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Kimberly Dree Hudson

Community borderlands: Exploring liminal and contradictory experiences
of belonging and wellbeing

Kimberly Dree Hudson

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Reading Committee:

Teresa A Evans-Campbell, Chair

Susan Kemp

Karina Walters

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Abstract

Community borderlands: Exploring liminal and contradictory experiences
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Kimberly Dree Hudson

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Associate Professor Teresa A Evans-Campbell
School of Social Work

Community borderlands are spaces that are shifting, polyvocal, and multidimensional; they embody, transform, and resist systems and cultures of oppression, impacting the material realities and lived lives of their occupants and visitors alike. In this dissertation, I apply a borderlands framework to learn about lived experiences in relationship to three central concepts within social work: community, belonging, and wellbeing. This project integrates elements of transnational feminism, postcolonial studies, and borderland epistemology within a queer framework, employing theoretical pluralism to interpret stories of lived lives, material realities, and perceived wellbeing. Using critical narrative and feminist methodologies, I interviewed 12 adults in the Seattle area who identified in flexible, critical, or ambiguous ways across race, gender, and sexuality; most study participants self-identified as mixed race and queer. I explore articulations and intimations of liminality and belonging used by participants to make meaning of being in community and being well. Emerging from this analysis is a conceptual framework to understand belongingness in community borderlands and corresponding, contradictory experiences that enhance and detract from participants' perceived wellbeing. Wellbeing itself, from a borderland perspective, is

understood through participant positions on reclaiming “healthy bodies,” priority-setting within their communities, and critical self-reflection regarding the intentional creation of spaces and the unintentional replication of oppressive practices and discourses. This dissertation challenges the singular assumption that liminal status is a source of chronic stress and social disconnection that deteriorates wellbeing. Instead, I demonstrate that borderland experiences of community may provide a sense of connectedness that actually enhances perceived and actual wellbeing through increased resources, sense of safety, and belonging. However, I also highlight the complexity, ambiguity, and discontinuities of these relationships. This study suggests the application of a borderlands framework in social work scholarship, pedagogy, and practice, namely by informing existing and potential collaborative community efforts to address disparities and promote wellbeing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Chapter 1. Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework | 15 |
| Chapter 3. Methodology | 33 |
| Chapter 4. Belonging and Wellbeing in Community Borderlands | 57 |
| Chapter 5 Ethics of Care in Community Borderlands | 83 |
| Chapter 6. Discussion and Implications..... | 98 |
| Bibliography | 121 |
| Appendix A: Interview Guide..... | 132 |
| Appendix B: Consent Form | 137 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure Number | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Epistemological and theoretical heuristic | 20 |
| 2. Global reach map | 55 |
| 3. Relationships between dimensions of belonging and wellbeing | 61 |
| 4. Ethics of care in community borderlands | 85 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table Number | Page |
|---------------------------------|------|
| 1. Demographic information..... | 50 |
| 2. Global reach..... | 54 |

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION



Community painting created May 2011 at the University of Washington Q Center's annual Qolors event, which celebrates "Queer of Color" people, communities, and contributions. Published here with permission.

Being connected to other people makes us happier and healthier: Research findings indicate a positive relationship between a sense of community belongingness and subjective wellbeing, also called *self-reported health and wellbeing* (see Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Ross, 2002). This dissertation explores the relationship between community belonging and subjective wellbeing as described by individuals who self-identify in non-traditional, non-conforming ways across multiple identity categories and transgress normative racial, gendered, and sexual borders. This study will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between community belonging and wellbeing through weaving together participants' intersectional, interconnected, and often contradictory narratives. Specifically, this project uses a borderland perspective that is both feminist and queer to explore *if, how, and why* experiences of community engender and contribute to a sense of connectedness and belongingness, with the ultimate goal of enhancing scholarship concerned with lived and embodied experiences of community and wellbeing, as well as areas of research and practice related to multiracial, queer, and transgender populations and experiences. I theorize that exploring mixed-queer experiences, specifically the experiences of transgressing norms across race, gender, and sexuality, can help to better understand a “collective in-betweenness” and its relationship to belonging and wellbeing. The inclusion of this knowledge within social welfare research has the potential to inform existing and potential collaborative community efforts to address disparities and promote pathways to wellness.

The goal of this study is to learn from mixed queer folks about communities that are full of beauty, struggle, laughter, and love; about how to take care of ourselves and each other, and resist together, collectively. Considering the complex geographies of lived

experiences and embodied knowledge, especially those related to community and wellbeing, will allow us to better design and conduct effective and meaningful research and practice with those whose experiences reside in community borderlands. As Norma Elia Cantu (1993) wrote: “One must also see border life in the context of its joys, its continuous healing, and its celebration of a life and culture that survives against all odds” (as cited in Hernandez-Wolfe, 2011, p. 293). This chapter begins with an overview of the context and background that frames this study, followed by a statement of purpose and accompanying research questions and aims. I also discuss my research approach, professional background, and rationale for this study. Finally, I provide definitions of key terminology and outline the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Background and Context

Frequently grounded in either geographic or identity-based commonalities, community is often conceptualized as a real or imagined place where meaning-making happens and a sense of connectedness, belonging, and responsibility exists (Hudson, 2012; Underwood & Frey, 2007; Willson, 2006). As important as these attributes are for individual and collective wellbeing, when they are perceived as static, apolitical, homogenous, and lacking ambiguity, “community” can become a totalizing mechanism that suppresses difference (Young, 1990). Throughout this study I use a borderlands framework to conceptualize ideas about community, paying attention to the spatial and socio-cultural boundaries that inform experiences of community belonging and wellness. I conceptualize community borderlands as transgressive spaces that are shifting, polyvocal, and multidimensional; that transform and resist systems and cultures of oppression; and as a site

for making sense of everyday life, for nurturing wellbeing for ourselves and each other, and mobilizing for action (Hill Collins, 2010; Hudson, 2012).

Community Belonging and Wellbeing

Community belonging, and more specifically its relationship to wellbeing, is a core concept in this study. A well-established construct in the social sciences, there is a wealth of literature related to community belonging. Following Emile Durkheim's (1897/1951) suggestion that a sense of connectedness and belongingness grants individuals a sense of collective purpose as well as access to resources, often in times of need, the concept of community belonging emerged within social science literature beginning in the 1950s (Kitchen, Williams, & Chowhan, 2012). A review of this foundational literature points to at least three additional roles community belonging may play in everyday lives. First, a sense of belonging has been thought to be one of the most important basic human needs, preceded only by physiological needs and safety on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. Second, community belonging serves as a protective factor against adverse events across the life course (Bowlby, 1969). Third, and more generally, a sense of community belonging is important to our wellbeing not only on the individual level, but the societal level as well (Sarason, 1974).

In general, the social sciences continue to treat community belonging as a mechanism for both mental and physical health, as well as a catalyst for social action and civic participation, making community belonging a concept of interest and concern in social work scholarship. The notion that a sense of community belonging can lead to positive outcomes in an individual's life and serve as a protective factor against a number of health risks is well

documented in both theoretical and empirical social science literature (Greenfield & Marks, 2010, Haggerty & Williams, 1999; Kitchen et al., 2012; Ross, 2002; Shields, 2008). As such, the relationship between community belonging and wellbeing remains an imperative for many contemporary social science scholars. Ross (2002), for example, built upon a body of theoretical work, arguing that community belonging influences health and wellbeing in three specific ways. First, community belonging may impact the transmission of social norms related to behaviors that promote or damage one's health, for example exercise or smoking. Second, a sense of community belonging can also lead to increased access to social and material resources that may increase or enhance protective factors for health. Third, when a person feels disconnected from their community or communities they can experience chronic stress, which may erode their health over time.

This framework for thinking about the relationship between community belonging and wellbeing has been supplemented and substantiated by empirical studies. For example, a number of studies have demonstrated a negative relationship between a sense of belonging and both stress and depression (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Hagerty et al., 1992). More recently, empirical, quantitative studies, many at a national level, have provided evidence for the positive relationship between community belonging and wellbeing (see Kitchen et al., 2012). For example, in a Canadian study, Ross (2002) found that those who felt close ties to a community reported lower adverse health outcomes compared to those without such connectedness. Similarly, Shields (2008) found community belonging to be strongly related to self-perceived health, even when controlling for socioeconomic background and chronic health issues. Carrieri (2011) found that an individual's perception of other people's health, especially those who an individual feels close or connected to, might also serve as a

consistent benchmark for their own perceived health and wellbeing. Correspondingly, one's perceived health, or subjective wellbeing, has been established as a reliable predictor and important determinant of *actual* physical and mental health and wellbeing (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Okun, Stock, Haring, & Witter, 1984).

Community belonging has been examined in various ways across the social and health sciences (see Chipuer, Bramston, & Pretty, 2003). Because of its subjective nature, a number of approaches and measures have been used: in community health, a 4-point Likert scale has been developed that allows subjects to assess their feelings of community connectedness (Ross, 2002); in epidemiology, community belonging is often measured with counts of social ties (friends, affiliations) or perceived social or emotional support. In psychology, psychological sense of community (PSOC) scales are used to measure both real and imagined aspects of community across a number of dimensions, including: belonging, fulfillment of needs, influence, and shared connections (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). However, often in these traditions, community is conceptualized as a geographically-bound place, like a neighborhood, and is sometimes measured in static and inflexible terms, thereby failing to explore the lived, subjective experiences of community and belonging.

Less common are descriptive studies of community belonging, as well as explorations of this concept at the local level. To this end, qualitative approaches are increasingly used to explore relationships between community, belonging, and wellbeing, especially with respect to multiple, intersecting identities and experiences of marginalization. For example, one study explored recent Latina immigrants' experiences of community, and found that participants were highly concerned with developing a new sense of community belonging in the United States, as well as maintaining connections to their country of origin (Bathum &

Bauman, 2007). Findings from this study also indicated that the participants' sense of community influenced their likelihood of engaging in health-promoting activities. In another recent empirically-driven qualitative study, interview respondents reported that "a strong sense of community provides adults with social support and the opportunity to positively influence the lives of others" (Greenfield & Marks, 2010, p. 132). As such, enhancing sense of community belonging within collaborative community efforts has been recommended for improving health status and eliminating disparities (Bathum & Baumann, 2007; Belue et al., 2006). By exploring the connections participants make between community, belonging, and wellbeing through a borderlands frame of reference, this project informs existing community-level approaches to social work research and may provide insight into new, innovative community practices.

Statement of Purpose and Research Aims

Research indicates that an increased sense of community belongingness enhances wellbeing, yet little is known about how and why this happens, for whom this is true, and the contexts within which these relationships emerge and develop. For example, despite a strong sense of community, many still experience a lack of belonging and connectedness. Conversely, some may feel very connected to others yet lack a cohesive sense of community. Regardless, we all use strategies to keep ourselves, and each other, well. Particularly for mixed race and queer individuals, little research has been done to explore the way community is practiced, the ways it is experienced, and the impact it has on the ways one thinks about one's own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. In order to address this limitation, this exploratory study centralizes a narrative-based approach to understanding the concepts of community, belonging, and wellbeing as they unfold within a borderlands

epistemological and theoretical framework. The following aims and research questions are addressed in this study:

Aim 1: Further develop a complex understanding of community borderlands through centering experiences of belonging.

1. Explore multiple meanings and liminal experiences of community and belonging.
2. Explore lived experiences with and within communities that impact belongingness, including drawing and policing borders.

Aim 2: Explore relationships between community belonging and wellbeing within community borderlands.

1. How are the complex relationships between community belonging and wellbeing experienced and expressed by individuals within community borderlands?
2. How, from the perspective of participants, do borderland experiences of community and belonging both contribute to and detract from wellbeing?
3. How can we better understand wellness priorities among participants and how these priorities are related to liminal experiences of community and belonging?

Aim 3: Provide evidence for the usefulness of border thinking within social welfare scholarship and contribute to narrative approaches within social welfare research.

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of using narrative inquiry to explore complex borderland experiences?
2. How can the field of social work further advance, and benefit from, a borderlands perspective?

Research Approach

With approval of the University of Washington's Institutional Review Board, this study explored the experiences and perceptions of 12 individuals who identified as both

mixed race/multiracial and queer. This investigation represented an exploratory study using qualitative research methods. In-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection. The interview process began with conducting two pilot interviews. The information obtained through 12 individual interviews subsequently formed the basis for the overall findings of this study. To support the emerging findings from the in-depth interviews, new sources of literature were reviewed on an on-going basis. Although the nature of this study prevented me from achieving triangulation of data, I utilized various other methods of ensuring rigor and trustworthiness throughout the study. Coding categories were developed and refined on an on-going basis through an extensive iterative process between the literature and the data. In addition, I used a constant reflexive research approach, including critical self-reflection in the form of memos and notes.

The Researcher

Throughout my academic career, I have been very interested and perplexed by the ways experiences of sameness and difference are articulated in intentionally “diverse” contexts. In my MSW education, I was trained in intergroup dialogue facilitation and over the years have gained significant experience in that practice. Intergroup dialogue utilizes intentionally diverse spaces to encourage bi-directional and self-reflective learning about power, privilege, and oppression, as well as strategies for collective action taking within and across communities. My experiences in this practice raised both intellectual and practical questions for me, a number of which have led to this dissertation project. For example, how do we know who we are “in community with” and what does this mean to us? Specifically for issues related to mixed race, queer, and trans/gender non-conforming folks, questions emerged such as: What if I am both White and a person of Color, or neither? Is there space

for people who don't identify within a gender binary? What if I am both straight and gay, or neither? What is my role in community building, anti-oppression and ally work? As complex, shape-shifting, and elusive as these questions have been, they have lighted my scholarly path and remind me of Kevin Kumashiro's (2001) simple yet profound call to anti-oppressive educators and researchers:

We need to examine the intersections that we find upsetting, that we often ignore, that could disrupt the ways we otherwise make sense of oppression and identity. And we need to problematize the ways we already examine intersections, complicate how we already make sense of oppression, rethink our strategies for change. (p. 2)

This agenda has been reflected in my personal experiences as well as in the experiences of other social work students I have had the honor of getting to know as an instructor. In my teaching practice, I have adopted and developed pedagogical strategies that I use to support a respectful and inclusive space in the classroom, encouraging students to engage in critical self-reflection at the personal and professional levels. Witnessing and supporting students in their processes around learning and integrating a critical social justice lens has both solidified my commitment to sitting in ambiguous and (sometimes) uncomfortable spaces and using that positionality to learn more about how systems of power work in everyday ways to divide as well as bring together people who are committed to anti-oppression work and positive social change.

Within the researcher role, I acknowledge that the same experiences that are so valuable in providing insight also serve to inform the research design and my interpretation of findings. In addition to my assumptions and theoretical orientation being made explicit at the outset of the study, I have remained committed to engaging in on-going critical self-reflection through journaling and dialogue with professional colleagues, community

members, and advisers. Moreover, to address my subjectivity, the intersubjectivity of the interview process, and strengthen the trustworthiness of the research, various procedural safeguards were taken, such as crystallization, reflexivity, and member reflections.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study emanates from my desire to uncover ways to position my research in an anti-oppressive framework, to let community discourse inform the research questions, and to contribute to community-level social welfare scholarship, education, and practice. This study intends to expand and complicate the existing body of knowledge concerned with ideas and strategies for collective wellbeing using a borderlands framework that incorporates a postcolonial/transnational feminist framework and queer perspective. Increased attention to these critical approaches may not only serve to enrich existing knowledge in the field, but may have real-world application in better understanding the ways community and belonging can interact and intertwine to help keep ourselves and each other well.

Communities forged within and across borders challenge ideas of belongingness and wellbeing, which therefore transgress conventional norms in social work, as well as community psychology, public health, and other community-level scholarship. This dissertation project will contribute to existing knowledge across disciplines that consider the complex relationship between community belonging and wellbeing. By looking to and from the borders of communities, we can better answer the questions of *how*, *why*, and *for whom* does this relationship exist? Additionally, given the dearth of social welfare research that considers the intersections of multiracial, queer, transgender, and other non-conforming identities and experiences, this research will signify the inclusion of traditionally

marginalized voices. However, I like to think of this project as *lending ears* to social work scholars rather than *giving voice* to a specific population. While this study may lend itself to practice implications for identity-based communities, and these are important implications to name and acknowledge, the intervention this study wants to make is not a typical one. My desire is for this study to be a paradigmatic intervention for the field of social welfare, a call for more complex and nuanced thinking around the lived life, the ways the center and the margins collide and bend, and ultimately, a testimony of the capacity community holds to shape people's lives in the most raw and delicate ways.

Definitions of Key Terminology Used in This Study

Throughout this study, I use terminology that has multiple meanings and that could be understood in various ways. The language I use to describe experiences of race, gender, and sexuality is not meant to misrepresent or reduce any of the various ways people describe themselves. I have chosen to use the following terms to be able to consistently, and more concisely, refer to a larger set of experiences and ways of identifying that may fall under these umbrella terms.

Mixed: a term often used to acknowledge identification with more than one racial, ethnic, or cultural background. *Mixed* can also indicate a singular racial identification (e.g., "I am only one race, *mixed race*"); often in these instances, an individual identifies with more than one *ethnic group*. For the purposes of this study, I am using *mixed* as an umbrella term to incorporate those who identify as racially "other," multiracial, "half & half," biracial, and racially queer.

Queer: In this study, I use the word *queer* in a number of ways. Primarily, I use this term as an umbrella term that encompasses all non-heterosexual sexual identities. These include gay, lesbian, bisexual, Two Spirit, pansexual,

asexual, flexible, questioning. *Queer* is also used to refer to a singular identity that is unique from those just listed. Finally, *queer* is used as both a theoretical and analytical tool for disrupting social and cultural norms, many associated with gender, sexuality, space, and knowledge.

Trans/Gender non-conforming: I have chosen to use this language to refer to the range of experiences of gender that do not conform to Western societal and cultural norms, particularly of what it means to be, act, or look like a “man” or “woman.” *Trans/Gender non-conforming* is used to locate an often fluid, non-static experience; it is also used to refer to experiences that can be both stable and in constant transition. I also use this phrase as an umbrella referent for other gender identities including, for example, trans, transman, transwoman, genderqueer, gender fierce, gender defiant, female-bodied/masculine presenting, male-bodied/femme presenting, masculine of center, Two Spirit, and aggressive.

Overview of the Dissertation

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I describe the key epistemological and theoretical frameworks that guide this study, namely borderland epistemology, transnational and postcolonial feminisms. I also tease out the intersectional and queer context that emerges from my use of this kind of theoretical pluralism. In the third chapter, I provide a description of my methodological approach and how it is informed by my epistemological and theoretical orientation, as well as walk through the specific analytic methods I used and how I accounted for rigor and trustworthiness in this qualitative study. This chapter also includes a sample description. In chapter four, I center the voices of participants and allow their experiences, stories, and reflections to guide my analysis of dimensions of belonging and their respective relationships to wellbeing in community borderlands. Chapter five explores and discusses another emergent set of themes: ethics of care. In the final chapter, I provide a

discussion of a set of implications this study may have for social work scholarship, research, practice, and education.

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*I am not sure that I exist, actually. I am all the writers
that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the
women that I have loved; all the cities that I have
visited, all my ancestors...*
— Jorge Luis Borges

The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of community belonging and wellbeing with a sample of mixed-race and queer-identified individuals. Specifically, I sought to understand how their collective experiences might overlap, diverge, and shift in concert with their individual identities and histories. Generally in traditional, positivist social science research, multiracial/mixed/racially other individuals are often excluded, as are non-White (and specifically non-LGB identified) queer folks and trans/gender non-conforming individuals, because they are deemed to be uncategorizable and/or insignificant in sample size (see Root, 2002).

Alternatively, research that does focus on mixed race and queer individuals has been either largely atheoretical or based on modernist paradigms, such as identity development and population-level outcome measurement. In social work, these bodies of literature are generally grounded in two perspectives, both of which are useful in investigating particular topics and also limited in scope: a) concern for a growing number of multiracial clients and the field's capacity to effectively and competently serve them (Fong, Spickard, & Ewalt, 1995; Hall, 2001; Jackson, 2010); and b) a "risk" paradigm concerning behavioral problems, substance abuse, and mental health issues (Bolland et al., 2007; Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, & Catalano, 2006; Jackson & LeCroy, 2009; Jackson, 2010; Sanchez & Garcia, 2009; Udry, Li, & Hendrickson-Smith, 2003).

Similarly, social work research related to queer experiences often centers around “lesbian and gay issues,” a paradigm which has received a number of critiques primarily for its reliance on a binary, categorical approach to exploring the lived experience (see McPhail, 2004). Social work literature regarding transgender experiences has been growing, with critiques launched against the pathologization of gender nonconformity, foregrounding the field’s ethical obligation to be in alliance with trans-identified clients, students, and communities. (Burdge, 2007; Kenagy, Moses, & Ornstein, 2006; Markman, 2011). Only recently, more fluid conceptualizations of racial and gendered experiences, including relational and ecological models, have been introduced into social science literature to better capture the dynamic and non-linear nature of identity (Choi et al., 2006; Hall, 2005; Jackson, 2010; Shih & Sanchez, 2005, Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002; Root, 1999; Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

However, these approaches tend to be identity-centric. Undoubtedly, identity signifies an important component of an individual’s meaning-making and sense of self. However, identity is not the sole container of mixed and queer experiences, nor is it always the most useful analytic for exploring race, gender, and sexuality. Anthias (2002) argued that the concept of identity is not an effective heuristic towards an understanding of “contradictory, located, and positional aspect of constructions of belonging and otherness” (p. 511). In this vein, rather than considering race, gender, and sexuality as individuals’ “possessions,” in this project I see them as processes that are dynamic, contested, and relational. Specifically, I look towards the borderlands of these experiences and explore how they are negotiated and embraced within the context of community, thereby displacing identity as a central heuristic (Anthias, 2002).

For these reasons and due to the high level of variance within experiences of race, gender, and sexuality, a critical component of this project was the epistemological and theoretical framework within which I imagined this study. This framework is also reflective of my personal worldview, positionality, and standpoint, which have guided not only the development of the study, but also my interpretive lens. The following review of the theoretical background of this study will outline many of the significant moving pieces involved in the conceptualization of this study, starting with the epistemological origins and extending through specific theoretical concepts that serve as useful analytic tools in this exploratory study. This review was ongoing throughout the data collection, data analysis, and discussion phases of the study.

Epistemological and Theoretical Framework

Over the last several years, especially with the emergence of intersectionality theorizing, a number of scholars have identified theoretical pluralism as an often useful and sometimes necessary theoretical approach (Borden, 2010; Mehrotra, 2010). Stemming from a feminist of Color and social constructionist perspective, theoretical pluralism and its sister-concept *bricolage* follow in the tradition of making creative and resourceful use of theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hill-Collins, 1990; Hurtado, 2003; Kincheloe, 2001). In this study, I rely on a borderlands framework that is at the heart of this work, as well as employ the type of theoretical pluralism and bricolage that calls for *using the theoretical tool you need when you need it* in order to make the strongest contribution possible to understanding and bettering the lives of individuals, strengthening communities, and impacting policy and practice. Theoretical pluralism and bricolage can be contentious practices, particularly when they challenge very well maintained (and vigorously patrolled) disciplinary boundaries or

when employed in a way that promotes superficial interdisciplinarity (Kincheloe, 2001). These practices are also contentious because, multiple paradigms with differing epistemological and/or ontological bases are brought together, as is often the case in theoretically-informed social work literature than is intended to communicate ideas across diverse audiences. However, as Kincheloe (2001) argues, theoretical pluralism and bricolage are also useful tools for multiperspectival knowledge production, translation, and application across disciplinary boundaries. As such, the epistemological and theoretical perspectives from which I draw to inform this study are adapted and applied beyond their original intended purpose; however, I do so in a critical way, paying attention to original context and selecting those theories that offer novel insight into the topic of this study and contribute most abundantly to a better understanding of the lived experience.

The theoretical framework reviewed in this section is broadly framed within a *borderland epistemology*, borrowing from previous work from feminist scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Sandra Harding (1998), who argue for academic atrocities such as inconsistency and contradiction to exist within scholarly spaces. Utilizing the bricolage or theoretical pluralisms approach discussed above, I have selected a cohort of theoretical perspectives to inform this study and to further develop a borderlands perspective. Primarily, these include liberatory theoretical frameworks from transnational feminisms and post-colonial studies because of the insights they offer into lived experiences of race, gender, and sexuality, and their relationships with systems of dominance and collective resistance. Drawing from these perspectives allows for distinctive imaginings of community borders and belongingness that pay particular attention to ambiguity, discontinuity, and flexibility, and the ways in which these experiences inform material realities, hardships, and triumphs.

Figure 1 is a heuristic that represents a suggested framework for understanding the epistemological and theoretical approach to this study.

This section begins with a brief discussion of borderland epistemology, a metatheoretical perspective on the meaning of knowledge and knowledge production that is grounded in the idea of symbolic borders and rooted in the disentanglement of knowledge valuation and domination. The subsequent sections offer a description of: transnational feminism, emphasizing the intersectional lens extended from this body of work; Chicana feminism (specifically Borderland-*Mestizaje* feminism) and the queer framework generated from this frame of reference; and finally, critical postcolonial studies, particularly the ideas of third space, third scenario, and otherness. These concepts lend unique strengths and opportunities for discussing community borderlands and the ways they are experienced and expressed.

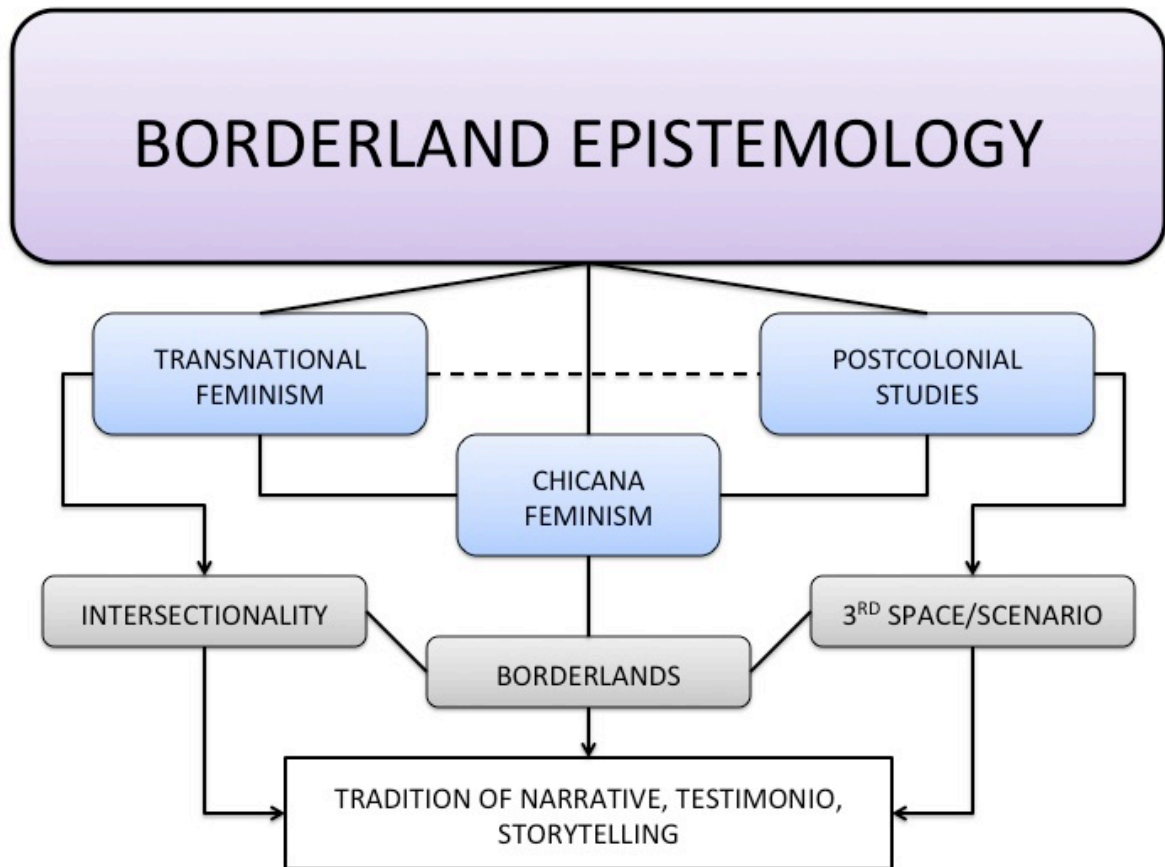


Figure 1. Epistemological and Theoretical Heuristic

Because each body of work from which this study draws is voluminous and nuanced, this section is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the literature. Rather, the following section will describe the essential elements of each body of work as it relates to the present study. As the epistemological and theoretical frameworks unfold, I will attempt to highlight the interconnectedness of each of the pieces. One such linkage is the ongoing intimation of liminality and belongingness woven throughout this framework.

Borderland Epistemology

Broadly stated, borderland epistemology is primarily concerned with demystifying relationships between systems of knowledge and of colonization, and how these relationships emerge historically and contemporarily; it critically looks at processes that protect the dominant position of Western knowledge, that inhibit the sovereignty of indigenous ways of knowing, and that result in the emergence of *hybrid* knowledges. Specifically, borderland epistemology considers physical and symbolic borders to be sites where the intimacies of epistemology and coloniality can be unraveled and explored. In his work, Latin American philosopher Walter Mignolo (2000, 2007) uses the term “border thinking” to describe the process of interrogating the interconnectedness of coloniality/epistemology and the exploration of borderland spaces. Mignolo posits both symbolic and physical borders as both *knowers* and *places of knowing*. This study follows in this tradition by exploring borders related to the body, community, and knowledge, as expressed in narrative accounts of mixed-queer lived experiences, belonging, and wellness. As I have discussed in previous writing, I think about these borderlands (of bodies, communities, and knowledge) as dynamic spaces that are created, crossed, occupied, and policed from within as well as from outside, both individually and collectively (Hudson, 2012). I incorporate a borderlands perspective in order to help better understand multiple and contradictory experiences of community and belonging, and how we keep each other and ourselves well.

Border thinking has two main objectives relevant to understanding communities as both physical and conceptual places that hold potential for decolonization, liberation and social justice. The first objective is to identify and then fracture the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge, and means of producing and validating knowledge, that have been established

since modernity (Carter, 2010). This means ensuring the recognition of other knowledges as well as acknowledging the limitations that Eurocentrism brings, including those related to social justice. The second objective is “the delinking from Northern knowledges... [which] involves an epistemic shift from [...] principles of Eurocentric knowledge toward the geo- and body-politics of ‘other’ knowledges” (p. 440). “Geopolitics of knowledges” spatializes, locates, and gives authority to other ways of knowing, while the “body-politics of knowledges” is embodied knowledge, substantially generated from the lived experiences of race, gender, and sexuality (p. 441). Both geopolitics and body-politics of knowledges recognize how historical conditions (such as processes of colonization) as well as contemporary conditions (such as neoliberal globalization) have reshaped “traditional” knowledges into hybrid, mixed, or “in-between” forms that have been, at times, systematically denied and hidden, and at other times misused and exploited. In this study, I extend this epistemic shift through challenging the “exclusivity of insight” claimed by dominant discourses (Appiah, 1991) by looking to lived experiences and practiced lives at what some frame as “troubled and troubling” intersections (Kumashiro, 2001; Ratcliffe, 2005), or in the case of this study, lived experiences that challenge dominant narratives around community, belonging, and wellbeing, and that disrupt traditional notions of being racialized, gendered, and sexualized. These lived experiences may draw and define boundaries differently than Western knowledge which, within the context of neoliberal globalization, displaces knowledge gained through spatial, lived experiences of the body and replaces it with aspatial, corporately-produced and market-driven forms of knowledge (Carter, 2010).

There are many nuances, disagreements, and contradictions among scholars who draw upon and contribute to borderland epistemology, making a comprehensive review of the literature difficult: the current agenda of borderland scholars is far-reaching and diverse. One of the reasons for this divide is the wide applicability of the border and borderlands as a conceptual tool. Another reason is a general divergence in thinking around the value of empiricism versus theory; yet another is disagreement regarding the wider application of border theory beyond the U.S.-Mexico border (Naples, 2010). For example, some scholars, such as Vila (2003), criticize conceptual, metaphoric adaptations of border theory. “For scholars doing border studies from the Mexican side of the line, it is difficult to see the border as mere metaphor, as the epitomized possibility of crossings, hybrids, and the like” (Vila, 2003, as cited in Naples, 2010, p. 514). However, the theoretical contributions of border theorists in cultural studies fill in theoretical gaps faced by social scientists doing empirical work not only along the U.S.-Mexico border, but other bordered spaces where material realities could only be explained through first understanding the complexity of relationships across and within bordered spaces. Particularly useful to this study is borderland theory’s reach into racialized, gendered, and sexualized spheres through underscoring the significance of their processes of overlap and convergence.

While some disciplinary focuses remain at measuring outcome-related characteristics of U.S.-Mexico border populations, others scholars continue to develop conceptual and metaphoric ideas of the border. Within the social and health sciences, borderland scholarship remains primarily focused on demographic trends and health-related outcomes of those who live at physical borders. Recently, however, borderland frameworks have been used within an emergent body of qualitative social science and health science research; for example,

Bathum and Baumann (2007) explored newly developed connections to communities as well as existing connections that are maintained by recent Latina immigrants. A borderlands framework has also been used as a reflexive framework in research; for example, Hernandez-Wolfe (2011), a Latina health researcher, drew from borderland epistemology to reflect on how her experiences in the field as well as in academia reflect multiple borderland positions. This kind of shift reinforces the feminist origins of borderland theories and their practical purposes. Naples (2010) highlights borderland theory's unique capacity to link scholarship and activism—in fact, Naples emphasizes the value of “contemporary feminist and queer border studies that link local struggles with cross-border organizing against violence against women, labor rights, and sexual citizenship” (Naples, 2010, p. 1). Therefore, borderland epistemology—when considering its queer, feminist, and critical realist roots/applications—grounds this study in a social justice agenda concerned with upholding and extending certain social welfare values, such as self-determination and social justice, while remaining critical of its limitations through engaging in an iterative, reflexive process.

Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminism has a legacy of seeking out in-between, liminal, or borderland spaces, in order to work through and across them in a collective resistance to systems of dominance and oppression, and so is a critical framework for liberatory social welfare scholarship, practice, and education (Moosa-Mitha & Ross-Sheriff, 2010). One major contribution of transnational feminism is a focus on the intersectionality of identities and embodied experiences of race, gender, and sexuality within specific contexts (e.g., historic, political) and on multiple scales (e.g., social, spatial). “Transnational feminism grew out of an engagement with social, economic, and political struggles that relate to dominance and

exploitation in terms of colonial and national contexts” (Moosa-Mitha & Ross-Sheriff, 2010, p. 107). This study is framed within these very contexts, and extends this critique to lived experiences across intersecting identities that are sometimes situated within and across bordered spaces and scales. As a transnational feminist project, this study is also invested in the translation of theoretical projects into action-taking “on the ground,” the interrogation of power relations in knowledge production, and the on-going self-reflection and self-critique of academics engaged in collaborative practices (Swarr & Nagar, 2010).

Intersectionality. An intersectional approach allows for the exploration of lived experiences of making sense of various discontinuities within borderland spaces (Hernandez-Wolfe, 2011), such as multiple identities and (simultaneous) experiences of connection/disconnection, visibility/invisibility, and the local/global divide. Following a transnational feminist perspective, this study considers identities to be flexible, situational, relational, and co-constructed, partially in relation to community. While considering the intersectionality of multiple identities, this study is more broadly focused on the intersectionality of space: the creation and collision of physical and psychic spheres, the maintenance of socio-spatial boundaries, and the deployment of “community” to name and locate experiences of belonging and wellness of individuals whose experiences of race, gender, and sexuality engage with and contradict multiple dominant discourses *simultaneously*. An intersectional approach to exploring (and claiming) community borderland spaces serves to disrupt racialized, gendered, heterosexualized, and classed spaces (Oswin, 2008; Puar, 2002). In order to accomplish this, this study looks from the perspective of “people moving in and out of borders constructed around co-ordinates of differences of power” with the intention of speaking “of, from, and across [...] identities and develop[ing]

narratives of plurality, fluidity, as an always emergent becoming” (Hall 1994; Bromley, 2000, p. 2). Consequently, I support an emerging scholarly agenda within social work to understand “how interconnected systems of inequality operate on multiple levels to affect marginalized people” (Mehrotra, 2010, p. 419), and strive to hold the field of social work accountable to its commitment to exploring lived experiences of privilege and oppression (CSWE, 2008).

Scale. A feminist conceptualization of borderland spaces relies as much on a critical consideration of the intersectionality of space as it does on the concept of *scale*. Recent feminist scholarship by geographers has illustrated “how attention to processes at multiple geographical scales allows us to understand the nuanced ways in which neocolonial relations of power and political economic structures of domination and subordination combine to shape gendered politics of inequalities, difference, and resistance” (Nagar, 2000, p. 685). Transnational feminism lends an eye to issues of power at multiple scales: challenging binaries and focusing on interdependencies; conceiving of cultural forces that construct borders; and ultimately seeking social justice (Nagar, Lawson, McDowell, & Hanson, 2002). Binary-dependent scales, such as the local-global divide, are socially constructed, and “social relations are in fact played out across scales rather than confined with them” (Kelly, 1999, pp. 381-382). I extend this argument in two ways. The first is through applying the notion of *scale* to multiple binary expressions: Self-Other, Insider-Outsider, Oppressor-Oppressed. The second is through centering the idea that not only are social relations played out across scales but also *between* them, thus highlighting interstitial configurations of power. This means reaching beyond binary divides and allowing for multiple power positions within, between and across identities (Deepak, 2011; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994).

Borderland-*Mestizaje* Feminism & the Closeness of Queer Theory

Another area of feminist thought grounded in the exploration and utilization of borderlands for academic theorizing, personal reflection, and collective action is Chicana feminism. Foundational Chicana feminist literature conceptualized the border as a liminal space that generates and resolves conflict; it is situated both physically and symbolically between domination and resistance, but also a “home” with the power to restore and transform (Anzaldúa, 1987; Hurtado, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Gloria Anzaldúa, a poet and cultural theorist, was instrumental in the articulation of a Chicana feminism. Particularly with her foundational work on border identities during in the 1980s, the work of Anzaldúa represents a hybrid genre of hybrid spaces. While a number of scholars, particularly feminists of Color, have advanced and continue to advance Anzaldúa’s work (see Keating, 2005), any project on borderlands failing to at least nod to her “seminal” work would be remiss, as her conceptualization of borderlands is one that has proven to be an enduring poetic and politic within a number of disciplines. Anzaldúa (1987) conceived of the borderlands as liminal spaces between races/ethnicities/cultures, genders and sexualities that produce epistemic resources for resisting dominating culture and creating “new” knowledges – an “open wound... that bleeds” (p. 25), yet also a place with potential for healing and liberation on multiple scales: personal, familial, communal, national and political. As I have asserted in previous writing and continue to explore, such transformation can occur through the recovery of knowledges related to the lived experiences of community—the ways we care for each other, resist together, preserve and celebrate collective memory, and hold each other accountable—especially within those communities marginalized within dominant ideological landscapes.

Born out of and located within the family of Chicana feminist approaches, Borderland-*Mestizaje* Feminism (BMF) pays attention to relationships between the physical body (and its desires), the (physical and spiritual) environment, and lived experiences in generating valuable knowledges. Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) conceptualized this approach as a way of theorizing *in the flesh*, centering how “the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (p. 23). Working within a BMF framework allows us to “rethink, deconstruct, and reconstruct new and hybrid ways to know, be, and become” (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008, p. 263). In line with a BMF framework, this study considers the body and sexuality, and how they intersect with race, ethnicity, and gender, as perhaps two of the most “subversive and anticolonial” *herramientas* (tools) to recover bodies that have been “scarred and split” by colonialism and other systems of oppression (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008, p. 266). It disrupts and decenters the “Western clinical sterilized approach to theory, research, and practice” (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008, p. 267); this study affirms those experiences that fall outside of normative ways of being, being together, and caring for one another. Life at and within the borderlands allows for a kind of openness to contradiction, “deviance,” fierceness, and beauty that comes from surviving together, transcending adversity, and loving unaffectedly.

Queer Framework. As is true with many critical and feminist epistemological standpoints, Borderland-*Mestizaje* Feminism is a bricolage of a number of perspectives and frameworks that according to Saavedra and Nymark (2008) “[...] use, embody, and borrow from queer, feminist, postmodern, postcolonial, and poststructuralist scholarship and epistemologies” (p. 262). As such, *queerness* in particular is a key element of this study.

Rather than drawing from traditional “queer theory” literature, which largely stems from a white, gay male tradition, this project emphasizes the intersections and co-articulations of race, gender, and sexuality, and employs Borderland-*Mestizaje* Feminism as a queer framework. In line with a larger body of literature, in this study, “queerness becomes a topic and a resource for investigating the way group boundaries are created, negotiated, and changed” (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 26). This is accomplished through centering the subjective experiences of the body (its racialization, gender socialization, and sexualization) and belongingness, which allows for the interrogation and deconstruction of racial, gendered, and racialized subjects, boundaries, and norms (Denzin et al., 2008). My use of queer theory also disrupts binarist systems, including the heterosexual-homosexual divide and other reductive conceptualizations of socio-spatial organization. As Oswin (2008) notes: “once we dismiss the presumption that queer theory offers only a focus on ‘queer’ lives and an abstract critique of the heterosexualization of space, we can utilize it to deconstruct the hetero/homo binary and examine sexuality’s deployments in concert with racialized, classed, and gendered processes,” as well as (trans)nationalized, global, capitalist, diasporic, and migratory processes (p. 100). In this study, I use a queer framework to disrupt normative conceptualizations of “being together” and “being well,” as well as construct a mixed-queer perspective that is partial, polyvocal, and contradictory—a perspective that collects histories of place, connectedness, and struggle.

Critical Postcolonial Studies

Postcolonial theory pivots on the following logics. There is *a shift in voice*—who gets to speak—with and for whom, opening the categories of diversity in race, genders, and sexualities (see Spivak, 1988a); *a shift in context*—from larger social and political systems to the specific contexts of private/public lives and the ways in which place and space become meaningful terrain of

practiced lives... (Gandhi, 1998, Goldie, 1999; Hawley, 2001a, 2001b); a *shift in theory*—from modernity to postmodernity to critical postcoloniality, from abstracted generalizations to emergent constructions grounded in the articulation and actualization of experience (Hall, 1994; Parry, 2002). (Alexander, 2008, p. 106)

This study follows a critical postcolonial perspective through centering the voices and perspectives of mixed queer individuals (*shifting voice*); by focusing on the everyday lives and lived experiences of mixed queer folks, while holding onto and making ties to larger social systems, contexts, and histories (*shifting context*); and finally, contributing to a critical postcolonial (and transnational/Chicana feminist) perspective through reconstructing “other” possibilities that can serve as praxis for transformation of future social welfare scholarship, education, and practice (*shifting theory*). Postcolonial theory and social work have at least two very important values in common: self-determination and social justice; yet, until recently, postcolonial theory has been largely missing from social work research, teaching, and practice (Deepak, 2011). By focusing on intersecting global systems such as imperialism, militarization, migration, and capitalism, postcolonial perspectives allow us to pay attention to and resist various colonial gestures articulated by social work research and practice; for example, “giving voice’ to voiceless subjects, re-ensuring the authority of the researcher/educator, and rescuing disempowered clients (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). This perspective lends critical social welfare scholars tools to identify and dismantle oppressive and disempowering relations created through the research process, many of which parallel social welfare practice, and offer alternative ways of thinking and doing.

Third space, Third scenario, & Otherness. Postcolonial theory has offered the social work profession and social work education, in particular, the concepts of third space and third scenario. These concepts, put forward by different theorists, are similar in their central thesis and usage. In the section that follows I will briefly outline several key

definitions and discuss their utility for this project through an umbrella term of the “Third.” ‘Third space’ refers to an unpredictable and changing, hybrid space located on the border between two domains (Bhabha, 1994). Third space is also thought of as an ambiguous location where meaning and representation have no fixed origin or destination. Like Anzaldúa’s *mestizaje*, third space seeks to move beyond the “either/or’ binary. Similarly, the “third scenario” (Hall, 1994) refers to a “non-binarist space of reflection” that reimagines and transforms ideas of plurality and difference (in Bromley, 2000). “The dilemma we experience is of both attempting to situate this scenario and also refusing to confine it to a knowable location. It is not a liberal, multicultural space in which several cultures are juxtaposed with their essentialized frontiers intact—the space of demographic plurality,” but instead, a space that is in constant transition (Bromley, 2000, p. 6; Hall, 1993).

The construct of the Other is also a central tenet of post-colonial theorizing that has relevance to this project. “Postcolonial studies is built around the concept of otherness—as both a point of departure and critique that has the potential of opening spaces of critical discussion about how we construct self and other ... and the resulting devastations of such differentiation” (Alexander, 2008, pp. 106-107). These ideas of the “third” described above offer the field of social work conceptual tools for resisting Othering processes and binary dependence. The “third” also allows us to consider real and imagined geographies of social space—specifically, Otherness, hybridity, and borderland communities (Saldivar, 2006) and as Juanita Heredia (2009) writes, engage in a “decolonizing process through writing and relocating subaltern cultures” (p. 5). As such, this study intends to situate communities that are in constant transition, that undermine forces that discipline migrating and moving bodies that live, connect, and create social bonds within, across, and beyond borders.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I present and discuss the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of this study, fashioning a borderlands framework that can be useful to the field of social work in: a) exploring lived experiences of liminal spaces, b) better understanding what contributes to and detracts from a sense of community and belongingness, and c) providing evidence for the utility of narrative approaches in social work research. The borderlands framework used in this study is uniquely conceptualized, blending transnational and Chicana feminisms, border theory, and postcolonial studies. This instance of theoretical pluralism was consistent with this project's intent to consider and disrupt multiple borders and boundaries, including those around disciplinary traditions, as well as use the best theoretical tools available to explore lived experience of community borderlands. Included in this set of theoretical tools were ideas of: intersectionality, stemming from a transnational feminist approach; queerness, as articulated from a Chicana feminist standpoint; and the "Third" and the Other, originally conceptualized within a postcolonial framework. The following chapter, *Methodology*, builds upon this framework and provides a set of rationales for a feminist and narrative approach to social work research and describes how this theoretical framework was operationalized in this study.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

She waited for the train to pass. Then she said, "I sometimes think that people's hearts are like deep wells. Nobody knows what's at the bottom. All you can do is imagine by what comes floating to the surface every once in a while."
— Haruki Murakami, *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions and meaning-making processes related to community and wellbeing with a sample of individuals who self-identify in flexible, critical, or otherwise ambiguous terms across racial, sexual, and gendered categories. I believed that a better understanding of these experiences would advance collaborative community efforts, including broad-based coalition building and community organizing as well as social work education, from a more informed perspective in terms of the meaning and lived experiences of community belonging and wellbeing. In seeking to understand these experiences, this study addressed three research aims: to explore multiple meanings and liminal experiences of community, especially as they relate to belonging and wellbeing; to further develop a complex understanding of community borderlands, and to contribute to a borderlands perspective in social welfare research using a narrative approach.

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and includes discussions around the following areas: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) overview of research design, (c) ethical considerations, (d) sampling approach, (e) methods of data collection, (f) analysis and synthesis of data, and (g) issues of trustworthiness. The chapter closes with a description of the sample and a brief concluding summary.

Rationale for a Feminist Approach

This study draws from the fundamental assumptions and key qualities of a feminist methodological approach (for overview of feminist social work research, see Gringeri, Wahab, & Anderson-Nathe, 2010). These features include (a) a critique of hierarchical, deductive approaches to knowledge building (Hesse-Biber, 2007), (b) attention to issues of power and authority as they are manifest in research design, implementation, dissemination, and ownership of the research, (c) an “ethic of care” relative to issues of representation, risk of harm, and the researcher-participant relationship (Preissle, 2007), and (d) recognizing the “complexities of multiple, competing, fluid, and intersecting identities” (Gringeri et al., 2010, p. 394). Consistent with feminist approaches, this study constructed co-narrated intersubjectivities (the situated, co-creation of meaning through researcher-participant interaction), paying attention to reflexivity and representation in knowledge production. These issues, and approaches I use to address them, are discussed in further detail later in this chapter (*Issues of Trustworthiness*).

Rationale for a Narrative Approach

Situated within a qualitative, feminist framework, this study also utilizes a critical narrative methodological approach. Based on a social constructionist perspective, I use critical narrative methodology in this study to explore participants’ lived experiences of community, belonging, and wellbeing. Using an exploratory, interview-intensive approach, participants were asked to share their subjective experiences of community belonging and wellbeing. As Brodkey (1987) notes, using critical narrative methodology is “presuming that a way of telling is also a way of knowing” (p. 70). Because multiracial, queer, and gender non-conforming experiences often fall outside normative constructions of race, sexuality, and

gender, they are frequently subject to pathologization rather than validation as competent authorities over their own lived experience (Butler, 2004). Applying a critical lens to narrative inquiry allows for the deconstruction of oppressive discourses and enabled individuals to construct their identities and lives in ways that better reflect their lived experiences, and is therefore in line with social work values (Keddell, 2009). As Chase (2005) adds, critical narrative approaches “confirm or challenge the status quo... when someone tells a story, he or she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience and reality” (p. 657). In-depth interviewing encouraged respondents to talk freely about their lives, and through a thematic analysis of narrative data, the structural components of these stories were elucidated through examining how respondents construct and give meaning to social relationships (Padgett, 2008). Because community designates some of the most important social relationships we have, narrative approach was a reasonable methodology for better understanding the meanings, and diverse experiences, of community.

This project uses narrative as a form of data, not as an analytic approach. A decision driven by my research questions, I chose instead to conduct a thematic analysis of narrative data, in order to construct an understanding of community belonging and wellbeing from the perspective of the collective participant voice, rather than investigate the slippages and discontinuities of individual narratives. I, as do the participants of this study, “use their views from these cracks-between-worlds to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics enabling them to reconceive or in other ways transform the various worlds in which they exist” (Keating, 2005, p. 2). In this sense, I wanted to understand better the ways study participants’ made sense of community and its relationship to their wellbeing, and used the narrative as

meaning-making units of discourse around community and wellbeing, and the ways belonging is ambiguously woven between.

Critical narrative inquiry situates this research in a social context embedded in unequal power relations and structures. Additionally, this approach allows for multiple forms of voice and presence. It also provides an avenue for accounting for my personal relationship to the research process and positionality within the area of research through reflexive practices (Madison, 2005). Due to the interview-based nature of this project, the co-construction of meanings between researcher and participant was an inevitable (albeit unintended) outcome of the chosen methodology. However, I continually returned to Foster's (2007) claim: "we do not *give* voice but we do *hear* voices that we record and interpret" (as cited in Gringeri et al., 2010, p. 401). Through community-centered interviewing around borderland experiences, this study contributes to existing knowledge in this area of research and tells life stories that are often marginalized or silenced in academia as well as popular press. The ultimate goal was to come to a deeper understanding of the many ways the context of borderlands influences the substance and form of community and wellbeing, and how these narratives are often flexible, fragmented, and strategized around both individually and collectively to enhance wellbeing.

Rationale for a Seattle-based Study

Although it centers mixed queer experiences, this project is not intended to be a population study. Rather, lived experiences of racial, gender, and sexual borderlands are explored within the context of community and connectedness. Because communities represent bounded geographic locations as well as "informally organized sites of intersecting social relations, meanings and collective memory" (Johnston, Gregory, Pratt, & Watts, 2000,

p. 582), *place* becomes a critical feature of this study. Seattle is a unique location from which to learn more about lived experiences of community and how these experiences are interwoven with individual and collective wellbeing. According to 2010 Census data, 5.1% of Seattle residents identify with more than one race, compared to a national average of 2.9%. As such, Seattle is one of the most commonly used locations for research on multiracial identity and families, and is home to such resources as the MAVIN foundation (www.mavinfoundation.org). Seattle is also home to a growing population of immigrants and refugees, the Census reporting 17.3% of Seattle residents are foreign-born, compared to an average 12.7% nationwide. There have also been interesting projections of regional and national populations of folks who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB). In a report from the Williams Institute at UCLA, Gates (2011) estimates that around 3.5% of the nation's population identifies as LGB, and that approximately 0.3% identify as transgender. Gates also estimated Seattle to be the second gayest major city in the country per capita with an estimated 12.9% of residents identifying as LGB (Gates, 2006). These demographic features make Seattle an interesting place to locate a borderlands framework and learn more about how community and belonging are experienced, and how these experiences contribute to and detract from overall wellbeing. Because of its uniquely rich gay history stemming back to the 1930s, Seattle has become a resource-rich place for LGBTQ communities, a popular host city for young adult queers who migrate to Seattle from all over the country as well as neighboring rural areas, and a generally gay-friendly, gay-affirming city (see Pettis, R., & Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project, 2002).

Troubling Seattle's "progressive" stance around LGBTQ issues is the city's problematic history with racial and ethnic segregation. For example, in the 1960s, gay-owned

businesses were flourishing in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle; these same businesses also happened to be predominantly White-owned. Meanwhile racial and ethnic minorities (of all genders and sexualities) were still prohibited by law from owning homes in certain Seattle neighborhoods (see Silva, 2009). Such consideration of the intersectional history of queer and racial geography and policy in Seattle helps to better understand some of the complexity of the social contexts of this study.

Overview of Research Design

In this study, a thematic analysis was conducted on data from in-depth interviews, researcher notes and memo-writing; additionally, multiple strategies were used for ensuring credibility and rigor. The list below summarizes the procedures used to carry out this research, followed by a more in-depth discussion of each step:

1. Following the proposal defense, I acquired approval from the IRB to proceed with the research. The IRB approval process involved outlining all procedures and processes needed to ensure adherence to standards put forth for the study of human subjects, including participants' confidentiality and informed consent.
2. Potential research participants were contacted via email. Respondents were encouraged to share the recruitment email with other potential participants. Interviews were scheduled; participants were allowed to select time date, time, and location of the interview.
3. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 adults in the Seattle area. The interviews were digitally audio-recorded and professionally transcribed.

4. Interview transcripts and researcher notes were analyzed.

IRB Approval and Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the University of Washington's Institutional Review Board (IRB). A number of human subjects considerations were made and outlined in full detail in the IRB application. Efforts were made in a number of key areas to protect all participants. These efforts include, for example, informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data storage. Each participant was protected by informed consent. There were no direct benefits for participants in this study; no remuneration occurred. There were also no foreseeable health risks to participating in this study, though it was possible that sensitive issues would arise and some may participants might feel stress or discomfort in disclosing personal information. An opportunity was presented for participants to opt-out before the interview is conducted. Additionally, each participant was provided with a resource list in the event they wanted to seek support services following the interview.

Participants read and signed a consent form prior to the interview, and any concerns were discussed. Participants were assured of confidentiality; they selected a pseudonym at the time of interviewing (if they so desired), and all sensitive material was securely stored throughout the research process. No identifying information was linked to the interview. Additionally, all participants had the right to self-select out of the study at any time and for any reason with no negative consequences.

Sampling Approach

A purposive sample procedure was used to select this study's sample. To yield the most information about the study's issues of central importance, purposive sampling is a

method that is typical of interview-based studies with specific selection criteria and small sample sizes (Patton & Patton, 2002). The target number for enrollment was 15. Using a chain sampling approach, I located key personal and professional contacts in various community networks, and asked them to share the recruitment letter with their networks. I did not contact anyone directly soliciting their participation. This recruitment email described the purpose of the study, introduced myself and invited their participation. I sent confirming emails to qualified individuals who responded, requesting a date, time, and location to conduct the interview. Post-interview, participants were asked to refer other individuals whom they knew to fit, or perceived to fit, the selection criteria. The recruitment letter specifically encouraged the participation of trans/gender non-conforming individuals and those whose experiences fall at the intersections of (other) marginalized groups, (i.e., immigrants/refugees, religious minorities, those with a disability, and/or lower SES status). People who were interested in participating were screened for eligibility and an interview was scheduled. The criteria for selection of the participants were:

- Adults living in the Seattle area, and
- Self-identified as multiracial and queer or trans/gender non-conforming, or identified with an ambiguous, flexible, or critical relationship with race, gender or sexuality; and
- Interested, willing, and able to talk about experiences of community, belonging, and wellbeing

The criteria regarding identity and self-identification were purposefully open and ambiguous due to the study's theoretical underpinnings. Because experiences of race, gender, and sexuality were considered contextual, relational, and flexible, participants were not required to self-identify using specific terms. A more thorough description of the sample is offered later in this chapter.

Data-Collection Methods

Interviews. The interview was selected as the primary method for data collection in this study. The interview method is a standard method for eliciting credible data because of its potential to elicit rich, thick descriptions necessary for exploring lived experiences and meaning making. The individual, in-depth interview also allowed for participants to construct their lived experiences in their own terms, capturing the unique language and stories that are reflective of their perspective of a relationship, place, process, or phenomenon. Furthermore, the interview method provided me, in the role as the researcher, the opportunity to clarify statements and probe for additional information.

Interview Schedule of Questions and Pilot Interviews. Interviews focused on understanding multiple meanings and liminal experiences of community, and especially community as it relates to wellbeing. Specifically, I used the study's three research questions as the framework to develop the interview questionnaire. Interview domains covered experiences of (a) race, gender, and sexuality; (b) community; and (c) wellbeing. Open-ended interview questions were developed to reflect various established components of community belongingness and perceived health/wellbeing. Matrices were developed to illustrate the relationship between this study's research questions and the interview questions as they were being developed. Two doctoral colleagues were then asked to review and provide feedback. Their comments were considered, and the schedule of questions was revised. Two pilot interviews were conducted in person. These key informants no longer qualified as study participants. From the pilot interviews, a series of open-ended interview questions were refined, which enabled the flexibility to allow new directions to emerge during the interview.

The interview guide was a semi-structured, rolling guide that changed depending on responses, form, and direction the narrative took during each interview and to allow for new ideas and directions to emerge. Following each of the initial five interviews, the interview questions were revised to encourage a more natural “flow” in the interview, and to incorporate follow-up questions and probes that were shown to be useful. The final interview schedule is included as Appendix A. In addition to the primary substantive domains of the interview guide (identity, community, and wellbeing), I included a warm-up phase and a wrap-up phase. I also utilized *probes* to enrich depth and richness: to go deeper, go back, clarify, steer, and contrast during the interviewing process. In addition to the interview guide, I included a brief script for eligibility. I also generated a *facesheet*, a standardized document for recording the date, time, and location of the interview, as well as demographic information of the respondent, as well as an *interviewer reaction sheet*, a log of observations about the interview, i.e., setting and nonverbal cues, concerns and ideas to follow-up with (Padgett, 2008). The interview also included a brief script for eligibility.

Interview Process. The interviews took place in February and March of 2012. Before the interview commenced, the participant was asked to review and sign a consent form required for participation in this study (see Appendix B). All interviews were conducted in person and were audio recorded in their entirety. I expected each interview to last approximately 90 minutes. However, because of the semi-structured nature of the interview guide, the length of the interview varied by participant, ranging from just under one hour to 2 ½ hours. Upon the completion of all interviews, the digital audio files were professionally transcribed verbatim.

Researcher Self-Reflection and Notes. After conducting each interview, I wrote notes regarding my initial impressions, thoughts, and reactions to anything that came up in the interview. This was a space for open reflection and generally took the form of journaling. This reflexive practice was useful in ensuring transparency in my role in the research process and added to the rigor of the study. Excerpts or summaries of these notes were useful in the analysis and interpretation stage. Research indicates that participants may feel more comfortable sharing with an interviewer who shares commonalities and familiarity with topic (Root, 1992). However, because of this familiarity, or potential shared experience, it was important that as the researcher, I remained aware of my reaction to or identification with the narratives being produced. I worked to ensure this through constant reflexive practices.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

Before data were analyzed, all materials (facesheets, reaction sheets, notes, and interview transcripts) were cleaned, organized, and standardized. I listened to all of the interview audio files as I read through the transcripts, de-identifying proper names such as people's first names, names of local organizations, and city names. All interview transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software; all other documents were analyzed using the "pen and paper" method. Excel spreadsheets were used to manage participants' demographic information and organize emerging themes.

There were a number of analytic approaches I could have taken with the data. After reading through the transcripts and revisiting the research questions, I decided to conduct a latent thematic analysis. This approach is flexible to theoretical frameworks and is oriented towards a more conceptual rather than explanatory analysis; in other words, a latent thematic analysis reflects reality and unravels its surface (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, I looked

for social and cultural meaning and meaning-making processes using an open-ended, inductive approach. I also looked for emergent themes across the interview domains (community, belonging, and wellbeing) using a theory-driven approach. Conceptual frameworks were developed from both the unique and convergent themes that emerged from the data.

Coding. Coding was the first level of analysis to search the texts for “meaning units” that can be organized, combined, or differentiated to form broader conceptualizations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Padgett, 2008). Codes were developed after several readings of the interviews. As Padgett (2008) suggests, I began with open coding by assigning code labels within each transcript using Atlas.ti. Based on my guiding theoretical framework and research questions, some labels were developed *a priori* (i.e., intersectionality, connectedness, socialization) while others were derived organically from emerging thematic content of the interviews (i.e., safety, basic needs, geographic location). After several transcripts were analyzed, a code list was developed and used to guide the analysis of other transcripts. Codes with too-few excerpts, or with content that was too “thin,” were dropped or merged into other codes.

Second-level analysis included organizing codes into categories, themes and patterns. I used axial coding to specify the characteristics of each category/theme and its subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)—creating a preliminary conceptual framework. *Schemas* were used to visually display these themes and relationships between them. Mapping relationships was important to achieving data *saturation*, or the point in which the data/analysis has reached “fullness,” the point no new codes needed to be developed and the themes were clearly conceptualized (Padgett, 2008). I edited the quotations I selected for inclusion in the analytic

chapters for readability, handling each quotation or excerpt with the highest integrity to the narrative as a whole.

Having started the analysis after five interviews, I was also able to determine that saturation of themes had also been achieved after 12 interviews. This is not to devalue the participants' stories: each interview added something new to the body of narrative, and it is true that more interviews would have contributed uniquely. However, the majority of themes were identified within the first six interviews, and after twelve interviews, the thematic schema was exhaustive and no new themes were identified. Other studies have also shown this pattern of data saturation in thematic analysis (see Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Memo-writing. Before, during, and after the analyses, I collected my thoughts and reactions through journaling and memo-writing. Memos enabled me to explore the affective work of the interview process and document my insights across each interview. In this sense, I used memos as “safety zones for discovery and creativity, a place for hunches and conjecture” (Padgett, 2008, p. 155). Through the use of memo-writing, I performed a *constant comparative analysis*, systematically seeking out and naming similarities and differences that emerge across and within interviews, as well as areas of overlap and contradiction. Additionally, memo-writing served to organize notes of emerging ideas and potential interpretations.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness features consist of any efforts by the researcher ensure that the study is conducted in a rigorous manner. In order to ensure rigorous scholarship, I employed a range of techniques to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. Moss (2004) described the process of establishing trustworthiness in critical narrative

and ethnographic methodology as a “creative art.” Using her approach as a starting point, negotiating the tensions between scientific rigor and the integrity of the participants’ experience was an integral component of this study. As noted in previous research, “Although narrators are accountable for the credibility of their stories, narrative researchers treat credibility and believability as something that storytellers accomplish” (Chase, 2005, p. ??). Primarily, I used Tracy’s (2010) model for achieving credibility in qualitative research, focusing on the following elements discussed below: crystallization, multivocality, member reflection, and researcher reflexivity.

Crystallization. A concept similar to triangulation, crystallization was used as an alternate approach to credibility (Ellingson, 2009; Moss, 2004; Tracy, 2010). Within this framework, truth and knowledge were always considered partial, contextual, and multidimensional. Therefore, the coding and analytic processes used searched for themes and patterns across participants and also consider each narrative’s unique form and content, examining each narrative independently as well as in relation to others. This strategy allowed ideas and experiences, as well as the way they were narrativized, to remain complex while being interpreted and communicated effectively by the researcher.

Multivocality. I used multi-level coding procedures that accounted for rigor, while also striving to remain faithful to multivocality—the unique voices and experiences of the participants—rather than reduce their stories to singular conclusions. To achieve this goal, this research was not focused on generalizability, as is true for most qualitative work (Savage, 2000). Instead, I worked to preserve “the worth and dignity of the teller” as a measure of faithfulness and integrity (Moss, 2004, p. 364). This was accomplished through honoring the diverse responses to the interview questions and experiences of the research

process. In the analysis as well as the writing of this study, I organized interview excerpts in such a way that they were “in conversation” with each other, allowing for divergent positions on any specific topic/theme to emerge. My use of multivocality allowed for stories that departed from others, that self-contradict and fracture, and that create dissonance with the researcher.

Member Reflections. Another way I ensured credibility in this study was seeking member reflections throughout the analysis and interpretation stages of the research. Member reflections provided new directions and insights through an on-going dialogue with participants. After returning the interview transcripts to participants who requested them, I encouraged participants to review and edit their transcript and to provide feedback during for the analysis and interpretation of their stories, “providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). Participants were also encouraged to reflect on the process of participating in the study; the several participants who followed up with me via email reflected, generally, a positive experience throughout the interview process and expressed their support of this project. Only one participant requested that I not include a sensitive segment of our interview in this or any future study.

Researcher Reflexivity. Throughout the research process, personal reflection and reflexivity were essential to recognizing my role as the researcher. Researcher reflexivity was woven throughout the study with the goal of a genuine, honest, and transparent research process. I achieved this through “showing” reflexive practices, not just “telling” (Tracy, 2010). For example, I was intentional with my use of voice and positionality as I analyzed and interpreted the data, weaving in my own meaning-making moments, reflections, and

reactions. I was honest and transparent about my own goals, biases, and mistakes regarding the research process. This use of transparency allowed me to provide “a methodologically self-critical account of how the research was done” (Seale, 1999, p. 468) in the form of memo-writing and an audit trail (Tracy, 2010).

Sample Description

Through purposeful and network sampling techniques, I recruited and interviewed 12 qualified participants for this study over the course of eight weeks. Though my target sample size was 15, there was no compelling reason to continue to recruit intensively. At 12 interviews, the sample was representative of various sociodemographic targets, including diversity across racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Information

| NAME | AGE | RACE ID | GENDER ID | SEX ID | Child. SES | EDUCATION | YRS/ Seattle |
|-----------|-----|--|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Alix | 35 | Mixed, South Asian, Middle Eastern | Genderqueer | Queer | Middle | College grad | 13 |
| Charlene | 28 | Black | Female | Lesbian | Lower middle | College grad | 4 |
| Chrissy | 29 | Mixed, API | Genderqueer | Queer | Working professional | College grad | 7 |
| DeAnn | 29 | Racially White, Filipino | Female/ Feminine | Queer, Lesbian | Working poor | College grad | 12 |
| Diana | 25 | Biracial | Woman | Queer | Working class | In graduate school | 7 |
| Erika | 20 | Mixed | Cisgender female | Queer | Well-off | In college | 2 |
| Hilary | 20 | Mixed | Female | Queer | Upper middle | In college | 2 |
| Jaime | 25 | Mexicano, Chicano, Latino, Mixed | Genderqueer | Queer | Working class | College grad | 8 |
| Lori | 30 | Latina, Mexican American, Mixed | Woman | Queer | Poor | College grad | 2 |
| Perrisima | 24 | Filipino, Pacific Islander | Two Spirit | Two Spirit | Middle | In college | 5.5 |
| Rae | 26 | Mixed | Cisgender, gender fluid | Pansexual | Upper | College grad | Child- hood +2 |
| Sarah | 22 | Multiracial | Woman | Queer | Upper middle | In graduate school | <1 |

Participants varied in the ways they described their race and ethnicity. Some participants simply used the word “mixed” while others several words and phrases they use to describe themselves, such as “Latina, Mexican American, and Mixed” or “Racially white and Filipino.” Interestingly, the only participant who identified with Black heritage was also the only participant to use only one monoracial categorical descriptor (Black). Eight participants identified with ties to East or Southeast Asian heritage, three with Mexican heritage, one with Middle Eastern and South Asian heritage. Four participants had “dual-

minority” multiracial identities, meaning both parents are people of Color; one of those eight participants identified one parent as also mixed race.

Similarly, participants described their gender identity and gender expression in a number of ways. Three participants identified as a woman and four participants identified as female; of these four female-identified participants, one also identified specifically as a cisgender¹ female and one as also feminine. Three participants identified as genderqueer, one identified as Two Spirit, and one identified as both cisgender and gender fluid. Less varied were sexual identities: nine participants identified using “queer.” One of those nine participants also used “lesbian” to describe herself, which was important to her due to being partnered with a lesbian-identified woman. One other participant identified as lesbian, one as Two Spirit, and one as pansexual.

One procedural change I made early on in the interview process was related to gender pronouns. I realized I had not written into the interview guide a question regarding preferred gender pronouns. An embarrassing oversight considering my personal relationships, intergroup dialogue, and anti-oppression training, I formally integrated the pronoun question early on in the interview guide, a question that was expected and appreciated by most study participants. As such and throughout this dissertation, I will be referring to study participants using their preferred gender pronouns at the time of the interview: feminine pronouns (she, her), gender neutral pronouns (such as they, their), masculine pronouns (he, his), or a combination of different pronouns. Some participants had no preference; I refer to those participants using gender neutral pronouns.

¹ *Cisgender* refers to identifying with the gender/sex assigned at birth; similarly, cisgender can also be used to indicate a “non-transgender” identity.

There were several trends across other demographic categories, such as age and educational level, which were predictable and probably reflective of the networks I as the researcher had established since living in Seattle. The age of participants ranged from 20 to 35. It is safe to say that this sample represents 1-1 ½ generations during a particular (and critical) stage in the life course. Young adulthood marks a particular developmental period during which time individuals tend to explore their identities, particularly in relation to other people, which is likely reflected in the participants' narratives. Additionally, reported childhood socioeconomic status showed a high level of diversity across participants. Although there was a full range of socioeconomic backgrounds, from working poor to upper class, this sample also represents a very well educated group of individuals. All participants were either in college or college graduates; two participants were in graduate school at the time of the interview. This undoubtedly impacted the nature of the interviews, especially in terms of shared language, intellectualization of lived experiences, and anti-oppression analyses that were scattered across interviews.

All participants were employed and/or students fulltime; many participants were advocates, professional activists, and social service providers, working at local nonprofits, community based organizations, or active members of student organizations and spaces such as LGBTQ centers on college campuses. These interviewees offer unique and important glimpses into community borderland spaces, but can only speak from their own experiences; their perspectives are not intended to be generalizable to broader populations. The limitations and opportunities for future research posed by these sample characteristics are further discussed in chapter six.

One surprising trend was the number of years each participant had been living in Seattle. I decided to add this question after the first interview. Being a non-native to Seattle was so significant to the first interviewee, and was such a strong thread throughout the interview, that I wanted to be able to look to see if that was an emergent theme. This hypothesis proved true: only one participant was born and raised in Seattle. For all other participants, the average (mean) number of years lived in Seattle was around five years, ranging from less than a year to 13 years. This may be largely due to the educational level and age range of participants, yet is interesting to consider in terms of leaving behind support systems, forming new communities, and entering existing communities. It is reasonable to imagine that the experiences of these interviewees may significantly differ from those of people who have lived in one place for an extended period of time, a lifetime, or for generations. For example, the ethnic and cultural ties that sometimes compel people to stay in a particular place may likely influence the ways in which meaning is made of community and how it is experienced.

Regional differences were also understood by participants to impact the way they understood their race, gender, and sexuality, and the language they used to describe these experiences. A number of participants did not use the language of “mixed” or “queer” until moving to Seattle; Lori, who had mostly lived in the South and Southeast regions of the United States before moving to Seattle noted:

I definitely identify as mixed, yeah. Although it’s interesting, I think that’s more of a—I used to say that some in like middle school or I would sometimes just talk about it like, “Well, you know, my dad’s Mexican and my mom’s white, so I’m kind of mixed,” you know, like just kind of in that conversational way, but it’s definitely more of a phrase that I’ve heard from moving here, actually. I don’t remember that being a huge part of conversations or communities [...] where I used to live. So it was, yeah, so the

whole mixed thing is more of a thing I've just been recently kind of exposed to a little bit more.

Transnational migration also emerged as a contributing factor to participants' ideas of community and self-appraisal of connectedness. For example, Charlene, who was born in the Philippines and moved around quite a bit throughout her childhood and young adulthood, noted: "if I sort of get real with it, I guess maybe since I've never been part of a community, I've never really known what it's like to not have one." Charlene's narrative in particular challenged the way I was approaching the topic of community and the assumptions I was making as to what it might mean to participants. This emergent pattern involving the role of migration and place made for an interesting geographic descriptive analysis. In Figure 2 and Table 2 you will see a map of the world depicting the somewhat surprising diasporic qualities of the sample

Table 2. Global reach

| NAME | <i>Self = solid line in Figure 2</i> | <i>I+ generation = dashed line in Figure 2</i> |
|-------------|--|--|
| Alix | Western Washington, Ohio | Lebanon, India |
| Charlene | Philippines, Germany, Illinois, California, Delaware | Philippines |
| Chrissy | Southern California | Japan |
| DeAnn | Western Washington | Guam, Philippines, Spain |
| Diana | Northern California | Mexico |
| Erika | Japan | Japan |
| Hilary | Northern California | China, Sweden |
| Jaime | Southeastern Washington | Wyoming, Mexico |
| Lori | Georgia, Tennessee | Mexico |
| Perrisima | Florida, California, Philippines, Japan | Philippines |
| Rae | New England | Vietnam, China |
| Sarah | Michigan | Netherlands, China |



Figure 2. Global reach

Overwhelmingly, participants held close transnational ties: more a third of the participants had resided in another country in their childhood; in fact, two participants immigrated to the United States and another five participants identified with having immigrant parents. This was a compelling characteristic of both the sample and of the interview narrative. Initially, I had no questions regarding immigration/migration history. However, through the course of the data collection period, the accumulating characteristics of diasporic narratives illuminated for me the need to further consider mixed, queer, and gender nonconforming experiences within a transnational, globalized context, and is further considered in the discussion chapter.

Often and without being prompted to do so, many participants told me their family histories and genealogies of migration. Some of these stories of migration had to do with

physical border crossing: for example, a parent's immigration to this country, stories that were often coupled with reflections on mixedness and racial/ethnic socialization as a child. For example, several participants tied stories of their mixed race identities to their family history in relation to migrant work, colonization, and internment camps. Other stories had to do with the participants' own national and transnational migrations either in childhood or young adulthood, often storied in concert with experiences of queerness and socialization around gender and sexuality. For example, some participants talked about leaving their home and hometown as a teenager after having "come out" to their family, or leaving due to issues related to bullying at school. Several participants wove these stories together, understanding that the tools they used to understand and learn about mixedness were similar to those related to queerness, and that altogether, how they understood their experiences of race, gender, and sexuality had much to do about their geographic location and movement across space.

Collectively, participants named a variety of communities with which they identified. The community most commonly referred to was the queer community. Most participants also identified the queer people of color (QPOC) community. Other communities mentioned by participants, though less consistently, were a people of color (POC) community, mixed community, and Asian Pacific Islander (API) community. Some participants simultaneously identified with other identity-related communities that were not tied to race/ethnicity or gender/sexuality: for example, the DIY (do-it-yourself) and punk communities; the dance community; and professional, anti-oppression and social justice communities. One participant expressed that she did not identify with any communities.

Overwhelmingly, the communities identified by participants were imagined as immediate or proximal communities, meaning that they were comprised of folks that were

known by the participants: friends, acquaintances, neighbors/roommates, partners, colleagues, etc. Participants less readily identified with symbolic or distal communities, such as an “LGBT community” at a national scale: while they might identify with an LGBT or queer experience, when they referred to their communities, participants rather clearly spoke of local networks, and sometimes national networks since many participants had relocated several times across the country, of people that were known to them and with whom they interacted.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of this study’s research methodology. Critical narrative methodology was employed to illustrate participants’ experiences and meaning-making process regarding community borderlands, belongingness, and wellbeing. The participant sample was made up of 12 purposively selected individuals. Two data collection methods were employed, including in-depth individual interviewing and reflexive practices, which included researcher reflection and interview notes. The data were reviewed against literature and theoretical frameworks, as well as coded as themes emerged. Rigor was accounted for through various strategies for enhancing the trustworthiness of the study, including multivocality and reflexivity. A review of the literature was conducted to construct a conceptual/theoretical framework for the design and analysis of the study. A latent thematic analysis enabled key themes from the data to emerge. I also presented a description of this study’s sample, including some unique and interesting sample characteristics such as its diasporic quality, and provided some discussion of why these patterns might have appeared in the sample and how they likely influenced the emergent framework in this study.

CHAPTER 4 BELONGING AND WELLBEING IN COMMUNITY BORDERLANDS

The purpose of the following analytic chapter is to explore community borderlands, how they are formed, experienced, and expressed, and the complex relationships between community borderlands and belonging. This chapter also explores how borderland experiences of belonging relate to wellbeing. It was clear from the outset of this study that community borderlands contained complex relationships, complex affective and embodied experiences of belongingness, and complex configurations of everyday somatic realities, including perceived health and wellbeing. As such, I wanted to explore how a sense of belongingness, when it occurs and when it is absent, impacted the strategies participants utilize to keep themselves and others healthy and happy.

Throughout this study, I worked with at least two major assumptions. First, I assumed that mixed-queer experiences, specifically the experiences of transgressing norms across race, gender, and sexuality, can be explored to better understand a “collective in-betweenness” and its impact on experiences of belongingness as one mechanism that influences overall wellbeing. I explore these experiences using a borderlands perspective. It is important that I note, however, that not all participants might describe their communities using a borderlands framework: some might not feel on a border or within a borderland space, others might have those experiences some of the time, while some others might experience bordering communities rather consistently as they walk through the world. Community borderlands, therefore, should be thought of as only one way to organize, locate, and make sense of complex positionalities and ways of “being together,” as well as fluid,

ambiguous, amorphous bodies and embodied experiences of race, gender, and sexuality in communities.

The second assumption that has driven this study has been that within community borderlands, experiences of belongingness are complex and liminal—somewhere in-between and absolutely multidimensional, both occurring in and *creating* liminal spaces, and shaping pathways to wellbeing. As such, I expected that expressions of belonging and wellbeing would be contradictory and polyvocal. Interview data presented in this chapter provide evidence to support these assumptions; however, the data also illustrated the shortcomings of this approach. For example, while my goal was to present data that reflected contradictions, I organize interview data within a unifying thematic framework. Attempting to present the whole of this study using broad, hermeneutic strokes was a challenge. With the aim of coherency ultimately overriding the desire for maintaining complexity, I do my best to balance the two through an organizing framework that, I believe, communicates an overall structure while allowing for dual meanings, self-contradicting statements, and the “undisentangleable.” As such, I will present a set of overarching themes relating to the topic of community borderlands and belonging. Woven throughout the themes will be a number of interview excerpts to illustrate each theme as well as the interconnectedness of the themes. Many quotes will be contextualized and interpreted; others will simply sit with you.

As part and parcel to my analytic approach, I read and re-read interview notes and transcripts. In doing so, many themes surfaced; while some themes grew in depth and complexity, others faded or were subsumed within other themes. In solitude as well as in conversation with colleagues and advisors, I attempted to capture a thematic constellation that represented the most salient, collective voice echoing within and between participants’

stories, keeping in mind the power of my own voice and story as the researcher, interviewer, and an individual whose life experiences both mirrored and differed from participants' experiences in significant ways.

This chapter begins with a description of the study's sample, highlighting one compelling sample characteristics that emerged in this study: a significant global reach. The rest of this chapter is organized around four emergent themes, each of which I am considering to be dimensions of community belonging, *being close*, *being read*, *being seen*, and *being heard*, and their corresponding relationships to wellbeing. Together, these dimensions and relationships tell one story of complex community borderlands and experiences of belonging and wellbeing.

Dimensions of Community Belonging: *Being Close, Being Read, Being Seen, Being Heard*

Because of the broad nature of the research questions, the ways the interview questions reflected this quality, and the sheer complexity and deep ambivalence around experiences of community and belonging, some interviews varied significantly from others. Therefore, the process of theme-generation became a subjective series of decisions made on my part as the researcher. Given this reality, I used all of the knowledge gained through an extensive literature review and information collected through the interview process to “lift up” from the data the most representative set of themes to answer the initial research questions.

Overwhelmingly, data from this study suggest contradictory pathways between belongingness and wellbeing. In this chapter, I explore and lend meaning to connections between wellbeing and the four dimensions of belongingness: *being close*, *being read*, *being seen*, and *being heard*. In Figure 3, I provide a visual representation of these dimensions and

examples of how each dimension offers both opportunities and challenges for participants' subjective wellbeing. The four dimensions of belonging described in this chapter carry with them various histories, contexts, and affective responses. Throughout the interviews, some participants identified and articulated the contradictory ways belonging affected their overall sense of wellbeing. While clearly multidimensional experiences, a rather clear pattern emerged in how participants spoke of belongingness as contributing to and detracting from their subjective wellbeing.

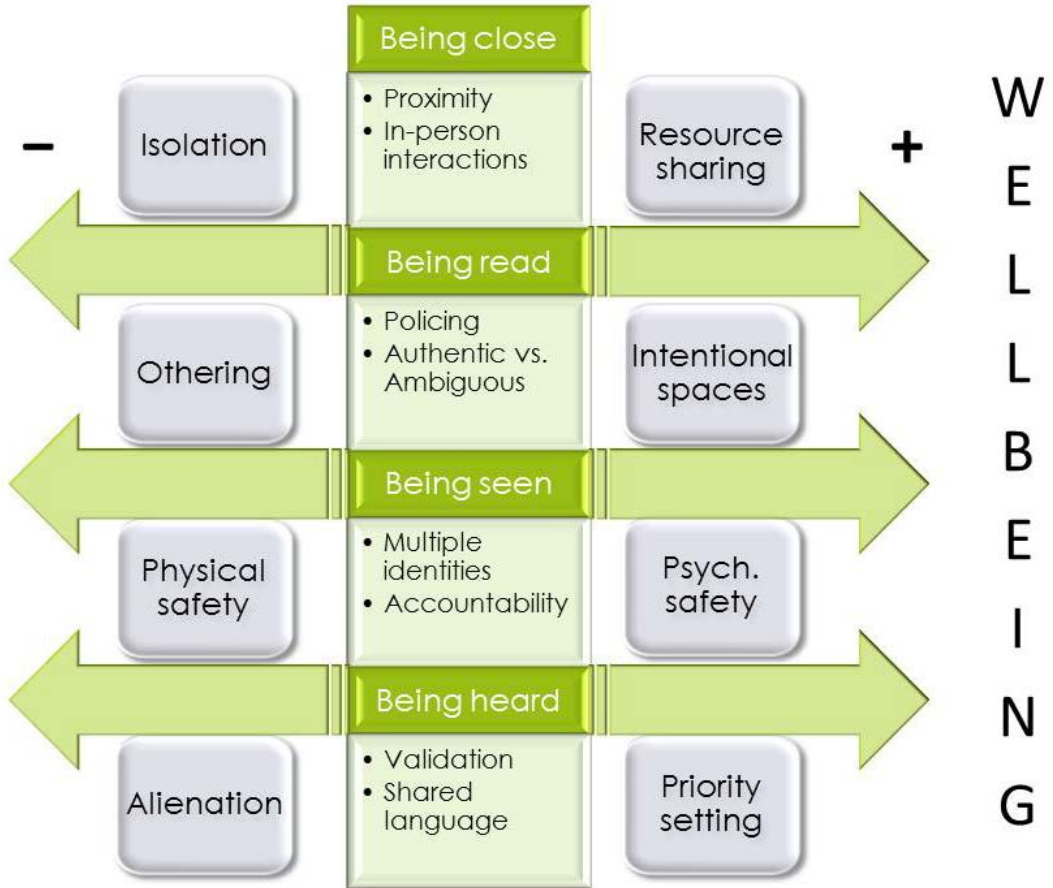


Figure 3. Relationships between dimensions of belonging and wellbeing

This figure represents an emergent conceptual framework that could be used in future studies to tease out and more methodically explore these pathways. What can be said from this study, however, is that these relationships are clearly multidimensional, differentially experienced, and reflective of the complexity of the lived experience. In the following section, I will describe each dimension of belonging and corresponding potential pathway between belonging and wellbeing.

The first theme, *being close*, speaks to importance of both physical and geographical proximity, as well as intentional spaces, in making meaning of community. *Being close* offers for some people a sense of connectedness, while for others it results in a feeling of isolation and disconnection, especially when physical proximity is nearly impossible due to class-specific neighborhoods, histories of racial segregation (especially for immigrant families), and gentrification. Within the thread of intentional spaces, stories of *being close* were intimately woven into the second theme, *being read*. This theme speaks to experiences of the “what are you” question, as well as how one is perceived by others, often in terms of race, gender, and sexuality. Even without utterance, this question almost universally characterized participants’ personal interactions within and outside community spaces. In fact, and as this section further explores, *being read* seems to be a necessary moment in establishing intentional, “safe” community spaces. This sense of safety, however, seems to be lacking at times as evidenced by participants’ reflections on policing within borderland spaces.

The third theme takes the moments of *being read*, which are largely negative, and complements them with the largely positive experience of *being seen*. This element of belonging grounds the community borderland experience in wholeness. *Being seen* has to do

with individuals bringing their “whole self” into community spaces, trusting that their multiple identities will be acknowledged and appreciated. This also means that people look to community borderlands as a place absent of racism, sexism, transphobia, and homophobia. Bringing community borderlands out of this idealized space is the explicit commitment of many to hold each other accountable in moments where these “isms” and phobias bare their faces either implicitly or explicitly—a way of forming an intentional space.

The fourth theme, *being heard*, is a way to both promote accountability and discuss collective priorities. *Being heard* emerges in a number of ways, such as in the significance of recovering one’s voice, the power of dialogue for social action, and the simple fulfillment of having a conversation with someone with shared lived experiences. However, *being heard* in community also emerges up as a barrier as well: for some participants, not having access to the shared language many active community members used detracted from their sense of connectedness and desire to be present in intentional community spaces.

***“We Just Somehow Find Each Other”:
Being Close in Community Borderlands***

Being close to one another emerges from the data as one defining feature of community belonging. In different ways, participants talk about physical closeness and proximity to other queer and queer of color folks as something that contributes to their sense of belongingness when it is present, and that detracts from belongingness when absent. Perhaps related to the fact that many participants a) had significant transnational experiences and b) were relatively new to Seattle at the time of the interview, geography, place, and movement/migration are all important subthemes that characterize and give shape to the experience of *being close*.

People can identify as queer and not have community because they're isolated, because they live too far away, or in a place where there aren't other gay people. I guess you know you're part of a community when there are other queer people around you. You know, and I think that level, like the deepness of that, whether it's superficial or deeper than that, people can still feel comfort in knowing that there's another gay person out there even if it's just like a, "Hey, let's hang out a couple times." (Jaime)

Jaime hints to the isolation some people experience and the lack of access to community due to geographic location. It seems that some folks who would otherwise belong to communities have a hard time connecting due to where they live. There is some intersection here with income and class: it is increasingly expensive to live in traditionally queer communities in Seattle due to racial gentrification. For example, the Capitol Hill neighborhood in Seattle was one of the first neighborhoods where small businesses run by gays and lesbians flourished, making Capitol Hill an important neighborhood for LGBTQ communities. Today, as a primarily White and queer enclave, Capitol Hill residents and developers have moved into the bordering Central District, a historically Black neighborhood, pushing out long-time residents. With skyrocketing costs of living in these neighborhoods, and because of the well established correlation between race and class, many residents of color, both straight-identified and LGBTQ-identified, cannot afford to live in or close to their traditional neighborhoods and racial/ethnic enclaves. Similarly, many queer folks of Color cannot afford to live within the borders of queer enclaves; therefore, many queer of color communities are dispersed across geographic locations. Perrisima talks about geographic location as a primary challenge to organizing queer and queer of color events as well as a challenge to increasing access to support networks.

I'll be like, "Oh, where do you live?" And they'll be like, "Oh, I came into town from Everett or from Kent, from Puyallup, Tacoma." Dang, that's far for them, right? And so I'm like, dang, the other people, if they need any support or they want to go to events, I'm in Seattle, but these people—and they're

mostly I'd say women of color—they live either super north or super, super south. So I think [...] there could be more QPOC who could be organizing or [...] more access to services and resources, but they don't live in Seattle. I think that's why it's hard. And then we just somehow find each other, the few that are here. (Perrisima)

Here, Perrisima identifies “place” as an experience that is intimately interwoven with race, gender, and class. They also imagine these experiences as directly impacting some individuals' access to resources from which they might potentially benefit. The ways in which geography can be isolating are intersectional, and bridging those gaps requires resources and effort.

Rae also talks about her experiences of having relatively recently arrived to Seattle, and the lack of meaningful and practical community support she feels she can access. Rather, Rae depends on a few friends rather than an extended network of people on whom she can depend. Having a proximal community is one step towards entering or establishing a community that also functions as a support system, an opportunity to share resources and help one's self and others to meet basic needs.

I think just on a basic level I need to see people and get to know people and feel like we're really there for each other. And I know that that exists out there for some people, but I don't feel like I have that right now. If something happened to me, I feel like I have very few people that I could call upon to help me. So to me, if you have a community, there's really a net there to support people. I don't feel like other kinds of basic needs, like medical, health stuff, or mental health support, or other kinds of support, I know that those support systems are out there, but I don't feel like I have access to them right now or I don't know how to access them. (Rae)

Pathways Between *Being Close* and *Being Well*

Physical proximity or closeness within communities was identified through this study as an important element of belonging. The absence or lack of closeness seems to detract from a number of participants' sense of belongingness and overall wellbeing, often articulated through stories or observations of “isolation” and “burn out.” Geographic and social isolation

seem to diminish wellbeing in a number of ways, including a paucity of resources and a dispersed support network. These findings support previous studies that have posited that the density of social networks and strength of social connection is positively associated with increased wellbeing (Greenfield & Marks, 2010). A second negative pathway between closeness and wellbeing that has also been previously documented through narrative approaches has to do with self-isolation, especially among community organizers, activists, and advocates (for example, Rodriguez, 1998). A number of participants in this study struggle (and have struggled) greatly with putting space between themselves and the communities that they have worked so hard and cared for so deeply. This seems to create an emotional grief so heavy that it detracts from these participants' wellbeing.

Belonging through *being close* also carries positive pathways to wellbeing. The sharing of resources—material, emotional, and spiritual—is woven throughout many of the interviews, enhancing a number of participants' wellbeing in both symbolic and practical ways. One interviewee spoke of resource sharing to meet basic needs as a top priority for her communities, and another described physical closeness as a necessary piece of that project. The ways that closeness happens through finding and creating intentional, safe spaces also emerges as a potential pathway towards wellbeing. Of particular note, establishing and maintaining community borders, for some participants, contributes to their psychological (and likely physical) safety in the sense that they trust community members to not cause them harm through oppressive language, such as racist, sexist, or transphobic remarks: as Alix remarks,

That would make me feel more welcome places if I knew that people were more understanding and weren't going to say racist things to me or homophobic things to me or whatever. If I didn't have to worry, I mean, that would change everything.

Experiences of high levels of anticipated discrimination, such as the oppressive verbal comments Alix refers to, have been associated with poor self-reported mental health (Lindstrom, 2008). Community borderlands may not always offer a resolution to a distressing environment, as policing can be injurious; however, Alix's narrative indicates to me that once established, intentional, safe spaces may lead to enhanced wellbeing by eliminating the expectations of witnessing or experiencing oppressive, phobic remarks predicated upon race, gender, and sexuality.

***“I Get Asked A Lot, ‘What are you?’”:
Being Read in Community Borderlands***

Not surprisingly, all participants in this study allude to the experience of what I call *being read*. In the interviews, I asked participants about their experiences of being received differently across communities:

Interviewer: Are you are received differently in different spaces and communities that you belong to? Interviewee: Yeah, I think that's pretty normal, especially for like folks that are mixed or folks that are queer, folks that are gender queer. Like wherever you show up, people are going to bring their own baggage and they're going to read you with their own baggage. And that's fine, you know. (Chrissy)

Many participants used this question as an opportunity to talk about their multiple, intersecting identities and the ways in which they experienced “policing” around those identities (for further discussion on policing, see Hudson, 2012). Policing has to do with the ways in which the boundaries around people's identities are questioned and challenged and, often, is a way in which normative ways of being “raced” and “gendered,” as well as certain mixed and queer normativities, are enforced. In many ways, these experiences were connected to issues related to authenticity; for example, demonstrating racial/ethnic and sexual “credentials” such as language proficiency, skin color, hair style, sexual experience,

and personal experiences with discrimination (DaCosta, 2003). Authenticity was also uniquely intertwined with the opportunities/challenges of ambiguous racial, gender, and sexual expression and presentation, especially in terms of privilege and oppression.

I think that in all my communities, I feel different for one reason or another. In communities with people of color, I feel too white. And in white communities, I feel like I'm of color. In queer communities, since I pass, quote-unquote pass as straight a lot of the time, I get a lot of discrimination from narrow-minded queer people. Like, "oh, your hair is long. There's no way." "Oh, you're a femme, so you must be a bottom." I get the weirdest comments. Or like I had this whole group of gay men once tell me that I was too pretty to be a lesbian. And it's really, really hurtful to feel that way within your own community. (Hilary)

As a femme-presenting queer person, Hilary's narrative lends itself well to an intersectional analysis of the ways oppression plays out within communities. Processes of "Othering," often stemming from the exoticization and eroticization of mixed race people, especially women and gay men, come in part from processes related to legacies of anti-miscegenation and colonization (where the white and the brown meet is prohibited, criminal, erotic), and is also inseparable from rape, dominance, and violence (see Powers, 2002; Root, 2004). For queer people, and queer women in particular, Otherness is partially tied to the (sometimes internalized) hetero-male fantasy and fetishism of lesbian sex. When Hilary recalls being told "Oh, you're a femme, so you must be a bottom," the person commenting on Hilary's sexuality is able to interrupt and/or experience queer intimacy and simultaneously map onto Hilary (and an imagined sexual encounter) normative heterosexual sexual behavior and gender role. For other queers, especially those masculine of center, the Othering may have more to do with the anxiety queerness raises for those who struggle with stereotypes and phobias they carry consciously or subconsciously around queerness and sexuality, and their intersections with race, ethnicity, and class (see Halberstam, 1998; Moore, 2006). As painful

as this experience seemed to be for Hilary, she also sees this experience of *being read* by others as a process through which community borders are maintained and a sense of belonging often remains liminal.

I definitely feel like the communities that I identify with are places where I belong. Like these are my people almost. But as far as being a person of color in those communities, I almost feel like an outsider because I know that my race or whatever is not apparent to people. When I eventually tell people, they're always like, "Oh, I would have never guessed that." And I get asked a lot, "What are you?" Even from people of color. (Hilary)

There seems to be an ideal balance between *being read* and being policed. For some people, having their identity questioned seems to be a predictable element of being in community. Some participants described this process as a pathway towards acceptance in that community:

We're finding community with each other or comfort or belonging or whatever, but then sometimes what we end up doing too is policing who can be and who cannot be, right? Even though I'm a mixed person, I'm lighter-skinned, so I question the other mixed people, I'll be like, "Are you sure you're a POC?" You know, and that's fucked up, like I am policing other people in how they identify. And then it's complicated too because then sometimes you got white people coming out of the woodwork being like, "My great-great-great-grandma was Native." I'm like, "Oh my god, like that's complicated and you go through the world as if you're a white person. You got to do some thinking about that." You know, it's complicated. (Jaime)

Jaime's thoughts indicate the importance of learning about one's mixedness and family history, but to also remain aware and mindful of how they benefit from white privilege. Jaime provides some reflection on accountability among mixed race folks to support each other through this exploration. However, the complex ways *being read* serves to establish a "safe" and intentional community space seem to generate a deep ambivalence around policing community borders. In this sense, *being read* can also be a painful experience, for

both those doing the “reading” and those being read. On one hand, it feels terrible to police other people in ways that have been hurtful to you:

I fucking hate it when I start policing stuff either with myself or with other people because I’m like, “That’s what’s happened to me my whole life.” And it feels shitty to do that to other people, to shut people out. (Jaime)

I think we do a lot of talking about like what does it even—like what do these labels even mean? And how are they getting broken down and like who gets to police those? And who historically has been policing those? And like how our identities have been policed our whole lives and like not wanting to replicate that, you know. (Chrissy)

At the same time, it is important to protect a sacred community space that, in part, comes from that same border setting and enforcement. Understanding and paying attention to community borders, and who is inside them, can allow for a certain sense of safety, in that the folks around you will have a better sense of who you are, treat you with more sensitivity around your multiple identities. One interpretation may be that part of belonging to a community is going through a process of *being read* as almost a rite of passage, or a means of gaining entrance to the community. This process, as described by participants, seemed to be accepted as a naturally occurring phenomenon, especially given participants’ experiences of *being read* in other spaces, with less favorable outcomes, such as discrimination and violence. In a broader sense, then, *being read* has larger implications related to one’s safety. Here, Perrisima talks about their experiences living in a south-end neighborhood of Seattle.

I know when I’m walking down there, I am really worried about what I look like to other people because there’s been a lot of violence happening down here and a lot of queer folks getting jumped. And I always wonder, oh man, I don’t know what’s worse, trying to pass as a dude but looking like a gay boy, or like I’m being read as female and I’m trying to look like a dude. I don’t know how people are reading me. Both of them scare me ... I generally try to be a chameleon lizard daily, depending where I’m at. (Perrisima)

Pathways Between *Being Read* and Being Well

As outlined above, *being read* has to do with the ways people assess with whom they are interacting or sharing space, often along the lines of race, gender, and sexuality. *Being read* enhances and detracts from wellness in part through the practice of policing borders. Along a positive pathway, *being read* (and reading others) seems to help establish and build a sense of community for participants, in that spaces become intentional and a sense of safety—or at least accountability—can be nurtured, therefore increasing opportunities for wellbeing. Participants describe policing as, in part, a strategy for building community with others and for establishing, at times, healthy, anti-oppressive community norms and practices.

Participants, however, also describe how the policing of community borders can also detract from wellbeing. When asked about self-policing and policing of others, Jaime declared: “That’s what’s happened to me my whole life. And it feels shitty to do that to other people.” Clearly an emotive response to a complex phenomenon, this quote rather poignantly illustrates policing as a harmful, yet sometimes useful, practice. In another form, being asked “What are you?” is a common form of policing, especially when responses do not satisfy the interrogator, and a cross-examination or alienation ensues, such as the case described by Hilary:

I had this whole group of gay men once tell me that I was too pretty to be a lesbian. And it’s really, really hurtful to feel that way within your own community.

In this instance, Hilary was both unseen as who she is and spoken out of a community with which she identifies. The types of experiences described by Hilary are likely hurtful on a number of levels—from not being acknowledged as a member of her community to being

actively discriminated against. While some people, such as Hilary, may have a strong sense of Self and rarely, if ever, questions their role in their communities, it is reasonable that in these types of situations, many might question their place in a community. Some participants speak about these experiences as threats to their “authenticity” as a person of Color or as a queer person. This may not only cause an internal fissure, being policed out of community inhibits an individual’s access to the psychological, spiritual, and material resources offered by feelings of acceptance, belonging, and connectedness.

***“I Border A Lot Of Different Identities”:
Being Seen in Community Borderlands***

A look into intersectional experiences of race, gender, and sexuality (among other social identities) was part and parcel to this study. How participants experienced *being read* by others, and the conflicting and painful ways some saw themselves as policing others emerged from the interviews as closely related to a fundamental desire to be *seen*. For some, this meant something as simple as being in community with other queer people of Color; for others, *being seen* had more to do with the liberatory dimensions of self-determination and self-definition (Hill-Collins, 1998), a freedom to self-identify in whatever terms they choose and to name their own reality, and to have others honor those identities/realities:

[...] now I’m just sort of like, “Cool, this is who I am,” and I think part of that like crisis was being read differently in a lot of situations. And then thinking I was supposed to like take on that role of like, “Oh, you think I’m this, so maybe that means I really am more X,” you know, or whatever, and like how that changed in every situation. I’m like, “I’m over it, this is who I am. It’s your baggage to figure it out if you’re reading me a certain way. Like that says more about you than it does about me. I’m doing me.” (Chrissy)

Here, Chrissy alludes to the development of a strong sense of self within a community, a process that intertwined with experiences of *being read* and *being seen*. Jaime also talks about this, speaking more specifically about his experiences with gender:

I don't want people to determine who I am or determine or place identity shit on me. And part of like becoming politicized is like my own determination to be like this is who I am, this is how I identify. And that only goes so far, right? I can identify as gender queer, but if people keep seeing me as a woman, people keep seeing me as a woman. People keep interacting with me as a woman, whatever, like I understand that, but also I get to also determine to be like, "I am gender queer." But you know, sometimes they don't match up, right? And that's okay and that's what happens and that you have to understand where do I have privilege, where I don't, where can I navigate things easier or not as easily? (Jaime)

For Jaime, *being seen* comes with a certain responsibility around self-awareness. He identifies some ways in which he incorporates an awareness of privilege and oppression.

Tying back to the experiences of *being read*, there is an intentionality around *being seen* in a way that acknowledges where one holds privilege, for example around whiteness or gender normativity; there also seems to be a way to ask your community to honor the wholeness of you without challenge or threat of harm.

For Alix, *being seen* has to do with finding community with others with whom he shares a common experience around multiple identities. Alix seems to be more interested in those (more rare) intersectional spaces that he may not have always had access to in the past:

It's actually more fulfilling to me to have community with people that have more than one of my identities in common with me because I'm bored with that. That was just how it always was. You know, I was too Armenian for the Indian community and too Indian for the Armenian community, too straight for this community, too queer for this community, whatever. (Alix)

Hilary has multiple experiences of bordering communities, and never quite feels strong attachment or belongingness to one:

I feel like as a person, I am kind of—I border a lot of different identities, and so that makes thinking of one community that I belong to really strongly hard. But that’s something that I’ve dealt with my entire life and feel okay about.
(Hilary)

When asked to imagine whom she views as being her community, Rae highlights how drawing intentional community boundaries can be a complicated and somewhat dubious project.

In terms of viewing my community, there are a lot of queer folks who, for example, are wealthier, have power, and do really terrible things to other people. So the definition of where those boundaries lie around a particular community is difficult for me to—that’s why it’s difficult for me to use a particular identity to draw those boundaries. Because even if I say, you know, I’m a part of this queer community, that’s true. And members of my community are also oppressing me in certain ways. And then if I draw the boundary around ethnicity or race, similar processes are happening. So yes and no, I guess. I think I do feel like I’m a part of something larger, but I don’t know that just because we share a community that we have the same goals and needs. (Rae)

Rae expands upon their intersectional view of community, and the tenuous boundaries around shared commitments, needs, and goals. Rae hints that they may not be so apt to use a singular identity, or identity at all, to define community, especially because some of the people who would be “drawn in” are at odds with other parts of who she is and what she needs to feel safe and accepted. In this example, the experience of one’s whole self *not being seen* seems to be an experience more likely associated with community belonging. Jaime also speaks to the experience of *not being seen*:

I read somewhere, “To be in community means you mourn together, rejoice together.” There were some other things in there. And I was like, “Wow. If that’s what community is, then I don’t know what community is because—” Maybe I do to some extent, but it doesn’t feel that deep sometimes. In terms of Latino community, right, I don’t know Spanish very well. I’m lighter skinned. I’m really gay looking. There are so many barriers for me to even be really involved. (Jaime)

Here Jaime talks about some of the barriers they perceive to impede upon feelings of belongingness. Some of these are appearance, such as skin color and gender expression. Using an intersectional lens it becomes clear that multiple ambiguous or border identities seem to impact Jaime's sense of community. Even though he rather strongly identifies as Mexicano, Chicano, and Latino, he identifies phenotypical racial characteristics, gender and sexual expression, and linguistic barriers that detract from his sense of belongingness. Chrissy also talks about the ways *not being seen* is experienced in communities, and ties those experiences back to a larger, systemic framework:

We all carry all this shit that we've learned from these systems of oppression. Those definitely play out in our communities and it'd be fabulous to not, you know, but like how is that going to happen? I don't have a roadmap for that. I think one thing that those communities focus a lot on is like seeing a whole self. There are ways that we still aren't able to do that and like I feel like none of us are going to be able find our clone and be like, "Oh, you have the exact same experience as me. This is totally cool," you know. Finding ways that that's okay and we don't have to totally have the same experience to be able to connect and grow. This is something that I'm like, "I see you're community, you're doing it," and I'm sure that there's all these other ways that we don't really see or hold each other. (Chrissy)

Chrissy talks about the imperfection of community, and the work it takes to create and sustain healthy, supportive communities, inclusive of their borderlands. For Sarah, this work includes an element of openness, trust, and preparedness to stand one's ground:

Community has forced me to be more critical here, I think, or allowed me to be more critical than it used to. And it's become a much more safe space for me to feel comfortable being who I am, but at the same time ready to defend myself. With being vulnerable, you kind of have to be on the defensive. (Sarah)

Pathways Between *Being Seen* and *Being Well*

Community borderlands, as described in this study, seem to offer a sense of wholeness that at other times was lacking for some folks in their daily lives. Alix, for example, expressed:

I was too Armenian for the Indian community and too Indian for the Armenian community, too straight for this community, too queer for this community, whatever.

Several participants describe the powerful moments of connecting with people who had similar experiences and identities, moments in which they felt the most seen and understood, a novelty considering the more prevalent narrative of being considered an odd, “fascinating” and distant Other, an experience which seems to be shared by other participants. For example, this was evidenced in Alix’s thoughts around finding a queer Indian community:

Like they understand trans things. They understand queer things. They maybe had similar struggles with family or growing up around identity or whatever.

For Alix, finding this community was an exciting moment in his life; although he reflected to me that he always carried a strong sense of self, this sense of community belongingness contributed to his overall wellbeing and likely the wellbeing of others in that community. Alix was able to build a supportive community with a group of individuals with whom he could share stories about his life history and, importantly, learn from others with similar experiences. For Alix, this community seems to serve as an invaluable resource for amplifying a sense of connection and compassion within liminal spaces, where they often lack otherwise.

Perrisima, however, shared with me their thoughts around *being read* and *being seen* by (some) others and the potential risk of harm that carries:

I don't know what's worse, trying to pass as a dude but looking like a gay boy, or like I'm being read as female and I'm trying to look like a dude. I don't know how people are reading me. Both of them scare me...

While there is a liberating quality related to self-expression and *being seen* in all your fullness and complexity, there are real and perceived threats to safety, both physically and psychologically. Even passing, as described by Perrisima, does not guarantee safety: in fact, passing and even perceived passing can increase others' anxiety around the transgression of racial, gender, and sexual norms and put an individual in even more of a precarious position in terms of reconciling safety and visibility, as well as maximizing opportunities for wellness.

For other participants, such as Hilary, *being seen* is uniquely and intimately tied to experiences of passing in a different way. Emphasizing personal accountability and commitment to issues regarding privileged-oppressed positionalities, Hilary notes:

I realize I carry a lot of privilege, unlike a lot of people in my communities. Like I was saying, I do pass for white, I do pass for straight. I am from an upper class-ish family, all that stuff. And as long as I can know that and work on it, then that's all I can do. Yeah, but I do have privilege guilt a lot of the times, but what can you do?

Here, Hilary describes the ways in which being seen is not only relational, but a self-reflective practice that can nurture healthy communities. Hilary refers to the guilt associated with not only a privileged positionality through passing (or being "passable"), but also the liminal space this created for her in her communities—it distinguishes her experience in her communities and sets her apart from others. However, Hilary frames reconciling *how she is seen* with *how she sees herself* as work to which she is committed; her statement above reflects the awareness she wants to bring into community with others and her commitment to

contributing to safe spaces for others. Accountability strategies such as these allow for, and actually help define, safe, intentional spaces in communities.

***“I’ve Never Had A Conversation Like This”:
Being Heard in Community Borderlands***

The kind of vulnerability and readiness to defend oneself that Sarah speaks about ties into the final element of belongingness, *being heard*. For some participants, *being heard* means, in a very literal sense, the vocalization of their wholeness.

There’s power and usefulness and safety sometimes in being like I identify as queer, I identify as mixed, or like just a sense of belonging or a sense of, “This is who I fucking am. Accept it.” (Jaime)

From Rae and Alix’s perspectives, talking with people who have similar experiences offers a sense of acceptance and validation:

It was a really, really tiny space, but it was this really special space, and there was a lot of room to talk about things and have people listen to me. For the first time in my life, right? And have people say, “Oh yeah! I feel that way,” or, “Wow, that’s really interesting,” instead of just dismissing everything that I had been—because it was something that I did try to talk about with people before that, but it just didn’t work. (Rae)

I think that a lot of us talk about our identities and our race and our gender and our sexualities a lot because it’s exciting to talk about them with people who understand. Even when I’m with people who are just like from the queer Indian community, I feel like that’s just really exciting too. Like they understand trans things. They understand queer things. They maybe had similar struggles with family or growing up around identity or whatever. You know, it’s like I’ve never had a conversation like this with another Indian person in my whole life. That’s so exciting and now there’s like seven of us who can all talk about it. (Alix)

Here, Rae is talking about a queer people of color community they were a part of in college that albeit small, made a huge impact in Rae’s life. Alix also talks about a relatively small number of folks with which he can have these very intersectional conversations. For Alix, it

was a remarkable experience to be in conversation with other people with shared cultural experiences, who could understand the ways culture and gender intertwine through the lens of their own lived experiences. A number of other participants talked through their experiences of community through highlighting dialogic and purpose-related aspects of being in community.

When I'm around queer people and we're having really critical discussions and all those things are going on, that is a very positive space. It feels good and it renews my faith in people that things are going to be okay because we are working towards better things. And even if they're not okay right now, we can make change. Like that's good. I feel like I have pretty positive experience within all the communities I belong to because you feel like you're with people who understand. (Hilary)

For some, this means explicit conversations about intentional spaces: discussions about community priorities and an increased collective awareness around privilege and oppression.

I think there's also a really awesome intentionality a lot of times in some of the communities, at least that I'm a part of, of really thinking about how do we want to be showing up, what do we really want to be saying, how do we want to be bringing in lots of people's experiences? How do we want to be putting people of color's experiences and voices at the fore? You know, I do think there are a lot of white people who are also having those conversations and really trying to be intentional about that and not in—hopefully not in tokenizing ways, although I think that can come up sometimes too. [...] I think that we're doing really good on that end, like the organizing piece and trying to like bring people into those communities and make sure everyone has kind of room at the table. (Lori)

Here, Lori identifies the beautiful and fortifying qualities of intentional spaces, such as the equalization of power dynamics and the intent to stay cognizant of intersecting identities and systems of oppression. For others, this dialogic aspect is a barrier to community belongingness, noting a certain educational privilege around acquiring and speaking this specific anti-oppression language:

A lot of people I've met in spaces come from a similar educational background, so they share a lot of language around certain issues. And even though I think the intent is to try to create a better world and advocate for ourselves and our own community, I find that it can be pretty alienating if someone doesn't have the kind of background or the kind of language skills or whatever that would allow them to participate in that. (Rae)

For Rae, there are certain community expectations in terms of shared values and political commitments, and the education and language to back up those commitments and see them forward. For those who may not share the same ideological viewpoint, language or way of articulating their commitments and vision for their communities, acceptance and belongingness may not be as easily achieved.

In any case, there seems to be an irrefutable, liberatory quality in reclaiming one's voice, developing or joining a collective voice with others, and pushing towards a self-determination that is reflective and purposeful; one that incorporates and honors history, that is deeply affective and personal yet intimately intertwined with a collective lived experience, and that requires constant work.

I want to talk about these things, I want to talk about how we're fucking reclaiming this shit, how we never were taught to be this—taught our languages or how we felt always fucking in between or never wanted. Or how do we find belonging? How do we have analysis of anti-racism and understand our own selves in being mixed, you know? [...] I think for me, it's really connected to finding belonging and finding people who feel similar to me and that means like there's a lot of emotion there, you know, and a lot of pissed off anger, but also coming to a realization that no one else is going to do that for me, so I have to do that for myself, right? (Jaime)

Pathways Between *Being Heard* and *Being Well*

The ways *being heard* relate to wellness follow along the path of shared language. A few participants note the ways that some communities become inaccessible when members use a specific anti-oppression discourse. It seems as though the use of this discourse, for

some, has become engrained in what it means to be in community: some will acquire the language as they build a relationship with the community. Others may have acquired the ability to understand and engage in this discourse prior, and are attracted to the community because of its use.

It's very obvious that our conversations revolve around social justice and social change. And if you aren't interested in that, we probably aren't interested in you, which is limiting and exclusive and it's a bad thing. But we have a hard time relating to people who have different opinions than we do, so it's easier sometimes to just stick with our own. But I mean, we bring people in from the outside, but if they don't at least follow those guidelines, it's hard to continue socializing with them. (Sarah)

For folks who may not share the same ideology or have access to the same language, which is primarily acquired through higher education, or those people who wish to not primarily engage with community in a politicized way, language can be a barrier to acceptance in a community. In this way, community borders help to maintain the type of language that is used and shared by its members. This could, in turn, limit some people's access to the material and symbolic resources of that community. And because many of those who I interviewed were employed in social service or advocacy organizations, the resources available within communities are likely to be abundant. Sarah continues, thinking more about the relationship between language and the meaning of community:

I think being a part of this community means that your language is infused with awareness. It's hard to be around gender queer individuals and people from queer sexual identities and not be aware of how you isolate them or disenfranchise them and yourself just by the way that you talk. So that's been kind of a challenge for me and just trying to change the way that I speak about people. For my own benefit too, but making it a habit is difficult. But as long as you're trying, I think that you can be a part of this community.

Sarah very poignantly speaks to the need for demonstrating effort and intentionality around the use of language in forming community spaces and engaging with others. However, when

there is a shared language within communities, it can facilitate priority setting and increase a sense of interdependence, commonality, safety and purpose, all of which can directly and indirectly impact individual and collective wellbeing. This may look like organizing to meet a need of a particular community member, or it could manifest through alliance and coalition building around certain social issues, such as those related to the prison industrial complex that impact a number of groups of people across dimensions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, for example. More is said around the wellness possibilities engendered through priority setting in the following section in which I explore the ways participants talk about ways they care for themselves and each other.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I explored participants' experiences of community belongingness through a borderland perspective, centering instances of liminality, in-betweenness, and the complex ways these phenomena relate to intersecting and multiple identities, community borders, and the meaning of community itself. Through this analysis it became clear that the communities participants referred to in the interviews were comprised of existing and potential networks of people who were known by the participants, with whom they shared space and experienced a sense of interdependence. These spaces were intentional and sometimes liminal: participants described the process of finding or creating these spaces as influenced by experiences of in-betweenness and Otherness; some participants also spoke of feeling like an "outsider" even within these spaces that they help create and maintain.

Lived borderland experiences help articulate the complexity of community belongingness, especially when characterized by the kind of liminality in which borders of belonging become blurred (Hall, 1994; Kavoori, 2007). Finally, across all themes, we learned

that community belongingness is relational, participatory, and embodied—even corporeal. Belongingness, at a very basic level, had to do with the visual and the verbal: how individuals, and by extension community itself, were imagined and understood through a number of seen and spoken social cues. The flexibility and permeability of community borders allows for individuals to come and go as needed, but not often without experiences of policing, interrogation, shaming, or guilt. These borders can be generous, extending rare and often highly desirable qualities such as acceptance and validation, yet can fail to offer the same understanding to individuals who seek distance from, or disagree with certain practices within, community spaces.

I also discussed dimensions of community belongingness in terms of their contradictory relationships with subjective wellbeing, drawing directly from interview data. This study supports a multidimensional understanding of the known ways community serves as a mechanism of wellness; the data presented in this chapter support all three theories Ross (2002) puts forth on the relationship between community belongingness and wellbeing. Participants talked about the ways being in community a) impacted their conceptualizations of wellbeing and b) led to increased material and spiritual/symbolic resources, and also discussed how c) disconnecting/being disconnected from community was sometimes a source of stress, grief, and pain. Significantly, participants' borderland narratives go beyond a basic understanding of community belonging as a singular pathway for wellness: their stories detail how these pathways are traversed and contested, with visceral realities and longings in tow.

CHAPTER 5 ETHICS OF CARE IN COMMUNITY BORDERLANDS

Through an iterative analytic process, it became clear that interview data stretched well beyond my original intention to look for relationships between belongingness and wellbeing and reimagine the meaning of wellness through borderland narratives of lived experiences. Overwhelmingly, participants integrate elements of an *ethic of care* into their narratives of wellness. Stemming back to Carol Gilligan's seminal work *A Different Voice* (1982), ethics of care are paramount to feminist thinking around moral psychology and integral in thinking through meanings of justice. Ethics of care, and particularly an ethic of *self care*, have also been considered by some moral philosophers, such as Michele Foucault, to be a liberatory/liberating practice (Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988). Over the last thirty years, ethics of care have come to be a permanent fixture in the health sciences, including social work, nursing, and public health (see Beauchamp & Childress, 1994; Botes, 2000; Leininger, 1990). Often in these fields, ethics of care are evidenced through the ways support systems, networks of care, and problem-focused community interventions are developed both formally and informally with, among, or for marginalized populations (for example, Derosé, 2000; Keating, Otfinowski, Wenger, Fast, & Derksen, 2003).

The following chapter explores how participants talk about how they take care of each other, and themselves, in a community context. Figure 4 provides an illustration of ethics of care in community borderlands, as articulated by participants, organized around three levels of care that emerged from the data: self care, relational care, and collective care. In this chapter, I strive to capture the tone of deep care and concern for the wellbeing of self and others that surfaced within the interviews.

| | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| <u>Collective care</u> | “Building together” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource sharing • Setting priorities |
| <u>Relational care</u> | “Showing up for each other” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validation, support • Accountability, relationships |
| <u>Self care</u> | “Reclaiming a ‘healthy’ body” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of self • Stepping in/out of spaces |

Figure 4. Ethics of Care in Community Borderlands

Self care has to do with participants’ awareness that in order to be able to care for others, they must also take care of themselves. For some, and at times, this means seeking out intentional, safe spaces. For others, or at other times, this means allowing oneself to “step away” from community commitments when feeling overwhelmed or burned out. *Relational care* can be understood as some of the ways participants describe taking care of each of other. For some, this meant paying attention to interpersonal relationships like romantic partnerships and friendships. Relational care also had to do with what some participants called “showing up for each other,” expressing acceptance, extending validation, and in general, being supportive of others with whom participants shared spaces.

Distinct but not distant from relational care is a way of caring centered around meeting basic material needs, resource sharing, and priority setting. This kind of *collective care* speaks to the ways in which participants want to be there for others and the purpose

behind being together. In this section, I provide three examples of collective priorities as put forth by participants: 1) resource sharing to meet basic needs; 2) developing intersectional awareness; and 3) organizing around the interconnectedness of social issues. Some of these priorities directly relate to, or are thought of by participants as directly affecting, their wellbeing; others do not. However, it seems that the very act of envisioning a collective purpose and something to strive for enhances participants' perceived wellness through the exercise of self-determination and an increased sense of interdependence and interconnectedness.

**“It’s your spirit that keeps you going”:
Self Care in Community Borderlands**

I feel like there’s this sense of the world is so shitty, like we have to hurry up and make it better and at the expense of our own wellbeing as individuals. Like the collective sense is more important than the individual sense. I think in some ways that’s true. I also think that it’s—if you take the example of putting your oxygen mask on first and then put your person next to you’s oxygen mask on if they need that help. It’s really hard to like keep us all breathing if, as individuals, we’re not breathing. I think that kind of ebbs and flows, but I think that sometimes I don’t want to go out or do things because I don’t want to try to get sucked into doing more work. I think that that really is an unfortunate byproduct of living in a capitalist society and just feeling like we always need to be working, working, working, and like producing something that is sort of antithetical to actually being well or taking care of ourselves. (DeAnn)

The idea of self care surfaces as a theme across the majority of interviews. In DeAnn’s quote, she talks about self care as a necessary component to being in community: one needs to take care of one’s self first in order to bring their full, best self into caring relationships with others. In other words, this kind of self care seeks to prioritize individual wellbeing in order to be able to continue working toward a collective wellness. Perrisima’s perspective on what keeps them healthy and well in community spaces echoes DeAnn’s thoughts, expanding the “self care first” notion by integrating an element of spirituality into what self care means.

I've learned that people separate their individual self from the collective of a movement and they don't prioritize or see that self care is important in organizing. I was talking to a friend last week about the struggle I had where people just don't consider spirituality, quote unquote, to be part of the movement organizing work they do. But I'm just like, "How did you lose that? It's your spirit that keeps you going in the movements that you're in." I never felt like it was separate, but a lot of people do and they burn out and die in the organizing they're doing because they're not taking care of themselves. (Perrisima)

However, seeking the time and space sometimes necessary to do self care can be at odds with community expectations, especially around "showing up" and being visible within communities.

Perrisima: I feel like even when people don't say it, there's a lot of shaming, looking down on people who want to leave and take care of themselves. Or disappointment or feeling like, "Oh, you're leaving? Whatever, you suck."

Interviewer: By leaving, do you mean just kind of taking a time out?

Perrisima: Taking time out or just not wanting to be this militant, radical activist anymore or something.

As Perrisima describes, sometimes needing to take time away from community involvement will be met with some feelings of intolerance, shaming, or guilt. This is where a desire to be accountable (and to be held accountable by others) collides with expectations to be available and able to continue nurture community relationships and care for others. This tension tells us something about community borders: in order for people to move in and out of community spaces more freely and without threat of punishment, harm, or being ostracized, community borders need to be permeable, flexible, and accommodating of individual needs.

The kinds of self care participants allude to go beyond a need for time away or time alone in order to prevent burnout. For some, self care is a continual appraisal of one's wellbeing; specifically, this means learning about and critically evaluating the tools used in

that self-appraisal. For example, exploring what it means to be doing well, how wellness standards set and maintained, and what they teach us (both implicitly and explicitly) about ourselves.

I like the idea of wellness as opposed to healthy. I think healthy makes me think of the medicine. It makes me think of body mass index. It makes me think of like really fucked up ideas of who is healthy, who is not, and which bodies are and which bodies aren't. Which is also racialized. A lot of research has been done on a lot of white men and that is not going to be true for people of color or white women or whatever, right? Or like women of color or queer people. It's not. Or like bodies that are trans people. (Jaime)

As Jaime describes, notions of wellbeing require an intersectional analysis, looking at multiply marginalized experiences at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. He points to the sanitation and policing of borders around health and healthy bodies. In this sense, wellness is tied to a larger sense of reclaiming a body that has been deemed “wrong” and “unhealthy” by medical and other professional standards. These issues continue to be addressed in activist scholarship in the area of trans health. As Barnes (2001) argues: “It is imperative that the medicalized control over transgenders’ bodies and psyches be subject to scrutiny” (para. 2). Jaime’s quote speaks specifically to the ways trans and queer people of color’s bodies, lived experiences, and wellness have all been pathologized, medicalized, and criminalized.

Jaime also speaks about his definition of wellness outside of a framework that is purposed to “talk back” to normative and normalizing forces. Despite dominant discourses about trans health and Jaime’s experience of holding multiple marginalized identities, in the following quote he takes a more holistic view of how he would like to think of wellbeing:

Wellness for me is how am I feeling? Do I feel balanced emotionally? How does my body feel? I think that means actually being more connected to yourself, which can be hard considering like lots of things. Like things

happening when you were a child or a trauma or like whatever various things that happen to people in their life. And wellness means more holistic, right? Not just like I have a pain in my foot, but like how do I feel emotionally, how do I feel physically, how do I feel like in terms of my relationships? Like do I feel connected to people? Do I feel isolated? You know, wellness is bigger. (Jaime)

Because his thoughts run in contrast to a dominant narrative that tends to pathologize queer, trans, and mixed race folks' experiences, often characterizing them as in crisis, developmental, or an illness, in one sense Jaime is constructing a *counternarrative*. However, his definition of wellness can be read as a "normative" narrative of wellness and could be seen to fall within dominant discourse on health and wellbeing: desires to feel balanced and connected. Jaime and others speak of wellbeing and self care in ways that were not always unique to and reflective of their multiple identities, nor their experiences of oppression. This reminds me of Wendy Brown's (1995) challenging question: why is there such an investment in narrating "injured identity" and constructing counter-narratives from an "oppressed" position? Similarly, it brings into question the idea of "oppositional knowledge" (Hill-Collins, 1998), knowledges derived from and for resisting oppression, and the utility of an adversarial/ "counter" conceptualization of knowledge derived from lived experiences, an approach that ultimately fails to subvert knowledge hierarchies by centering them.

Here, Jaime does not speak to his experiences of race, gender, or sexuality, nor does he incorporate an oppression framework. Why is this interesting or surprising, and what does that tell us about how we think about borderland experiences as representative of the lived experience, needs and desires? Perhaps it can be said that the narratives of folks who occupy borderland spaces do not always fall outside of normative discourses of health and wellbeing, even though they may have complicated, and often painful, relationships to them. Then, it can also be said that discourses about balance, connection, holistic wellness and

groundedness *are also* mixed race, queer, and trans discourses of wellbeing, thereby drawing borderland experiences back in from the somewhat dehumanized place where some might situate them: as identity centric and therefore different, distant, and Other.

“Showing up for each other”:
Relational Care in Community Borderlands

The ways participants talk about taking care of themselves are often intertwined with ways they talk about taking care of other people. For instance, the majority of participants discuss the significance of learning about and investing in strategies for managing healthy interpersonal relationships, such as friendships and romantic partnerships, as well as developing new relationships with less well-known acquaintances in the communities with which folks felt a sense of connection, responsibility, or attachment. Participants speak to the importance of welcoming folks, especially those who may be new to Seattle, into community spaces, affirming their presence, and maintaining those connections—in a sense, develop a sense of community within borderlands. Developing this sense of accountability to relationships seems to be important at both the personal and social levels. In many instances, participants speak of their personal wellness in relational terms:

To me, it’s really trying to be healthy in your relationships and community, and admitting when you’re wrong. And being accountable really is the openness and willingness to evolve and change, shift your thinking or shift the way you act into something more healthy and positive. (Perrisima)

This quote illustrates how some participants talk about not only the importance of self care, but the transference of that work into maintaining important relationships, and maybe more significantly, building the types of relationships that are and feel healthy, as well as those that keep each other well. While Perrisima approaches healthy relationships from a substantially deep and affective perspective, other participants note how even the smallest of gestures can

have quite a significant impact. When asked about what it means to take care of each other within a community context, Chrissy says:

Well, I mean, it's how folks show up, you know. And even if it's a small thing, like being like, "Hey, juice these oranges," you know, like how that can be really powerful in moments like when you're not doing well or just like kind of showing up for each other and making sure we have each other's backs, you know. (Chrissy)

The idea of "showing up" for one another is one thread that pulls together moments of thinking about belongingness—particularly the element of *being close*—and those related to experiences of wellbeing in community. Jaime also talks about the importance of sharing space and interpersonal interactions, and the ways these experiences enhance his sense of community connectedness and wellbeing:

I think that community can be really validating and community can show up for you in ways that feel affirming and that feel supportive. And to be able to have a space where you can just be pissed off or cry, or a person or people that you can do that with or feel like, "I want to do this thing," or, "This thing happened. It was really fun and it was really great," you know. To be able to share those things is super powerful. I think can help people feel grounded and well, you know, when people are checking in with each other, being like, "How are you? How's your day?" And just knowing that other people are there. (Jaime)

Intentional community spaces, ones intended to be validating, affirming, and supportive as Jaime describes, appear to be a common theme across interviews as well. The process of creating these intentional space—negotiating and patrolling borders, reading and policing other people (and *being read* and policed)—can ultimately result in a space that enhances health and wellbeing, that feels safe, that helps people to feel seen and understood, and that generates and nurtures a sense of connection:

Knowing that you're home and you're safe and you're going to be even if it's just for these moments and this space or within this group of people—I think

that that's the most important role that community plays in my life. Because I do tend to isolate because it's safer there. That's why community is really important for pulling me out of that and remembering that I'm not the only person who's ever gone through these things and I'm not going to be the last. And so it's going to be okay. (Hilary)

“How do you build community?”:
Collective Care in Community Borderlands

The ways in which borderlands respond to community needs through safe and healing spaces offers a link, as well as distinction, between self, relational and collective care. Within a collective care framework, borderlands can remain permeable, allowing folks to enter and leave depending on their need: borderlands can allow for moments of isolation as well as draw people out of isolation when desired. Below, Perrisima tells a story of one such moment in which a local indigenous Aztec community opened up and brought Perrisima inside its borders, offering a kind of space that on many levels had been absent from their life, at a moment when they were feeling in much need of healing:

I was attacked at Capitol Hill last year. After that, I was like, “Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, I'm going to get attacked again.” So he was like, “You should come. You need to slow down. You're organizing a lot. You're burned out. You're not taking care of yourself. Come and hang out at our circle and, you know, we dance.” That's what he said. He was like, “We dance and we pray.” I was like, “What is this?” And so I went and I sat there. I was like, “Oh my gosh, this is so beautiful. I've always wanted to know what indigenous Filipino culture and tradition would look like.” And I'd like to think that maybe that's what it looked like. But so much of it is gone. I don't know if any of it really exists anymore. (Perrisima)

Perrisima talks about this unexpected community space, and the connections they make between it and their own relationship with known and unknown histories of colonization and the erasure of indigenous Filipino culture. In that sense, this instance of collective care seemed to attend to some of Perrisima's enduring feelings around experiences of violence, as

well as extend a certain tenderness to a perhaps less immediate, though no less significant, feelings of cultural loss and colonial mystification.

Accepting community support when extended, as well as extending support to those in need, seems to be a defining feature of collective care in community borderlands. Sadly, a number of participants talked about this aspect of care in relation to experiences of violence. Many participants disclosed to me that they had experienced some sort of violence in their lifetime. For some, a stranger perpetrated the violence, a kind of “random act” often predicated upon their gender or sexual expression; for others the experiences of violence came from schoolmates or within romantic relationships. These collective histories, shared and private, undoubtedly characterize community borderlands in their role in fostering a sense of safety.

There have been a series currently of some queer people of color that we are in community with and that we know, that we care about, who have been assaulted. And a couple of them have actually sought trust in us. Like it’s funny, people have come to call it the Brown House ... we all wanted our house to be like a place where people could come and feel safe and feel comfortable. If they just needed a spot to crash, they could crash at our house ... Sometimes it’s having people over and feeding them, or having people over and listening to music or doing art or watching RuPaul’s Drag Race, right? Whatever. I think like that’s taking care and taking care of each other ... It’s not just surface level, it’s deeper and it’s more like how do you build community? I think that’s what taking care means. (Jaime)

While in the previous quote Perrisima speaks to their healing at a more spiritual level, Jaime describes some of the ways he and his housemates open their home to community folks with basic needs: food, shelter, laughter. In fact, a number of participants spoke to community’s role in meeting basic needs mainly through resource sharing. In the following section, I continue to explore this theme, positioning it as a feature of communities some would like to see strengthened and brought to the fore in community conversations. I also offer two other

examples of themes that emerged as priorities within community borderlands: an increased awareness of a) the intersecting identities people bring with them into communities and b) the interconnectedness of issues that many communities face.

Envisioning Wellness

To close my interviews, the last few questions I would ask focused on envisioning community wellness. I asked, for example, “In terms of a collective wellbeing, what would you like to see change in your communities?” and “What would you like to stay the same?” Rae answered, reflecting a similar commitment and desire expressed by Jaime:

I think one thing that would help a lot of people and would take a lot of work to figure out would be some kind of sharing of resources. Even little things like driving, picking people up who don't have a car, or having some kind of cooperative eating or food situation, just something that would ease the burden a lot off of people who are under a lot of pressure right now. Or childcare and those kinds of things, just a little bit more of those supportive systems in place. A lot of queer folks that I know here, a lot of people live really far away from family, or are estranged from their family and have kids and don't have the support that they need. It's not going to come from any sources. You know, it's not going to come through the state, it's not going to come through any private sources, so I think as a long-term plan, that kind of community would benefit a lot from strategizing around how we can basically materially support each other during really difficult economic times. (Rae)

Rae integrates elements of geographic location and isolation that sometimes characterizes community borderlands, which is also discussed in chapter four in thinking about dimensions of community belongingness. Rae connects and talks through how intersections of queerness, family, class, and capitalism impact people's abilities to meet certain basic needs, and how communities could play a central role in people's lives in terms of reconciling hardships through commitments to intentional, collective care. This is the type of material reality community borderlands struggle through, and the kinds of conversations that can and do happen when there is a sense of connection and interdependence.

However, sometimes communities fail. There seems to be a delicate balance between self and collective care; for some, this balance can be too delicate and at times result in disillusionment and pain. For many of the participants who were far from home, or who never felt a strong connection to any home, investing in communities does not seem to be worth the occasional heartache.

It's also really important that, specifically within communities, we hold ourselves accountable. I think that would be really important to create these spaces that are supposed to be reaffirming, that are supposed to be what the idea of community is, but sometimes miss the mark. (Diana)

In so many words, how communities “miss the mark” plays out in various ways for different participants. This is how Alix responds when I ask what he would like to see change in his communities:

As someone who falls under a lot of those oppression categories, that would make me feel more welcome places if I knew that people were more understanding and weren't going to say racist things to me or homophobic things to me or whatever. If I didn't have to worry, I mean, that would change everything, I think, if I didn't have to worry about that. Or if something happened, I would know that people would talk amongst themselves, that'd be great. (Alix)

A general lack of intersectional awareness and sensitivity (or respect) emerges as one barrier to feeling completely welcomed in some community spaces, and sometimes deterred participants away from wanting to participate in community events or investing much of their time and energy. When imagined as at the intersections of “in-betweenness,” it is reasonable to expect to see harmful artifacts of oppression played out in subtle, and sometimes not-so-subtle, ways. Many participants such as Alix understand that community is not a perfect project and that people sometimes “mess up”—we all carry with us pieces of misinformation and stereotypes we have learned—many of which we are unaware. Alix also understands,

however, that part of being accountable, of caring for others, is to unlearn our (sometimes internalized) racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., and to help others to do so in ways that are supportive and that encourage dialogue.

Closely related to enhancing an intersectional awareness is the priority within some communities to highlight and bring to the fore the interconnectedness of issues facing communities. Just as multiple identities and systems of oppression intersect, so do the complicated and multidimensional issues many communities seek to address and sometimes fail to in a singular, impactful way. Community borderlands greet these issues, with all of their complexity, head on:

I think there's a very distinct sort of thing that's happening where it's like queer people are doing this thing where it's like not only is it about gender and sexuality, but it's connected to prisons, it's connected to race, it's connected to class, it's connected to all these things and being super critical. And then you have gay and lesbian folks who are on the other side who are like, "I want to get married. I want to join the military. I want to shop at Banana Republic." And it's like how do we be more critical and continue to make even more connections to oppression and how oppression affects people's lives or shapes people's lives, and really talking more about power. (Jaime)

Here, Jaime comments on what has emerged in LGBTQ activism and liberation projects as a split between queer politics and a gay/lesbian liberal agenda. The former can be framed as having more to do with addressing interconnected systems of oppression and critiquing/dismantling capitalism, whereas the latter tends to be more concerned with the acquisition of equal rights to pro-capitalist goals, such as access to marriage and military (see Cohen, 1997, 2011). Community borderlands are also spaces with ideological, political fissures and contradictions, making priority-setting a potentially alienating endeavor. Yet, we can see how dialogue and social/political engagement remain core components within borderland spaces. While some communities hold rather divergent beliefs and attitudes, the

desire for a set of shared values—or at least a commitment to acknowledging and discussing issues facing communities—surfaced across the majority of interviews. For some, a set of shared values seems to be a requisite for a sense of community while for others it was thought of as a goal to work towards.

When asked about types of conversations she would like to see happening in her communities, Lori also talks about shared values and commitments around social issues, as well as broad-based coalition building and allyship. She tells me:

What are the values that we do hold and how can our community show up for those? I don't know how you actually get there, [...] like having the community really respond to lots of different issues, right, so not just violence but like inequality in other areas, like laws that are being passed or infringements on women's rights to reproductive justice. There's a way that some communities really shy away from showing up for some of those tough topics or tough issues. I don't think—it's not sustainable to keep doing that—you just have to be able to more unified under those things instead of being divided under them. I would love to see a little bit more of like collective, generative kinds of discussions or alliances with other communities. Being open to that, I think, is a really important piece of that, but sometimes is hard to find. (Lori)

These exercises in envisioning wellness within communities illuminated not just for me but for the participants as well, an investment in individual and collective wellness. Looking ahead and imagining a better way of being in community plays an important in working towards those goals. Envisioning healthy communities can be a source of community healing and renewed purpose, as can reflecting on the interrelatedness of life histories and centering interconnectedness of social issues and conditions through storytelling and narrative (Krech, 2002). Within community borderlands, specifically, this practice may likely take unique and complex shapes and forms, and is worthy of further exploration.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I presented an integral element to wellbeing that emerged from within and across interviews: ethics of care. I provided a preliminary discussion of how ethics of care materialize in community borderlands, how they contribute to wellbeing, and how they sometimes are at odds with desires for community cohesion, togetherness, and belonging. The data show three levels of ethics of care (self care, relational care, and collective care) expressed through participants' stories of navigating liminal community spaces. Strikingly, *ethics of care* also emerge in this dissertation within the context of a rationale for a feminist approach to research methods, specifically the interview process and narrative analysis. This serves as a reminder of the importance of practicing care not only within communities, but also within our scholarship.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

*Do you like these shoes? But the truth is it is scary to
look down at your foot that is no longer yours and see
attached a long long leg.*
— Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

Community borderlands are spaces in constant transition: that swell and shrivel as edges meet, where histories and geographies hybridize and collide. The critical postcolonial and feminist frameworks within which I imagined this study guided the analysis and writing of this project. They helped me to understand how a borderlands framework would be useful for social work: to unravel complexities, to learn more about the practiced life as it is situated in a larger context, and to think about constructs that are so central to the field of social work as are community, belonging, and wellbeing, through the lens of articulated and actualized lived experiences.

Borderland Narratives

They are figures with hyphenated identities, living hybrid realities which pose problems for classification and control, as well as raising questions about notions of essential difference. The in-between zones are shifting grounds, threshold spaces, and displacement and migration have led to a struggle for space where identity is endlessly constructed, and deconstructed, across difference and against set inside/outside oppositions. (Bromley, 2000, p. 5)

While many approaches use the narrative to explore the lived experiences of a particular population, this study used the lived experiences of individuals who occupy and move within community borderlands to further understandings and conceptualizations of predominant constructs in the field of social work. Rather than seeking generalizations/essentialisms of “a mixed-queer experience,” this project centered such experiences in order to better understand meanings of community, belonging, and wellbeing through constructing borderland

narratives. These narratives continue to be “of particular interest to scholars of collective imaginings around belonging” because of their accessibility and the stories narratives of belonging tell about positionality, location, and other social relations across time and space (Anthias, 2002, p. 498).

This study learned from borderland narratives by centering the situated knowledges derived from borderland experiences that, often, represent a dual privileged-oppressed position. This positionality was reflected in the hybrid nature of the borderland narrative. Notably, participants in this study used counter-narratives to construct their lived experiences and “talk back” to normative discourses of being together, belonging, and being well. They also drew upon and utilized dominant discourses as another way of reclaiming their power of self-definition and self-determination independent from positionality and relationships within a privilege/oppression continuum which, ultimately, served as liberatory/liberating (Hill Collins, 1998). In the following section I think through and situate these findings in a brief discussion of the ways this study contributes to understandings of community, belonging, and wellbeing.

Community: Processes and practices of being and becoming

Largely, the borderland narratives of this study illuminated features of community through a framework of *being and becoming*. In part, and as Wilcock (1999) wrote:

Being encapsulates such notions as nature and essence, about being true to ourselves, to our individual capacities and in all that we do. Becoming adds to the idea of being a sense of future and holds the notions of transformation and self actualization. (p. 1)

Being and becoming community were shaped at the personal, relational, and collective levels through both *processes* and *practices*. In the storying of community, many participants

reached into pools of memories related to precipitating events that informed self-making and sense of community, for example: socialization and politicization around scripts and discourses of race, gender, and sexuality as well as processes related to liminality, visibility, and vulnerability. In this sense, meaning-making of community was reflected in *processes* of being and becoming, a feature reminiscent of Anzaldúa's (often overlooked) theory of *nepantla*. *Nepantla* is an in-between space that is "process, liminality, and change— occur[ing] during many transitional stages of life and describ[ing] both identity-related issues and epistemological concerns" and a time/space for self-reflection and "opportunities to 'see through' restrictive cultural and personal scripts" (Keating, 2006, p. 8, 9). As was the case in this study, many of those scripts had to do both identity and community—the "confusion" of mixedness, the "deviance" of queerness, the "loneliness": of in-between, and the "elusiveness" of community.

This study engaged and resisted these scripts in a number of ways. For example, instead of centering racial, gender, and sexual identities as a singular framework for conceptualizing community, this study draws upon community in such a way that emphasizes how socialization around race, gender, and sexuality are intertwined with making sense and meaning of community. Following Anthias' (2002) critique, community replaces identity as a central heuristic for understanding race, gender, and sexuality (even more specifically, mixedness and queerness). This is evidenced in the emergences of dimensions of community belonging that are characterized by "being" (close, read, seen, heard) in community coupled with priority setting practices or, practices of "becoming" community. These dimensions of belonging are "being" processes and practices: stories that allow mixedness and queerness to rearticulate community in absence of a reliance on identity and

the assumptions embedded within, such as crisis, categorization, and developmental linearity. Rather, this study reflects discourses of being and becoming, of wholeness, self-determination, self-definition, and transformation.

Place was another integral process in being and becoming community reflected in the borderland narratives of this study. According to Allan Pred (1984), place is “a process whereby the reproduction of social and cultural forms, the formation of biographies, and the transformation of nature ceaselessly become one another” (p. 279). In this study, place appeared not only in the general sense of (creating/finding) spaces with meaning attached (and attaching meaning) but within the specific context of geographic location. That the study was set in Seattle was significant to the findings, as were participants’ stories experiencing the unique sociopolitical context and geographies of Seattle. Within this study, communities were *places* of being and becoming: community meant physical proximity and creating/sharing spaces, as well as movement/migration across spaces and between places.

Overwhelmingly, participants’ narratives of community reflected a much more pragmatic rather than symbolic idea of community. Participants, generally, had little identification with a larger community, such as a broadly imagined “LGBT community” comprised of other people of Color or queer folks unknown to them. Perhaps largely due to a high degree of geographic movement and migration, interviewees instead formed *actual* national and transnational networks and pointed to those friends and acquaintances as past, present, or potential community members. These enduring ties point to the ways in which community was neither geographically bound nor geographically based, but rather geographically *informed*: place and location shaped the ways participants formed and maintained relationships, yet did not necessarily serve as constraints or containers of

community itself. In a sense, these narratives “reconfigure[d] spaces of belonging shaped through *both* movement and attachment” (Fortier, 2001, p. 405). This also demonstrates the ways in which communities are flexibly bound: community borderlands require some level of fluidity because of the high frequency of in/out movement in their geographies. In the case of this study, being located in Seattle, a magnet city for young queer folks, seemed to shape the ways communities and their boundaries were formed and maintained. Additionally with a rising cost of living, especially within contexts of gentrified neighborhoods and queer/ethnic enclaves, community borders seemed to be malleable to movement, stretches, and in/out flow.

Participants also narrated concrete actions they take to create and maintain communities, including those related to accountability, meeting/providing basic needs and resources, balance/self-care, interdependence through showing up/physical proximity, setting priorities and meeting goals related to wellness. Emergent in this study were also narratives of envisioning futures for communities, which for some provided a sense of purpose. In this sense, communities are *practices* of being and becoming. Within participants’ narratives, community served in several capacities and was generally in line with bodies of literature on the role of community from a more functionalist perspective (Hill-Collins, 2010; Underwood & Frey, 2008). First, community was accessed for material resources and basic needs: for example, shared meals, childcare, resources related to parenting and domestic violence, and transitional housing. These provisions were reflected in both formal and informal community practices.

Similarly, community also served as a catalyst for action taking, a sense of purpose and shared connections, and a site for participation and engagement in collective activities.

As is true for many communities, for participants, this has become manifest through the use of technology (see Willson, 2006), such as listservs and social networking sites. Third, participants' narrated community as a strategy for maximizing wellness opportunities. For example, the grassroots organizing of a queer/trans affirming people of Color yoga practice served to physically bring people together in an intentional space and also functioned as a site for reclaiming a health practice that has been largely appropriated by White, upper class consumer culture (Birdee et al., 2008).

Strikingly, community was also practiced with goals related to safety. While intentional spaces created through boundary maintenance and border patrolling may have led ultimately to a sense of safety, these processes reflect a community space premised upon what Derrida (1992) called a foundational violence. This foundational violence did not serve in the kind of totalizing capacity that erases difference and contradictions (Devadas & Mummery, 2007; Young, 1990); instead, in the course of seeking safe spaces, difference and contradiction were positioned and centered as moments/sites of connection and purpose, a process that proved for some participants to be intrusive and violative, while for others was celebratory.

Community Belonging: Narratives of being and becoming *with*

Findings from this study contribute to the diverse body of knowledge concerned with furthering our understanding of community belongingness as one mechanism that impacts individual and collective wellbeing. Many participants indicated that their experiences as mixed race and queer impacted the degree to which they felt a sense of belonging in communities, naming others' lack of intersectional awareness of multiple identities as one of the major factors inhibiting their sense of belonging. There were two compelling patterns in

the way belongingness was articulated in the borderland narratives of this study: that belonging was process-oriented and interpersonally driven. Belongingness was particularly reflective of processes of being and becoming, rather than an achievement or possession. For example, rather than describing a need to acquire and retain a sense of belonging, participants' generally spoke to belonging as a process that is relational, dynamic, opportunistic, and creative. These narratives also lacked a sense of entitlement to belonging: some embraced the reality that a sense of belonging can be fleeting and lost. This marked a turn towards ideas of belonging, and community itself, as lacking guarantee (Agamben, 1993; Nancy, 1991), and therefore always in process and "becoming" (in Devadas & Mummery, 2007). In this sense, these borderland narratives "reconfigured spaces of belonging" through collective articulation of practices, processes, and priorities related to creating, finding, and sustaining community.

Community belonging was also largely driven by interpersonal relationships. Somewhat surprising to me was the attention paid participants to the importance of having healthy and well-maintained friendships and relationships, rather than large, extensive networks of acquaintances, or a pool of potential acquaintances that could appear or be accessed (especially in times of need). In this sense, participants seemed to focus more on *being with* than *being in* community (Nancy, 1991). Within the context of this study, *being with* was demonstrated in the discourse of "showing up" (being proximal) and maintaining interpersonal relationships rather than struggling with attaining a sense of a cohesive, unified sense of being in community—one that is premised upon a unified sense of identity and also foundational violence. This follows Devadas and Mummery's (2007) interpretation of community as "an active, interruptive idea... [that] calls for a continual unworking of

totalizing and exclusionary myths of collectivity” (para. 7; Levett, 2005). An interrogation of belonging, therefore, helps us to better understand community as an action rather than an achievement.

Wellbeing and *Wellbecoming* in Practice

Sometimes we must look beyond the current place of being and endure some discomfort in order to move towards a better future. (Huxtable, 2009, p. 216)

The majority of participants indicated that being in community both contributed to and detracted from their subjective wellbeing. More specifically, participants shared how and why these pathways might have emerged in their lives; the specific ways they made sense of the contradictory relationships between being together and being well; and how, more broadly, they navigated those liminal, borderland spaces. Narratives of community borderlands tell us multiple things about wellness. One is that people organize around community for purposes of becoming and staying well. This study speaks to the enduring nature of this role of community, no matter how contested the idea of community itself is. Community served as one avenue for addressing unhealthy practices that are known to affect certain people more than others—there is truth to the literature around mixed race and queer health, risk behaviors, likelihood for traumatic experiences across the lifecourse, etc. However, the borderlands narratives of this study go one step further to say that “while these conditions affect my wellbeing, they do not define it.” As such, within these narratives, standards of being and doing “well” are addressed, reclaimed, in light of oppressive discourses around healthy bodies, identity development, relationships, family formation, even child-rearing. In fact, some participants name community resources, both grassroots and federally funded programs, coalitions, and organizations that are serving in these capacities.

As I discuss in further detail later in the chapter, this is an area of future research I would like to pay more attention to: specifically, the formation (and limitations) of counterspaces that accomplish inclusive, affirming, and non-tokenizing/non-exploitative practices and processes. Specifically, learning from these counterspaces can lead to ways we can be more careful in following Bathum and Baumann (2007), Belue et al. (2006), and others' recommendation to include community-building strategies in wellness practices. How will this be safe for everyone? Who will get seen and which will be the processes by which they become visible? Which cultures of oppression might be invited into otherwise safe spaces? These questions inform specific practice priorities, such as: self-determination, intersectional awareness, bridging geographic isolation, and acknowledging a range of disparities and discontinuities in communities (i.e., language, education, ideology, political commitments). This study points to the potential hazards of intentional spaces, the activity of community, and the liminality of belonging, and invites further exploration of how these are manifest and reflected in formal and informal community-level practices and policies.

Towards a Borderland Analytic for Social Work: Implications for Social Work Scholarship

In contrast to such studies focused on developing a set of policy and practice recommendations, this dissertation situates social work scholarship and education as suitable sites for intervention. While this study may point to implications for social work practice with “diverse” populations and community configurations, the purpose of this study was not to fashion better services for mixed race queer individuals and their communities. This study does not suggest that mixed race queers need a specific type of social service—or social services at all. Nor does it promote a list of skills to improve cultural competency among service providers. (I do believe, however, this area will always remain in need of constant

critical evaluation.) Rather, the purpose of my dissertation is to look to the mixed-queer perspective as an equitable partner in knowledge building. I situate this study within a larger body of critical, feminist work by problematizing the idea that some (Other) people are best suited to be recipients/beneficiaries of research rather than active contributors to a body of knowledge—a position that may, ultimately, improve work towards an inclusive and liberatory practice.

I accomplish this, in part, by refusing to involve the study participants in a traditional, population-based research approach. As such, this study benefited from avoiding theorizing on identity. In interviews, participants talk a great deal about how they identify and how they have come to identify that way—which, I believe, has become such a large part of the mixed-queer cultural script and is a type of self-fashioning well practiced by many of the participants. Throughout the analysis, however, I have held those stories as a backdrop to the areas of interest that are central to this study. By doing so, I (hopefully) avoid essentialist and reductive conclusions about mixed race and queer identity, identity politics, and social “issues.”

Using a borderlands framework within the context of this study has led me to new sets of insights and, ultimately, questions—many of which I plan to explore in future research. The heart of this study involved the stories and life histories of the participants. A borderlands framework allowed me to weave together narratives in a way that illustrates how participants’ stories overlapped and diverged, and map participants’ meaning-making across domains of community, belonging, and wellbeing. This framework also allowed me to: a) detail some of the complexity of often elusive and amorphous communities; b) identify specific ways belongingness is sought, achieved, and forfeited in communities; c) explore

how participants experienced community and community belongingness as both contributing to and detracting from their wellbeing; and d) better understand how intentionality and ethics of care promote wellbeing in community borderlands.

A queer, transnational feminist and postcolonial framework offered this study a conceptually rich context for working towards a borderland analytic for social work scholarship: dislocating the Us-Them, Self-Other binaries, minimizing the socio-spatial difference between the researcher and participants while simultaneously seeking and amplifying experiences of Otherness in a larger context. By engaging a borderlands framework, this study employed at least one very useful analytic tool for thinking about borderlands through exploration of lived lives: liminality. As seen in the borderland narratives of this study, liminality can be a useful heuristic to explore how individuals shape and nurture senses of Self, communities, and other spaces of belonging that are “in-between.” (see Gallego, 2002). In addition, liminality, in the sense that the liminal Self and liminal Space, are always “becoming,” can be seen as not only a status, but a process as well. As such, liminality can be used to describe the experiences of those “who look in from outside while looking out from inside to the extent that both inside and outside lose their defining contours” or in other words, the state in which borders of belonging become blurred (Hall, 1994, as cited in Kavoori, 2007, p. 55).

While this research disrupted the category of a distant and invisible other, it did so without sustained purpose and intention: there were no participatory or action-related elements to the study. Because the individuals I interviewed belonged to multiple and diffuse communities, there was no singular locus for change. These qualities of the study raised significant ethical tensions for me as the researcher; they compelled me to consider the ways

in which engaging in this research reinforced processes of Othering and in-betweenness. I grappled with extent to which this study contributed to a body of knowledge and the extent to which it contributed to a “[...] postcolonial perspective and queer theory [...] grounded in Whiteness. Each is committed to rescuing the silenced other...” (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 25). Either in intent or as a consequence, research on “Otherness” is conflictively positioned between “voicing” and exploitation, and has become an issue I have had to grapple with in an academic space that is personally delicate and sacred. While I intended this research to “speak truth” and “shed light,” the unknown, yet somewhat predictable, consequences of doing so loomed.

The liberal injunction to listen to the Other can turn out to be *access for dominant groups* to the thoughts, cultures, and lives of others (see also Boler, 1997; Roman, 1997, 1993). ...the powerful require those on the margins not to be silent, or to talk alone, but to open up their territory and share what they know. The imperialist resonances are uncomfortably apt. (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 480)

Throughout this study, I engaged with this tension through personal reflection, consultation with peers, and openly acknowledging and dialoguing with study participants about the sometimes cruel and contradictory contexts of academic research, and the ways in which we could do “better work” within and for our communities. A borderlands framework lends itself well to this type of on-going, critical reflexivity by encouraging the field to engage in a number of practices. First, advance a social justice imperative that critically engages with the field’s investment in narrating oppression, allowing for agency in self-definition while maintaining a structural analysis. Second, acknowledge “Outsider-Within” experiences in social work research (see Daniel, 2007), considering the space social work scholarship has for those who are usually the subject or beneficiary of research engage in the knowledge building process. Third, consider liminal spaces as capable of providing a basis for critical

self-reflection as well as opportunities for equitable collaborative practices within communities. Not only does this allow for social welfare scholars to better conceptualize, grasp, and work towards liberatory and anti-oppressive goals, it also allows the field to reinvest in asking better questions and thinking more complexly about how systems of dominance and oppression are played out in practice settings, as well as in our own scholarship and teaching.

Future Research

There are a number of other opportunities for future research stemming from this study. For example, the age range in this study's sample was quite narrow (range= 20-35, mean= 26); this sample characteristic may indicate that future studies should and perhaps ought to look more critically at the role of generation and age cohort. The age cohort of this study represented a collective moment of borderland experiences of race, gender, and experiences. Namely, this generation not only has access to a certain language around being mixed and queer, but many have created their own ways of expressing who they are and engage in critical self-reflection around their positionality and the ways they experience privilege and oppression. This practice is undoubtedly unique; other generations may have historically engaged in a different liberatory politic, or none at all, and may currently hold other priorities and processes of "being and becoming." In this sense, a life course perspective could be incorporated into future research to better contextualize the narratives and provide a broader representation within a borderlands approach. This study might also lend itself well to comparative studies, including differences and similarities across life stages as well as representation across education and class-related characteristics.

Additionally, this study offers opportunities to dig deeper into various wellness practices, especially participants' use of informal care networks as health-promoting resources. A number of participants identified informal community practices as central resources for maintaining their wellness. For example, Jaime discussed the ways in which he opened up his home and provided basic needs for community members in need. Many other participants spoke about a People of Color Yoga project that emerged from within a Queer of Color network of activists who wanted to define an intentional, affirming space for wellness practices. Although not a central aim within this study, I hope to take a more intimate look at these less-formal and often non-professionalized spaces, perhaps through organizational ethnography or a community-based participatory research project.

I will also continue to carefully consider the role of migration (more specifically, the movement across both symbolic and physical space), the mixed queer diaspora, and the "othered" border crosser. As described in chapter four, participants' global reach was much broader than I had anticipated. In some important ways, participants' narratives mirror, and actually are, diasporic narratives. Diasporic narratives often think of the "home" as either an origin or a destination (Fortier, 2001); borderland narratives seem to mirror these, even in terms of community: it is interesting to consider the ways participants thought about *community* as both an origin and a destination, likening it to a home. I wonder in what ways this project was already "seek[ing] to renew severed links between the conflicted diasporic 'self' and the collective, to shape a critically imagined solidarity, a healing, out of the discursive rupture" (Bromley, 2000, p. 2). The borderlands framework used in this study served to identify and examine dominant and normative discourses around community

belonging and wellbeing, and perhaps it also served in understanding the possibilities of dissonance and contradiction.

Using border thinking within this study allowed me to see how borderland narratives were also queer diasporic narratives and multiracial/transnational narratives. The presence of a diasporic quality within both physical and symbolic borderlands lends itself well to a closer examination of *place*, and movement across space. Locating knowledge generated through, and identifying the power structures embedded within, the lived experience is a main concern of border thinking. This approach can help social work scholars, students, and practitioners to more critically and holistically approach practice concerned with multiple client systems, including multi-, inter-, and trans- racial, immigrant, and queer/trans-affirming families, organizations, and institutions by looking at the intersections of race, place, and the role of community in people's lives and strategies to become and stay well.

Similarly, in future research I will like to think more broadly about borderland experiences. In this study, I conceptualized borderland experiences of race, gender, and sexuality as being primarily reflected in mixedness, queerness, and gender non-conformity. However, borderlands are home to many more experiences than those alone. Future studies could look at other experiences and populations, including: transracial/transnational adoptees, children in foster care, people with disabilities, the 1.5 generation and immigrant families, detained and incarcerated individuals, as well as the dilemmas and contradictions faced by activist scholars (see Hames-Garcia, 2009).

Methodological Reflections

Resulting from this study was a complex yet practical set of considerations regarding community borderlands research that I will carry moving forward, and that might be useful to

other qualitative researchers. As a primary source of qualitative data collection in social work research, the interview is an important practice to continue to evaluate. Though many practice approaches highlight the centrality of the relationship between social worker and clients, traditional interview frameworks ought to continue to acknowledge the researcher-participant relationship in meaningful and practical ways. In particular, there is a pervasive assumption that interviewer-interviewee interactions begin and end with the interview. However, a community-centered interview approach,² like the one that emerged through this study, provides evidence that in many cases this assumption does not hold true. Through utilizing a set of feminist assumptions, including an intersectional and relational lens, I was able to understand the interview a site for not only data collection, but also for co-construction of meaning, relationships, and community building.

In community-centered research, the researcher will often have existing relationships to the community that are central to their identity, history, and/or the topic being studied. Other times, the interview site is thought of as the beginning of a relationship and a connective moment from which to build community. In both cases, community relationships, both existing and potential, characterize and influence the interview process from the perspectives of researcher and participant. In this study, I absolutely experienced both scenarios, and at least three critical questions arose: 1) What ethical issues need to be addressed?; 2) What is the role of the researcher at various points in the research process and in relationship with participants?; and 3) How can multiple commitments be managed?

While a number of participants I had never before met, all participants in this study were connected to the communities to which I am personally tied. Many participants

² The conceptualization of a “community-centered interview approach” is borrowed from a conference proposal currently under review, submitted by the author and her colleagues Gita Mehrotra and Miriam Valdovinos, entitled: “Developing a community-centered approach to interviewing.”

happened to be acquaintances, friends, and/or partners (and/or former partners) of friends or colleagues of mine. Knowing that I am a social work student and previously active in community organizing efforts, several participants wanted to talk with me about planning community events and re-establishing networks of mixed queer folks in Seattle. As transparent and reciprocal as I wanted my relationships with participants to be, I struggled with knowing how to situate this project within the larger community landscape. Which are my ethical dilemmas, and how do I fulfill both personal and professional commitments? My desires (as well as hesitations) to engage in community-centered work are what drive my scholarly interests around community borderlands; however, some participants wanted to hold me accountable, and reasonably so, for my imposition into their individual and collective lives. This was reflected through several requests to engage with email listservs and organize/participate in community-related events. More subtly, this expectation was communicated to me through nebulous mentions of “future work” and reflections on the importance and potential impact of this study.

Journaling was a central reflective practice that I carried out throughout the data collection and analysis process to engage with these dilemmas. It allowed me to make note of how I was feeling after each interview and while I was interpreting the data. In many ways, journaling has been a reflexive practice and skill that I will continue to work on, and will continue to learn to write about in a meaningful, authentic way. In this study, journaling has helped me illuminate features of my own research experiences that I need to continue to develop and refine.

However, the practice of journaling has led me to rather concrete methodological lessons and reflections. The following is an excerpt from my journal regarding the interview experience:

It seems like people have certain ideas of what social work research is, and I wonder how I can disrupt that prior to or during the interview. [...] It reminds me of Diana's reflections after our interview, on social work research as trauma stories: *"I was expecting, because it's social work, I thought there was going to be like way more—I thought trauma was going to be used. Like I thought like every other question was going to be about like some kind of trauma, so I was like, 'Okay.' So I was able to not have to talk about trauma so that was good, I guess."*

Diana's reflections on what she was expecting to encounter in our interview fascinated me, and told me a lot about how social work research might be thought of by others, and made me more aware of how I talked about my study with participants. In fact, a number of my journal entries had much to do with my reflections on engaging with participants before, during, and after the interview. As an example, the evening after my sixth interview, I wrote:

I'm pretty amazed that no one has yet asked me more about my race, gender, sexuality identities. Mostly this surprises me with race because most people do or have asked me AND because I'm talking with them about their identities and experiences, and asking probing questions. I wonder if people think that these conversations would be discouraged or disruptive to the interview/research process. I wonder this even though I give them the opportunity to ask me personal questions or questions about the project before each interview. Not even after the interview process, during which time we might feel more familiar with one another, do people turn the focus to me.

One of the later interviewees did, however, end up asking about how I identify in terms of race and sexuality before our interview. It was interesting that she rationalized her questioning of me by remarking, "We have similar coloring." Notably, she was also the one participant to most directly suggest that we ought to maintain a collegial relationship after the interview, and work to continue organizing in "the community." Perhaps this was a courtesy,

or maybe it was a genuine request and directive related to how I can be accountable to her, and the community, after this study was over. From my experiences conducting this study, I would strongly recommend social work researchers to continue to describe and discuss the process of designing, conducting, and reflecting upon interview-based studies that involve participants who share community affiliations with the researcher.

Developing a Borderlands Pedagogical Approach: Implications for Social Work Education

Generally, this study encourages social work scholars and educators to be critical of our assumptions regarding our students and the communities we research. For social work educators specifically, a critical lens can push us to more carefully imagine community-level practice and practitioners. By thinking “in-between,” we can envision more creative strategies for maximizing the possibility of relevant and meaningful knowledge- and relationship-building, both inside and outside of the social work classroom. In the following discussion, I will outline and detail more specific recommendations for pedagogical interventions intended to inform social work practice.

As mentioned in the introduction, I often point to the social work classroom as space that inspires my scholarly ambitions; as such, social work education is an important sphere into which this dissertation study can reciprocate, and offer insight and intervention. As a borderlands framework can be used to illuminate and challenge certain binaries, such as the gender binary, the White/of Color binary, and the insider/outsider binary, it can also be useful in bringing into question the educator/student and the practitioner/client divides within the social work classroom. Incorporating a borderland perspective in the classroom, social work educators can create learning opportunities and “teachable moments” through: a) acknowledging and making space for the ways we are both teachers and learners, b)

understanding that social work students and practitioners are also community members and authorities on their own lived experiences, and c) more genuinely consider the complex relationships students have with the commitments they hold and work they pursue.

In this discussion, it is important for me to not rely on imagining implications for some distant, Other clients and client systems. In fact, I imagine the most direct consumers of social work scholarship to be other scholars and students. Integrating borderlands frameworks into both the process and content (the explicit and implicit curriculum) of social work education could be another strategy for encouraging an anti-oppressive, liberatory learning atmosphere that appreciates multiple perspectives and worldviews without tokenizing or exploiting them. This would be one step towards what Mohanty (2003) calls “the decolonizing and politicizing of knowledge by rethinking self and community through the practice of emancipatory education” (p. 10). Borderland pedagogy within the social work classroom could support a critical self-reflective practice among and for MSW students, as well as social work educators and scholars. Acknowledging borderland experiences allows educators and students alike to think critically about working in communities we “belong” to, and negotiating community borders, responsibilities, voice, and needs. In this way, a borderland framework in social work education could help us better to understand social work education as an intervention and to learn in a more holistic, honest way how students and practitioners enhance to the work we do and how/what we teach.

The Example of Third Space Caucusing³

As a pedagogical approach often used in social work classrooms, the purpose of identity-based caucusing is to create a small group experience for students based on shared identity experiences. The theory behind identity-based caucusing is that it allows students to discuss issues of identity-centered privilege and oppression within a space that is predicated upon some shared experience. Caucusing allows privileged groups to discuss and “work out” issues commonly related to privilege awareness, such as guilt and denial, without subjecting others to witnessing this process. Caucusing also allows those with target or marginalized identities to share and discuss common issues in a shared space separate from the privilege space, thereby safeguarding these individuals from experiences of exploitation and vulnerability. Following identity caucusing, the facilitator or instructor brings the groups back together and facilitates an intergroup discussion.

Through my experience as an instructor and dialogue facilitator, I have learned that the model of conducting two identity-based caucuses (i.e., White people caucus and people of Color caucus) raises issues related to reductive frames of reference regarding experiences of privilege and oppression. The common practice of one “privileged” and one “marginalized” group can serve as a divisive, irrelevant dichotomy; in fact, many experiences fall between these categories, even within the same identity category (like race, gender, sexuality). Creating a third space visibilizes these positionalities and advances a truer identity-based/intergroup process. For example, students who identify with this experience often self-identify as mixed race/racially “other,” queer, and/or trans gender/gender non-

³ The following section is adopted from an accepted, forthcoming conference presentation, submitted by the author and her colleague Sarah Mountz, entitled “‘Third space’ caucuses: Intersectional and borderland praxis in the social work classroom.”

conforming. “Third space” allows us to think through and from “in-between,” i.e., borderland positions, and recover and build upon that knowledge within the classroom.

Emerging from an intersectional, borderlands perspective, ‘third space’ caucusing is a critical pedagogical approach that is student-centered and anti-oppressive. Caucusing inherently addresses issues of privilege and oppression; an inclusion of “third space” furthers the social work mission of self-determination by allowing students to complicate binaried notions of identity and social justice and to self-express and situate their experiences in a space that is reflective of who they are. This process, however, is beneficial to all students. It allows for a more critical analysis of one’s assumptions and values, and engages students in an on-going process of self-appraisal. I invite others to explore how third space caucusing might enhance the social work classroom in particular, benefit the implicit curriculum of social work programs, while raising critical questions for other pedagogical approaches.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I adopted and applied a borderlands framework to think through and learn about lived experiences of community, belongingness, and wellbeing, central concepts within the social work discipline. Namely, this project pulled together transnational feminism, postcolonial studies, borderland epistemology within an overarching queer framework represented an instance of theoretical pluralism employed to collect and interpret stories of lived lives, material realities, and perceived wellbeing. In the two analytic chapters of this study, I explored expressions and experiences of liminality and belongingness as I saw them to be used by participants to make meaning of being in community and being well. I presented an emergent conceptual framework to better understand (a) belongingness in community borderlands and (b) corresponding, contradictory pathways that enhanced and

detracted from participants' perceived wellbeing. I also explored perceptions of wellbeing itself from a borderland perspective and discussed the ways some participants narrated their position on reclaiming "healthy bodies," articulated priority-setting within their communities, and engaged in critical self-reflection on creating intentional spaces and replicating oppressive practices and discourses, such as policing. It is my hope that this study might inform the application of a borderlands framework in future social work scholarship, develop borderland pedagogical approaches in the social work classroom, and ultimately impact social work practice.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide*Community borderlands: Exploring liminal and contradictory experiences of belonging and wellbeing*

Participant Name/Pseudonym: _____

Interview Date: _____ **Time Began:** _____ **Time Ended:** _____

Interview location: _____

Transcript desired? Yes No

**Email or mailing
address for delivery:** _____

Any other notes:

I. Introduction

- Interviewer introduces self
- Thank you for taking the time today to talk about your life experiences and your experiences of community and well-being.
- This project is interested in better understanding the relationship between community and well-being, especially for people who identify as multiracial, mixed, or racially “other” and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. The interview will be divided into three sections:: identity, community, and well-being. The questions may seem simple- that’s because they are! There are no right or wrong answers, no trick questions, and no judgment about your experiences.

II. Review Consent Form and Get Written Consent

III. Review Procedures

Before we begin, I would like to go over the interview procedures.

- Our interview today will last about an hour.
 - We will not be taking a formal break, but you may ask to stop or take a break at any time.
 - We will only use first names in our discussion today. If you feel more comfortable with using fictional names (for yourself or others), please feel free to do so.
 - If you do not want to answer a particular question or talk about a particular topic, please let me know and we will move on.
 - I will be audio-recording this interview and a different person will be transcribing your words. This will help us make sure that we accurately get your thoughts on the issues.
 - Your interview responses will all be confidential; however if you share any information regarding current child abuse/neglect or intention to harm yourself or others, I will have to report it.
 - You will have the opportunity to see the interview transcript if you so desire.
 - Do you have any questions before we begin? (*Address any questions*)
-

To start, I am going to take a few minutes to ask you some questions about your identity and life experiences:

1. I have a few direct, personal questions to start with:

- Age?
- How long have you lived in Seattle?
- Employment status?
- Educational background?
- How would you characterize your SES growing up?

2. How do you identify in terms of your race, ethnicity, and/or culture?

Probes:

- How did you come to identify this way?
- Are there (or have there been) situations or times in your life when you identify yourself differently?

3. How do you identify in terms of your gender?

Probes:

- How did you come to identify this way?
- Are there (or have there been) situations or times in your life when you identify yourself differently?
- Preferred pronouns?

4. How do you identify in terms of your sexual orientation?

Probes:

- How did you come to identify this way?
- Are there (or have there been) situations or times in your life when you identify yourself differently?

5. Are there any other identities that are important to who you are? (consider: religion, nativity, socioeconomic status, age, etc.) Why?

Probes:

- Any other identities that stand out to you as the most salient in your day to day life or interactions with other people?

6. Would you guess that the way you identify yourself is more similar to or different from how your closest friends think of themselves?

Probes:

- How would you compare yourself to your friends?
- What is that like?

I'm interested in how multiple identities influence people's experiences with community. Now I'm going to ask you a little bit about your experiences with communities.

1. What does community mean to you?

Probes:

- When you think of community, what comes to mind?

2. Are there any turning points in terms of what community has meant to you in the past, or what it means to you now?

Probes:

- Are there moments you can remember your idea of community changing?

3. Do you belong to an identity-based community, such as one related to your race, gender, sexuality, or another identity?

Probes:

- How would you describe your relationship to that community?
- How do you think someone would know that they are a member of that community?
- How would you describe the experience of belongingness?
- What is one word or phrase that you would use to describe that community?
- What is one word or phrase that you think others would use to describe that community?

4. I am also interested in knowing more about how people experience multiple communities. I would like to understand how you relate to different communities that you are a part of (i.e., racial/ethnic communities, LGBTQ communities, etc.)

Probes:

- Are you, or have you been, received differently in different spaces/communities you are a part of?
- How so? Why do you think that is/was?

5. Can you think of a time when being in community meant the most to you?

Probes:

- When has it had a significant impact on your life?
- What is the most important thing to you about that community?

6. What would you say is the one thing least understood by others about the communities you belong to?

Changing topics a little bit, I'm now going to ask you a few questions related to well-being. I'm interested in how people make sense of identity and community, especially as it relates to their well-being.

1. What does it mean to you to be “doing well”? What are 2 or 3 things you need to be well?

2. In terms of your general well-being, what would be one thing that you might say concerns you the most?

Probes:

- What's one thing that detracts from your well-being?
- Have you done, or do you currently do, anything to address this concern?

3. What would you say contributes most to your well-being?

Probes:

- Would you say that community affects your well-being? Why/why not?

4. How would you describe the overall well-being of others in the communities you described earlier?

Probes:

- How are communities doing?
- In terms of a collective well-being, what do communities “do well”?
- In what ways do communities keep themselves healthy and happy?

Wrap-up question:

1. In an ideal world, how would the experiences you shared today be used?

- Is there anything you would like to see change? Stay the same?
- Are these conversations happening?

I'd like to tell you again how much I appreciate your willingness to talk with me. During this time you've shared significant and personal stories. I want to thank you for sharing your experiences with me.

Closing the interview:

- *Make sure the person is doing okay emotionally*
- *Remind interviewee re: confidentiality. Make sure participants understand that they can receive a copy of the transcript (and confirm delivery email/address).*
- *Let them know they can contact me with questions/concerns following the interview if necessary*

Appendix B: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM “Community borderlands”

Researcher: Kimberly Hudson, MSW (Doctoral Student)
University of Washington, School of Social Work
[phone]
kdree@u.washington.edu

Dr. Tessa Evans Campbell (Advisor)
University of Washington, School of Social Work
206-543-6075
tecamp@u.washington.edu

*Please note that we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of email communications.

Researchers’ statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study is to learn more about how multiracial and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) individuals understand their multiple identities and experiences, particularly in regards community and self-perceived well-being.

Kimberly Hudson, a PhD student in Social Work, is carrying out this research. I will be interviewing 15 participants for this study. I am doing this research as my dissertation project. The study results will be shared with participants and the broader School of Social Work community when completed.

PROCEDURES

I am asking you to participate in an interview that will be about 1-2 hours long. The interview will be held in person. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your identity and life experiences. For example, some questions you might be asked include: “How do you identify your race, ethnicity, or culture?” “What have been significant turning points in your life that have impacted how you understand or experience ‘community’?” “How would you describe your overall sense of well-being?” You can refuse to answer any

questions. You can withdraw from the study at any time. With your permission, I will audio record the interview. All interviews will be transcribed. You can also review your interview transcripts if you desire. You will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym or to be identified using your birth name or name of choice. Fictional names will be used in describing any other person mentioned in the interview. I will not indicate which participants are using pseudonyms and which are using real names.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

There are no physical health risks to participating in this study. However, I will ask you questions that include sharing of personal information. This could bring up feelings of mild discomfort, such as embarrassment or anxiety. In the case you would like to seek support services after the interview, the following is a list of local resources: a 24/7 crisis hotline can be accessed by calling (800) 273-8255. Seattle Mental Health Services can also be reached at (206) 224-2840. If you prefer to speak to an LGBTQ mental health specialist, please contact Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities (206) 323-0220. In addition, if you choose to be identified using your birth name or name of choice, you are assuming all possible future risk that may come from being identified with information shared with me in the interview process.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

You will not benefit directly from being in this study. However, you might enjoy sharing your experiences as a multiracial and LGBTQ community member. This project will also contribute to greater knowledge these experiences which can help to inform culturally-relevant social services, programs, and future research.

OTHER INFORMATION

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

All of your information will be kept confidential. However, if you tell me about current child abuse, elder abuse, or that you are at risk of harming yourself or someone else, I will have to report this information. All interviews will be assigned a participant number that will be kept separate from your name and audio file. I will destroy audio files and list of interviewees' identifiers after the study is completed or within 5 years.

If you have any questions about this research at any time, you can contact Kimberly Hudson at [\[phone\]](#) or via email at: kdree@uw.edu. Also, if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call the Human Subjects Division at the University of Washington at (206) 543-0098. You will get a copy of this consent form for your records.

Printed name of researcher obtaining consent

Signature

Date

PARTICIPANT STATEMENT

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at the University of Washington. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to audiotape my interview.

_____ I do NOT give my permission for the researcher to audiotape my interview.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

Copies to: Investigator's file
 Participant

Curriculum Vitae
KIMBERLY DREE HUDSON
 University of Washington
 School of Social Work
 kdree@uw.edu

EDUCATION

University of Washington, Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare **August 2012**

Dissertation: Community borderlands: Exploring liminal and contradictory experiences of belonging and wellbeing

Committee: Dr. Tessa Evans-Campbell (chair), Dr. Susan P. Kemp, Dr. Karina Walters

University of Michigan Ann Arbor, Master of Social Work **December 2007**

Concentration: Community Organization

Minor: Social Policy and Evaluation

Method Area: Community and Social Systems

University of California Los Angeles, Bachelor of Arts **June 2006**

Major: Anthropology

Minor: Public Affairs

Distinction: College Honors

City College of San Francisco, Associate of Arts **May 2004**

Major: General Studies

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

Hudson, K. D. (2012). Bordering community: Reclaiming ambiguity as a transgressive landscape of knowledge. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 27(2), 167-179.

Hudson, K. D., & Mountz, S. (2012). "Third space" caucuses: Intersectional and borderland praxis in the social work classroom. Roundtable presentation in the Teaching Methods and Learning Style Track at the Council for Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Washington, DC.

Hudson, K. D., Garcia, A., Shapiro, V. B., Moylan, C. A., Derr, A. S., Waithaka, E. N., Almgren, G. R., & Uehara, E. S. (2011). Transforming our training: Integrating a social justice framework into doctoral education. Social Work Curriculum and Pedagogy Panel conducted in the Social and Economic Justice Track at the Council for Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Hudson, K. D. (2010). Racially queer femme. In A. DeRango-Adem & A. Thompson (Eds.), *Other tongues: Mixed race women speak out*. Toronto, ON, Inanna Publications.

Hudson, K. D. (2010). What does “passing” look like in the US today? Seminar presented at the inaugural Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference, Depaul University, Chicago, IL.

Hudson, K. D. (2010). Racially queer femme: Decolonizing reflexivity at the intersections of “passing.” Paper presented at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Urbana-Champaign, IL.

Hudson, K. D. (2009). The possibility of postraciality: subverting racial identity, categorization, organization. Paper presented at The University of Chicago Minority Graduate Student Association “Eyes on the Mosaic” Graduate Student Conference, Chicago, IL.

Alimo, C., Hudson, K. D., McCallum, C., Torres-Zickler, A., & Watson, K. (2009). Intergroup dialogue: Leveraging diversity, creating the courage to act. Presented at American College Personnel Association Convention, Washington, DC.

Hudson, K. D. (2005). The forgotten class: Adult education and welfare policy. Paper presented at the International Conference on Social Science Research, Orlando, FL.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

GRADUATE & POST-MSW:

Community Borderlands and Well-Being 05/10-current
Independent research
School of Social Work, University of Washington

Social Justice Integration in Social Work Doctoral Education, 09-10-current
Co-Principal Investigator
School of Social Work, University of Washington

Learning to be Illegal: Undocumented Youth and the Confusing and Contradictory Routes to Adulthood 06/09-09/10
Research assistant
Principal Investigator: Dr. Roberto G. Gonzales
School of Social Work, University of Washington

African American Male Educational Network and Development 01/08-07/08
Research consultant
Associate Dean of Student Affairs/Vice Chancellor of Student Development
City College of San Francisco

Lab on Race and Self-Destructive Behavior 10/06-02/07
Research assistant
Principal Investigator: Dr. Sean Joe
Social Work Research Center, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS:

Ronald E. McNair Undergraduate Research Scholars Program 01/05-06/06
Academic Advancement Program, University of California, Los Angeles

Summer Program for Undergraduate Research (SPUR) 06/05-07/05
Graduate Division, University of California, Los Angeles

Quarter in Washington Program 03/05-06/05
Center for American Politics and Public Policy, University of California, Los Angeles

Center for Sport and Society 08/03-01/04
Assistant to Principal Investigator: Dr. Mark Robinson, City College of San Francisco
Performed explorative research in the area of institutional services to student-athletes;
drafted mission statement with the Center's founder; wrote grant proposals

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

GRADUATE-LEVEL INSTRUCTION:

Adjunct Lecturer
Intellectual and Historical Foundations of Professional Social Work Practice 09/12-12/12
Required course, MSW program
School of Social Work, University of Washington

Sole Instructor 01/12-03/12
Foundations of Social Welfare Research
Required course, MSW program
School of Social Work, University of Washington

Sole Instructor 03/11-06/11
Social Welfare Research and Evaluation
Required course, MSW program
School of Social Work, University of Washington

Teaching Intern 09/09-12/09
Social Justice for Social Workers
Required course, MSW program
Instructor: Dr. Karina Walters
School of Social Work, University of Washington

Co-facilitator 09/07-12/07
Organizational, Community and Societal Structures and Processes
Required course in concentration, MSW program
Instructor: Dr. Michael Spencer
School of Social Work, University of Michigan

Peer Facilitator 01/07-04/07
 Contemporary Cultures in the United States
 Elective, MSW program
 Instructor: Dr. Michael Spencer
 School of Social Work, University of Michigan

UNDERGRADUATE-LEVEL INSTRUCTION:

Teaching Assistant 09/10-12/10
 Introduction to Research and Evaluation
 Required course, BASW program
 Instructor: Dr. Tracy Harachi
 School of Social Work, University of Washington

Teaching Assistant 09/09-03/10
 Human Behavior and the Social Environment I/II
 Required sequence, BASW program
 Instructor: Dr. Theresa Ronquillo
 School of Social Work, University of Washington

Facilitator 09/08-12/08
 Sociological Lenses: Contemporary Issues in Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation
 Required Freshman Interest Group seminar, University of Washington

Instructor 06/07-08/07
 Inequality: Intersections of Isms and Identities
 Educational Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Tutor/Teaching Assistant 08/05-09/05
 Honors Research Forum
 Transfer Student Program, University of California Los Angeles

Mentor/Tutor 08/02-06/03
 Areas: Social Sciences, English/Writing, Spanish, College Skills
 Tutoring and Mentoring Programs, City College of San Francisco

CERTIFICATE: Multicultural Classroom Facilitation, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, November 2007

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE & TRAINING

Multi-University Intergroup Dialogue Institute, Facilitator 08/08
 Ann Arbor, MI

Program on Intergroup Relations, Data coordinator 11/07-12/07
 University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Center for Reflective Community Practice, Intern 05/07-08/07
Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Affairs, Intern 02/07-04/07
Department of Student Affairs, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

University of California, Washington DC Program, Outreach assistant 10/05-12/05
Center for American Politics and Public Policy, University of California, Los Angeles

Wider Opportunities for Women, Intern 03/05-06/05
Washington, DC

Student Advocacy, Rights and Responsibilities, Assistant to Associate Dean 06/04-09/04
City College of San Francisco

OnFocus, Inc, Founding Director of Research and Planning 01/04-01/06
San Francisco, CA

Translator (Spanish-English) 06/03-03/04
Goldman, P., Abiola, H., & International Museum of Women. (2006). *Imagining ourselves: Global voices from a new generation of women*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

HONORS, AWARDS, & FELLOWSHIPS

| | |
|---|------------|
| Ronald E. McNair Graduate Fellowship, University of Washington | 2008-2012 |
| GADE Doctoral Student Award for Leadership and Service | 2011 |
| School of Social Work Excellence & Innovation Fellowship, University of Washington | 2009, 2010 |
| Top Scholar, University of Washington, Graduate Dean's Office | 2008-2009 |
| Center for Reflective Community Practice, Visiting Fellow, MIT | 2007 |
| Wheeler Family Memorial Scholarship, School of Social Work, University of Michigan | 2006-2007 |
| Community-Based Initiative Fellowship, School of Social Work, University of Michigan | 2006-2007 |
| College Honors Research Scholarship, Stone Award, UCLA | 2006 |
| Honors Research Program & Scholarship, UCLA | 2005-2006 |
| Undergraduate Research Scholars Program & Scholarship, UCLA | 2004-2006 |
| Dean's List, UCLA | 2004-2006 |
| Social Equity Caucus Scholarship ASPA National Conference | 2005 |
| Dean's List, CCSF | 2002-2004 |

SERVICE TO ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

| | |
|--|-------------|
| University of Washington School of Social Work: Seattle, WA | |
| Social Justice Committee, PhD Steering Committee, subcommittee member | 03/09-06/12 |
| Undergraduate student research mentor | 09/09-06/11 |
| "Social Justice for Social Workers" Race & Gender Caucus guest facilitator | 12/10 |
| Social Work Immigration Alliance, member | 09/09-06/10 |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| “Social Justice for Social Workers” Race Caucus guest facilitator | 12/09 |
| “Research Problems and Priorities in Social Welfare” guest speaker | 01/09 |
| Ronald E. McNair Undergraduate Research Program, mentor | 11/08-06/09 |
| Ethnic Cultural Center (ECC) Annual Community Retreat guest facilitator | 10/08-10/08 |
| Doctoral Student Representative on the Impact of Intergroup Dialogue Panel, Ann Arbor, MI, speaker | 08/08 |

University of Michigan School of Social Work: *Ann Arbor, MI*

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Global Social Work Committee, steering committee member | 10/07-12/07 |
| Multicultural and Gender Affairs Committee, student representative | 01/07-12/07 |
| “Intergroup Dialogue Facilitation” guest speaker | 11/07 |
| Curriculum Committee, student representative | 09/06-12/06 |

University of California, Los Angeles: *Los Angeles, CA*

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Public Affairs Society, founding Vice President | 09/05-06/06 |
| Honors Interaction Program, Honors Fellow mentor | 10/05-06/06 |
| Bruin Partners, middle school tutor/mentor | 09/04-12/04 |
| Project BRITE, GED tutor for incarcerated youth | 09/04-12/04 |