologies, including within queer community and culture. Since then, Devin has attempted to do anti-racist work within Vancouver's drag king and queer communities, creating performances that are conscious of the constructed nature of race as well as gender. Devin has faced resistance from those who just want to "do a 50-Cent song" and don't want to think about racial issues. In Devin's experience, many white drag kings see drag as being primarily about deconstructing gender performance, not race, as though they do not intersect with one another.

Tania spoke about negotiating an identity in response to other people's perception that she couldn't possibly be part of the cultural groups from which she comes. While Tania is part white and part Native, she is sometimes read as a white person, and therefore only registers or matters at that level within society at large. Her identity and mixed-race worldview sit outside of the way she is marked in society. The racialization and gendering of our bodies ensure that in order to register to other people in a particular racial or gender role, we have to recognizably fit ourselves within the boundaries given to those categories. Tania spoke of the ways in which her childhood friends denied her Indigenous identity, saying "Oh, you totally don't seem Native. I totally don't see that….You're not stupid and dark and pregnant and dropping out of school, so we don't

think you're Indian." In the minds of her white peers, then, Tania remained a failed Indian and, by default, she was identified as one of them, as white. Tania's own identity is more complex, and can use this misreading of her racial background to her advantage, choosing when to reveal, or not to reveal, various aspects of her mixed identity.

Stereotypes based on racial or gender ideals were also projected onto some of the participants based on a perceived identification with the marked group. Tara talked about being stereotyped as the "smart Indian" while her brother was seen as just another "dumb Indian," constructed in the racially-divided community of Prince George. Her continual assertion that she wasn't Native went unheard, as her mixed-race Japanese heritage was not one of the categories available within that cultural context.

Another element of contradiction or impossibility emerged from the interviews as participants talked about identifying with a culture that they simultaneously rejected. Several people talked about wanting to develop an identity within a marginalized community, while also rejecting and being critical of that community. Tara talked about the misogyny within traditional Japanese culture and her ability as a mixed-race person to take the elements of Japanese culture that she admires and leave behind those in which she doesn't believe. These complex relationships to their/our community and heritage are erased in the simplistic labels they/we are forced to adopt, as they/we assume whole rather than partial identifications.

Contradiction was also seen in identifying with symbols or markers of having a fluid identity or being part of a mixed community. Naomi N. talked about her identification with being a "rainbow person" or one of a community of "rainbow people." Although Naomi identifies as queer and has spent years within queer communities, she rejects the easy adoption of the rainbow symbol within queer contexts. Dominant queer culture is usually shaped by whiteness, and, in Vancouver, it has been dominated to a large extent by white, middle-class men. Naomi talked about both identifying with symbols such as the rainbow and seeing a lack of true diversity within the queer community. The rainbow metaphor that Naomi adopted as a symbol of her identity formed in a dynamic, mixed-racial community was simultaneously an ironic disidentification with the insincere diversity of the queer rainbow. The resignification of this symbol is an irony that informs Naomi's queer and mixed-race identity, but may not be seen by those who read the rainbow symbol within the context of whiteness.

Stories of home and family

All of the participants talked about the complicated relationships they have had with home and family, particularly with negotiating an identity that is incongruent with family history and lineages. Home has different meaning for each person, building layers ranging from individual bodily experiences, to physical homes, traditional territories, and relationship to land. For many, the relationship to home is bound up in personal experiences of abuse, colonization, and racial or gendered violence. Tara was the only person who talked about feeling at home in her body, as she had come to understand herself as rooted there in connection to her physical experience of the world. Tara said

that although she has not found a home in any particular place in the world, "I do have a place that feels like home. I feel at home in my body. Especially with sex and stuff, it's like I'm at home and it's very good." She talked about realizing that her awareness of this positive relationship to her body has changed through being in relationships with trans people who have never felt "at home" in their bodies, but have wanted to escape them or change them.

Others expressed the ways in which childhood sexual abuse has shaped their relationship to their bodies, and the relationship between these experiences and personal racial or gender identities. For example, Naomi N. talked about understanding at a very young age that her childhood sexual abuse was happening because she was a girl, she was poor and she was black. In fact, these early childhood experiences of abuse framed her understanding of what it means to be black and poor within dominant white society. She said that although her mom was always saying black is beautiful, black is proud, "I held it very negatively in my own body. Probably because we lived in a very, very racist society. And I was dealing with people calling me nigger all the time when I was little." Experience of childhood sexual abuse, racist violence and other forms of physical violation have had a great impact on Naomi's ability to find a place of home or safety within her body.

For the mixed-race participants, it is impossible to find a sense of home in any geographic location, as they are contested terrains of colonial histories. Tara talked about going to Japan and Scotland, where her ancestors are from, hoping that she might find a

connection to the land and culture there. She said, "I was lucky enough to get a scholarship to study in Scotland. And the white people around me were like 'oh, I hear bagpipes'. So I thought that by physically going to Scotland I would understand my roots, of all the people who go to Scotland to find their roots, I went there looking for a place of home and I realized that wasn't home. And then when I went to Japan I kind of had this romanticized ideal that I'd find my roots and stuff. But no, Japan's not my home either."

This relationship to land was different for people of mixed First Nations ancestry whose identity was very much connected to traditional territories. Tania talked about the experience of going from Vancouver to the interior on the bus, going home to see her family. She said "riding the Greyhound home and then once you hit Merritt the climate changes and really feeling it. Really feeling at home like I never do anywhere else, you know?" I have also felt this connection to Vancouver Island as my home through my father's family lineage, as not only have we lived here for thousands of years, but our cultural practices are meant to pay tribute to the ways in which the land and the people sustain one another. The metaphor of the ocean waves coming up against the shoreline has a particular meaning for me because it is connected to a sense of place, a sense of belonging, however partial or fragmented that belonging is. In a way, connection to land goes beyond any political or cultural lines that may be drawn between myself and the communities with which I identify. Even if I am not visibly marked as an Indigenous person, or a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation, my relationship to this island as my home remains.

Tania also talked about stories of struggle that root her in her home community, and through the very history of colonization, she feels connected to her family. Despite this personal connection, mixed-blood Indigenous people may feel an inherent tension in Indigenous communities, as questions of authenticity arise. As Tania said, returning to her traditional territory, she asks herself "am I 'Indian enough' to have a voice here, to claim this identity?"

All of the people I interviewed talked about finding the greatest sense of home or community within an urban setting. Naomi N. talked about places of home being located at a cross-roads, or those places of conflict among her various cultural histories. She used the image of the spiral to talk about the way her identity moved around itself, even around the historical and cultural conflicts that were part of that identity. She said, "the image I have had of myself is of a spiral. And I live on this spiral…every time it swings around, it's all of who I am, all of my experiences being revisited throughout my life from a different vantage point." This spiraling around multiple identifications and complex histories can be mirrored in a diverse urban setting which expands the possibilities for finding community in multiple places. Tania said, "For a lot of mixed-blood, marginalized and queer people the city is a place where we've made community ourselves…I think we create a community that's accepting and that's where I feel most at home." The spiral serves as a powerful metaphor for shifting identifications by challenging dominant narratives of linear identity progression. The spiral is also reminiscent of circular imagery used by Indigenous cultures to speak to a holistic worldview that moves around itself and allows for unfixed positionalities.

For some participants, the relationship to home and family was dependant on a certain degree of silencing and denial. Kym, Devin and Naomi G. all talked about the silences that they have kept about their gender identity within their family, often related to silencing around sexuality. While Devin's father first embraced their trans identity, he since ignored it and continued calling Devin by their birth name. Similarly, Kym talked about explaining "trans" to her mother but not pressing the issue on her, with an understanding of the cultural differences between them and a need to protect their relationship. Naomi G. talked about being called a man in public and feeling bad that her mom had to deal with the embarrassing inconsistency, as she insisted, "no, she's a girl." While Naomi herself doesn't care if she is called a man or a woman, but does identify with masculinity and consciously adopts masculine traits as she moves through the world, she has not adopted a gendered label to reflect this (she does not call herself trans or genderqueer, but says she "isn't sure"). Rather, she is comfortable being called "sir" or being read as male, but doesn't want her mom to have to deal with these situations. These family relationships, then, have underlying silences about what it means to move through the world as someone with shifting gender markers and a shifting gender identity in order to maintain those relationships while upholding dominant gender categories.

For all of the people I interviewed, silencing one's identity was talked about as central to maintaining family relationships, whether in terms of race or gender. The extreme lengths of this silence could be seen in Tara's experience of being at a party in her white grandmother's house in Point Grey, an upper-class neighborhood in Vancouver. As one of few people of color there, and one who was likely marked with a queer femme gender

expression, Tara was marked as "other" to the wealthy, white people there. One of the women attending the party assumed that Tara was the hired help, rather than part of her grandmother's family. The intersecting factors of race, class, and a queerly gendered identity resulted in Tara's identity being silenced in order to maintain harmony within the family.

Naming and language

The English language continually fails to capture and represent the experiences of people with trans/formative identities, as gender and racial categories mean to fix us within a hierarchy of social and cultural codes. While other languages may offer a variety of words to represent gender identities that allow for multiple meanings or shifting expressions of self, most people in Western societies do not have knowledge of these languages, even those of our ancestors. Some elements of Indigenous traditions of two-spirit people remain, but even there, the term has been used so broadly by the gay and lesbian community that it has become distanced from specific spiritual traditions. Speaking to the inherent colonial nature of dominant racial and gender categories, all of the participants have a profound discomfort with taking on any labels which attempt to fix identity. As Naomi N. said, "I always feel uncomfortable and it doesn't matter what the label is. Whether it's about racial identity, queer identity, gender identity… I actually don't think of my self in any of those labels at all. Although I use them." Mixed-race people may move through periods of trying out the labels "breed," "mixed-blood," "bi-cultural," "hapa," and "mixed-race," while trans people negotiate the labels of "transgender," "genderqueer," and "two-spirit." During the interviews, I noticed that some people said things like "I was nothing," "I was the other," "I am neither," or "I

don't identify as anything specific." These statements, then, inform the way that labels are negotiated within various cultural and social contexts, which do not allow us to refuse them altogether.

The participants generally talked about their shifting identities from early childhood through to the present context. For some, this has meant forming an identity out of resisting dominant categories, saying "I'm not gay," "I'm not white," "I'm not a man," or "I'm not a woman." Others have identified with the dualities presented in dominant categories through taking on both. For example, Devin's use of the word "they" signals their identification with both masculine and feminine gender markers and categories.

All of the participants have moved through various stages of naming themselves differently as their self-perception has changed along with the communities in which they live. Kym talked about the ways in which people discount her identity by assuming that because she has identified a certain way in the past, she must still identify that way now. For example, she talked about calling the facilitator of a peer support group for trans people in Vancouver, leaving a message asking for more information about the location. In the message she received back, the facilitator said "just so you know it isn't for people who identify as butch." Kym believed this assumption was made because she was in her mid-40's and because she, like Devin, did not try to fit a set of markers of trans masculinity. For Kym, naming herself as trans, and identifying with that term, emerged out of her own meaning-making rather than that of the trans community around her. She embraced different labels at different points in her growing self-awareness, such as

lesbian, butch, and then transgendered. She said, "when I read that one, it made the most sense because it was 'transitioning gender'. … All my life I was mistaken for a boy, girl, boy, girl."

Within the trans community, there is a certain weight that is given to the label trans, and parameters set around the trans community. Devin has experienced the consequences of these boundaries, especially in the trans community itself. In one situation at a trans conference, Devin was assumed to be a woman by another trans person because of their lack of adherence to markers of masculine trans identification. As Devin said, "It was horrible all around. I had to tell people 'I'm trans!' If I said genderqueer, they would've brushed me off." Devin was prevented from using the male washroom at the trans conference; in the dialogue that Devin had with the conference organizers, they had to prove themselves to be "trans enough" to use the male washroom. While Devin may, at different times, prefer to use the term genderqueer, it is not a term that they have experienced to be taken seriously. As Devin said, the reaction to their use of the term genderqueer has been "they're just playing dress up," undermining Devin's multiple gender identities as authentic.

Naomi N. talked about her shifting relationship to claiming an identity as a black person. She began, "I only identified black as something that was externally placed on me and I never really had a lot of internal family discussion, personal reflection on the fact that I was black. Outside of the consequences of racism, I didn't really give it any consideration if I was black or if I was white or what the fuck or somewhere in between."

Moving into a university environment, Naomi was identified as a "woman of color" within the context of a highly politicized Women's Studies Department and campus community. After being identified by others, Naomi saw that it was important to name her mixed heritage: "pretty much immediately I started to identify as a mixed-race woman, once I started participating in women of color communities." She went on to say, "I am more than the sum of my parts….No one of those labels can express actually anything about who I am because it takes up all of those different aspects of being and it's what happens between all of those aspects of being that creates who I am."

Naming one's identity takes on a different meaning for many Indigenous people who claim first and foremost an affiliation with their ancestral nation. Contemporary struggles for land rights and sovereignty depend on the insistence that Indigenous people assert their rights as a people, as part of a nation, rather than a generalized Indigenous population. Tania talked about her own mixed-race identity and her tendency, particularly within Indigenous urban communities, to identify herself as Secwepemc. The irony here is that many mixed-race Indigenous people may feel compelled to reinforce their identification with nationhood when in fact it may feel very tenuous. This movement within and outside of one's nation or one's people produces an identity that has been informed through the simultaneous identification and disidentification with home. Home and identity, then, are located in the movement among the two worlds and the critical relationship to both (or several). This is especially true for people who have grown up off-reserve or within a non-Native family, and who are not easily identified by other Indigenous people as being a part of that community. These are painful affairs of

the heart for many of us, as we negotiate the loss of our family connection through these distances and fractured knowledges. Still, there is some comfort in claiming connection to a specific lineage and a traditional territory.

Ultimately, people with trans/formative identities are challenged with the task of negotiating a language which does not account for fluid or shifting identities and a culture which insists on individual attachment to normative categories of belonging. For many, the fictions of the dominant culture and society are negotiated at a price. As Tara said, she can "fit the best in white society" because she knows it well and it comes naturally. Our names for ourselves may be situational, dependant on the level of knowledge of the people around us, or the degree of perceived safety. Of course, while we may be able to read the fictions of whiteness or dominant gender systems, they are complicated by shifting societal conditions that continually re-shape the nature of whiteness in order to maintain its boundaries.

Embodied negotiations, contextual selves

Trans/formative identities stem from negotiating markers or signs of race and gender and our manipulation, conscious or unconscious, of those markers as we move through the world. Our shifting identities are frequently seen by those around us, as we fail to live up to social conventions of racialized and gendered bodies, our racial and gender markers sending mixed signals and making it difficult to categorize us. Other times we pass through the world being read within dominant identity categories as we negotiate the always unstable relationship to markers of gender, class and race. For most of the people I interviewed, there was a gap between the ideologies of race and gender we hold and our

physical embodiment of those ideals. For example, Devin talked about believing that gender is fluid and shifting along a continuum from masculine to feminine, while simultaneously feeling the impossibility of embodying both at the same time. Devin talked about the crisis that often faces them before leaving the house, trying to decide how to best represent themselves in either masculine or feminine appearance through highly-gendered markers such as hair and clothing.

All of the participants talked about being highly aware of how decisions about hair style affect the way they are marked along racial or gender lines, as well as those of class and sexuality. Naomi N. said "Before I shaved my head and when I was dating women I definitely would speak to homophobia and heterosexism because it was shocking. Because I knew people around me were looking at me and thinking 'straight girl'. Because I had long hair. It didn't work so well after I shaved my head which is another effect of labeling. So I used that as a strategy to challenge people's ideas about who may be lesbian or who may be straight." Naomi's hair was also a marker of her black heritage throughout her life, which she experienced through racial slurs as a child, and later as a marker of her "exotic look" within the queer community.

Devin said that their hair was long throughout their childhood, because they were trying to be hyper-feminine in order to fit in as a girl: "hair is this thing that has screwed me up my whole life." When Devin finally did cut their hair, they became accepted within the trans community and then had to maintain that masculine haircut in order to be seen as masculine enough or as trans enough. Devin lost this credibility when they started

growing their hair long and was immediately called "she," even by trans people who know of Devin's trans identity.

The people I interviewed saw these shifting markers as being useful for teaching people about their assumptions, when they choose to make use of that gap between cultural norms and their own embodied identity. Naomi G. shared experiences of working cross-culturally, traveling in India and other parts of the world, as she used her awareness of racial and gender dynamics to adapt to the culture and respect local customs. This afforded her access to cultural spaces that were dependant upon her being read as male or as a member of the local culture. In First Nations communities, Naomi has been aware of the need to respect local protocol and has worked this into her role as a journalist and photographer. She believes she is seen as part of the community because of the fluidity of her identity and her ability to adapt to various cultural situations by reading local racial and gender markers. She said she has a problem with maintaining a set identity as she travels because "... in different cultures I can put my identity on the shelf in order to understand the culture. This has allowed me a lot of experiences [of seeing working culture] in practice….I am very aware of my status of being in countries traveling, but don't carry my identity of being masculine, or of being Samoan. It's not negating who I am, I just choose to move through that world for the purpose of understanding rather than the purpose of carrying my identity."

Several of the people I interviewed identified strongly with Indigenous stories about trickster figures who change shape in order to teach people lessons. Kym talked about

the coyote as a strong symbol of changing shape and choosing when to speak up or to remain silent depending on the situation. Tania also uses images of coyote and raven in her artwork, signaling her own role as a teacher and shapeshifter. The very physical embodiment of diverse or contradictory elements was also talked about by Tania, as she shared the story of her childhood understanding of what it meant to be a half-breed. She said, "I remember starting to learn that term 'half-breed' when I was 3 or 4. My parents were telling us you're half Native and half white, you're half-breeds. And I got all excited and said 'I get it!'. I showed my brother [my arm] and said 'see, this is our white half and this is our Native half,' turning my arm over."

Artistic visions

All of the people I spoke with said that although their mixed or shifting identity presented challenges, painful points of conflict, and the very real presence of violence, it can also be used to open other people's eyes, and to teach people in their community. This desire to create change in the world was common to all of the participants, myself included, as I see great possibility in the narratives of transformation held by people with trans/formative identities. Some of us have spoken directly to people about the reasons they need to create space for fluid identifications. Particularly in women's studies classes and other contexts where many analyses are dependant upon fixing and legitimizing gender identities, these lessons have been hard fought and often silenced. Many people told stories of speaking out as an ally to other trans or mixed-race people, showing solidarity in an environment in which someone has felt isolated or targeted.

For the participants, art, performance, and creativity are outlets for expressing the stories and metaphors that they/we carry with us as people with trans/formative identities. For some, artistic spaces are the only places they are able to see the various parts of their identities come together in a concrete way. Naomi N. talked about writing as a "crazily sane place," specifically in the case of her writing about childhood sexual abuse. Devin's experiences of staging drag king performances opened up a space where their masculine and feminine identifications could meet in Devin's body on stage. Devin said of this experience, "it was the only time I felt I could be both. I was only wearing underwear and had "other," "boy," and "girl," written all over me. It was equal. It was the only time I wasn't male or female visually." Tara also talked about performance spaces as learning spaces where cultural codes can be played with. The trick, however, was manipulating those codes in a way that was legible to the audience, or the lesson would go over their heads. This spoke to the need to centralize or prioritize white culture, even within the context of the queer community and queer performances spaces. As Tara said, "How do you do a sexy performance without buying in to the same stereotypical misogynist shit? Like how do you queer that, or how can you play with ideas of race when a lot of people will look at you and say 'oh, you're Hawaiian. That's exotic.' And not get that I'm trying to fuck with that?"

For Kym, the act of painting is an ongoing process of transforming and re-making the canvas, mirroring her shifting identity and self-understanding. In the case of one particular painting, this process of transformation has been occurring on and off for many years. In this painting, the canvas is set on a diagonal and the body parts of the figure are

cut off. She said she "wanted people to feel the wibbly-wobbliness of it," of having a trans identity or meeting someone with shifting gender signifiers. Kym insisted that "we need to be creating our own symbols too," rather than waiting for them to be made available to use, and her artwork has attempted to create a set of cultural markers for trans experiences.

As a visual artist, Tania also uses the canvas to represent the path between worlds, the path that she negotiates between dominant culture and Indigenous community contexts. Tania's art often references mainstream works of art, as she remakes these figures within the context of Indigenous struggles and histories, or uses symbols of consumer culture in juxtaposition with Indigenous culture to speak to the conflict that exists in these places where cultural values meet.

These artistic spaces create opportunities for exposing and sharing the metaphors and stories of transformation with the people around us. For many of the participants, even our personal relationships are with people who we feel don't understand our mixed or shifting identities. While some people have found a partner or a group of friends who see us in all our complexities and our multiple identifications, most of us struggle to explain ourselves to those with whom we are intimately connected, as with the rest of society. We may even be faced with friends who tell us that "race doesn't matter anymore," or that "class is not an issue," while we struggle to make visible our own personal story as a way of creating understanding. As Naomi N. says, the themes of her writing have always spoken to themes of both hope and despair, those opposing forces in our lives and

communities. She says, "Who I am, from my temperament to the complexities of identities that make up my person, and experiences I've had along the way, I am someone who has trodden and lived in despair for many, many years. And at different points I have had this burning flame of hope." These themes of hope and despair spread across various histories and social positionings of people with trans-formative identities, informing our desire to create social change while negotiating dominant ideologies that tell us we do not exist.

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Notes About the Video

One final element of this interdisciplinary project is the creation of a short video. The participants in this research allowed me to record them on film so that I could create an educational autoethnographic video to accompany the written thesis.[22] The video is intended to bring voice to a handful of mixed-race, genderqueer and trans people in my community, as my first attempt to create connections and dialogue through the use of visual research methods. My interest in film stems partly from my family background in visual art, and a personal desire to find my own way of telling stories through visual media such as photography, film and staged performance. The film is an experiment of sorts, as I have been interested in investigating the range of possibilities that visual media hold for bringing trans/formative experiences and expressions to life. It is an exploratory contribution to a growing body of cultural representations of trans/formative stories and experiences, one which I hope to use as a jumping off point for my future work in these areas.

The process of creating the video was itself an attempt to explore the possibility of reclaiming spaces of representation, such as those of film and video, which so often exclude the voices of mixed-race and trans people. As a creative writer, I have been able to weave storytelling throughout this written thesis, and the video allows me to bring the artistic element of storytelling to a different level. The video is also one way to bridge my academic and community work, as many people won't read my written thesis but may be willing to watch a short video. Video is more accessible and open to

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[22] The video is not available for public viewing or distribution. See Appendix B for more information.

interpretation, lacking the kind of formal analysis that is seen in parts of this thesis. I hope that the video is a positive contribution to creating shared meaning through re-making narratives of race and gender, sharing stories across difference, and moving among various community contexts. As I complete the journey of this thesis project, the film will be one way to share the possibilities held by my fledgling artistic vision and gesture at the possible forms of my future interdisciplinary work.

The video takes the audience on a very personal journey as they listen to the stories of my friends and acquaintances, stories about pivotal life experiences as mixed race, gender queer and/or trans people. The quality of the film is clearly not professional, but is that of a student filmmaker as I take my camera with me into my community to record what I will find there. The autoethnographic quality of the storytelling comes through as I invite the viewer along on my quest for other people's stories about identity and transformation. An intimate feeling is attained by bringing the viewer into the living rooms of the people whose stories are being shared, including myself as the creator and narrator of the film. There is also intimacy to be found in the friendships that I have with the participants, which comes through in the candidness and comfort of the discussions. I hope that this level of intimacy will allow the viewer to identify with the people in the video, and with my own story as a mixed-race person. Through watching the video, the viewer is brought into the dialogue, the questioning and the stories being shared on screen.

I begin by locating the journey of the film within my own questioning and life experience as I introduce the viewer to my story as a mixed-race Aboriginal person. I pose questions

to the viewer, asking them to consider the restrictions put on our gender and racial identities, and the necessity to create alternative stories within our own lives as people with trans/formative identities. The themes in the video echo those outlined in the thesis, and I guide the viewer through the various topics by grouping interview clips together to stress the shared experiences. Here, the participants speak for themselves, both through words and their physical presence on screen. While I framed the interviews with my own questions, the participants also asked questions of me and contributed to the flow of dialogue. Rather than analyzing or pulling theory from the interviews, the film allowed me to piece together a narrative woven together through imagery, story, and community involvement.

The participants share stories of complex family histories, concepts of home, mistaken identities, and growing self-awareness. These stories are sometimes painful, sometimes full of laughter, and always told with a great wisdom gained through years of navigating the racialized, gendered terrains of difference . Complex relations among dynamics of class, race, gender and sexuality come alive as stories are shared about childhood memories and university classroom experiences. Themes of personal creative expression and artistic vision are also discussed by several of the participants, as they talk about how their artwork and performance are closely tied with the ironies of a shifting sense of self. While these themes also surfaced in the written thesis, the complex nuances of the stories come through in watching the storytellers in their own homes, talking about their lives and personal experiences.

Reflecting Back: Lessons Learned and Lingering Questions

As this thesis project draws to a close, I am left wondering how my original vision has been transformed through the process of the research unfolding. I am reminded of the same dilemmas I have struggled with in the past of what it means to bring one's voice and experience into an academic framework which has been pre-established as an authoritative institution. The shape and texture of this project has been shaped by many forces, including my own areas of interest and the experience of the "research participants" –the hearts and minds of those mixed-race and trans people who shared their stories with me. But, in the end, I am wondering if the knowledge that remains on these pages belongs *here* at all. What has been accomplished here other than my going through the steps of obtaining an MA? What is the story, or the metaphor, of this thesis?

My day-to-day life continues to take me in and out of community contexts in which I shapeshift and adapt, moving across relaxed borders of "us" and "them," in the space where I am tentatively both us and them most of the time. Let me give you an example of how this movement unfolds in any given day.

Currently, I am living in the spare room in my mom's mobile home, which is situated on a reserve in Victoria. I am on Aboriginal land in my white mother's mobile home—neither here nor there, I suppose, as not even taxi drivers can find the place because the numbers follow no logical sequence on this street. I take the bus downtown to a government office requiring a security card to get in – no Aboriginal faces here. In this context, I am marked as Aboriginal, having been hired to work on issues of violence and

victimization in Aboriginal communities across British Columbia. I have been invited into this Canadian government space *because of my nativeness*, perhaps facilitated by my whiteness, my ability to adapt to this environment and to blend in. I wear nylon, I know all the abbreviations for important institutional references, and I can put Aboriginal issues in terms that translate at the level of policy making. I then go home on the bus and join my mother at a fundraising event for my goddaughter (though I am in no way religious). We are cramped in a small, sweaty room supplied by the band office, and my mom is one of three white women there, all girlfriends/wives/ex-wives of Aboriginal men in the community. Everyone else is Aboriginal, in fact most are Songhees and most are related. I am introduced to a young woman about my age who seemingly reads me as "outsider" (because of class or race or both perhaps) telling me, "we don't shake hands here, honey" as she hugs me hello. I feel self-conscious here, wondering how I am read, more so than at work where I can blend in, or have my Aboriginality worn as a marker of my expertise. Here, I don't feel useful, but rather question my right to be here at all, other than to support my goddaughter. At the end of the night, I win a raffle prize—it is the biggest prize of all, a carved silver eagle pendant. I am torn. Who am I to take this pendant when I am probably the person who could most afford to buy such a thing? The dynamics of racialization, power and privilege play out in both concrete and abstract terms here; the geography of my belonging is complex.

This project has been a hybrid or mixture in itself, forcing me to think about the ways in which personal stories and academic stories can be woven together in one thesis. Going through the text, I found it difficult to insert voices of academic authority into the

narratives of my own life, as well as the lives of the participants in this project. Rather than weaving them together, I feel I have positioned them side by side on the page, creating blocks of individual experiential knowledge and that of academic writers and researchers, each with their own place in this project of trans/formative identities. For me, this raises questions of authority and voice—if this is a story that started with my own interests and experience, which voices do I want to be a part of my own lineage on the page?

I made a decision not to directly reference such institutional documents as the Indian Act—rather I looked for scholars who had written about the Indian Act and cited their findings. The power that this document has had on the lives of Indigenous people is immense, and I could not bring myself to read through passages about the danger of "intoxicants" to "Indians," the definition of "mentally incompetent Indians," systems for buying non-Indian status through enfranchisement (though which people lost their status and in exchange were given a piece of land), and all the other categorizations the federal government has set out for shaping the lives of my ancestors.

The physical and emotional spaces of moving between and across boundaries of identity are where I had envisioned the dialogue of my thesis unfolding. However, I fear that my ability to stay in this place has been difficult because of competing pressures or needs of these varying spaces. A central theme of this thesis has been the meaning of community. Indeed, I have come to do this work because of those who have gone before me and taught me about my role in life. But how do I represent community and story within

academia, a space which determines that the story must be told a certain way? And how do I position myself within multiple communities, within multiple subject positions simultaneously when the written word seems to demand that I fix myself in order to clearly argue my point in this thesis?

The tracing of my day-to-day living does not translate well as thesis material. It requires justification and legitimized knowledge above and beyond my experience. What does it mean to live on a reserve? How many native people work in government? Why does it matter that I am staying in a mobile home? In the end, I wonder if the process of writing this thesis has been more of a "talking back" to the academy in which I am situated as an MA student, rather than witnessing and validating what I have witnessed. Aboriginal women such as Patricia Monture-Angus (1995 and 1999) and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1996 and 2001) have been down this road before and used their writing to warn of the difficulties faced by Indigenous women in academia. Why then would I have thought I could find a way around this struggle?

One of the lessons I have learned in the process of this project has been that film is truly a useful tool for telling stories. Every time I struggled with writing and revising this thesis, I watched some of the interview footage and was reminded of the true heart of this project. Watching the stories of the participants reveal themselves on screen, I felt the connection made clear again. My intention was to create dialogue among mixed-race and trans voices, to expose the constructed nature of race and gender, and to look to stories which undermine the hold these categories have on our lives. I feel this work has best

emerged in the voices which have survived untouched on the page and on screen as they are seen in the film. All around those stories and voices, however, it has been challenging to stop myself from drawing further boundaries and definitions in order to legitimize my project.

I do not intend for this thesis to represent all mixed race and trans people. Indeed, it may resonate with anyone who has felt a sense of being divided, uncertain about where they fit in. But I do hope that I have been able to tease out the nuances of trans/formative identities in such a way that this project connects with people who are seeking stories which speak to them. Admittedly, I have sought out similarities in experience rather than differences, because I know how important it has been for me to find stories that validate my own.

In the end, I must circle back to the notion of bridging, the image of creating a link between and among various shores. I am living in Victoria, where there are events which speak to issues of racialization, or those which speak to gender, or sexuality, or class, but very few events which speak to the links among all of these simultaneously. In particular, I walk down the street with the knowledge that I read gender differently than many of my peers because of my experience in the queer community and the number of trans people that I have known. I also know that this is informed by my own personal cultural history which includes transformative figures. Much of what I have accomplished here has been the realization of a personal journey, engaging in dialogue with people and theory/academic writing, and seeking connections that extend beyond

my personal worldview. This has also been an opportunity to talk about experiences that several participants said they just don't talk about very much, which continues to be reflected in conversations I have with other mixed-race and trans people.

I have purposefully not defined who "we" are, in many parts of this thesis, or have later defined what group or community I am referring to. In order to loosen the boundaries around categories of belonging, around "us" and "them" and around concepts of community, I feel this confusion or lack of grounded identification can be a useful or productive confusion. As Arnaldo Cruz-Malave and Martin F. Manalansan IV say in introducing their anthology of international queer experiences, "instead of providing a term or a grammar that would dispel the complexity of these cross-cultural interactions, making them universally legible, the contributors to this anthology would rather open them up, and interrupt and interrogate the hegemonic logics and moves that would prematurely solve them, reducing their meaning and their political potential" (Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 4). The situated knowledge created in this thesis has given voice to the shifting identifications of people with trans/formative identities. As creator, participant, and witness of this thesis project, my role has taken on multiple meanings, like that of Dzunokwa, "…the wild woman of the woods, a sometimes malevolent being who kidnaps babies but who also can impart great wealth" (Jonaitis, *Art of the Northwest Coast* 108). Hopefully through such metaphors of creation and destruction, this project will provide new points of connection for relations of trans/formative identification.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

First Interview (audiotaped)

PURPOSE: The purpose of this interview is to gain an understanding of the ways that mixed-race and transgender/genderqueer people move between, within and outside of normative racial and gender categories. It is also intended to build an understanding of the range of stories, metaphors, and myths that inform the worldviews of the participants. Additionally, it will begin a dialogue with my own ways of articulating shifting identities, and thinking through colonial categories of race and gender.

1. How have dominant racial or gender categories been restrictive or unsuitable for you?
2. Can you talk about some examples of times when people have labeled you as something you do not identify with?
3. Are there specific moments or incidents in your life where you began naming your racial/gender identity differently?
4. How have you named your identity when talking to your family? Your partners? Your co-workers? How do you decide which words to use when discussing your identity in these different contexts?
5. Have you had moments in which you choose to let people assume things about your identity or to remain silent about naming yourself accurately? When do you choose to be silent and when do you choose to speak?
6. How does your mixed race or transgender/genderqueer identity inform your artistic or creative expression as a (artist, poet, dancer, drag performer, etc.)?
7. As a mixed-race person I talk about experiences of "moving between worlds" to describe my experiences of being in various racialized spaces and the self-awareness of my own racial embodiment. Does this term of "moving between worlds" fit for your experience? Why or why not? Are there other terms that you use to describe this shift in your own life?
8. To what extent have you seen your experience reflected in the dominant culture and society in which you live?
9. Are there any images or figures that you see as pivotal to the way you understand your racial/gender identity?
10. What stories do you tell about your identity through your art or performance?

Appendix B: Ethical Considerations for Video Distribution

Due to the personal nature of the participants' discussion about racial and gender identity, the video *Trans/formative Identities: Explorations* is not available for public viewing or distribution, nor will it be archived with this thesis in the University of Victoria library. Each participant filled out an ethics form which stated the following about the use of the thesis and video:

> It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: I will produce a written thesis which will be available at the University of Victoria library. A video will also be produced, which will include you if you chose to participate on Options B and/or C. It is also possible that I will also present these findings at conferences and/or meetings after the completion of my research. I will use sensitivity and caution when choosing the venues in which the film is shown, as I am aware of the potentially revealing nature of the research topics.

Further, participants signed an agreement stating:

> Your signature on this consent form shows that you are now agreeing to participate in option B, an interview discussion with me at a location that is convenient for you. This interview will be recorded on video for use in the short video that I am creating for my master's degree. You have been made aware that the film may be shown at community events such as youth conferences, workshops and other relevant educational or artistic spaces.

Consent was not obtained for the video to be made available beyond carefully chosen educational venues, in which the video is contextualized by myself as the creator. I made a decision to maintain this level of protection of the video because of the potential consequences of making discussions of racial and gender identity public information. In particular, the two participants who talked about the shifting nature of their gender identities may not be comfortable with their parents, employers or other acquaintances seeing a video about their gender fluidity. Additionally, if a participant chooses to go through sexual reassignment surgery later in life, they may not want anyone to know their gender identity prior to changing their sex. For these reasons, it is important to me to prevent the video from becoming available in a public format.