# Women at the Boundaries

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## Abstract

This paper presents the narratives of women who work in the university and their experiences of silencing and institutional containment. Through these narratives, I describe the ways in which the narrators deal with being silenced, and their attempts to establish their voice in personal, public and institutional realms. Many of the narratives are studies in how women challenge marginalization through their actions and by speaking out. The paper suggests that the stories are shaped by individual diversity and how these women experienced the politicization of difference. Individual voice and agency are mediated by personal, social, and spiritual connections within the past and present. For all of these women, their developing voice and agency were factors in their being able to challenge dominant institutional discourses.

Feminist and critical race literature discuss the intersections between race and gender, the connections between race, gender and power, and how the relations of power affect knowledge. These considerations also raise the issues of patriarchy within the institution, and how this affects possibilities of change and empowerment. Race and gender stand out as primary categories and lenses from which these women tell their stories.

## Introduction

Feminist authors have discussed the intersections between race and gender[1] and the connections between race, gender, and class,[2] as well as multiple intersections.[3] Intersections are examined within the context of the relations of power and the affect on knowledge.[4] Intersectionality considerations also raises the issues of patriarchy within the institution, and how this affects possibilities of change and empowerment. Race and gender are subjects that are often silenced in the discourses of higher education institutions, whereby there is an avoidance of the issues of race and gender, because they are seen as issues that do not count.[5] While some of the literature has challenged dominant discourses of patriarchy within institutions, I suggest that the intersection of race and gender has rarely been taken up within higher education analysis and praxis. In everyday terms, there is also difficulty for racialized women to speak out because of

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[1] F. Anthias and N. Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1992); P. H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[2] D. K. Stasiulis, "Theorizing Connections: Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Class," in *The Politics of Race in Canada*, ed. M. Wallis and A. Fleras (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[3] L. McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs: The Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2005).

[4] H. Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-racism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995); S. Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); D. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

[5] F. Henry, C. Tator, W. Mattis, and T. Rees, *The Colour of Democracy* (Scarborough, ON: Nelson, 1998).

personal vulnerability and the dynamics of power.[6] Mechanisms of power are evidenced in practices of silencing and having voice.

In this paper I examine race and gender through the lens of silencing and voice, and the challenge of working at the boundaries. The boundary challenges documented in this paper occurred primarily in response to increasing tensions in academic life, the practices institutional containment, and heightened racial and gender politics. This paper is based on research into the meaning of institutional experiences, social justice, and the interpretations within the personal, social, and institutional lives of educators. The paper briefly presents three theoretical contexts: the intersections of race and gender; marginalization and boundaries; and relations of ruling. A dominant ideological paradigm that has been articulated in the academy tends to focus on fairness and equity. However, I suggest this paradigm is interpreted in discursive ways and may even be used as a rationale for perpetuating fixed boundaries and gatekeeping. The interpretations of experience are derived from the narratives of six racialized women in the academy. These women occupied multiple transitional and marginalized spaces. Through the interconnections of their personal, social and institutional narratives, they acknowledged their voice, discussed how their voices were more clearly expressed and heard, and how they challenged institutional discourses.

Silencing is a powerful means of marginalizing racialized women and this process occurs in the everyday mechanisms of institutional values, contested practices, and avoidance. These mechanisms for silencing are rarely addressed or acknowledged by the institution. Institutions and groups have subtle, covert, overt, and powerful mechanisms for silencing. Gestures, looks and even the "*gaze*"[7] can silence. This silencing is also related to visibility as well as invisibility, what is seen and not seen, what is politicized and what is kept 'under ground', and where attempts are made to neutralized and reframe concerns as personal rather than political.

The phrase "*coming to voice*" is used by Collins[8] with reference to elements of power and knowledge in Black feminist thought. Historically, Black feminists have challenged western feminism, or White feminism, in the failure to consider race.[9] The concept of coming to voice can be used to acknowledge that many women and minority groups have been silenced by the power of institutional discourses. Voice is constructed in terms of self-expression, talking back,[10] speaking out, and breaking silence.[11] The concept of voice extends to epistemology: ways of knowing, who has voice to claim knowledge, and ways of speaking out by marginalized groups. Voice highlights the issue of speaking for oneself and the ability to declare that there are injustices and problems within the institution. Voice is activated as a result of individuals who are developing their own authority of expression.

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[6] Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*.

[7] P. Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991); M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (London: Harvester Press, 1980).

[8] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

[9] Anthias and Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries*.

[10] b. hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

[11] P. H. Collins, *Fighting Words* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

## Intersecting race and gender

Race and gender stand out as primary categories and lenses from which the women in the research tell their stories. Writing about race and gender is a complex theoretical and political task. In order to research the experiences of women, there is a need to explore the intersection of race and gender within this experience. Thinking about intersectionality engages in complexity, rather than working from separate categories of analysis, or using an additive, cumulative approach. McCall suggests the examination of intersectionality, interrogating an anti-categorical approach, and suggesting an intra-categorical approach that engages with complexity.[12] The intra-categorical approach avoids reductionism, and rejects the individualistic nature that is set up by identification with a particular group. This approach further avoids thinking about identity that is based on binaries and oppositional frameworks (i.e. "what is not").

Black feminist thought has created a genre for considering race and gender together.[13] However, this is also complex.[14] Black feminist thinking does not assume speaking for 'all' Black feminists. Similarly, Asian, South Asian, and Aboriginal (Indigenous) women take into account the cultural hybridity and complexity of their experiences and being "marked."[15]

Engaging with intersections of race and gender signifies moving away from binaries. Binary positions are a process of containment,[16] whereby diversity is denied and there is no consideration of permeability or continuity of categories. Jakobsen further suggests that differences, diversity and complexity may invoke an "intertwining" and a "criss-crossing" of contradictory and (even) conflicted relationships.[17] These notions suggest multiple levels and interactions for race and gender.

The women in this study often saw race as the primary marker for identity. For these women in particular, it seemed that their experiences of racism or ethnocentrism were more personally jarring and evocative. Experiences of sexism and male hegemony were often taken for granted. Intersectionality was less visible because women's experiences tended to separate race from gender. The conjoining of race and gender was a contested territory that many women recognized when it was identified for them—but it was not a terrain that they had readily engaged in any systematic way.

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[12] McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality."

[13] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

[14] Anthias and Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries*.

[15] M. J. Alexander and C. T. Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (London: Routledge, 1997); K. Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2000); C. T. Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); T. Minh Ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

[16] J. Jakobsen, *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

[17] Ibid.

**Marginalization and boundaries**

Marginalization is a process that has been defined as a '*disconnection from mainstream social institutions.*'[18] The mainstream largely refers to Eurocentric practices and values when considering issues of race or ethnicity.[19] White suggests that marginalization, powerlessness, and alienation construct and co-produce one another, particularly in an institutionalizing process.[20] Young refers to marginalization and the labour market (workplace).[21] Individuals and groups are excluded from resources and opportunities because of their race, gender, disability and other characteristics. We know that women have been marginalized historically through patriarchy. Marginality is made more complex with the intersection of race. The interaction and co-production of marginalization, powerlessness, and alienation also creates feelings of disconnection. For women in the academy, this disconnection is evidenced through stories of isolation, frustration, and resistance. Marginalization is also a key concept in considering historical marginalization and peoples who are implicated by a history of oppression and colonization. This is particularly salient for Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Within marginality, Yeatman interrogates voice and representation within a framework of the politics of difference.[22] Yeatman takes up concerns regarding white women who historically claimed a universal feminist voice while speaking for others. The politicized authority of speaking for women of colour has made this particularly difficult terrain for feminists. While feminists may intend to voice concerns regarding marginality, the process may further disempower groups of racialized women: who has voice and how do individuals gain the power and attention to speak out. Alcoff and Ellsworth have explored the issue of speaking for others and the implications of empowerment, voice, and participation.[23] One problem with difference is that it is not located in a horizontal space. Difference occurs in divergent ways and means of exclusion. While white women have been subject to the oppression of patriarchy and hegemonic discourses, they have also participated in different levels of oppression and marginalization. These have occurred in unwitting racist, heterosexist and privileged discourses, and implicate the politics of difference for white women.

Marginalization has engaged in a new production of margins whereby an active space is occupied by women in the academy. In this context, there is an emerging perspective of empowering marginalities and creative spaces for access along the edges, or what is sometimes called the borderlands.[24] [H]ooks describes the margin as outside the main body of the whole,

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[18] R. White, "Schooling and Youth Alienation," *Education Links* 54, Winter (1996), 25.

[19] S. Richer, and L. Weir, eds., *Beyond Political Correctness: Toward the Inclusive University* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

[20] White, "Schooling and Youth Alienation."

[21] I. M. Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism and Classism*, ed. M. Adams, W. Blumenfeld, R. Castaneda, H. Hackman, M. Peters, and X. Zuniga (New York: Routledge Press, 2000.

[22] A. Yeatman, "Voice and Representation in the Politics of Difference," in *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, ed. S. Gunew and A. Yeatman (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 1993).

[23] Alcoff, 1991; Ellsworth, 1992.

[24] J. McIlroy and S. Westwood, eds., *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 1993).

and conversely argues '*that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance,*'[25] which is perhaps most aptly characterized in a number of historical social movements (e.g., Marxism, Black feminism). Within these movements, there is potential in the margins to give people freedom to exercise civil action, and revolutionary challenges to institutional systems.

Further, challenging boundaries takes place through action and resistance to dominant discourses and everyday practices. Boundaries are maintained and monitored through gatekeeping at the individual and at the institutional level, especially through institutional discourses.[26] The academy is an institutional body that has developed sophisticated practices of monitoring and keeping the boundaries fixed.[27] These are, in turn, interpreted as normative institutional values and regulations.

In a recent national review, Aboriginal peoples continue to be largely absent from the university professoriate, and women identified as visible minorities, experience a higher rate of unemployment and take home a salary that is roughly 90% of their counterparts.[28] This data is part of the ongoing evidence that race and gender in the academy continue to be a concern;[29] one that has not been addressed in any significant way. The status quo has been maintained by fixed boundaries and gatekeeping.

Gatekeeping of the boundaries is central to the academy. The 'gates' of the academy are not opened to everyone, and once entry is made, there is maintenance of specific domains through establishing boundaries. Women have particularly felt this in promotion, salary, and funding. It is in the academy that gatekeeping occurs in discourses of merit, in the process of rank and tenure, as well as in the policies that are used to regulate behaviour. Boundaries in the academy are kept rigid by institutional members who hold power and use that power for 'keeping out' individuals, or requiring conformity from individuals who are 'allowed in.'[30]

**Relations of ruling**

Smith's work on relations of ruling[31] is a framework that articulates a complex theory of power relations that is embedded in everyday practices, as well as in language. It is through relations of ruling that individuals understand the concepts of power, organization and regulation as a structure to implement the cultural imperatives of the institution. Discourses of power are constructed and conveyed through practices we might perceive as ordinary. Relations of ruling

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[25] b. hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 149.

[26] J. Holmes, "Monitoring Organizational Boundaries: Diverse Discourse Strategies on Gatekeeping," *Journal of Pragmatics* 39 (2007): 1993–2016.

[27] J. J. Thompson, "The Perils of Academic Administration: Gatekeeping, Academic Freedom, and Corporatization," *Reflections* 12, no. 2 (2006): 26–31.

[28] Canadian Association of University Teachers, *CAUT Education Review* 12, no. 1 (2010).

[29] A. Wagner, S. Acker, and K. Mayuzumi, eds., *Whose University Is It Anyway? Power and Privilege on Gendered Terrain* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2008).

[30] C. Crombez, T. Groseclose, and K. Krehbiel, "Gatekeeping," *Journal of Politics* 68, no. 2 (2006); A. M. Johnston, "Co-membership in Immigration Gatekeeping Interviews: Construction, Ratification and Refutation," *Discourse Society* 19, no. 1 (2008).

[31] D. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

are useful in thinking about educational institutions, because they explain how power becomes embedded in actions and documents, even while there is no consciousness of the power that these actions and documents convey.

Knowledge is an important component of the construction of power and the relations of ruling. It is knowledge that tells us what exists and what is left invisible or unspoken. Knowledge is withheld for the purpose of regulating behaviour and practice. Knowledge is also the regulator of how individuals and events are socially constructed. Smith points out how knowledge that comes from the standpoint of women has been denied.[32] Women were traditionally not present in the construction of knowledge, yet were still considered to be a part of the knowledge base. The exclusion of particular forms of knowledge is a critical point when considering the intersection of race and gender, because the complexity of the intersections acknowledges the multiple ways in which exclusion take place.

Smith's notion of 'outside the frame' is helpful in understanding exclusion from the centre and relegation to the periphery or boundaries. Smith suggests the discourse in institutions is part of ruling relations and thus conveys how we see and interpret the world. In essence, this is how we have come to understand the relations of ruling in which it is men who generally have and maintain power; men who have knowledge and construct knowledge. This is where race and gender and relations of ruling are at a tension.

Feminist poststructuralist perspectives on power have been informed by Foucault and his analysis of power as a moving force that occurs in everyday social interactions and becomes internalized in many of us through the agents of the state (also Gramsci). In Foucault's terms power is everywhere, and occurs in all forms of interactions including the "gaze."[33] The all-encompassing power relations are produced and reproduced in the social milieu. This in turn fosters an internalization of the power mechanisms where individuals and institutional members take on an internal surveillance that is related to the panopticon and panopticism.

W.E.B du Bois described a double consciousness that is congruent with internal surveillance, where the Black person was "always looking at oneself through the eyes of others."[34] Through these internalized mechanisms individuals maintain hegemonic relations in white patriarchal institutions, and self regulation takes place without the need for powerful individuals to maintain a presence in everyday interactions. Gramsci also describes a contradictory consciousness that suggests ideological consciousness may be quite different from practice and human agency.[35] This tension may be in conflict, particularly with individuals who occupy multiple sites in the university, whereby they straddle the centres and the margins. Contradictory consciousness is pervasive in the discourses of race, gender and class.

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*; A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

[34] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin, 1989, originally published 1903), 5.

[35] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.

**Methodology**

This research explored the interpretations and experiences of individuals and how they considered these in relation to power, discourses, and the dominant ideologies in the institution. The subject of the research was social justice, including race, diversity, and equity. My interest is in the diverse levels of experiences including the social, personal, institutional, and the relationships and the connections constituted by these different degrees of experience.

The approach to the research was through an interdisciplinary, feminist, narrative qualitative framework. An interdisciplinary approach is particularly relevant for researching women's experiences because these experiences also challenge traditions and boundaries. Qualitative semi-structured interview processes allowed participants to consider elements such as their sense of self, change, and power. An approach that considers self draws from a psychological perspective as well as a feminist one and considers individuals where the personal is social.[36] A feminist approach begins where the participants are located whether this is in struggle or activism. This approach makes connections from private experience to wider social, political perspectives. Studies that engage in a narrative approach to the peoples' lives provides and encourages insight into wider social problems.[37]

Feminist research emphasizes that the researcher's involvement be recognized and integrated into the research. As a feminist, I engaged in a process of understanding how I influenced the research process, and what the issues existed in interpreting individual experiences and the elements of power. While the research was about people's experiences, it was about particular aspects of their experiences, and how they made sense of their stories and experiences. Some individuals chose to tell me their stories in broad exploratory ways. Some participants theorized about the meaning of their lives, where others were content to share their experiences with me.

All of the interviews were taped and transcribed. Through an inductive process, a number of themes were generated. Narrative analysis is the production of stories.[38] These stories may be historical accounts, case studies, or life histories. Themes may be both individual and collective. Although I asked for interpretations from the participants, much of my analysis highlights aspects of the data that were salient and 'interesting' to me. This challenges the notion of a single 'truth', disrupts the process of truth seeking, and suggests multiple forms of analysis and truths.

**Participants and their experiences**

In this paper, six narratives focus on the boundary challenges of racialized women in the academy. These women had worked in the institution for a number of years (from five to more than twenty years) and had occupied multiple spaces of resistance and marginalization. Through their personal, social and institutional stories, they expressed their voices, their challenges, and

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[36] M. Evans, "Reading Lives: How the Personal Might Be Social," *Sociology* 27, no. 1 (1993).

[37] L. Smith, "Biographical Method," in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, ed. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).

[38] D. E. Polkinghorne, "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis," in *Life History and Narrative*, ed. J. A. Hatch and R. Wisniewski (London: The Falmer Press, 1995).

worked within their marginality to create a space of action. Some of them were able to contest the boundaries and challenge modes of surveillance.

Each of the women agreed to the research by volunteering or accepting an invitation to participate. Some came forward based on their own interest. Some of them were suggested to me by other participants. All of the women came to the research with stories and experiences they were willing to share, and that they thought were important for others to hear. I suggest that all of the women were committed to a broad goal of anti-racism, decolonization, and social justice. This means that their self-selection into the process gave them a framework from which they spoke.

Most of the women did not explicitly talk about the intersection of race and gender. Rather they talked about these separately. For many, race, ethnicity, or culture was their primary category of analysis. Three of the women were Aboriginal, two were Black, and one was South Asian—an immigrant from India.

The narratives reflect on the ways in which boundaries are experienced, and how boundaries are challenged. In some cases, these are more personal experiences of vulnerability and silencing. In other examples, the responses were more questioning and critical. The participants in the study had various roles in their universities: instructor, student, student advisor,  program coordinator, manager, counsellor, and a woman who transitioned into the role of  a senior administrator. A number of the narratives explore how individuals were socially constructed by institution, and how the institution motivated a need to be seen authentically, rather than be seen as an 'idea' within the university.

The participant interviews are synthesized into three common themes: containment, acts of resistance and speaking out, and boundary challenges. Each of the themes resonated for the participants in complex and different ways. These themes are a construction of the researcher, and as such it is acknowledged that the participants did not necessarily describe their experiences in these specific ways.

*Containment*
Containment is a process of gatekeeping, the regulation of power, and institutional maintenance of social order. Containment is discussed by Gramsci, whereby politics and power enter everyday life.[39] Consistent with Foucault and Smith,[40] containment implicates institutional relations and discourses. Gramsci also argued that there is a balance between coercion and consent, and between the political and ideological.[41] These inter-relationships, and the balance between coercion and consent, are features of academic life in the university. Forms of coercion and consent are embodied in institutional work, such as meetings, committees, program planning, and negotiated discourses between management and faculty. Thus, containment occurs at individual, group, and institutional levels. A discourse that often accompanies containment is

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[39] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.
[40] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*; Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic*.
[41] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.

the discourse of dismissal, whereby administrators (typically) trivialize concerns brought to them, and interpret complaints as over-reactions and paranoia.

For Susan,[42] containment occurred at an individual level, for example by being excluded from receiving memos and administrative information. Susan discussed her experience, where a decision was made to exclude her from a distribution list so that some people received the information, but she did not. Susan knew this was a deliberate decision because she questioned someone about the distribution list, and was told that she did not need to receive the information. This was not an isolated example, but rather a pattern of group behaviour and decision-making. Susan was also "told" not to solicit support for various activities; she was told what she needed to know. However, containment could have negative effects on the university. Susan talked about a program that the university established in partnership with another entity. The program was going to involve Aboriginal students. Susan was unable to express her concerns because the university would not discuss the program with her. However, " *the program ... was a, a, -- pretty much a disaster. But, okay, they didn't consult with me*."

Dale suggested that gender barriers continue to exist in areas of study and that this is a barrier for both students and for faculty. Gender is still "an issue around promotion and tenure". She posited that there was less concern for social justice issues, and this was "*in part [because] more people are just struggling to survive*". Dale further discussed the "*reification of qualities and characteristics*" that would make a good faculty member in the university. A good researcher, for example, would bring in "'*x' amount of dollars*", and the value of the faculty researchers became dependent on these dollars, as well as numbers of publications. This seemed contradictory: "*how do you know that person is going to be a good university ... citizen, a good professor?*" Dale suggested that surviving in the academy requires compliance to the "*community rules, language and culture". This community is uni-cultural; it is the uni-versity,*" in spite of explicitly acknowledging Aboriginal peoples. Similarly, Shawna indicated that there was a strong attitude of "there's nothing wrong here".

Susan and Shawna spoke about the geographic containment. Shawna's office was on the edge of campus and 'not easy to find'. Susan's office was one of the smallest in her area and she could not have more than one other person in the office meeting with her. The political nature of office space is played out on the university campus, and these are forms of marginalization. Susan and Shawna talked about their frustrations. Susan, in particular, in relation to concerns that were "*echoed by my counterparts in the province. And, of - of not being taken seriously*."

Susan and Dale talked about the history of colonization, the struggle to justify Aboriginal specific programs, and the financial constraints placed upon Aboriginal programs, in spite of receiving external funding. There was a sense of the continuing colonizing discourses within the university. Susan's examples are ones of silencing and exclusion, while Dale's examples speak to the culture of the university, through imperial eyes. These stories are frequently heard among racialized women.

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[42] All names used are pseudonyms.

Workload was suggested as a device for containment. Anne talked about the full time teaching load and the expectation to take on additional duties that were important to the institution and to her. Students came to her with concerns about race and gender in both an official and unofficial capacity. The university appointed Anne to the role of part-time advisor and reduced her teaching load. However, this strategy had the effect of working in two positions and contributed to feelings of fragmentation. The university could be seen as genuinely working to address issues by having an advisor. However, under-resourced positions may be indicative of a lack of commitment from the university.

Gena talked about the sense of struggle she felt at the university, that she suffered " *from internalized oppression*"—a kind of internal containment. She suggested that there were many times where she was on the verge of giving up. Her self–questioning led her to ask "*what's the point*". On the other hand, Gena stayed in the university because she believed it would not necessarily " *be better anywhere else*". As well, Gena had made choices. To further her career, she would have to relocate to another institution, and she was unwilling to uproot her family for a career move: "*what would that do to my children?"* This was the reality of a woman who has a family and the way society and the academy also contains women's career choices.

### *Acts of resistance, speaking out*

Acts of resistance are taken up by women generally, and by racialized women in particular by actions and by speaking out. Examples of resistance occur with Aboriginal and Black women where they do not accept the ways in which they have been constructed through stereotypes and cultural images. Education has been culturally biased and racist, with depictions of Aboriginal peoples as savages and spiritual at the same time.[43] Black women and women from India and Asia have been exoticized as well as demonized. All racialized women live with stereotypes or so-called truths about their essentialize 'nature'. These stereotyped forms are also consistent with images of women generally where women are depicted in opposing categories.

Resistance movements have taken place in labour conflicts, women's movements, and challenges to racist legislation (e.g. Chinese Exclusion Act in Canada; segregation laws in the USA). Aboriginal peoples have keenly felt the effects of silencing and have moved forward in their taking a place where they can have a voice.[44] Resistance to the ways in which women are depicted in the academy and in education is taken up in multiple ways.

Collins uses the phrase '*coming to voice'* to engage in the definitions of power and knowledge in Black feminist thought.[45] Coming to voice acknowledges that many racialized women and minorities have been silenced by the power of institutional culture and discourses. The concept of voice extends to ways of knowing and speaking out by a number of marginalized

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[43] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*.

[44] Ibid.; D. A. Murray, "Bridging the Gap: I Will Not Remain Silenced," in *Whose University Is It Anyway? Power and Privilege on Gendered Terrain*, ed. A. Wagner, S. Acker, and K. Mayuzumi, 104–114 (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2008).

[45] Collins, *Fighting Words*.

groups. Collins' description of voice is used to highlight the issue of speaking for oneself and the ability to declare that there are injustices and problems within the institution.

Susan talked about an evaluation meeting with her Dean, where he dismissed some of her input. At first Susan responded apologetically, then she rallied and expressed her frustration to him, that she had a right to express what she did not accept, what she did not like. She went on to take her concerns to appeal. In that appeal she had documented examples of "everything" that concerned her. Here, Susan regains her voice and speaks out.

Susan further challenged containment, by obtaining the information that she was told she "*did not need*", and acting on this information. This example was about attending a conference. The conference was an important academic and supportive event for Aboriginal educators. Susan said that administration was displeased by her attendance. For Susan, her actions were a way of resisting the institutional discourse, what Collins (1998) refers to as the *"legitimacy of public transcripts."*[46]

Susan's experiences of silencing began in residential school in Canada; this was a place where Aboriginal children could not speak their native languages; this was a process of assimilation. For Susan, speaking out and acts of resistance are integral to creating a future for the next generation. Naming injustices[47] and identifying strategies and a way forward are part of this process.

Shawna's ability to speak out was based on someone listening. This meant creating spaces and finding audience for sharing stories and goals. Shawna was participating Equity Committee—a place where goals and objectives were shared. The forming of the committee itself was a beginning form of resistance, and naming what issues existed on campus. "*I believe that it's important to have an equity policy in place to protect the people that work here, but also to protect our students.*"

Anne theorized about the relationships between feminist and anti-racists as a dichotomy: "*While feminists might emphasize women, and people in anti-racism might say, well fight for, you know, we don't fight together*". Anne was concerned that there is not enough working together as "*allies*". Anne organized students and faculty following a racist incident directed at a Black student. The administration had made a decision to give the White student (perpetrator) community work for a few hours a week as a penalty for his racist remarks. There was a campaign of emails, finally resulting in a rally and lobbying for some institutional responses to racism.

Deepa's story explored how she was perceived as a 'cultural expert' by colleagues. Many individuals went to Deepa asking her advice about any racial or cultural matter. Contesting her role as a cultural expert, she had to respond that she did not know "*everything*" about culture, and she further suggested that faculty and staff could work on their own cultural and racial awareness.

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[46] Ibid., 50.
[47] P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970); hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*.

Gena commented on the institutional structure and administrative attitudes: "*Well it's like the fine, fine quote from the president of ____ , who says, 'We don't have any sexual harassment, 'cause if we did I'd know about it'*". The importance of the institutional culture, what is seen and what is not seen is an integral part of how we take up resistance and voice. There is a need to "name" actions, and resist interpretations stated by people in power. By taking action, racialized women can break the silence;[48] they can challenge university discourses, and take on a voice and authority of their own.

### *Boundary challenges*

The concept of challenging boundaries, margins and centres is integral to feminist, anti-racist, and social justice work. Challenging boundaries raises questions of equity where marginalized spaces have been deeply embedded and institutionalized in universities. Boundary maintenance is facilitated and monitored by individuals in power, through both 'talk' and institutional structures.[49]

Gena talked about the replication phenomena within institutions. She described a caricature: "*where a person is being interviewed by a person who's dressed and looks very much the same, and on behind is the picture of someone who looks exactly the same as the interviewer who has on the wall behind that person a picture of the person who looks [very much the same] and the character is getting ready to shake his hand and says, 'Thank you, I think you'll fit in'*"
This pattern was challenged by Gena, but it was a difficult institutional challenge, where persons in power are content to replicate themselves in administration and in the ranks of senior faculty. Gena herself challenged the replication model, by asking questions and requiring rationale and explanations for hiring decisions. Her actions went beyond union and faculty association discussions, she challenged the administration on how hiring decisions were made. The union and faculty association were groups that were also viewed as immersed in their own institutional culture and embedded in normative ways of behaving.

Dale talked about the "*political will of the institution*". Even when there are equity policies, " *the world is an unequal place and what counts as knowledge is the reflection of Western authority, Western power*". To continuously challenge the institutional norms and boundaries leads to fatigue. Within institutional faculties, there is variation from department to department, from individual to individual. Dale was focused on "*attracting, recruiting, and sustaining and mentoring Aboriginal faculty, all of those things are extremely difficult*". However, the boundaries continue to be challenged, the search goes on for Aboriginal faculty.

For Shawna, addressing student needs became a primary focus of her work—working with students to become more successful would challenge the institutional norms of Aboriginal failure. Shawna suggested that Services to students must become more culturally sensitive and less ethnocentric. By asking for these services, a 'gentle' challenge was made to institutional culture.

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[48] Collins, *Fighting Words.*
[49] Holmes, "Monitoring Organizational Boundaries"; Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic*.

Shawna, Anne, and Susan talked about equity and diversity positions and policy as foundational to the work. A faculty or staff role would facilitate some energy and even some energy for "*fighting*". At the same time, these discussions were contentious and caused fracturing to potential action. Anne talked about the status of women group within the union. Traditionally this group has been "White", and therefore the power structure within this group should also be challenged. Anne asked why this group would not be called an "equity group"—and while she challenged the group, her voice was not largely heard.

Deepa suggested a successful strategy where challenges occurred in "*workshops on racism in the classroom*" This was a way of identifying incidents and events, while developing strategies "*on what to do*". Deepa challenged faculty and staff to take on cultural and racial issues, and to take responsibility for learning themselves.

Gena described the problem with gatekeepers who "*interpret on the behalf of an entire organization. And won't even check it out, just know*". Gena's suggests that a strategy to address people in positions of power because they have the responsibility for the issues "t*he issues, are often lost, because the people who have the greatest responsibility don't suffer*". Thus, people in power must have an emotional commitment to the issues as well as a political one. Gena and Deepa worked with senior administrators to facilitate discussions regarding change, gatekeeping and the boundaries.

**Concluding comments**

This paper has examined the experiences of participants where they were compelled to challenge specific practices, while considering broader institutional issues. Some individuals worked with allies with each other in their universities. This was a way of exercising resistance to the institutional norms and prevailing practices. Resistance to institutional culture also occurred at individual level where people refused to participate or conform. Resistance can be characterized as the disruption to the institutional practices. While universities may not embrace new norms, they are affected by the deconstruction of traditional norms and discourses.

Many individuals and groups have avoided the issues of race, gender, and class in universities.[50] Yet individuals such as Susan, Gena, Dale, Deepa, Shawna, and Anne continue to speak out to challenge silencing, exclusion, and injustices. By speaking out, dominant institutional discourses are challenged. There were actions of 'taking on' administrators by pointing out where they had actively or passively allowed normalized, exclusionary practices to continue.

Susan said she was in a transformative stage, on a "*cusp*" of change. This image of the "*cusp*" is salient to this paper. Boundary challenges take up the place that is on the edge; this is the transitional space that we are engaged in to make the boundaries more permeable and to create different academic and social spaces in the university. The intersection of race and gender,

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[50] R. Ng, "Sexism and Racism in the University: Analyzing a Personal Experience," *Canadian Woman Studies* 14, no. 2 (1994).

and dialectic of silence and voice produces complex relationships across individuals and within individual internal struggles.

Challenging boundaries frequently meant risking censure where there was, in fact, a desire for support. The margins gained some credibility as a space for action and freedom.[51] Equity committees and other committees were frequently marginalized, but they provided the alternative function of alliance building. Challenging institutional practices of power and gatekeeping requires attention at the individual and collective level. Freire and hooks suggest 'naming' as a step to empowerment and as a way of challenging power.[52] Resisting the dominant institutional discourses is also a strategy for change. Speaking out and demonstrating resistance are actions with purpose, actions with knowledge, and therefore forms of agency.[53]

The women in this study indicated the need to consider individual and collective experiences, and the tensions surrounding institutional ideology, what is normalized and what is valued. Possibilities for change within universities are contingent on venues to hear what individuals have to say. Many participants talked about the importance of the collective group, where listening and 'naming' took place. Power and resistance is resonant of Foucault, where he views resistance as effective when it is directed towards specific methods of power rather than at the general social body of power.[54] Finding voice and coming to voice are part of the specific action where "*I will not remain silenced.*"[55]

Women at the boundaries are in a place to play a role in changing the university. Challenging boundaries is linked to having voice, to having people who will listen and who recognize the speakers as credible. Women at the boundaries may work with others to participate in change processes as allies. Challenging boundaries takes place where there is an explicit examination of rules, regulations and positions of power.

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[51] hooks, 1990.

[52] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; hooks, *Yearning*.

[53] A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[54] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*.

[55] Murray, "Bridging the Gap," 104.

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