

Two-Spirit Stories: Learning to navigate multiple forms of oppression and establishing a
practice of Wahkowntwin

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education
In the Department of Educational Foundations
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By

LINDSAY R. JIMMY

© Copyright Lindsay R. Jimmy, 2019. All rights reserved.

PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by Head of the Department of Educational Foundations or the Dean of the College of Education. It is understood that any copying of publications or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without written permission. It is also understood that due to recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of material in my thesis.

Request for permission to copy or to make other use of material in this thesis in part or in whole should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of Educational Foundations

28 Campus Drive
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0X1
Canada

OR

Dean
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
University of Saskatchewan
116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5C9
Canada

ABSTRACT

In 2011, Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE) published the following study, *Every Class in Every school*¹. The study, first of its kind in Canada focused on gathering high school students' perspectives around homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. One of the recommendations from this study was that future research needed to be done around the experiences of Two-spirit youth (*Every Class in Every school*, 2011). This recommendation brings attention to the unique experiences that Two-spirit youth and/or Queer Indigenous people may have, particularly around their interconnected identities (Wilson, 1996). It has been expressed that if the only forms of oppression that go noticed are singular we soon only begin to represent those who are fortunate enough to possess a simple and uncomplicated oppression (Kumashiro, 2002). This thesis focused on four Indigenous undergraduate and one Indigenous graduate students' narratives around how they navigate their multiple forms of oppression while attending universities in Saskatchewan.

The Cree concept of *Wahkohtowin*² shaped the mixed qualitative nature of this study. A combination of an Indigenous research methodology with an anti-oppressive lens, and a voice-centered relational method of data gathering and analysis were used. The perceptions that participants shared in this research were heavily influenced by their varied relationships with their families, partners, teachers, Elders, and communities. A key finding that emerged was the notion of teaching others through their lived experiences and this was perceived to be an advantage of navigating homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and racism. Implications for enhancing education and policy are

¹ Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliot, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schacter, K. Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report. Toronto. ON: Egale Canada Human rights Trust. Retrieved from: <http://egale.ca/>

² Defined as *all my relations*, a concept common to many Indigenous cultures. The emphasis on the extended family was fostered through the creation of physical and spiritual relationships between people (living, ancestral, those still to come), land, the spirit world, and creatures with whom they shared physical space. Everyone therefore, was taught that who they were as individuals could only be understood in relation to their family relationships and which, in turn, reflected relationships to the community, environment, sacred world, and outsiders. As used in Macdougall, B. (2006). *Wahkohtowin: Family and cultural identity in northwestern Saskatchewan communities. The Canadian Historical Review*, 87(3), 431-462.

provided. Include themes that educators can explore when teaching Two-spirit issues. Highlight the ways policies can change to reflect a safe and nurturing environment for Two-spirit students in levels of education that are not exclusive to post-secondary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend thanks to all beings, the land, and the creator for the provisions and opportunities in life that helped me pursue my dream of graduate school. Thanks to my supervisor Dr. Alex Wilson and committee member Dr. Stephanie Martin for your guidance, patience and support in this lengthy but life changing process of writing a thesis. Educational Foundations graduate chair, Dianne Miller for pushing me. Dr. Chantal Fiola for sharing your insights and questions was my external examiner. I also acknowledge the participants of my study: *Billie, Jack, Timothy, North, and Calico* for your involvement and your encouraging stories which made it possible to complete my thesis. I appreciate the mentorship of my professors in the College of Education for offering advice and healing when I needed it: Marie Battiste, Verna St. Denis, Maggie Kovach, Carmen Gillies, Sheelah Mclean, and Isobel Findaly.

I acknowledge the support I received from my colleagues and friends in the Department of Educational Foundations: Annie Battiste, Myrna Briggs, and Laura Negraeff. I thank the Onion Lake post-secondary department for the funding that allowed me to pursue this thesis work. Thank you to Sakewew high school students and staff for allowing me to work in your school and take part in facilitating the Gay-Straight Alliance group. Your teachings and stories will forever be cherished. I extend a thank you to my colleague Reid Stewart who pushed me to forge forward with the research. Thank you to my parents Albert and Sharon for encouraging me to never give up on my educational journey and the support of listening to me when I could not see myself finishing this thesis. Thank you to my siblings for helping me balance work and graduate school: Sheldon, Lavern, Ashely, Misty, DJ, and Dawn there are many memories that taught me the values of family while completing this thesis. I acknowledge my friends: Jennifer Rabbitskin, Danielle Jeancart, Kesha Laroque, Kevin Dreaver, and Bonnie Mausakapoe for our wonderful conversations about life, healing, and the process of completing this thesis. Most of all believing in me. I appreciate the support of my colleagues and new work family at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies.

Ninaskomin to all of you!

Dedication

This study is dedicated to the Two-Spirit youth who I have worked with and who inspired me to carry out this research project. Some of you I have kept in touch with and others will always be in my spirit. It's my hope that these words offer healing, as many Indigenous knowledge keepers have shared with me, our stories are medicine.

I dedicate this work also to my grandparents who have come before me and enriched my life with memories, may this work honor your relations and those to come. To all my teachers out there, I hope this work offers some insight into how your work pushed me to create a project that is meaningful to me and so many Two-Spirit youth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE	I
ABSTRACT	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
DEDICATION	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
PROLOGUE	1
My COMING IN JOURNEY: MUSHUM VISITS ME	4
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	9
SITUATING THE RESEARCH IN LIVED EXPERIENCE	9
THE RESEARCH QUESTION:.....	9
CONTEXT & PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY.....	10
SIGNIFICANCE TO KNOWLEDGE.....	12
THESIS OVERVIEW.....	13
SETTING THE TERMS.....	14
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
INTRODUCTION.....	16
UNDERSTANDING THE COLONIAL AND MOVING BEYOND THE ‘BERDACHE’	18
EXPERIENCES WITH MULTIPLE FORMS OF OPPRESSION	22
MEANINGS OF TWO-SPIRIT	26
POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF INTERCONNECTED IDENTITIES AND ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICES	30
TWO-SPIRIT IDENTITY THEORY	33
IMPLICATIONS OF THE LITERATURE FOR THIS STUDY	36
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS	37
INTRODUCTION.....	37
INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY	38
DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....	40
PARTICIPANTS.....	42
METHODS OF ANALYSIS.....	43
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	46

CHAPTER FOUR: SITUATING THE PARTICIPANTS IN RELATIONSHIP	48
INTRODUCTION	48
BILLIE	48
TIMOTHY	51
BACKGROUND.....	51
NORTH.....	52
BACKGROUND.....	52
JACK.....	54
CHAPTER FIVE: AFFIRMING THEIR IDENTITIES: WEAVING THE COLLECTIVE VOICES OF THE PARTICIPANTS.....	56
INTRODUCTION	56
PARTICIPANTS PAST EXPERIENCES.....	56
CURRENT EXPERIENCES	70
FUTURE EXPERIENCES FOR TWO-SPIRIT YOUTH.....	79
CHAPTER SIX: THEMES AND DISSCUSSION.....	90
INTRODUCTION	90
BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN SAFE SPACES.....	90
PERCEIVED STRENGTHS OF NAVIGATING MULTIPLE FORMS OF OPPRESSION	93
GIVING BACK AS A FORM OF RESILIENCE	96
DISCUSSION.....	98
REFERENCES.....	106
APPENDIX A – CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS.....	111
APPENDIX B – CONSENT FORM.....	112
APPENDIX C – RESEARCH TOOL	115
APPENDIX D – TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM.....	117

Prologue

Situating oneself in research is part of an Indigenous research framework, it is preparatory work that helps the researcher become self-aware, accountable, and helps others locate the researchers' perspectives (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). What assisted me through this journey was grounding my work in an Indigenous paradigm. Wilson (2001) describes an Indigenous paradigm as having a fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. A helpful question that a person can ask themselves is, "How am I fulfilling my role in this relationship" as opposed to drawing from western paradigms that seek the validity and reliability of research. (Wilson, 2001, pg. 177). Dear reader, I conduct this research through the lens of a *Nehiyaw* (Plains Cree) person who also identifies as a Two-spirited man. My view of the trails and triumphs I have had in my life are shaped by the Cree worldview of *Wahkohtowin*³. It is this same view that I also build this research upon.

I was raised on the Onion Lake Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. I come from a large family of seven and I fall in line as the second youngest, the youngest boy in the family. Both of my parents are also *Nehiyawak* (plains Cree), my Dad's Family is from Onion Lake and his mother is originally from that reserve. Her maiden name is Whitstone, she was known as a crafted seamstress and often made my father and his siblings' clothes as they could not afford brand new clothes. My paternal grandfather grew up on the Thunderchild First Nation and is part of a long history of "Jimmy's" in that area; he moved to Onion Lake when he married my grandmother, which was rare at the time as it was often the women who had to relocate to their husbands' home reserve. My Mushum enjoyed hunting and trapping and to this day my Dad often says that he was most at ease

¹ Defined as *all my relations*, a concept common to many Indigenous cultures. The emphasis on the extended family was fostered through the creation of physical and spiritual relationships between people (living, ancestral, those still to come), land, the spirit world, and creatures with whom they shared physical space. Everyone therefore, was taught that who they were as individuals could only be understood in relation to their family relationships and which, in turn, reflected relationships to the community, environment, sacred world, and outsiders. As used in Macdougall, B. (2006). *Wahkohtowin: Family and cultural identity in northwestern Saskatchewan communities. The Canadian Historical Review*, 87(3), 431-462.

when he was out on the land with his parents and his siblings. My father still spends most of his time outdoors. He told me once that being out on the land reminds him of his parents; it is where he feels most connected. As I am getting older, I am finding that I am enjoying spending time out on the land with my Father; it has helped us connect in ways that has mended our relationship.

My mother is originally from the Mosquito grizzly head band and is the oldest of her biological siblings. My mother was not raised by her biological parents for all of her childhood. My Mom's aunt, on her maternal side had adopted her and two of her siblings, who are the grandparents I grew up knowing, Henry and Terresa Beaudry. Both of them were active pow-wow dancers and served on many community initiatives as keepers of knowledge. One of them was on the Elders committee when Wanuskewin Heritage Park was created. When I moved to Saskatoon for post-secondary schooling, this was one of my first part-time jobs in the city.

I remember during our first orientation to the park as visitor guides, walking the trails with the group and our manager familiarizing us with the history of the place and what things to point out to the visitors. As we were approaching one of our last sites, the medicine wheel site, I recall feeling an overwhelming sense of emotion; it felt like a space opened up inside me and I was being filled with feelings of connectedness. I remembered my grandparents and wondered what those conversations must have been like when helping to get this place running. I felt honored to have been working at Wanuskewin and walking in a place that gave me a sense of rootedness to my family. I knew that working at Wanuskewin would be good for me. I like to think that moments like this are special in that they remind me of who I am. In her book, *Anishinaabe*, researcher Kathleen E. Absolon (2011) mentions that to remember who we are and where we come from is an act of resistance. Moments like the one at Wanuskewin reminded me that although we cannot physically see our loved ones, there are times where we are still able to connect with them in spirit. I have found a great deal of support in the work of Indigenous scholars and in my graduate courses. As I conducted my research and found familiarity in the work, of Indigenous scholars who have conceptualized an Indigenous research methodology with notions of relationality, subjective knowledge, collective knowledge, and accountability (Ermine, 2000; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 1996, 2007

Wilson, 2009), I feel they walk with me on this journey along with my ancestors. Their notions of Indigenous research are varied and fluid; neither one insists that there is one way of doing Indigenous research as there is not one distinct way to be an Indigenous person. However, there are common threads that are weaved together that support each others' work and help newcomer researchers, like myself, navigate our way through our own research and academic journeys. I continue to navigate my way through my research, I remind myself that I am not claiming to be an expert on my topic or on how to do Indigenous research, but rather I am relating with concepts, ideas, stories, and people the best way I know how. This journey for me has been about restoring relationships with myself, my family and my community and creating relationships within academia. It has been a process to learn to trust my instincts and other forms of knowledge that are not western forms like dreams, intuition, memory, and emotion. I once heard somewhere that emotions are another way of relating to our world, another way of thinking and knowing. We do not need to be embarrassed when we express are emotions.

Indigenous researcher Cora Webber-Pillwax (2006) suggests that research should give back to our communities in some way and help mend relationships. I am in agreement with Pillwax as I feel that "giving-back" is what I find foundational to Indigenous people's way of life. My motivations for doing this research are similar to why I shared some aspects of my family; these people were my first experiences with love and compassion. However, as someone who struggled with his sexuality there was a time when I isolated myself for fear that I would not receive the same love and compassion I knew as a child. As I continue through this journey I remind myself of how far I have come in accepting who I am and remind myself that relationships and people are what matter in life. I have had to continually ask myself how the research I am doing fosters relationships and helps people connect with others. How will the research that I do help people connect or understand the Two-spirit experience? More importantly, these questions have impacted how I can establish a practice of *Wahkohtowin* within research.

My Coming In Journey: Mushum Visits Me

Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson (2008) notes that at the foundation of a research project is the heart and mind of the researcher, and “checking your heart” is necessary when identifying your motives for doing research. I appreciate Wilson’s words and the importance of re-storying a relationship with oneself. As I reflect upon what my motives are for choosing this research topic my heart is brought to a moment in my life where I felt that I knowingly chose to live my life honestly, openly, and accepted my sexual orientation as a gay male as a part of who I am. In western terminology, this process is called “coming-out,” however, Indigenous people around the world have distinct concepts and terms that support gender and sexual variances in their communities (Alaers 2010; Driskill, 2004, 2010; Wilson, 1996, 2007). For instance, Wilson (1996; 2007) has suggested that when Indigenous people assert a Two-spirit identity they “come-in” to their communities rather than come out. Reading this made sense to me, as it felt relational and connections with people are foundational to how we come to know ourselves. I was first introduced to Wilson’s work in my first year of an Educational Foundations course while an undergrad in the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) at the University of Saskatchewan. For me this was a formative experience that not only reinforced my identity but it also kindled something within me. Reading Wilson’s work gave me my “aha” moment; I wanted to read and learn everything that was out there around being “Two-spirited.” Something had shifted and changed for me, I was beginning to make sense of the negative experiences I had because of being gay and First Nation. I was able to articulate these experiences as racism, homophobia, and heterosexism and what was interesting to me was that these personal experiences were all interconnected forms of violence/oppression, all operating to uphold and Eurocentric system (Battiste, 2013; Settee 2013). Being exposed to Wilson’s work gave me an opportunity to share with my fellow classmates, who were going to be teachers, about the ways they could be inclusive teachers who made their classrooms safer for Two-spirit or Queer Indigenous students. I was able to share my experiences growing up on a First Nation reserve and being gay, my struggles with my culture, moving to the city, and experiencing racism, and homophobia in my community and family. These opportunities

moved me from victim to someone who was able to offer meaningful advice to others in hopes that they will not reproduce the violence and oppression that I and other Two-spirit people have experienced. This is what Indigenous research is about healing ourselves and healing our communities, all of which should lead us to “Miyo-pimatisiwin” or the “good life” (Hart 2002; Settee 2013).

I conducted this research with the intention of learning about who I am as a Two-spirit person, and what that means. I also view this journey as healing myself, connecting with my community and exploring how other Two-spirit and/or Queer Indigenous university students think about their identities, as they navigate their lives and reassert their presence.

One of my first learning opportunities about what it meant to be Two-spirited was in an Educational foundations class in my Bachelor of Education (BEd) program. Our class was introduced to an article written by scholar and activist, Alex Wilson (1996) from Opaskwayak Cree Nation. The article offered me a place to start coming home. Wilson expressed this as a process of *coming in*: “We are present when we have taken back that which was stripped from us. When we are present, we have recovered ourselves from the terrible violence of racism and homophobia” (p. 38). It is about being able to reclaim our Two-spiritedness and when we are able to do this we indict the oppression that unsettled us. How I have conceptualized this is that *coming in* is a restorative process that frees us from the pain, the violence left by colonial systems and thinking. In a way, we are re-centered towards a practice of Wahkowtowin, by knowing we have a place in our communities. This is what *coming-in* has meant for me. I recall reading Wilson’s work and feeling that I was free, that being able to realize that my community was not to blame for the homophobia but that there was something much larger operating within our communities, which contributed to the violence I experienced as teenager in my community. It was the beginning of my journey towards repairing my relationship with my community and my family. What follows is my coming in story; a process that reflects why I have come to dedicate my academic journey to exploring how Two-spirit people conceptualize their identities

The following story is an interpretation of a dream I used to have when I was struggling with my sexuality as a young adult. Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) mentions that

dreams are a form of knowledge, “Coming to know and use indigenous stories through story work requires an intimate knowing that brings together heart, mind, body, and spirit” (p. 141). What is revealed through our dreams is knowledge that comes from a spiritual space - this type of knowledge is holistic. My dream involved two of my family members, my younger sister and my late Mushum (grandfather) on my Dad’s side. My Mushum never really said much but he nurtured us with his actions and he looked after my younger sister and I after school while our parents were still at work. My Mushum is now in the spirit world, occasionally I have dreams of him. I learned First Nations people believe that some dreams hold knowledge and that whenever you dream of someone who has passed on, that is a very special visit and they have something they want you to know. The dream that I use to have was reoccurring dream and would always stop at a certain point. The dream would usually start with my sister and me getting off our school bus and walking to our house:

As we are walking I can hear some rustling in the trees, I try to ignore it but the rustling gets louder and faster. My sister starts to hear the noises and gets panicky I try to tell her it is nothing. Then my instincts tell me to look behind me and a black bear comes out from some trees and starts running towards us. My sister and I start running as fast as we can to our house and I can hear the bear running behind us. We manage to out run the bear and get inside the house and as we are locking the door I can feel the weight of the door being pushed on the other side by the bear. I can hear the bear clawing and scraping the door and his weight manages to open the door enough that I can see daylight coming in from the side of the frame.

The dream always stopped there just as I was keeping the bear from coming inside. For a couple months, I would have this dream and never told anyone, I didn’t really think anything of it. At the time, I was so concerned about my sexuality and if I should come out and tell someone that; I was gay. These thoughts were not new in high school; I knew I was gay but did what I could to ‘fly under the radar’ and keep myself safe. When the dreams started happening I had just graduated high school, was away from home for the first time, and was in my first year of college. It was a time of firsts for me and I was uncertain about who I wanted to disclose my sexuality to. I felt alone and that

no one really understood what I was struggling with. I felt as though I was going to live this lie for the rest of my life and have to keep hiding who I was from family and friends. I felt trapped and that I would never be able to be fully present in who I was. I could not exist.

During one of my visits home for the weekend, I had the dream of the bear again, the dream followed the same pattern but this time the bear managed to push the door open: *As the door flew, open, my sister and I ran to the top of the stair well and the bear started walking upright very slow and cautiously. My heart was pounding, the bear started to talk it said 'do not' be afraid, I'm a friend, come closer. 'I give into the bear's request because I was amazed that this bear was talking, so I slowly approach the bear. I am standing in front of the bear it stood up higher as if it was trying to reach the sky with his nose; its figure starts to change. The bear transforms and suddenly I can make out a familiar face, standing in front of me is my Mushum, he hugs me tight and starts singing in Cree. I cannot recall the exact words he was saying but the melody of his tone and humming was very similar to a song he would hum when I was younger.*

I woke up from this dream feeling happy and at this time in my life, happy days were few. For some reason, I just knew that I was going to tell my younger sister that I was gay; it felt safe to do so. That evening my sister and I were watching a movie on the couch and eating junk food. I cannot recall the movie because the whole time I was so nervous about what I was going to say. Finally, I just blurted out “Hey, I need to tell you something?” She said, “What is it?” I took a deep breathe recalled the dream I had the previous night and said to her, “I’m gay.” Her eyes locked onto mine and I knew she could see how vulnerable and scared I was, but I then saw love in her eyes. We hugged and cried together, she said, “I’m so happy you were able to share this with me. I love you and I’m always going to be here for you, no matter what.” In this moment I began to be present in who I was and as Wilson (2007) notes, “Come-in” to my identity as a Cree person who is also gay.

As I write this introduction, I am aware of how my knowledge and experiences connect to my work. My research focus is about unpacking how Two-spirit people are

positioned within a white, heteronormative-settler state, and the impacts it has on Two-spirit people and their communities. In addition, I want to learn how other Two-spirit people have found ways to “come-in” to their identities while transgressing boundaries of colonial violence. I feel that knowledge of our experiences and how we perceive our identities can help our communities heal by creating spaces for Two-spirit people to feel like they are important to their communities or have the potential to build new ones. As such, I echo the Cree concept of *Wahkowitzin*⁴ in this research, as many Indigenous scholars who have expressed an Indigenous worldview informs how we as Indigenous people sustain our relationships with all beings. We must be mindful of our actions and how they can enhance the wellbeing of our communities.

Moving forward with this research it is important to me that I continuously remind myself that the work I do should foster healthy relationships for our communities by making visible the experiences and perspectives of Queer Indigenous/Two-spirit people. The knowledge shared in this research is not mine to own. I am honored to have met each of the participants’ who have their own unique journeys and have much to teach us about the complexities of Two-spirit experience. Their stories are reminders of how important it is to listen with a good heart and to share their stories with honor. I am forever changed by this responsibility.

² Defined as *all my relations*, a concept common to many Indigenous cultures. The emphasis on the extended family was fostered through the creation of physical and spiritual relationships between people (living, ancestral, those still to come), land, the spirit world, and creatures with whom they shared physical space. Everyone therefore, was taught that who they were as individuals could only be understood in relation to their family relationships and which, in turn, reflected relationships to the community, environment, sacred world, and outsiders. As used in Macdougall, B. (2006). *Wahkohtowin: Family and cultural identity in northwestern Saskatchewan communities. The Canadian Historical Review*, 87(3), 431-462.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2011, EGALE published its study, *Every Class in Every school*⁵. The study, first of its kind in Canada focused on gathering high school students' perspectives around homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. One of the recommendations from this study was that future research needed to be done around the experiences of Two-spirit youth (*Every Class in Every school*, 2011). This recommendation brings attention to the unique experiences that Two-spirit individuals may have, particularly around their interconnected identities (Wilson, 1996).

Situating The Research in Lived Experience

It has been expressed that people who experience multiple forms of oppression often face conflict with their identities (Wilson, 1996; Ryan, Brotman, Bardman, & Lee, 2008). The importance of exploring interconnected identities and various forms of oppression cannot be overlooked. If the only forms oppression that go noticed are singular we soon only begin to represent those who are fortunate enough to possess a simple and uncomplicated oppression (Kumashiro, 2002). The focus of this research seeks to understand the perceptions of interconnected identities of Two-spirit or Queer Indigenous students attending the universities in Saskatchewan. It is important to investigate these perceptions by locating the lived experiences of those who identify with in the spectrum of Two-spirit or Queer Indigenous as they are the experts on their lives.

The Research question: How do Two-spirit and/or Queer Indigenous students attending the universities in Saskatchewan conceptualize their identities? What are their perceptions of navigating multiple forms of oppression?

The study will be framed within an Indigenous research methodology with aspects of a Queer methodology, and Anti-oppressive framework; the voice centered relational method will be used for analyzing and interpreting the data. The design of the study will be guided by the following principles of an Indigenous knowledge framework (Kovach, 2005; 2009) which are grounded in the practice of Wahkowtowin.

⁵ Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliot, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schacter, K. Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report. Toronto. ON: Egale Canada Human rights Trust. Retrieved from: <http://egale.ca/>

- a) Research preparation included following plains Cree cultural protocols found in Ceremonies such as smudging and sweat lodge. In addition this study followed the university of Saskatchewan ethical protocols.
- b) Decolonizing and ethical aim: Research is helpful in destabilizing colonial systems of power against Indigenous people.
- c) Gathering knowledge's – The methods used in the study follow a practice of relationality, Wahkowhtowin and Miyo-Pimiatisiwin.
- d) Relational accountability: Continual checking in on researchers motives and role in the research relationship.
- e) Giving back – How does the study and its methods give back to Two-spirit community and the researchers communities.

Context & Purpose of This Study

Lipkin (2004) encourages those with multiple identities to contest those parameters that oppress them and to create a pathway that allows authentic integration of their identities (p. 42). The research done around Two-spirit identity, illustrates how Two-spirit people have developed new understandings of their own identities. Two-spirit identity theory⁶ suggests that out of experiences with oppression emerges an empowered identity for Two-spirit individuals (Wilson, 1996; 2007). Appreciating the positivity that is conveyed through the research around two-spirit identity theory, this proposed study will also focus on how research participants perceive and come into their identities.

The proposed study is important because of the colonial context that still shapes the lives of Two-spirit people (Wilson, 1996). For instance, Two-spirit people who have experienced racism, sexism, and homophobia from institutions like residential schools are now disconnected from their families, communities, and even themselves (Wilson, 2008, pg. 195). The context of colonialism adds another dimension of oppression that may differ from other sexual minorities. Racism and discrimination from the larger queer community are also barriers for Two-spirit people. (Meyer-Cook, 2008). Currently, institutions like universities still host oppressive attitudes, beliefs, and policies that

⁶ Wilson, A. (2007). N'tacimowin inna nah': Coming into Two-spirit identities. Thesis submitted to the Graduate school of Education of Harvard University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education.

impact Aboriginal students (Monture, 2008). My experiences as an openly gay First Nations student studying at a university can also attest to the oppressive attitudes around being gay and Indigenous:

For instance, certain spaces become unsafe for me on campus. Although, no one ever singled me out directly the language that was used in the locker room on campus was disturbing. Guys would taunt other guys in the locker room by calling each other feminine pronouns or use the word “fag.” I never knew how to respond to this language, as it was never directed at me. However, just hearing the homo-negative language was enough for me to perceive the campus gym unsafe for me. I learned that it was not right to be perceived “female” if you were a guy. I internalized these negative notions of what it meant to be a guy. I noticed that even though I was out of the closet I would distance myself from gay guys who were too “girly” and even try to down play my own femininity.

There were times that I recall in my early undergrad days that I would have to be really selective about what events I wanted to attend. Often asking myself if I go to this event will I be seen as Aboriginal person or gay person? Will I experience racism? Or homophobia? I have attended Aboriginal events on campus that aim to foster a sense of pride through cultural teachings and elder visits.

Most of these events have been supportive but there were times that I would attend certain events and would feel anxious whenever an elder or cultural leader exclaims the importance of maintaining gender roles. I found it confusing, as I wanted to feel connected to other aboriginal students on campus. I wanted to nurture the Aboriginal part of my identity yet felt that in order to do so I needed to hide my sexuality. These negotiations of identity may seem minor to some but from experience they start to take a toll on a person and become stressful.

Another formative experience that shaped my inquiry was when I was a high school teacher at a First Nation School in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. During my time teaching here I also co-facilitated gay-straight alliance. It was the first time I was working with youth were identified as Two-spirit or along the spectrum of gender and sexual diversity. I remember thinking Wow, they are so young and so proud, and they just want to live their lives in ways that make sense for them. Yet, some of them also expressed

confusion and isolation within their communities and their families, they felt they did not understand their sexuality and this alienated them.

Some of them were trying to figure out how they can be queer and First Nation, and still be part of a family or community. Overtime, I have had the opportunity to see these youth find a place of peace and self-acceptance towards their identities. I was intrigued to know more about how Two-spirit find ways to move towards a place of embracing their interconnected identities. While teaching at this school I was taking my first graduate courses part time, and was not sure what my research topic would be. I knew I wanted it to be around Two-spirit issues, I just didn't know what specifically. So I'm not sure what led me to focus on identity but I do know that I felt worn-out from reading about the struggles; and violence that was in most of the literature around Two-spirit people. And although, that work is important, I felt empty usually reading these narratives, like I started to become numb to the violence, what was missing was how Two-spirit people were overcoming this violence and creating narratives of empowerment. I wanted this work to look at the positives of being someone who is Two-spirit. I felt I would leave my research topic open and allow others to share how they perceive that aspect of their identity. Realizing that for some they might have had to deal with oppression and for some they might not have, in the end I knew that centering the research on their own perceptions felt right.

Supportively, Morrison (2008) recommends that it might be helpful for future research to explore the advantages of having multiple identities (p.214). The proposed study will provide understanding of how some Two-spirit people develop and think about their interconnected identities. The experiences and stories shared in this study may inform educators to challenge they ways they teach, and inform policies to reflect a safe and nurturing environment for Two-spirit students.

Significance to Knowledge

I approach this research like other Indigenous researchers within the value of *Miyo-Pimatsiwin* (Kovach, 2010; Settee 2013; Hart 2002) which guides ones actions to live a good life and that a person conducts his/her self in ways that help others in the community to also reach *pimatsiwin* this weaved into *Wahkowntowin*. It is about healing

ourselves from colonization through Indigenous knowledge and ways of being (Hart, 2002). As such, I view this research as journey, I have gone through various processes of healing myself, and have “checked my heart” (Wilson, 2010). Going through this process has taught me that this research is about healing our communities, it is one way to bring understanding of Two-spirit people’s lives.

I feel that this research would contribute to some Indigenous communities by helping reveal the sources of fragmentation as experienced by Two-spirit students (Wilson, 1996, 2007). Fragmentation often leads to damaging coping mechanisms like self-harm in the form of cutting, and substance use and abuse as a way to numb the pain from the oppression (Wilson, 2007, pg. 195). I hope that this research would help create a space for the participants to share their stories of how they have found ways to resist oppression, and focus on the positivity they find within their interconnected identities.

Thesis Overview

Dear Reader, within this research, it is important to situate my intentions and motivations for you. One way that is helpful for myself is to find a way to relate to what I’m reading and writing. My self-location (Wilson, 2008; Kovach 2011) as a Queer Nehiyaw aligns with anti-oppressive research which suggests that insider researchers are best suited to carry out research that is significant to their lives. I have chosen to share aspects of my story in the beginning of the thesis as to help ground the research in my own lived experiences which are woven with the participants. I begin with a prologue that offers insight into my journey of understanding my interconnected experiences which Wilson (1996, 2007) has noted as a process called ‘coming-in.’ I acknowledge that the language and usage of Two-spirit⁷ has changed within the literature while conducting my thesis.

In this section I use a narrative style and speak as if I’m telling a story, and address you as the reader. I envision the thesis as a journey, which is woven with my experiences, the

⁷ In recent literature there are now varied meanings of Two-spirit which adapt/modify Wilson’s 1996 usage for contemporary contexts. Such as Indigenous groups moving towards creating terms in their local indigenous languages.

literature, the participant's stories, and your interpretations. Reader: As Indigenous people our stories are considered medicine; may they heal you if you need it. I hope you find the words helpful in understanding my journey as well as the participants.

Setting The Terms

My experience navigating my worldview around gender, sexuality, and culture has been complex. Although, it may have appeared like chaos to me at the time, especially in my teenage years. I have now been able to reflect on these terms. How certain terms either represented me well and in other contexts misrepresented me. With that in mind my intentions with this research are to explore the perspectives of Two-spirit students. The challenge has been trying to articulate and navigate a variety of terms when it comes to gender and sexuality. With this in mind, I am drawing upon the Cree concept of *Wahkowitzin*⁸ to help me be accountable to those who read my work, and the participants who co-created the work. I wanted to use terms that were broad enough that invited participants to share their own understandings of their identities and established their own meanings. I hope this section offers some clarity into why I choose certain terms over others.

Two-Spirit⁹, The term Two-spirit is a self-descriptor increasingly used by Aboriginal gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Canadians who live within a traditional Aboriginal worldview. It asserts that all aspects of identity (including sexuality, race, gender and spirituality) are interconnected and that one's experience of sexuality is inseparable from experiences of culture and community (Wilson, 2007, iv). This definition of the term is inclusive of interconnected identities and honors relationships

⁸ Defined as *all my relations*, a concept common to many Indigenous cultures. The emphasis on the extended family was fostered through the creation of physical and spiritual relationships between people (living, ancestral, those still to come), land, the spirit world, and creatures with whom they shared physical space. Everyone therefore, was taught that who they were as individuals could only be understood in relation to their family relationships and which, in turn, reflected relationships to the community, environment, sacred world, and outsiders. As used in *Macdougall, B. (2006). Wahkowitzin: Family and cultural identity in northwestern Saskatchewan communities. The Canadian Historical Review, 87(3), 431-462.*

⁹ I should also note that Two-spirit research done by Alex Wilson explores the meaning of Two-spirit in 1996. Since then the term has evolved to have many interpretations and usages. It will be used in this study to respect those participants fluidity of the term.

with oneself and with culture and community. In addition, the term may be used in this study to refer to the literature done around two-spirit identity. To respect the participants, own understanding of the term the researcher will also use this definition to have participants interpret it prior to the interview.

Aboriginal, this term is referenced in this study when referencing names of Centers that were utilizing the term at the time of the initial data gathering processes. For example, Aboriginal Student Center. The University of Saskatchewan along with many universities now use the term Indigenous. The term Aboriginal may also be used in when referencing studies, research that employed this usage at the time.

Indigenous, is used in this study to refer to those who are First Nation, Metis, Inuit. Currently, Universities, and Aboriginal groups have begun to use this term to be more inclusive of the varied indigenous groups.

First Nation, will be used in this study to refer to those who have treaty status and have lived on a reserve at some point in their lives. It will also be used in the collective sense to refer to the shared experiences, knowledge's, and practices of First Nation communities in Saskatchewan.

Queer Indigenous, I use Queer Indigenous together in this study to allow the participants who took part to identify where they feel they are at in the spectrum. There was one participant in the study who did not feel that he could relate to the term Two-spirit but did however feel that he was on the spectrum of queer and self-identified as Status First Nation. Finding terms that were inclusive of the many identities that make up the Queer community and include Indigenous perspectives of identity was challenging.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

For this study, I chose to work from an Indigenous research framework that weaves together queer and anti-oppressive theoretical understandings. In the book *Research is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson suggests taking an approach that “builds upon” previous work of others when doing a literature review, doing so assists researchers in being accountable (Wilson, 2008).

I conducted the following literature review with my lens as a Nehiyawak Two-spirit, it is significant for me to not only build on previous work around Two-spirit issues but it is also critical that I pay attention to ‘who’ is speaking about Two-spirit issues. Here I rely on one of Wilson’s (2008) guiding questions “How will I go about building this set of relationships?” (pg. 63). This question, has been helpful in how I go about in sifting through the emerging research and literature on Two-spirit experiences and voices. For example, during one of my check-ins with my thesis supervisor, I would update her on the literature I was reading and as I would mention names of the authors she would acknowledge her connection to some of them, and gently let me know that they are part of the Two-Spirit community and have worked with her in some capacity. These conversations were important because they helped me practice being accountable to the Two-spirit community, ensuring that I was validating their voices and ideas in a western academic space that has often erased their knowledge.

As I moved along with the literature review, I frequently conducted smudging ceremonies with prairie sage to help clear mind, body, heart of negativity and to invite helpful ideas as I linked everything together. I wanted to be in a good place as I read and wrote. I also developed set of questions that I would ask myself as I filtered through the literature:

- Is this person Two-Spirit or Queer Indigenous, or Queer?
- What are their theoretical frameworks for speaking about the experiences of Two-spirit people?
- How do they write about their relationships with Two-spirit people, their communities, and the land?
- How does this knowledge support Two-spirit sovereignty?

Throughout this literature review I described the meanings of Two-spirit and how it has functioned to empower Queer Indigenous identities. I define intersectionality as described by Two-spirit researchers and academics, consider anti-oppressive approaches to support Two-spirit students in various areas of education, and review studies that have focused on the inclusion of Two-spirit actions of sovereignty and right to self-determination.

My first readings of the literature on Two-spirit people appeared promising. However, I soon discovered that anything written mid-19th century about Two-spirit people was written by white-settler academics in disciplines such as anthropology, and psychology (Roscoe, 1992; Williams, 1986). The majority of this work was conducted as ethnographic field work of observations of early Indigenous American people who had a variance in their gender/s (Wilson, 2001).

After the 1990's there seemed to be an awakening of Two-spirit people who were writing about their experiences as fiction, poetry, and short stories (Brant, 1994; Chrystos, 1988; Scofield, 1999; Gould, 1996). The emergence of Two-spirit authors could be linked to third International Indigenous LGBT gathering held in Winnipeg¹⁰. Two-spirit has since evolved into a pan Indigenous term that embodies ones gender, sexual orientation, culture, community, and connection to the land (Wilson 1996, 2001, 2008).

The literature on Two-spirit identity that I collected is varied and was categorized into the following themes:

- *Understanding the colonial and moving beyond the 'berdache'*
- *Experiences with multiple forms of oppression*
- *Meanings of Two-spirit*

¹⁰ In the 1990's there was a three-week-long demonstration at the Manitoba Legislative Building in Winnipeg, in solidarity with the Mohawk struggle over land in Oka, Quebec. A woman who was camped on the grounds fasted for fourteen days in a Dakota Sundance tipi; Myra Laramée was her spiritual caregiver there. One night, Myra had a powerful dream about "the two-spirit, and those ones that came and they were man, woman, man, woman, man, woman; their faces, you know that vignette on TV, when people's faces change, it was like that. Seven of them talked to me." As described by Dr. Fiola in Forthcoming April 2020: *In Good Relation: History, Gender, and Kinship in Indigenous Feminisms*, Edited by Sarah Nickel and Amanda Fehr (University of Manitoba Press). Chapter 7: Naawenangweyaabeg Coming In: Intersections of Indigenous Sexuality and Spirituality.

There is a strong focus on how Two-spirit people themselves come to learn about their identities and the roles they play in their communities today, this is evident in the rise of a new generation of queer indigenous or Two-spirit visionaries who are building upon the work of previous researchers, authors, educators, and activists who have cleared oppressive spaces for these Two-spirits to thrive.

Understanding The Colonial and Moving Beyond The ‘Berdache’

Understanding how Two-spirit people have come to conceptualize their identities begins with exploring how the term it’s self-came to be. Reviewing the literature, I found that most of the current studies acknowledge how past documentation of gender and sexual variance in Native American communities was told from the perspective of Eurocentric explores, anthropologists, historians, missionaries without understanding Indigenous worldviews (Alaers 2010; Wilson 1996, 2007; Wesley 2014, Driskill 2006).

The literature also highlighted the early writings on Two-spirit people and supported the views that many Native American communities had more than one gender in which some had distinct names or terms that represented their genders and sexualities (Cameron 2005; Gilley 2006; Jacobs, & Thomas, & Lang 1997). Though, some indigenous communities were fully accepting of Two-spirit people and didn’t need separate terms because they were validated through their roles and contributions to the community (Wilson 1996, 2001). Early records from Eurocentric explores and Jesuit missionaries began to document the lives of Indigenous peoples in America and took note of the displays of gender and sexual variant roles that were distinct from normative, Eurocentric male/female binaries of the time (Cameron 2005; Gilley 2006). One of the first terms to be used to describe the gender variance in Indigenous communities was ‘berdache’. Meyer (2008) notes the term ‘berdache’ was still heavily used in academic literature until early 1990’s when ‘Two-Spirited’ was adopted (p.247). Researcher, Jean-Guy A Goulet (2001), provides insight into the implications of early writings of gender variance in Native North American communities. Goulet’s (2001) examines the term ‘Berdache’:

I shall now turn to the literature on the Northern Athapaskans, and argue that anthropologists mistakenly discovered ‘berdaches’ in these societies precisely

because the applied anthropological concepts to Native practices without an adequate consideration of indigenous ideas and social context (p.686).

Goulet asks his readers to consider how the term 'berdache' has multiple meanings which never considered how Indigenous people themselves constructed their own sex-gender roles. Early observations utilized a European lens, Goulet indicates that this lens may have hindered the identification of the term 'berdache' and complicates Indigenous peoples own understanding of gender roles. One of the early terms and miss-usage of 'berdache' that Goulet responds to is the notion that some women are 'manly hearted' as described by an early documentation in the fur trade era which was later used by a fellow academic writer named, Broche. (Goulet, 1996).

Goulet (1996) indicates that there were women of the Athapaskans who were forced into the fur trade and assumed roles as mediators between the Crees and fellow Athapaskans. The person is referred to as 'slave women'. Goulet (2001) describes how she achieved berdache status based on records that Broche interprets. Because 'slave woman' was able to negotiate risky matters between the two rivals the Crees and Athapaskans. What isn't considered is the context of why the behavior of slave women is being utilized; she was filling a role for a social and political purpose where it seemed to be lacking. Often these behaviors are considered to be embodied and displayed by men in Eurocentric norms. In Goulets' (1996) conclusion, he sates, "one must always question whether our terminologies and categories correspond to constructions of person hood and gender identities in specific cultural traditions and social context" (pp. 698). Goulet's arguments stand truthful in that various misunderstandings of the term berdache omit the lived experiences of queer indigenous peoples in America which further complicates Indigenous people from asserting their sovereignty, and Two-spirit people's roles in transgressing colonial boundaries.

Similarly, artist George Catlin who spent most of the 1830's painting the lives of Indigenous North Americans expressed views that erased notions of gender fluidity within in the communities, despite being fascinated by western romanticized notions of Native life. Carpenter (2010) references Catlin's words:

This is one of the most unaccountable and disgusting customs, that I have ever met in the Indian country, and so far, as I have been able to learn, belongs only to

the Sioux and Sacs and Foxes— perhaps it is practiced by other tribes, but I did not meet with it; and for further account of it I am constrained to refer the reader to the country where it is practiced, and where I should wish that it might be extinguished before it be more fully recorded.(p. 214)

Despite this erasure Catlin documented a ceremonial dance through his paintings and later called it *Dance to the berdache* however he did not go further into the details or intent of the dance, believing that his own interpretations were more than enough time that he wished to devote to the ceremony (Carpenter, 2010). Supportively, Audra Simpson (2015) maintains that colonization is linked with a system of heteropatriarchy that places cis-gender heterosexual white/European men at the top of the social hierarchy. This well executed erasure of the gender fluidity within native communities became a way to maintain colonial dominance over the spaces and lands, and as Scott L. Morgensen (2011) discusses in his book *Spaces between us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* essential in the colonial project of building North America. Such erasures and in some cases acts of colonial violence became the spark that fired many Two-spirit people in breaking free of the term Berdache and resisting centuries of colonial discourses.

Fiona Meyer-Cook (2008) verifies the denial of the term, “The term ‘Berdache,’ which translates as “prostitute” or “boy-kept for unnatural purposes” has been rejected for misrepresenting the history of consensual, equal relations between Aboriginal people” (p. 247). Likewise, Giley (2006) indicates that attitudes behind the term were equitable to acts of sodomy recorded by early Spanish explorers, he refers to an often quoted passage, by Balboa “saw men dressed like women; [he] learned that they were sodomites and threw the king and forty others to be eaten by his dogs, a fine action of an honourable and Catholic Spaniard” (pp. 13). The association of sexual acts as sinful was viewed as justification for the murders of Indigenous people who did not fit into the religious gendered binaries of the colonizers. The arrogance of the term ‘berdache’ inflicted wounds that can still be felt in indigenous communities today, with some members of these communities accepting any form of gender or sexual variance with negativity. Meyer (2008) discusses that the newly adopted western beliefs are part of assimilation had distinct impacts on Two-spirit people:

The imposition of the concept of sin in relation to Two-Spirit identities has led to exclusion from families, psychological and physical abuse of minors in attempts to “correct them” and the internalization of shame. At the same time, addictions, sexual abuse and political fractioning, in small communities, affects Two-Spirit peoples’ sense of safety, and compounds their fears about coming out. (p.248). Supporting Meyer, Wilson (2008) states “Two-spirit people who have experienced racism, sexism, and homophobia from institutions like residential schools are now disconnected from their families, communities, and even themselves” (pp. 195) Wilson (2008) positions these experiences as ‘Fragmentation’ that is felt spiritually by two-spirit people and their communities.

The notion of ‘fragmentation’ is also discussed by Cameron (2005) who expresses that elders in the communities who attended residential schools have been assimilated to believe that any gender or sexual difference is sinful:

The Dehumanization suffered by our elders and our communities in the residential schools has had intergenerational effects on Aboriginal Communities...the association of two-spiritedness with sin, and the erasure/denial of their very existence is the dominant culture/colonizer speaking with the voices of our Elders. (p. 124-125)

As pointed out the practices and ideologies that were used to oppress the Elders are still reflected in the some of their attitudes regarding Two-spirit members. The increased homophobia becomes integrated and adopted as the community’s way of life, further alienating Two-Spirit people and denying any positive representation of sex-gender variance. The belief that indigenous identity is hetero-normative has implications and is untruthful; when there is historical research that proves otherwise. However, Two-spirit people are aware that fellow community members have adopted patriarchal and hetero-sexist sex/gender binaries as the norm (Meyer, 2008, p. 525), implying their gender variant identities have no place in their communities. Gilley (2006) highlights the need for acceptance of the historical past, “Two-Spirit men come to know themselves as individuals who do not fit within the parameters of Indian identity as set out by their tribal communities, families, and Native society” (p. 20).

In response to the learned or adopted beliefs passed on through colonial ideologies, asserting the use of Two-Spirit and moving beyond 'berdache' becomes an empowered process, challenging the very notion of what a "true" indigenous person is. Gilley (2006) indicates, "Continually challenging the heteronormativity within the communities. One doesn't have to leave the culture but rather learns to create a space within the dominant ideology for themselves through slight variation" (p.21). This notion of *creating space* in oppressive places starts with acknowledging the term 'berdache' and the experiences with colonization that impact Two-spirit people.

The term 'berdache' has since been replaced with Two-spirit and was in response to the implications of the use of 'berdache' had in continuing to colonize and fragment indigenous communities. *Two-spirit* was created in the 1990's in Winnipeg at the First Two-spirit gathering; the term was meant to be complex, fluid, inclusive, and ambiguous (Driskill, 2010). Understanding the origins and conceptualization of the term 'Two-spirit' took me to places inside me that I buried, recounting similar experiences with being marginalized in my own community. Yet, I've come to learn that being 'Two-spirit' does not mean colonization defines who you are but seeing how systems of assimilation, heteropatriarchy, homophobia operate to sustain colonialism provides me with insight into how Two-spirit people embody their own unique forms of resistance.

Experiences With Multiple Forms of Oppression

Walters et al (2006) explain that within a Eurocentric perspective of gender and sexuality Aboriginal Two-Spirit people "experience a wide range of challenges including poverty, violence, suicide and hopelessness" (p. 23). For example, the historical legacy of residential schools has created negative assumptions about Two-Spirit Aboriginal peoples. Teengs and Travers (2006) explain that in the historical colonial processes, the term Two-Spirit "has become a source of shame and pain. Complicating matters is that community members might even perceive people with same-sex attractions to be potential perpetrators" (p. 23). Gilbert (1998) argues that a Eurocentric linear view of sexuality leads to extreme racism and oppression for those who are not "heterosexual, white and male" (p. 13). Teengs and Travers (2006) suggest that due to the western views

of gender & sexuality Two-Spirit people have to face many difficulties in and outside of their own community.

In the literature, Western and Indigenous views of gender and sexuality are often questioned because of how they influence Two-spirit people as viewing themselves a part of their communities. For instance, Ristock, J., Zoccole, A., and Passante, L. (2010) and Gilbert (1998) show that Two-spirit peoples have been historically honored and respected in their communities, but have experiences with ongoing colonization, heterosexism, racism and patriarchy that marginalize them in their own communities. The qualitative report, *Aboriginal Two-spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility, and Health* concludes that experiences with various forms of marginalization has in some cases resulted in Two-spirit people leaving their communities in hopes of addressing their health and well-being (Ristock et al. 2010). Two-spirit people leave their communities, families, and the land they're from as a way to cope with being treated unfairly and unjustly, this contests with literature that suggests prior to colonization Two-spirit people were valued just as any other member in the community.

Two-Spirit people seek to find an environment which could cater to the development of their sex/gender identities. Meyer (2008) summarizes the necessity for migration, "The move to a new city opened up a world of contacts and possibilities. The relative anonymity relieved the sense of loneliness and stress they had experienced at home, and some used the safety of distance to come out." (p. 260). The need and urgency to flee unsafe communities has been a way for Two-spirit people to survive and combat shame around their identities. Gilley (2006) elaborates on the driving force behind the shame that Two-Spirits come to harbor:

Leaving home was a metaphor not only for moving away from their parents' home but also was from their tribal, ceremonial, or church communities.

Accordingly, upon returning home for visits or permanently, they often go back in the closest for fear of homophobia and being seen as shaming their families (p. 69).

While some experiences of migration to urban areas have been positive for the most part Two-spirit people quickly begin to see that integration of racist ideologies are also fluent in the newly embraced gay communities. Meyer (2008) explores these experiences

and illustrates the internalization of urban racism through an interview from a Two-Spirit person:

Growing up I didn't want to be Native. I tried to embrace what I thought was reality and that was the white, blond, blue-eyed guy that I thought I had to be...I felt very insecure about being Native, about the way I looked. Anybody who looked ethnic to me was a turn off. I didn't want to know any other Native gays or lesbians (p. 261).

Additionally, in the above quote Meyer points out that there is also a tendency to distance one's self from anyone that is also from that same ethnic group. The internalization of racism causes complications of positive identity formation leaving an individual with the negative responses such as, drug use, alcohol, risky sexual behavior, sometimes suicide. Furthermore, the realities of social economic barriers associated with being Aboriginal are even more heightened with having to deal with internalization of racism and homophobia.

In a study that explores the combined oppressions around ethnic sexual minorities, Author Melanie Morrison, is able to communicate the shared stresses and tensions around Aboriginal men who deal with multiple levels of discrimination. Morrison (2008) conducted a small study of four ethnic minority men who also self-identified with being a sexual minority. The amplified stress was best indicted in an interviewee's response:

Yeah, there is stress there. You're part of two minority groups, like Aboriginal and then being a gay or lesbian person. Like in the gay community...its good, its really great if you're a gay Caucasian person, but then if you're a gay Aboriginal person you're not really put up there or seen the same way as a gay Caucasian person." (p. 208).

Morrison illustrates some effects of that internalization and its recognition when the interviewee is stating the ethnic majority is favorable. The stress associated with having to deal with both racial discrimination and homophobia is seen in the person response and expressing that having to deal with one minority is far much more desirable then dealing with two perhaps this is in response to wanting the added stress decreased. Clearly there have to be damaging effects when dealing with two forms of oppression.

Additionally, the multiple forms of oppression create an increased sense of isolation. There is recognition of other ethnic minorities' perceptions of the added stress that sexual-gender variant Aboriginals deal with, supporting the multiple oppressions.

Morrison (2008) illustrates the awareness from an Asian sexual minority interview:

I think that Aboriginal people face more racism than Asian people in Saskatchewan because they're misunderstood. Just the general feeling towards them...so first nations people face more racism and in terms of homophobia, from what I can gather, because they still live in communities that are predominately First Nations, I think there is very mixed feelings towards gay people so they may face more homophobia... (p. 209).

Multiple forms of oppression that Two-Spirit people have to navigate through in their daily lives, has implications and added stress that promotes many to engage in risky behaviors as a way of dealing with the violence. Meyer (2008) indicates the correlation between the additional stress and reactions of two-spirit youth. "A recent study of Two-Spirit youth under the age of 24 in Vancouver show that they reported higher rates of depression, and increased risk taking behavior (p. 262). The effects of dealing with multiple forms of oppression are far too many, proper education of the origins of these multiple forms of oppression need to be unpacked for the Aboriginal community so the communities can be whole again. Accountability from fellow community members needs to ensure that Two-Spirit youth are treated as members of their home communities and that they receive supports for navigating through their multiple forms of oppressions. Meyer (2008) elaborates on the task:

on a collective level Aboriginal Health and social services agencies, band councillors, urban community leadership, community elders, other leaders, peace keepers, families and the schools must ensure that anti homophobia work and training about the traumatic intergenerational impact of assimilation policies, and residential schools on Two-Spirit people are undertaken in urban rural aboriginal communities. (p. 272).

The task of creating changes for Two-spirit people is going to be a lot work as Meyer points out in the previous quote. However, she affirms the importance of collective participants stepping-up and acknowledging the discourses that oppress Two-Spirit

individuals. Acknowledging would not be enough, creating changes would have to allow for participants to start creating counter-hegemonic discourses, as mentioned early in the paper by Cameron (2005, p. 123). Education around dual oppressions is an important first step in creating counter-hegemonic discourses.

Similarly, it has been expressed that people who experience multiple forms of oppression often face conflict with their identities (Wilson, 1996; Van Der Meide, 2002). The importance of exploring interconnected identities and various forms of oppression cannot be overlooked. If the only forms oppression that go noticed are singular we soon only begin to represent those who are fortunate enough to possess a simple and uncomplicated oppression (Kumashiro, 2002).

Lipkin (2004) encourages those with multiple identities to contest those parameters that oppress them and to create a pathway that allows authentic integration of their identities (pg. 42). The research done around two-spirit identity, illustrates how two-spirit people have developed new understandings of their own identities. Two-spirit identity theory¹¹ suggests that out of experiences with oppression emerges an empowered identity for two-spirit individuals (Wilson, 1996; 2007). Appreciating the positivity that is conveyed through the research around two-spirit identity theory, the next section of the literature review will focus on how two-spirit researchers, academics have come to understand the meaning of two-spirit with careful attention paid to how relationships assist in their understandings.

Meanings Of Two-Spirit

Michelle Cameron (2005), a Two-Spirited scholar encourages the influence that proclaiming to be *Two-spirit* has, “The term two-spirited is part of our counter-hegemonic discourse and reclamation of our unique histories” (p. 123). The transition from ‘Berdache’ to Two-spirit is significant as Cameron points out. It allowed for Two-Spirit people to create spaces within the communities that they have been marginalized in and come into an empowered state.

¹¹ Wilson, A. (2007). N’tacimowin inna nah’: Coming into Two-spirit identities. Thesis submitted to the Graduate school of Education of Harvard University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education.

The term *Two-Spirit* has complex meanings and also highlights historical elements regarding the possible roles of Two-Spirit people in their communities and their place in the sacred circle (Beaucage, 2010; Wilson, 1996). While the terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ are considered a western invention, the term *Two-Spirit* is an Indigenous preferred term (Gilbert, 1998). Fieland, Walters, and Simoni (2007) explain two different meanings for Two-Spirit people. First, “The term refers to a person with GLBT orientation” (p. 271). Second, “it denotes an individual with tribally specific spiritual, social and cultural roles that are not defined at all by sexual orientation or gender role” (p. 271).

Gilbert (1998) defines, Two-Spirit identity as more than having a sexual identity, it is person’s spiritual, emotional, and mental being. Two-spirited people are described as having roles in the community that are linked to tradition, being gifted, and taking part in ceremonies. Although colonization has impacted Aboriginal culture and tradition, there are some First Nation communities who highly value Two-spirit people, “We must re-learn that to be two-spirited is an honour” (p. 14). Gilbert further explained that two spirited people in a First Nation community are considered as significant and are strong community members. Two spirited peoples “take an interest in the future of our Nations and wish to play an active role in that future” (p. 14). Furthermore, Walters, Evans-Campbell, Simoni, Ronquillo, and Bhuyan (2006) indicate that the term is used to reconnect with specific (Indigenous) Nation traditions related to sexual and gender identity.

Two-Spirit scholar and activist Alex Wilson shares the values she grew up with in her reserve, her experiences are “fairly positive” in her family and community. For example, she mentioned “social Powwow and Dances” in the community. Furthermore, Wilson (1996) emphasizes that Two-Spirit identity affirms the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity - therefore including gender, sexuality, community, culture, and spirituality. It is important to note that the term Two-Spirit is not easily translated into Indigenous languages and is also not used in a uniform or widely accepted way. Distinctively, from Berdache to Two-spirit is momentous in reclaiming and asserting one’s interconnected identity. However, the term Two-spirit is important in constructing identity, it’s noted that the term itself should leave room for variance, “There is a great deal of variance evident in Two-Spirit people’s expression of their gender identities, and

sexual orientations. Thus, every effort must be made to avoid pitfall of over generalizing and undermining the specificity of that experience within both individuals and Nations. (Meyer, 2008, p. 246-247). Proclaiming that there are specific ways to be Two-Spirit reverses its intended usage. And many Two-spirit people encourage each other to be open and fluid with how they come to identity with the term.

For example, in my search for literature that is written by Two-spirit people I came across Saylesh Wesley's work and the article called, *Twin-Spirited Woman: Sts'iyóye smestiyexw slhá:li*, (2014). Wesley, is Stó:lō of the lower Fraser Valley, and part of the coast Salish people. Wesley (2014) takes up the notion of a *Double Weaving Two-spirit critique* (Driskill 2004, 2010) and accesses her indigenous knowledge, to remind her coast Salish community of the cultural roles that transgender and Two-spirit play today but have been erased due to colonization. Two-spirit as a critique resists colonization in indigenous communities and challenges the imposed gender binaries that push Two-spirit people out of their homelands and out of their bodies (Driskill, 2004, 2010). For Wesley, the violence that caused tension, and frustration was felt through her grandmothers' actions that supported colonial views of gender and sexuality that were imposed upon her in residential school (Wesley, 2014). In her PhD research, Wesley (2014) mentions that one of the goals was locating stories of Sto:lo two-spirits precontact. This goal wasn't achieved, though Wesley was able to "Marshall new traditions and language together in ways that create a new vision of the future" (pp.339). For example, Wesley's grandmother worked through generations of imposed homophobic beliefs and attitudes and unearthed a term for Wesley in their Sto:lo language (Wesley, 2014). This illustrates one of the characteristics of *double-weaving Two-spirit critiques* (Driskill, 2010), which is to see "Two-spirit people and traditions as both integral to and a challenge to nationalist and decolonial struggles (pg. 81)." Driskill (2010) suggests, "By double weaving splints from queer studies and native studies, Two-spirit critiques can aid in the resistance struggles of Native communities and help create theories and movements that are inclusive and responsive to Native Two-spirit/GLBTQ people" (pg.87). Equally, Wilson (1996) writes , "We are present when we have taken back that which was stripped from us. When we are present, we have recovered ourselves from the terrible violence of racism and homophobia" (Wilson, pg. 38, 2001)

Wesley and her grandmother weave their experiences and knowledge to reclaim a lost history of Two-spirit people by working together to create a term that positions Two-spirit people as integral members of their communities and acknowledging their existence. Wesley (2014) recounts:

She came up with a Sto:lo two-spirited identity for me in our mother tongue—an exchange that remains surreal and miraculous. She coined the term *Sts’iyoye smestiyexw slha’li*. When she handed me the piece of paper to me with this title on it, she included the English translation, “Twin-Spirited Woman,” and explained that I could interpret it as “two-spirited woman,” or “twin-soul woman,” or “same spirit as a woman.” Ultimately, she left it open to for me to decide how I would interpret it, given that our language is much more fluid than English” (pp. 343)

Mirroring the openness and fluidity of the new term Wilson (1996), advocates Two-spirit identity includes “The interrelatedness of all aspects of identity, including sexuality, gender, culture, community, and spirituality” (pp. 304-305). This term connects two-spirit people to the past and restores the connection to their culture (1996, pg. 305). As such, rather than looking at each identity as separate, Wilson conveys the positive aspects and relational factors that shape the lives of contemporary queer indigenous people. I find that one of the promising factors of this meaning of two-spirit identity is the process of “coming-in” to our identities. Likewise, Wesley (2014) evokes the process of *coming-in* by weaving her grandmothers’ knowledge with Wesley’s understanding of two-spirit.

Two-spirit people reflect, and interpret their experiences and rather than trying to fit into established identities, they find a way to embrace and develop their identities to “fit” who they are (Wilson, 2007). Additionally, “coming in” is the opposite of coming out, and is not simply a declaration of one’s sexuality but rather it is assertion of an interconnected identity that is preserved by relationships with family, community, the land (pg. 197). I value the insights that Wilson shares that “coming in” is about learning to embrace who you are on your own terms and with support of local indigenous knowledge. This process of accessing local indigenous knowledge that supports Two-spirit people in their struggles is promising when we start to think or imagine what being Two-spirit can mean.

Reviewing the work by Wilson (1996, 2007); Wesley (2014) and Driskill (2006, 2010) the notion of challenging colonialism that oppresses Two-spirit people and focusing on including Two-spirit people as active participants in the process of decolonization is promising for understanding how Two-spirit students make-meaning from their experiences. A *Two-spirit critique* positions and helps Two-spirit people create spaces in their communities in response to colonialism. This critique offers a new way of thinking about the violence and barriers in the lives of Two-spirit people, moving away from naturalizing the violence that Two-spirit people experience towards seeing them as change agents and resisters of colonization, heteropatriarchy, racism, and homophobia. As illustrated in the creation of term *Twin-spirited woman* (Wesley, 2014), Two-spirit people have access to local indigenous knowledge's as means of re-storying their relationships, and *coming in* (Wilson 1996, 2007) to their identity as empowered two-spirit people.

Positive Perceptions Of Interconnected Identities And Anti-Oppressive Practices

In the study, “What is good about being gay?” (Harper, Brodsky, & Bruce, 2012) gay and bisexual adolescent male's positive perceptions of their sexual orientation identity were explored. The study allowed for participants to discuss their sexual orientation and required them to provide their own terminology and definitions that were based on their life experiences and perceptions (2012). Harper and etal (2012) concluded that, “The responses of these adolescents revealed that they were able to construct a positive identity and actively combat negative messages by educating others, seeking resources, and fighting stereotypes that exist about the LGBT community” (p.35). Although indicating that participants race/ethnicity varied from African American, European American, and Latino, the researchers did not indicate how their race and ethnicity factor into the participants positive perceptions of their queer identities (p.28). I appreciate the focus on “positive perceptions of sexual orientation” from the participants but I question what was lost from not incorporating race and gender in this study.

Kevin Kumashiro (2002) expresses that, “It is a problem to treat identities as separate incarnations, which denies how identities are already intersected, but more importantly, masks the ways in which certain identities are already privileged” (pg. 56). As such,

looking at identities separately limits our understandings of oppression and how it influences how we come to understand the purpose of its functionality. Equally, Ng (1993) also mentions “To treat race, gender, and class as relations enables us to see how racism and sexism were deployed to subordinate particular groups of people in the colonization of Canada and its subsequent development as a modern nation-state”(In St. Denis, 2007, pg. 1072). As it sounds, it would be beneficial to focus this research on the interconnections of oppression, as doing so would allow us to see how colonial narratives and processes continue to manage the identities of Two-spirited people. Unmasking how oppression and colonization influences our identities, we are able to resist these processes and reclaim our identities.

Similarly, current positions around anti-oppressive education advocate for the need for educators to trouble education (Kumashiro, 2002). Insisting that educators not only focus on how identities are influenced by difference, and how the other is constructed but to also examine how privilege is constructed and maintained within school cultures. For instance, in his book *Troubling Education*, Kumashiro (2002) expresses learning about the “other” in comforting ways like seeing one’s self in the other is problematic because it does not allow for those who have privilege to change how they see themselves and their actions (pg.5).

I agree with the points that Kumashiro outlines, by not looking at the intersections of our identities we are privileging certain identities and ignoring valuable stories that could teach us about how oppression is experienced and resisted. It appears promising that an anti-oppressive pedagogy that “troubles” education would be useful for this study. It would be beneficial to apply an anti-oppressive lens to this research by looking at how the participants resist oppression within institutions like the university, or in high school. I think that approaching the research in this way would help those invested in anti-oppression and anti-racist work by understanding how privileging normalcy can be unpacked or troubled.

Monture (2010) expresses that it is important for us to, “decode our experiences of ‘respectable spaces’ and our journeys through the racialized and gendered hate we experience them in” (pg.29). I would also add that we must understand Two-spirit students experience with oppression in white heteronormative spaces like universities as

way to offer all indigenous students a safe place for learning. Based on the omission of intersectionality from Harper et al's study (2012) I think it would be worth exploring what sort of negotiations take place when Two-spirit students develop their identities within Western institutions.

In the study *Navigating Sexual and Ethno-Cultural Identities in Canada*, researcher, Morrison (2008) explores the experiences and perceptions of multiple identities amongst Queer Aboriginal and Queer Chinese men. These are the three themes that emerged from that study: Participants perceived differences between themselves and majority gay men. Participants experienced tension when trying to balance their multiple identities. Participants perceived minimal representation of individuals with multiple identities in mainstream gay culture (Morrison, 2008). What I found promising in this study was the distinctions made between the participants' perceptions of their experiences in comparison with the majority gay men (2008). For instance, one Aboriginal participant shared: *Well there are differences with my Aboriginal gay friends who are gay. When I hang out with them I guess I feel more comfortable with them because there is so much we can relate to. But with my Caucasian friends or whatever, I feel like I'm more tagging along with them. I'm not really the leader of the group, so I feel almost like a follower* (Morrison, 2008, pg.208).

It appears this participant's role changes when in different groups. On one spectrum he feels that he can relate more with those who are gay and Aboriginal but does not feel that same quality when "tagging" along in white queer circles. This sense of not feeling accepted but tolerated in white queer spaces or groups illustrates why understanding multiple identities is important. To think or associate being queer with being white, excludes those voices and experiences that have multiple identities (Sullivan, 2007). In my opinion exploring how varied multiple identities are different from white queer identity is important. As such, Morrison does a good job of expanding how we think about being queer by exploring how queer Aboriginal and queer Chinese men view their multiple identities.

Similarly, when Morrison (2008) asked a Chinese participant if he thought Queer Aboriginal men receive more oppression, he agreed. This is what he mentioned:

There is a lot of resentment towards First Nations people because there is a sense of privileges given to them that aren't given to Asian people.... so First Nations people face more racism, and in terms of homophobia, from what I can gather, because they still live in communities that are predominantly First Nations, I think there is very mixed feelings towards gay people. So they face more homophobia (pg. 209).

The participant perception indicates that gay First Nation men may experience double layers of oppression due to racist attitudes of First Nation people from larger mainstream society combined with homophobic attitudes within their own communities.

Morrison's findings are congruent with my personal experiences. There have been times in my life that I felt I needed to suppress who I was as queer person in order to be seen or heard by members of my First Nation community, and vice versa. Finally, Morrison notes that future research should look at how multiple identities can also be perceived as strengths for ethno-cultural and sexual minority groups, "It is possible that advantages exist as a function of being multiply identified" (pg. 214). Appreciating this perspective, I will now transition into what has been written about Two-spirit identity.

Two-Spirit Identity Theory

Wilson (2008), in her research on Two-spirit identity, asked participants to talk about their identities. The participants connect their negative experiences with colonization in Canada and with intergenerational effects of the residential school system (para. 4). For example, one participant recounts the abuse in residential school:

.... The first thing they did was divide us by boy/girl. Girl go this way; boy go this way. Girl wear pinafores. Boy wear pants. All hair cut.... I didn't really know which side to go to. I just knew that I wanted to be with my sisters and brother. I had never worn a dress before so I went with my brother.... It was like a little factory—one priest shaved my head while the other tore off my clothes. I was so scared. I covered my area. It didn't take long for them to notice.... That was my first beating (Wilson, 2009, pg. 194-195).

This participant's experience illustrates how spaces were violently enforced and regulated by the priests of the schools. This experience is one of many, which eroded the

spirits of the children, eventually these children learned to harbour these same ideals of sexuality and gender, and in some instances imposed the same religious beliefs on their families and communities (Cameron, 2005).

Recounting, what the participants revealed, Wilson (2008) portrays how at one point in their lives they felt acceptance and love at a young age in their communities, and then later on were confronted with racism, sexism, and homophobia (Para. 4). This disconnection from community, family, and self was often replaced with negative coping mechanisms and frequently two-spirited and queer aboriginal people removed themselves from their communities, Wilson refers to this separation as cutting loose, or fragmentation (Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2007).

Upon leaving their homes a common practice for two-spirit people was to migrate to larger urban cities in hopes of finding support of their sexual identities (Giley, 2006). The removal from communities created a disconnection within two-spirit people who left, “as we are stripped from our communities we are also stripped of some of/ sum of our selves (Wilson, 2001, pg. 30). Cajete (2000) also articulates the importance of community from an indigenous perspective:

Through community, Indian people come to understand their ‘personhood’ and their connection to the ‘communal soul’ of their people. The community is the place where the ‘forming of the heart and face’ of the individual as one of people is most fully expressed; it is the context in which the person comes to know relationship, responsibility, and participation in the life of one’s people (pg.86).

As Cajete conveys the intimate bonds that indigenous people come to make with each other are integral to their development as confident, reliant members who come to know themselves through loving relationships, responsibility, and by sharing their gifts with the community.

Dear reader, I share with you that as someone who is Queer and First Nations, I have experienced the positive aspects of community that Cajete mentions. However, as Wilson expressed, I am also familiar with feeling fragmentation. When I grew into my teen years and faced pressure to conform to male gender norms in school and my community ceremonies, I began to distance to myself, and longed to be anywhere but in my community.

On reflection, I remember a time our high school had a feast. It was my first year in high school and we were told to sit in certain spots, boys on one side and girls on the other side. I wasn't asked to help at this feast as I usually did at our family feasts when I was a child. As I was going to sit down with the boys in my class, one of them said, "You are on the wrong side, go sit over on the girl's side." Even though I couldn't agree more with his comments, I felt unwelcomed, and hurt by these words. I felt like he took something from me, he robbed me from engaging in this ceremony because all I could think about the whole time was the hurt and confusion I felt.

Eventually, I decided I would stay home when these events were taking place at school, so I would not have to feel the discomfort that came from the teasing or ridicule. It has been expressed by Meyer-Cook (2008) "omission of Two-spirited notions of gender and sexuality is a form of violence enacted by community members on those who identify as queer or Two-spirited" (p. 247). Removing myself from these events was a conscious choice on my part, but I think that these negative experiences I had with my culture illustrates how a form of violence had pushed me out. Ultimately, uprooting my connections to community and place. To my surprise, I have been able to come-into my identity and present myself as a queer First Nations person easier in university.

My assumptions are that the courses and program that I was in encouraged me to examine the oppression I have faced. By unpacking or making sense of this oppression I am able, to as Wilson mentions, "be present" "when we present ourselves, we are empowered by our identity" (2001, pg. 39).

Supportively, Walters, Chae, Perry, Stately, Person, & Simoni (2008) share findings from a study on Two-spirit and American Indian and Alaska native men (AIAN), that looked at what factors may be associated with housing instability and homelessness. Notable findings from this study suggest the following are factors that may contribute to homeless for Two-spirit and AIAN men: Negative mental health and substance use outcomes may be linked with poorer housing outcomes among Two-spirit.

- Direct experiences or witnessing violence and trauma in childhood may contribute to housing instability and homelessness among two-spirit.
- Two-spirit individuals with experiences of extreme childhood emotional neglect may be more likely to be homeless.

- Frequent housing transitions combined with inconsistent poor caregiving were related to increased vulnerability for homelessness among Two-spirit.

As Walters et al (2008) suggest the factors around homelessness need to be looked at as conditions born out of interconnected colonial structures and not just individual experiences. As such current research needs to combine an approach that critically examines the historical and colonial structures while giving attention to the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of Two-spirit individuals. Research that embodies two-spirit understandings of how to contest such structures would be meaningful as Wilson concludes, as ‘coming-in’ to established identities while resisting oppression.

Implications Of The Literature For This Study

Dear reader, I conclude this literature review with an understanding of how two-spirit people navigate many worlds and are able to be “present” within their interconnected identities. I share with you, that sifting through the literature and the stories was not an easy task for me, as many of the stories around homophobia, and racism triggered intense emotional trauma. My strategy to heal from this trauma was to take time away from the readings, conduct a smudging a ceremony, and place tobacco down whenever I returned home to the reserve I grew up in. These practices, grounded me with the awareness that my journey is two help shed insight into these realities but find a way to do it while nurturing good relations.

It is through reviewing the literature that I have come to see a need for others to conduct research that explores how multiple identities, and oppression are currently experienced and contested by queer indigenous/ two-spirit people. There is a lot of research out there that is written by non-Indigenous and non-queer researchers who may have good intentions but as the literature indicates fail to incorporate indigenous views around gender and sexuality. Coming across the insights of Wilson and the other queer indigenous researchers was helpful for me in seeing the potential that our indigenous ways of knowing have when conducting research on our lived experiences. As such, Two-spirit identity theory is complimentary with Two-spirit critiques and are promising

when exploring the empowered understandings, the participants have around their interconnected identities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

As a Queer Indigenous, I used a mixed qualitative methodology for this study. An Indigenous methodology structured the study by centering a practice of Wahkohtowin in my research preparation and data collection methods. Anti-oppressive theory was used in understanding the meaning of multiple forms of oppression and how such knowledge helps educators unpack the ways that oppression functions, a Two-spirit critique also helped me structure the study in a way that gives back to the two-spirit community, and centers Two-spirit knowledge within research. A relational voice centered method of analysis was used to understand the stories of the participants.

Kovach (2010) states, “Indigenous epistemologies are action oriented. They are about living according to certain values” (pg.62). In addition, Herman Michelle (2005) describes Indigenous epistemologies as a lens through which we see and understand our environments: “The concept of Indigenous worldview acts as cultural framework and lens from which epistemology or ways of knowing can be understood” (p. 37). With these views in mind, I felt theories that resonated with me are Indigenous knowledge, queer theorizing, and relational methods of data collection. This combined framework was inspired by the theorizing of Two-spirit academic Qwo-li Driksill (2011) who writes, “the purpose of a Two-spirit critique is to bring Indigenous-specific critiques of colonial heteropatriarchal gender/sexuality into broader conversation within queer and Indigenous studies that link queer Indigenous people within and across Indigenous nations, colonial borders, and global network” (pg. 3).

I want to build upon this work, as it has impacted me greatly by affirming my own interconnected experiences as Queer Indigenous. I found Driskils work and Wilson’s helpful in that it accounted for my own stories with colonization and homophobia from multiple social groups.

A voice centered relational method of data analysis provided a way of conducting the analysis that was aligned with an Indigenous methodology as it encouraged me to focus on how the participants viewed their relational understandings of themselves, and those who were part of their narratives. Relationships, were important in how they made meaning from their experiences with understanding their Indigenous and Queer and identities.

Indigenous methodology

This qualitative study used an Indigenous, methodology to gather and analyze data. The Cree teachings of wahkowitzin (everything is related) was central in how the research sought out to understand how the participants made meaning from their stories around their gender, race, and sexual orientation. The design of the study was guided by the following principles of an Indigenous knowledge framework (Kovach, 2005; 2009).

- a) Research preparation cultural protocol and standard research protocol – this was followed by attending a Two-spirit sweat lodge ceremony where I asked the Elder to ask that my intentions for conducting this research are clear and give back to the Two spirit community in a healthy way. At the same time, I followed the Universities ethics around confidentiality and application process.
- b) Decolonizing and ethical aim – While engaging in my university courses in the graduate program I was taught that research with an Anti-oppressive lens focuses on centering Indigenous knowledge as a valid body of thought that accounts for Indigenous peoples stories. My own self-location and journal helped me navigate why locating research from Indigenous and Two-spirit researchers is an act of decolonization because it disrupts colonial narratives of gender and sexuality that are oppressive.
- c) Gathering knowledge's – Relationality: The process for seeking out participants of this study followed a relational element by me asking people in my social circles to help connect me with people they might know who would be interested in taking part in this study. Often, this was initiated with fellow Indigenous graduate students who I learned to build a relationship with as I shared with them my own experiences as a Two-spirit person. It was in these relational interactions

that I was beginning to see how my own telling of my stories – was decolonizing in itself because as the other Indigenous graduate students listened with kind hearts they were already making connections with similar stories of people they knew in their own social circles. In addition, before each email that I sent out to potential participants.

- d) Making meaning of knowledge's gathered – Relational accountability: I would smudge to clear any negative thoughts I would have but also to account for the vulnerability that potential participants were engaging in I would often let them know that I smudged before I contacted them and that my intentions were to treat their stories with respect. After each interview I would also send participants summaries of their interview so they could review what they shared.
- e) Giving back: I would often ask participants how they felt this research could give back to the communities they identified with.

Wahkotowin, is one of many Nehiyaw teachings of Miyo-pimatisiwin (living a good life) that was first taught to me by my Nohtawi (father). Nohtawi enjoyed to hunt and be out on the land. I recall, asking him one time, what that land taught him and he told me that through many of his struggles with alcohol it was the Elders in the community who continued to support him after attending treatment for his alcohol addiction through western methods. He shared with me once, that after a hunt he would visit the Elders and bring them fresh wild meat. Being out on the land was his way living a good life or Miyo-pimatisiwin and taking care of the Elders by sharing wild meat, this was one way of giving back, practicing Wahkotowin, and taking care of each other.

It is with his stories of the land, hunting, and giving back to the Elders in our community that I intend to frame this study. The stories in this study are grounded in the memories of the participants which collectively give back to their communities. The participants for this study self-identified as First Nation and were from the prairies. The research framework must be familiar to them as not to extinguish their voice but rather validate their experiences.

Accountability is an important characteristic of Indigenous research methodologies. Kovach (2010) encourages researchers to look at the relationships between the methods used and how they align with Indigenous worldviews and paradigms. She writes, “We

need to only look to the importance of protocol within Indigenous communities to recognize that how activities (i.e methods) are carried out matter. Protocols are a means to ensure that activities are carried out in a manner that reflects community teachings and are done in a good way. The same principle out to apply to research” (Kovach, 2010, pg. 40-41). This research that was conducted has methods that are congruent with Indigenous ways of knowing and also has a decolonial focus. For example, at the core of Indigenous identity is the notion of relationality. How we come to view ourselves an expression of the relationships we maintain with family, friends, the land, and our communities (Wilson, 2008).

Lastly, an Indigenous research framework was used because of its decolonization impacts (Kovach, 2010). Sharing and “queering” our stories can help disrupt colonial, and heteronormative practices, which help decolonize our communities and ourselves. Allowing us to move towards a more relational, nourishing relationship with our selves, each other, the land, and our communities. I will explain how the data collection methods in the study combine an Indigenous research framework with queer understandings of identity.

Data collection methods

In this study, I used semi-structured interviews that followed a conversational story-telling method (Kovach, 2010) as a part of Indigenous methodologies that honor the personal and subjective knowledge’s of participants. Our self-stories or narratives invite others to share our experiences through our understandings (Kovach, 2010). I use stories in this research within the context of Story-work” by (Archibald, 2008) who suggests that within Indigenous stories there needs to be a collaboration between story teller, listener, and the story. Following these suggestions, I initially did one round of interviews with each of the five participants. Once participants reviewed transcripts, they had an option of doing a follow up interview that allowed them to clear up any areas of the first interview that they wanted. Two participants were able to do a follow up interview. The follow up interview asked:

- What are some things you have been thinking about since our last interview?
- How do you think the interview/research has benefited you?

- Who do you think can benefit from this research and how?
- How do you see this research giving back to your communities?

Transcripts from the follow interviews were followed the same listening guide method used in the first interviews.

At the beginning of the first round of interviews, I shared with the participant an excerpt from Wilson's (2007) definition of the term *Two-spirit*:

The term two-spirit is a self-descriptor increasingly used by Aboriginal gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Canadians who live within in a traditional Aboriginal worldview. It asserts that all aspects of identity (including sexuality, race, gender and spiritually) are interconnected at that one's experience of sexuality is inseparable from experiences of culture and community (Wilson, 2007).

I adapted this interview strategy from Indigenous researcher Weber-Pillwax (2001) who supports the notion of participants being co-creators of knowledge in Indigenous research contexts. She writes, "In some ways this has been an excellent way for me to give back to people, as well as to receive from people" (p. 171). In this study, I invited participants to share their understandings of what 'Two-spirit' means to them. Building of Weber-Pillwax's (2001) interview strategy, sharing the term encouraged participants to interpret the term in any way that felt right for them. For me, it helped me be welcoming of how they made meaning from what I was sharing; it was a way of building a reciprocal relationship with them and being accountable (Kovach, 2010). I was not aiming on becoming an expert on everything "two-spirited" but rather that the participants and myself were able to engage in respectful conversations and collectively offer insights on current knowledge around the term two-spirit.

In many of my interviews, participants would often ask me about my experiences as well, knowing that I also identified as queer and First Nation person. The shared conversations felt organic and helped foster relationships. Thomas (2005) recognized that "Storytelling has a holistic nature...they [the storytellers] will tell the story the way they want. The teller is the one who controls how the story is spoken, and "the

‘researcher’ becomes the listener or facilitator” (p. 245). Storytelling provides an avenue to share Indigenous experiences that have not yet been heard or validated.

Kovach (2010) states, “Stories are vessels for passing along teachings, medicines and practices that can assist members of the collective...Stories were not always transferred in lexical form, but through visual symbols, song, and prayer” (p. 95). A conversational style method for the interview guide was used in this study it helped ensure that participants’ stories were viewed from a relational understanding and that each conversation had embedded teachings. As I conducted interviews and listened to participants’ stories about how they understood their gender, sexuality, and race, I also paid attention to experiences with oppression and how they developed an empowered sense of self through these experiences. The conversations consisted of individual interviews with the participants’ who also chose where they would like to have the interview. I met some of them on campus, in coffee shops, their homes, and in a park. I gave all the participants an opportunity to review their transcripts and invited them to have another conversation with me on what the first interview was like for them, it provided some participants an opportunity to reflect on the significance of their knowledge. In alignment with practicing Wahkowtowin, I thanked the participants for their contributions by offering a small gift and showing gratitude for the time they took to share aspects of their lives with me.

Participants

A snowball method was used for recruiting participants in this study as it allowed for me to recruit participants through my relationships and networks. I recruited five participants through a poster that was distributed to the PAWS website and shared on a bulletin. I also shared the poster with Indigenous stake holders at University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and the University of Regina who shared the call out to potential students. All participants were attending a post-secondary institution at the time of the interviews, and self-identified as Two-spirit, transgender, queer, and First Nation.

Participation for this study was voluntary and participants were asked to indicate their desire to participate by email or phone. Written consent to participate was done at the beginning of the first interview.

Methods of Analysis

For the analysis of the data I was conflicted with choosing an appropriate method that was aligned with an Indigenous framework. I needed to locate a method that centered the voices and aligned with an Indigenous research paradigm of relationality. A qualitative method that supports an Indigenous framework and stories is the Voice-centered relational method also known as the Listening guide method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2003). It is a relational method in the sense that “It guides the researcher into relationship with the participant through making our responses, experiences, and interpretive lenses clear in the process, and by listening to each participant’s first-person voice before listening for answers to our own research questions” (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & et al, 2003, p. 169).

The listening guide method asks the researcher to consider a set of basic questions about voice when analyzing the data: Who is speaking and to whom, telling what stories about relationship in what societal and cultural frameworks? With these questions in mind researchers are taught to read the interviews four times, with each listening tuning into a particular aspect of the voice (Gilligan et al., 2003). The listening guide is a method of psychological analysis that draws on voice, resonance, and relationships as ports of entry in the human psyche. It is designed to open a way to discovery when discovery hinges on coming to know the inner world of another person (Gilligan et al., 2003, pp. 157). There are four steps in this method with steps one to three guiding the researcher to “listen” rather than “read” the text/transcripts. This process of listening requires the active participation on the part of both the teller and the listener (researcher). Each listening is intended not as a simple analysis of the text but rather helps the listener (researcher) understand the layers of the story being told. Such as, who is speaking and to whom, telling what stories about relationship in what societal and cultural frameworks? With these questions in mind the researchers’ listen to the interviews multiple times, with each listening tuning into a particular aspect of the voice (Gilligan et al., 2003). The

researcher listens to rather than categorizes or quantifies, the text of the interview (Gilligan et al., 2003). There is a fourth step in this method that entails the analysis, the researcher brings together the voices that are most prominent with the research question. (Gilligan et al., 2003).

As I prepared to listen to the transcripts I would review my notes that I had on each participant. These notes familiarized me with any feelings or insights that I had during the interview. I listen to each participant's transcript three times. The first listening I focused on the plot of the interview following the steps of Gilligan et al., (2003), which suggest the researcher tune into the "Landscape" of the story: "We begin by first getting a sense of where we are, or what the territory is by identifying the stories that are being told, what is happening, when, where, with whom, and why" (p. 160). In this step, using a blue pen, I took notes of my own reactions and feelings experienced when listening to the participants' story. I focused on my relationship with the participant and asked: do I feel a connection with them, can I relate to what is being shared? Or do I not feel a connection? As multiple listening's are the heart of this method the goal is not agreement but rather an exploration of the different connections, resonances and interpretation that each listener naturally brings to the analytical process (Gilligan et al., 2003 pp.161). This process helps bring out my own subjective knowledge as the participant tells their story and keeps me an active listener (Archibald, 2006).

During the second listening of the transcripts I focused in on the voice of the "I" who was speaking by following the use of the first-person pronoun and constructing "I" poems (Gilligan et al., 2003). This step has two purposes. First, it is intended to press the researcher to listen to the participant's first-person voice, tone, and rhythms and second, to hear how this person speaks about him/herself. This step is a crucial component of a relational method in that tuning into another person's voice and listening to what this person knows of her- or himself before talking about him or her is a way of coming into relationship that works against distancing ourselves from that person in an objectifying way (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

During this step, I underlined every first person "I" in the text, along with the verb. I then pull out the underlined "I" phrases, keeping them in the order they appear in the text, and place each phrase on a separate line, like lines in a poem. This departs from other

narrative methods that tend to be focus on the structure of a story or text (Gilligan et al., 2003). Once the “I” poems were created I would listen for how the participant, felt, about what is being shared, and also how they felt about themselves, this process is tuning into their subjective understandings of their identities.

In the third listening of the transcripts the focus is on “listening for contrapuntal voices” (Gilligan et al., 2003) . I listened for at least two contrapuntal voices in the transcripts, counting how many times a voice would appear in the transcript. I chose to explore the contrapuntal voice that was more frequently used than the other in the next step. I listen to the text, listening for one voice (theme) at a time, and the evidence of this voice (theme) was underlined with a green pen. The text was then listened to one more, time listening for a different contrapuntal voice (theme) circled in red. Gilligan et al., (2003) indicates that listening for more than one voice indicates that a person can have a variety of multiple meanings and descriptions in what they are sharing. Gilligan et al., (2003) suggest that a minimum of two voices should be sought although one could potentially identify four voices in a text.

The final step in this method focuses on the analysis of the story: “The researcher begins to pull together what has been learned about this person in relation to the research question” (Gilligan et al., 2003, pg. 168). Three critical questions guided my analysis:

- 1) What have I learned about this research question?
- 2) How have I come to know this?
- 3) What is the evidence on which I am basing my interpretations?

I brought the voices into relationship with the research question” (Gilligan et al., pp. 164, 2003). In this step, I connected the person’s voice with the research question, identifying the relationship between the two. My intentions here were to identify, specify, and sort out voices that were most frequent and how they connected to other participants voices. This step is crucial in that it helps the researcher see a relationship between the person’s first person voice and how it supports the inquiry. I look at the text and ask questions about how the text helps illuminate something meaningful around the questions I was seeking to answer, or if the text helped identify any contradictions and if a voice or theme needs to be changed.

Ethical Considerations

I followed the ethics involved in undertaking interviews with students attending the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina and conducting research with Aboriginal populations and sexual minorities. The study was granted approval by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board. Participants read and signed consent forms that defined the methods and procedures for participation including storage of data, dissemination of results, possible risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality, data and transcript release, and steps for feedback.

As a researcher who is *Nehiyaw* and Two-spirit, I followed my understandings of *Nehiyaw* protocol as they applied to undertaking research with Indigenous people. This was practiced by engaging with Wahkowthowin. For example, each participant reviewed their transcripts, signed a transcript release form and were asked if they wanted their names changed along with places, people that could potentially be linked to them. This was important that I asked them this as I wanted to ensure that their well-being and safety was protected but also that they could exercise their autonomy if they chose to leave their names. As some participants felt that because they are already engaging in anti-oppressive work it was meaningful for them to be forthcoming in their actions.

Prior to data collection, I attended a gender inclusive sweat lodge ceremony that was put on with the Aboriginal Student Center and the Pride Center at the University of Saskatchewan. I brought cloth and tobacco to the Elder who was leading the ceremony, and asked that he pray for me to do the research in a good way, I wasn't entirely sure on what this looked like but needed guidance in ensuring that my intentions about the research were clear and honest. The Elder said, "That is a good place to start and that if I continue to ask for guidance along the way, the help will be there". As a way of giving back, I gave participants Tim Hortons card, and invited them to attend the next gender inclusive sweat if it applied to them. After data collection, all the participants gave me consent to use the transcripts with some minor modifications around removing names of people and places in their interview transcripts.

Prior to each interview, I provided each participant with a copy of the interview questions as a way to help them prepare for our meeting. I also prepared for the interview by smudging before meeting the participants, to clear any feelings of uneasiness or fears

of me unintentionally bringing up unwanted feelings for participants while they were sharing their perspectives. Conducting a smudging ceremony cleared, it my heart and allowed me to attend the interview with an openness to other's experiences, to listening with a good heart. At the interview, I shared with participants that I conducted a smudging ceremony, this disclosure was a way for me to let the participants know that I wasn't here to be the expert on their experiences but rather the goal was for me to learn from their stories and that they had flexibility in how they told those stories. I recognize the value in Indigenous methods (Archibald 2009; Kovach 2010; Wilson 2007) when it comes to minorities having agency in how they tell their stories but also they need to know they can trust the person who is listening. I built trust by being open to participants asking me questions about my experiences. We had some as interconnections due to my own Indigenous identity and how I defined my gender and sexuality. Some of their questions are included in the transcripts that were part of the analysis as it helped provide insight into how participants viewed their identities. Participants welcomed this which helped the interview process start in a good way.

CHAPTER FOUR: SITUATING THE PARTICIPANTS IN RELATIONSHIP

Introduction

In this section, I want to honor the participants who shared their knowledge and experiences with me by providing a brief synopsis of each person and our relationship, this is a necessary step of an Indigenous world view which validates and honors relationships (Wilson, 2007). Five participants took part in the interviews and two of the five were able to respond to a second interview and offer further interpretations of the first interviews. Three of the five participants agreed to disclose their real names however two of the participants did not want to be identified, so I chose pseudonyms for them.

At the time of the interviews each participant attended a post-secondary institution with very different reasons and motivations for continuing their educational journeys. They varied in their ages from 20 to 39 and each one of them identified as being on the spectrum of gender and sexuality. Participants had diverse working experiences; many of them were returning students who worked then decided to pursue post-secondary education. Some of them have been sought for their knowledge and advocacy in creating inclusive spaces for queer and two-spirit people. Each participant also identified as Indigenous, meaning they were full status Indians who belonged to a First Nations band in Saskatchewan and Alberta. One participant had recently received her status and was in the process of figuring what that meant to her, and the importance of having that recognition. The participants' stories are presented in the following format: *Background, Understanding the meaning of Two-spirit, and how they identify.*

Billie

Background

Billie is a Status Indian from a Saskatchewan First Nations community, at the time of the interview Billie was a student in the Indian Education Teacher Program (ITEP). Billie completed an internship with the Catholic School Board in Saskatoon and is a lover of sports. Billie does not have a strong connection with the male or female gender and has used them interchangeably as pro nouns when speaking of oneself. I have intentionally

used gender-neutral pro nouns in this part of the writing as to allow Billie to decide when to use male and female. As a new teacher one of Billie's goals is to be a role model for students who are questioning their identities. The day of the interview I met up with Billie's house and once settled Billie offered me a cup of tea. I immediately felt comfortable in Billie's home. Pride was in full swing at the time of the interview and Billie suggested that we share what this time meant to us, "Are you attending any pride events?" Billie asked. I shared a story of the first time I attended Pride in Saskatoon and Billie shared that they had never attended but respects those who choose to attend. I recall after the interview, that Billie had attended their first queer sweat. After the first interview we both supported each other over social media by letting each other know of similar events taking place on campus or in Saskatoon, and often running into each other at these events.

Understanding the Meaning of Two-spirit

Billie read the definition of Two-spirit and offered their own understanding of the term: "I agree with it and stuff but for me *Two-spirit* is just having the spirit of a man and woman, that's what Two-spirit means to me." Billie also interpreted the term as having a connection to being First Nation and coming to understand how cultural intersects with being two-spirit, "I'm only starting to come out with my spirituality and stuff. I never grew up with it you know I'm starting to smudge and try those things and the spirituality part I really want to find out and explore it." As our interview progressed, I found that I appreciated Billie's willingness to share their process around making meaning from their experiences with finding a term that feels at home for them.

How Billie Identifies

Billie, identifies with the term *Two-spirit* and has found it a helpful term in understanding they're gender and sexuality. And prefers to use pronouns that are not male or female. Billie stated, "I don't identify myself as male or female. I just identify myself as Billie, you know because I always had people saying to me growing up are you a boy or girl, so I don't like saying I'm a male or female. If I could pick I wish I was born male. I don't even say I'm two-spirited but if I could pick I would say two-spirited. I find that it's a better word than lesbian because I'm not a lesbian. I just thought of myself as a

boy growing up and I was attracted to girls.” For this interview, I use gender neutral pronouns for Billie, and Billie was okay with this.

Calico

Background

At the time of the interview Calico was a graduate student in the sociology department and is from a First Nations community in Manitoba. Calico speaks Cree and has studied in the United States. I met Calico, in a graduate class in the Department of Educational Foundations. Calico had responded to the advertisement for and agreed to meet me with me on campus, outside. The first meeting was great, we talked a bit about our graduate journeys and our goals for the research we were doing.

Understanding the Meaning of Two-spirit

When I presented the excerpt of the definition of Two-spirit (Wilson, 2007) to Calico, she looked at the term and shared with me:

Two-spirit was coined in 1990 during a Two-spirit quote on quote gathering in Winnipeg. I’ll talk more about that, for me my identity as a Two-spirit or a trans identified person is not as much of an issue as my identity as a Cree person is. I don’t identify as a Canadian so I feel like that is something that doesn’t apply to me personally. I say, I’m First Nations, I was born in Canada but I’m not Canadian...but other than that it’s a good description.”

How Calico Identifies

Calico shared with me how she identifies: “In English I say trans identified not man identified.” But in Cree there is a term that Calico chooses, “Ayekkwew, I prefer that cause its Cree and speaks more directly to my own experience.” I first heard of Ayekkwew in 1995 or 96 at the college I was going to and it was from the program director at the time. He said it’s not the same as gay it’s something else it’s how you relate to someone as an indigenous person.”

Timothy

Background

I met Timothy, in my undergraduate program at the University of Saskatchewan, through mutual friends. Tim later took some time off school but returned to take the Film Studies program at the University of Regina. I asked him if he would be interested in taking part in this study and he gladly said, yes of course!" Timothy just completed his program at the University of Regina and was recently nominated for a Saskatchewan Student Film Award.

Understanding the Meaning of Two-spirit

When Tim was presented the definition of Two-spirit he admitted some confusion, but was working it out by finding how he could relate to it or not. He said,

Well I was kind of confused with the part around 'one's experiences are inseparable from experiences of culture and community' and I'm just not sure what that meant. Is that me being gay? A part of my community or my family or my friends, is that what it means?

Tim shared that he never really understood what it meant when people call themselves Two-spirit and that this definition was a positive representation. He said, "I agree with the term, and I think it's pretty awesome." He also indicated that the term doesn't fit with his view of himself because he has "agnostic worldview" about his sexual identity as a gay man and that he wasn't brought up in a traditional" Way. His perspective shed some light on my own bias, I assumed that all First Nations people who are gay would claim this term. Tim was First Nations and gay but didn't use the term Two-spirit to describe his identity. However, he had similar experiences with oppression that were associated with being gay and growing up in First nations family that was Catholic.

How Tim identifies

Tim indicated that he found the term Two-spirit to be positive however he did not feel that it fit with how he identifies. He indicated that he is First Nations but also identified as gay. He explains:

I say, “gay” it means I’m attracted to other males and I learned that growing up I wasn’t like everybody else. All the guys in my class were excited to talk to the girls and I wasn’t. So just from growing up I realized that’s a part of who I am. I got the impression that he was very confident in who he was and how he identifies. Tim had a lot of questions, and later disclosed that this was the first time that he was asked to think about his identity and how he came to know this aspect of himself. He shared that he found the interview positive in that it helped him appreciate the growth he has gone through. Tim had a lot of questions about my experiences and indicated some awareness of how our social environments and relationships influence how we accept our sexual identities.

North

Background

North responded to the research poster that was posted on campus. She was open to meeting right away and wanted to just chat about the study and what my motivations were for pursuing the inquiry. She was in her first year of arts and sciences studies and recently left a trucking job. She is *Nehiyaw* and from a First Nations community in Saskatchewan and enjoyed sports. I respected her decision to meet and it gave her a chance to learn about the goals and my intentions with the research, and then she could choose if she wanted to be a part of it. I also saw this as an invitation to share with North some of my experiences, as I too identify as First Nations and gay. This was an opportunity for us to connect and for North to make the decision about participating in the study.

Understanding the Meaning of Two-spirit

When North interpreted the excerpt of the term Two-spirit (Wilson 2007) she said she agreed with it and that for her it was a process that she was figuring out:

I guess, in a sense, I’m actually still exploring exactly where I sit in the spectrum of Two-spirit. I was brought up spiritual and in the culture and everything else, like Sundance and sweats and all that, there is like a lot of these things you have to do like this. Where you’re a man you’re on this side and if you’re a woman

you're on that side. There are roles for men and there are roles for women. And they were pretty strict on where people had to sit especially at a certain age. But an Elder told me that at one time Two-spirited people had their own places in ceremonies.

I asked North how hearing the Elder say this impacted her, she said, "Back then I was still very self-conscious about my sexuality and everything else like that around the community. And then to hear that, it just kind of made me feel a little bit lighter in a sense. Just to have that acceptance." Hearing North talk about her understandings of the term Two-Spirit offered me some insight into the ways that communities and Elders can nurture a positive understanding of what it means to be Two-Spirit. Role models make a difference in how Two-Spirit people develop an empowered sense of self.

How North Identifies

When asked what terms she identifies with North said "Lesbian" and "Queer." She expressed the power in reclaiming terms that were once used to oppress sexual minorities:

I moved to [City name] where my mom's working and met a bunch of people there who identify as *queer* and I really like that. Just the fact that you know that it used to be used as a negative term and we kind of just turned it around and accepted it. Made it a positive term.

North also indicated that she uses certain terms in different spaces. For example,

My use of terms does change, like when I'm in smaller towns. I wasn't completely 100 percent comfortable even with using you know lesbian or gay but I was also a teenager and there was only maybe me and two other people who were on the queer spectrum. And it wasn't always a positive when people were talking about them I guess it just depends on the crowd you hang out with as well. Living in a small community, sports was a huge thing growing up and those who were also Queer, Gay or Lesbian they would usually prefer the term lesbian but it seems that more people who are advocates use the term Queer and in bigger cities like Regina.

North's experiences around identity illustrate a fluidity that is influenced by different geographies that North lived in, and some of these changing spaces nurtured a sense of empowerment.

Jack

Background

I met Jack through a mutual friend while he was still a student at Nutana collegiate. I had just finished the ITEP program and was interested in meeting current students who identified as Two-spirit. My research questions were just formulating and I'm not sure what motivated me to meet Jack but we met for coffee at Broadway Roastery. We had a quick chat about where we were from and our experiences growing up in First Nations communities. At the time of the interview Jack was a student at the U of S. We continued to work alongside each other and spoke at similar speaking engagements on campus and Saskatoon around advocating for Queer/two-spirit spaces. Jack has inspired me to continue this research, and encouraged me to live my life in an authentic way. Jack currently works at OutSaskatoon as their cultural coordinator.

Understanding the Meaning of the term Two-Spirit

After reviewing the definition of Two-Spirit (Wilson 2007) Jack offered some insight into how the term could be more inclusive, he said:

There is no 'ed' at the end (points to the term *transgendered*) I think these three are okay (going over definition) like lesbian, gay, bisexual, I would change the wording of this (points to *Transgendered*). The reason why there is no 'ed' it's kind of like saying you've been 'gayed.' I think I prefer gender and sexual diverse instead of just having those three (*lesbian, gay, bi-sexual*) it's not inclusive enough.

Listening to Jack speak about his understandings of the term Two-Spirit taught me how vast this spectrum is, and reminded me that the study was not about fixing the definition of Two-Spirit but is an investigation into how those who are First Nations and identify on the spectrum of gender and sexual diversity come to make meaning from their experiences. I think there is much to learn from these experiences that can improve how

educational, health care, and communities can nurture a positive interconnected identity for these people.

How Jack Identifies

“The terms that I use to identify myself; I’m a Cree, Two-Spirit, and Transgender man. But for ease I might tell people I’m a transgender male but when you go deeper there are like how many layers to that.” I asked Jack to explain what he meant by layers:

Yes, in different situations because of the level of education of the people I’m talking with I might use different terms. You know on a person to person basis I can break it down but when having to talk with large groups who have little to no knowledge of various identities in gender and sexual diversity, I would use the most basic ones that are the most identifiable.

Jack’s understanding of how to engage with different people who are at in different stages of their learning about gender and sexual diversity is helpful in this study as it illustrates the importance of terminology being used as starting points for people to become more educated.

CHAPTER FIVE: AFFIRMING THEIR IDENTITIES: WEAVING THE COLLECTIVE VOICES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I share the stories of participants who were part of this study and how they developed a positive understanding of their interconnected experiences Two-spirit and/or Queer Indigenous students. An interview strategy that I used in creating the interview script was to situate open-ended questions into the following three categories: past experiences, current experiences, and future experiences. This allowed for the conversation to start with participants reflecting on questions that gently eased them into the interview. The second set of interview questions asked participants to reflect on current experiences with their identities. Finally, I asked the participants how they perceived future generations of Queer Indigenous students may benefit from being exposed to Two-Spirit narratives.

This approach was supported by a conversational story-telling method (Kovach, 2010). Participants were allowed to share their stories and ask questions if needed. As the researcher, I listened to the stories as they were told and sought clarification where needed, or if a participant asked about my own experiences I shared with them. This approach to the interviews is grounded in Indigenous story telling methods that foster a relational space between story teller, listener, and the story (Archibald, 2008).

I used a variation of voice-centered relational method also known as the listening guide method (Gilligan, et al., 2003) to analyze and interpret the participants' stories. The stories in this section are summaries of the transcripts which is step one of the listening guide method that asks the research to construct an overview of the story being shared.

Participants Past Experiences

Billie

Reflecting on their past experiences Billie said that growing up they were popular because they were good at sports and they didn't have any negative experiences

associated with their perceived gender and sexuality, “Once people got to know who I was BOOM! I was deadly at sports people just loved me.” Billie went on to say that they did not have to deal with “stuff like that” meaning bullying or teasing due to his gender or sexuality. Billie’s middle years and early high school years were positive and questions of gender or sexuality were not a factor because it was not on Billie’s radar or others in the community at the time. People were more focused on Billie’s athletic talents.

However, later on in life as a young adult there were times where Billie did not feel safe in how their gender was being perceived by peers. In 2011, EGALE Canada published a report on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in schools (Taylor et al., 2011) the report identified locker rooms and washrooms as one of the most frequent spaces that were unsafe for Queer youth. Washrooms on campus, and at sports venues became unsafe spaces for Billie: “I don’t like to say I’m female and it sucks that I have to go into the girls’ washroom. There’s a lot I hate about the identity of myself but at the same time it’s because of how society has brought this view of myself up in the world.” Billie tried to make sense of how to negotiate their gender. Disclosing that they feel more comfortable being perceived a male, “If I could pick, I wish I was born male.”

Billie never lived on a reserve but did frequent sports events that were First Nation focused. Billie mentioned that when playing ball and when they first got their status, they were able to play First Nation fast ball. This was a positive and negative experience for Billie as different First Nation communities were vying for Billie to play with their team. It was during this time that teams were in disagreement on who Billie should play for and Billie got into a fight with a team member who was on one of the teams who wanted Billie to play with them.

Billie shared:

One of the girls jumped me and stuff because I was fair and wouldn’t go play with them and probably because I looked like a guy, because she was like ‘oh, I’m going to go beat up that guy’ you know what I mean.

Billie also refers to their skin color being fair and how it could be perceived by others as a negative attribute especially in First Nation spaces. Billie equates this experience as racism: “That’s the only thing I get because, I’m fair, is that I get racism sometimes from

my own people.” In recalling this experience, Billie shares tensions around how those in some First Nation communities have made Billie feel unsafe due to Billie’s perceived gender as Male and Billie’s fair complexion.

Jack

Children are socialized into western norms of gender however for Jack this socialization was viewed as taking away his ability to be himself on his terms. Jack recounts a story about how he learned how gender categories are constructed by society. He said:

When I was younger and was at my kokums place, I remember, I was probably like three or four years old. I was pretty young and she needed to find me clothes because I happened to have had a little accident. And she went into her laundry room and she wasn’t able to find me any girls underwear only boys underwear. So I put those on and I thought damn I really like these I want to wear more of them. I think for me it didn’t really resonate with me until years later actually where I realized people were putting me in the wrong clothes. One of the things I found when I grew older was that it was true like for my whole life people have been putting me in the wrong category that I really didn’t identify with.

Western gender norms are passed on early: boys learn what it means to be a boy and girls learn what it means to be a girl. However, through Jack’s story there is often little attention given to other experiences of genders. Queer affirming groups for youth were seen as place to learn about other genders and sexualities for those questioning their gender and orientation. Jack explained:

When I found out I was trans it was actually through drag, I was doing a lot of drag stuff in Calgary through this queer youth group. And one of the people who went to the queer youth group was this other trans guy. I roughly knew what the idea of trans was but I didn’t actually have any conversations with anyone, so I wasn’t fully aware. And I stopped and chatted with him and when we were talking my whole experience in life just rang true with his experience. From being forced to wear female clothing and to feeling utterly uncomfortable in one’s body and feeling uncomfortable with how society saw me. Then it dawned on me, I can transition and I don’t have to be a female. I think that right there was one of the

biggest, eye-opening experiences. Realizing I don't have to be sad and uncomfortable all the time.

Jack shared his understanding of how he learned that what he was taught about his gender was not true for him and that he found meaningful opportunities to learn from those who have gone through similar experiences as himself.

Jack said that when younger he thought sexuality meant that people were either attracted to girls or boys, and that meant people were 'straight' and in some cases people were also 'gay' or 'bi-sexual,' if you were attracted to someone of the same gender as you. In this stage of his life he had a limited understanding of other sexualities:

I had quite a narrow view point but I finally came out to myself when I was fairly young. I knew I was liking people of the same gender at quite a young age. I used to go to the pow-wow and tell my sister to call me a different name. I would switch it up once in a while. I would tell her okay I'm your brother Scott, now go over there and ask that girl if she wants to go out with me.

There were other experiences where Jack was attracted to boys and was able to find humor in recounting his past attractions. He said:

My very first kiss was with this boy and I shit you not his name was Rainbow. My very first kiss was with the rainbow and I knew I kind of liked boys. But when I started growing up realizing I was liking girls. I had more of attraction to them for a good portion of my life. In my teen years, I didn't really like masculine people too much sexually but I think it was because of the gender dysphoria that was really prominent but I wasn't really aware of. And then when I came out as trans I started feeling more confident in myself, therefore, was able start to feeling more confident in my sexuality as well and I was like it's okay to like men too.

Jack reflected on how his gender as a trans man is connected to his sexuality and there is a sense of fluidity in his attraction to both boys and girls. In addition, he reveals that there was an understanding of how gender dysphoria complicated his relationships with men and how he perceived masculinity. Reflecting on his past, Jack also shared that child sexual abuse hindered his perception of his gender and sexuality. This was a challenge for him when seeking intimacy with other men, as he did not feel safe:

I went to many years of therapy to talk about my child sexual abuse and to unpack that. And one I'm fairly open about it, and it's something I survived, I was able to learn a lot about myself even though it was a hell of a hard thing to go through. But I'm happy that I survived and that I spun it the way that I wanted to. I had power over the story now, I'm not a victim, I'm survivor.

Jack was able to reconcile this part of his life and demonstrates the qualities of resilience when asserting that he views himself as a survivor and not a victim of child sexual abuse. He said that this has aided him in forming new relationships and exploring his sexuality with masculine people.

Recounting his experience with gender dysphoria, Jack mentioned that it is a never ending journey. He said, "Gender dysphoria is like pretty much a very uncomfortable feeling of being in one's body. Like some days I physically can't leave my house because of how shitty I feel, or how like today I might feel like super female today and it's something that really bugs me." Jack also said that internally he sees himself as a muscular man but externally his body still is anatomically female. Further Jack talks about his experiences with anxiety due to the gender dysphoria:

It just brings about this huge bout of anxiety in yourself, it fluctuates though because some days I'm really good at being able to face it. I'm really good to handle my gender dysphoria but other days it's really hard. And I think it really started coming out when I was going into puberty. It was this feeling of dread because it felt like someone was pushing me towards this cliff.

The pressure of his body going through changes that young girls go through such as menstruating compounded stress. Jack said this got him depressed and he didn't know he was trans at this time. He adds that he didn't really name it until he started transitioning:

I was like okay all those feelings of dread, anxiety, sadness and just frustration with myself was because of gender dysphoria and now that I'm being seen as who I am and being seen as Jack, I feel a lot better way. I'm happier and I think even my parents see that and my family sees that. I was super shy and very closed off with people growing up and now that I'm out and proud of who I am I'm just happier.

Thinking about his high school experience, Jack describes how it was empowering for him to feel like he was a majority when attending an all First Nations high school. He said:

Having other First Nation students around and seeing teachers, First Nation teachers made me feel so comfortable. I just had this feeling like everyone knew what I was going through it felt awesome. Cause I gone to how many predominantly white schools so going there was just really epic.

Jack perceived the high school he attended to be a safe place that affirmed his interconnected experiences as a Trans, Two-Spirited man. His grade 10 teacher at the time made an effort to let him know that she was supportive of who he was. It should also be noted that during this time Jack's given name was Cheyenne and his gender was female. He said:

I went into her office and she was like Cheyenne, I really think you would like this book, so how about you go and read it and bring it back to me when you're done. She slides this book to me and I'm actually re-reading it right now and it's called "The man who fell in love with the moon," by Tom Spandeur. It's about this Two-spirit sex worker in the cowboys and Indians days. I was reading it and I was like how did she know. I brought it back and I was like that was the best thing I ever read. It was the first time I ever seen myself reflected in literature in school.

Jack said that he was impressed with how his teacher just casually affirmed who he was without outing him. It provided him an opportunity to see how Two-Spirit stories can be an empowering learning experience for youth who are looking for those stories that validate who they are. Jack's relationship with this teacher changed to a friendship. He said that she made a significant impact on he is today.

Looking at his past experiences living on the reserve Jack shared that he felt safe and affirmed during his younger years:

When I was super young and being able to go into ceremonies and be able to sit on whatever side I wanted to and wear shorts and a t-shirt into sweats and just being able to be me and not feeling like I needed to be anything else. So living on

the reserve I think my gender and sexuality were not necessarily too big because we do have a culture of non-interference. So I was able to be who I was.

Jack also said that this changed once he got older and became a teenager; his family felt that he should conform to some of the norms of other girls at the time. He also said that living on the reserve allowed him to gain some insight into the shared experiences with some forms of racism that other First Nation kids went through, such as being followed in the stores, or that people will assume that if your First Nation you are in there to do something bad.

When thinking about some of his current experiences on campus as student, Jack felt that the student orientation provided him a sense of acceptance. This was felt because the Pride Centre and the Aboriginal Students Centre had presented to students who were new and this gave Jack an opportunity to ask about what kind of Two-spirit programming the university had to offer:

I knew about Two-spirit people and I raised my hand and asked a question. I was like hey do you have any Two-spirit programming?' And [name removed] was just learning about Two-spirit stuff at the time, and said that we don't really have Two-spirit programming right off the bat but we have our pride flag in the Pow-wows. I was, like 'dude that's pretty awesome'. Relationship building is important to Aboriginal people, so to have the Pride Center there was huge it made me feel comfortable. I was able to go into the Pride Center and start asking questions and find out what we can do to get Two-spirit programming going.

Jack also shared that this experience taught him how this University has made progress in creating a safe space for the Queer community on campus but he saw there were areas of improvement. For instance, Jack said that he had an experience where another student thought Jack was 'checking him out' on campus. He said, 'that made me feel a little unsafe, a little passing not even a conversation just a small interaction that made me feel unsafe like, 'oh god I can't even look at anyone'.'" Another time that Jack felt unsafe was when Bill Walcott came to campus and he felt that the University did not do enough to ensure the safety of queer students on campus. Jack recounts this experience:

For them not sending out a notice of him coming onto campus. I got news from people phoning the Pride Center like 'Hey, Bill Walcott is on campus, he is pretty

volatile man, that's not cool. And then after words the university sent something out but the issue they sent out wasn't worded properly it made me feel like you know they're like 'Hey you know we're sorry he came out, but we're not sorry', you know like it really was a half-assed apology. But they did make up for it next time around. He came back again earlier this summer, I think, and then they sent out a notice. Some faculty members and students and staff got together where he was suppose set up and rain-bowed the shit out of the area, that made me feel safe. I was like, 'there are a lot of allies here and that's really awesome.'

There is sense of safety when the student body and campus faculty align to stand in solidarity with students who are queer, this was perceived as a way to combat homophobia, transphobias, and violence towards the queer community.

Tim

Reflecting on his past experiences with schooling, Tim expressed that there were some pressures to conform to heteronormative norms around dating:

“ In middle school, I remember, my best friend at the time was pressuring me to find a girlfriend which is ridiculous because you're only in grade seven. And you're supposed to have a girlfriend cause everyone else has one. I was never excited to do that. I only did it cause everyone else had one. And I think that's when I started to notice maybe I don't like girls”.

These expectations around dating are often encouraged as a way to fit in and do not include non-heteronormative relationships. Schools are often the places that young adults learn to build relationships with their peers, however they are not inclusive of same sex relationships.

However, there was a time in high school where Tim felt safe in his sexuality and found the courage to share with this group of friends that he was gay. He shared:

It wasn't until my last year of high school and I had a big group of friends. We all went to this Catholic high school and we just hung out with each other every day. Those were the first people that I told I was gay. We were all First Nations, Aboriginal kids going to school together. And that's when I first finally felt safe telling them who I was. They were cool with it and were like, 'oh, yeah we

already knew, Tim.’ It wasn’t big deal or anything which I thought was pretty awesome for them to say. I honestly didn’t know what they were going to say.

Tim also expressed that there were some pressures in the family around his cultural identity. While growing up, mother pressured him into practicing traditional Cree ceremonies and religious services. However, he did not have the same connection and views as his mother. He said:

“My mother just started being traditional 10 years ago, she wanted me to also live more traditionally. She would pressure me to attend sweats and pray with her. I just never felt comfortable doing that stuff. I don’t see myself as religious or traditional, so I guess that would be a different aspect to me identity.”

These sorts of pressures to practice or live a certain way were also shared in Tim’s home reserve. He expressed that he did not feel safe in his sexuality when thinking about his past experiences on the reserve:

I have actually never felt safe in my sexuality. Like most people there they have a small worldview and they don’t accept people like that, being gay. I have not officially come out to half of my family that still live on the reserve. They haven’t been off the reserve they just think of it as wrong ‘cause they go to church. I think it’s taught, because everyone that lives on the reserve goes to their own separate church and they were taught from the priests that being gay is a sin.

Tim’s description of how he felt unsafe because of the teachings around homosexuality as a sin sheds light on how heteronormative views of gender and sexuality are still being passed on in First Nation communities and impacts how those who identify as gay view their safety.

Reflecting on his involvement in this study, Tim shared some insights into how telling his story assisted in his growth and self acceptance.. He shared:

I think this interview benefited me by allowing me to look at the type of person I have become from my past experiences. I've never put too much thought into how I grow up a gay person but now that I have and I've come to really appreciate who I've grown up to be. Without this interview process I probably wouldn't have realized what else I need to learn accept into my life, like religion or spirituality, because that is one aspect of my life that I still have negative feelings towards.

But I know that I need to start praying to someone soon just so I can get that spiritual release that others have experienced, like the members of my family have. I mean I've thought about what I've gone through in the past and I've seen the teachings that life has given me since we last talked. I've come to the realization that I love being gay because even though it can be a hard life, I wouldn't have it any other way. I feel like being gay is something that a person doesn't get a choice in being, but they do get to choose whether they accept that part of themselves, and I love that part of myself.

North

North shared a few stories of her past and how she came to know that she wasn't like other girls at the time. She said, "I think I kind of just always knew, when I was kid my mom and my parents were always trying to dress me up in dresses but I was more interested in putting some pants on and playing with the guy things." It wasn't until North was older that she was introduced to the term Two-Spirit. It was also during this time that North embraced more feminine aspects of her identity. Prior to high school North said that she dressed, acted, and behaved like a boy. North also shared that being in high school and social pressures to date helped her process of liking her feminine self. When thinking about her past experiences in high school North felt she was safe in expressing her identity as lesbian: "That was the time I came out, I was in grade 12, I told one of my family members whose friend was a gay man. So I guess I felt safe talking about it." Although North felt safe to come out in high school she said there were issues around her being Cree and growing up near a small urban community that at times made her feel unsafe. She shared:

"My reserve was next to a small town and that's where we would go and alcoholism has been a problem where a select few people made a bad name for everyone else. There is ignorance from those in the small town and there is judging, because we're Native and they think if your Native you must be doing the same thing."

Looking back at her past experiences, North mentioned that she also experienced racism playing hockey:

I played hockey with bantam midget boys back then. And there were a few times where I got checked into the boards and then one of the guys would call me a dirty squaw but once I told my team mates, the guys I played with, they would go after the guy that did that.

North felt like she was a part of something. Having her team mates stand up for her made North feel a sense of safety and she knew they were on her side. There were moments while playing hockey that North heard comments about First Nations people that made her feel uncomfortable, for instance:

I remember I was on a [City name] hockey team and it was pee wee and we were traveling through to unity and we stopped in [City name] for supper. And two of our teammates were out by our bus and they got maced by a group of Native kids. Yeah, and they came inside, they were crying and their parents were pissed off, one of the parents made a comment like stupid f'n Natives. And it just sucks that A) they had to be Native people, B) that they had to say something because of the race.

North said this experience hurt her a little a bit but the father who said the comments apologized to her and admitted that he spoke out of anger.

There were some experiences with homophobia on the reserves that North lived at when she was a teenager. North said that there was an Elder who had made comments publicly that she was against homosexuality. Even though the comments were not directed at North the comments still left her feeling horrible about herself.

When thinking about her past experiences on the reserves North said that when she started dating girls and would bring them home to meet the family it was awkward but no one really said anything for her to feel unsafe or not supported at home. North had pleasant memories at the home and said that living on the reserve is where she was able to make some of most memorable connections with family. She said, "It's probably the safest place for me, like I feel safe and comfortable." There is a connection the land and history that instills a sense of pride in North. She shared:

"The hunting is amazing like, elk, deer, moose and everything. And just having that connection to the land, stories to the land, hearing stories from my Mom, Grandma, and my Great Aunt. It's that connection, that's why I feel so safe there and the story behind it, kind of gives you sense of pride, that's where my

ancestors have fought. And like the Gordon Red Oakes Red Bear, he was my Great Uncle. He guided my mom a lot in education and pushed her to go back to school and become a professor.”

North was also grateful that she was able to know of certain medicines that grew in the area and it made her connection to her home very special. North’s Cree identity is heavily influenced by the land and inspires her to learn more about her history.

Calico

Reflecting about past experiences and what influenced Calico’s perceptions of her identity. Calico shared a story where she learned early, in childhood that some people had negative perceptions of First Nations people. She shared:

“I was six years old and we had just moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba. I was playing in a sandbox with this little white girl and you know how kids are, we were kind of shy with each other at first and we started sharing each other’s toys. Next thing you know I hear ‘Get away from that dirty squaw’ and this was hard core racism. The reason why I even remember this is because it was traumatic. That was the first time I became aware that there was something else going on about me or around me that other people didn’t know. I became aware that I was considered an Indian.”

Calico mentioned that she never heard people using the term, ‘squaw’ up North and there were no negative connotations associated with being First Nations. Similarly, Calico mentioned that when hearing the term lesbian for the first time it sparked an interest in her to search the meaning of this term. She found that the origin of the term was Greek and based on a poet named Sappho, although she found it interesting that the term did not resonate with her. She said, “I felt that it didn’t really describe what was going on for me. One, because I was Cree; two, because I didn’t identify as lesbian; and, three, I didn’t have the language to describe what I was identifying as.” Calico says that the language came later when one of her friends was dating a Transman:

We use to have really long conversations about identity, bodies, and power and what does that all mean? But still I didn’t identify as a man I was drawn to the idea of this kind of transcending gender. To me it made sense, because to me our bodies are this thing that are vehicles that carrying who we are.

Calico also shared some of her perspectives of gender that involved thinking beyond the male/female binary. She said, “I feel that our bodies and these gender roles get in the way of totally expressing who we are as total human beings.” Calico felt that for her, a Cree model such as the medicine wheel was more fluid and flexible when thinking about her identity, saying:

The ideal expression of Cree humanity is finding balance between those four expressions and even as a model it has its limitations, but in terms of whether you’re going to use a binary model to describe human reality or a holistic model. The holistic one is more flexible because it takes into consideration all of these other parts. I didn’t relate to the idea of being a man. When I was kid, I didn’t relate to the idea of being ‘boy’ and I didn’t relate to the idea of being ‘girl.’

Calico mentioned that it wasn’t until moving to the United States and going to university that she met someone who used the term Trans identified, and this term made sense to her. Further, thinking about her identity, Calico acknowledged that there are many facets to who she was:

I understand that there are many different layers to me, there’s the layer of being raised in the bush in my formative years till ‘I was six, then there’s the urban layers, there’s the layers of being socialized in the western world in western education, and then layers of resisting it, being a Cree person, and I’m a Aunt [and] have four nieces and a nephew. And I don’t consider myself as being ‘out’, you know the saying, if you’ve never been in, than you’ve never had to come out?’

There was also some perceived tension in her family, when thinking about past experiences growing up that influenced the way she thought about her sexuality. Calico said, “I’ve brought my partners to visit my family and my sister she always describes me as a lesbian, she refuses to use my own description of myself and I think that is her way of expressing her homophobia or her way of trying to oppress me.” Despite feeling oppressed by her sister, Calico found opportunities in her family to have meaningful conversations with her nieces about her gender and sexuality, these conversations were positive and Calico understood. However, when thinking about Native communities in general Calico, felt isolated. S she said, “I don’t know I feel like there is no space for me,

for who I am anywhere in a lot of native communities there's homophobia or transphobia." Calico also saw people on her reserve treat those who were perceived to be gay violently. She said:

"In my experience on the reserve people can be very unforgiving of differences and sexualities and gender expression. I saw one of my cousins get beat up when I was fourteen. He identified as male, he was about seventeen but his gender expression was effeminate. It's what he liked, it made him feel fabulous. I guess it was his way of connecting those two, making congruency for what was going on his body. And it worked for him but he got targeted a lot and I saw him get beat up, he was chased down. They were yelling at him calling him 'faggot' it was very deliberate. There were girls in that group and they were all Native. He moved away, he moved to the city."

This feeling of not belonging and being shamed was also felt in Western Trans communities, where Calico felt that there was pressure to pick an identity: "People didn't get it's like I had pick, either I was trans man or trans woman." Further, Calico said that those who did not pick a gender with the Transgender identity were viewed as a minority in those spaces. She said:

"Tran's people who didn't identify as man or woman were the minority and they were seen similar to people who are bisexual, they are ridiculed by the Trans community. You have to choose. There is this imposition of choice, either you're one or the other and to me that's very Western that's very much an extension of that oppressive gender binary."

Further, Calico said, "these impositions are hurting people and it is up to us to decide for ourselves who we are, our identities are based on what's true and resonates." She also expressed, "In Indigenous communities there is more room to explore one's identity because the value systems are flexible and more fluid."

Current Experiences

Billie

Billie's experiences around feeling safe on campus were varied and there was a situation where a peer of Billie's in the College of Education made Billie feel unsafe. Billie's peer said, "What are you boy? You look like a boy!" Billie was shocked because this peer who was First Nation, a university student, and going to be a teacher. Billie states how this student who was going to become a teacher may also carry these views into the profession, "that's very discouraging, you're calling me out, well what happens when you have one of those kids who are in your class, how [are] you going to make that kid feel?" The concerns that Billie highlights indicate that student teachers need to have adequate opportunities to unpack their bias towards gender and sexually diverse students.

Billie transitions the story into how they and this student had another encounter and this student stopped to give Billie a ride to school in the winter. Billie tells me how this was an opportunity to listen to the student apologize and Billie accepted that apology. I get the sense that Billie had a very positive perception about people. Billie was able to forgive this student and equate it with, "People go through changes and, you know, may say something they don't mean to. So, you know I don't hold it against them but I did for a long time. I got over it and now I'm a clean slate." Billie demonstrated a forgiving perspective towards the experience and was able to use these moments to teach those who do not know much about what it means to be gender and sexually diverse.

In addition, Billie reflected on what might be some advantages of being perceived as a male. Billie used humor to share this experience: "If the girl bathroom is full I go into the guy bathroom; I rather go into the guys' bathroom because I don't get stared at." Billie goes on to describe how in the girls' washroom there are increased looks and being stared at and recalls attempting to pass as more female in times like this, "I will take my hat off and bring my chest out just to pretend I'm a girl, you know what I mean, so they are not freaking out." Washrooms can be a very hostile place for those who don't appear the 'appropriate' gender.

Billie described how silly the whole washroom thing was and how simple of a solution there is to this, "I like bathrooms where you can share, where it says both girls

and guys, those are perfect washrooms, or washrooms that just say ‘washrooms’ why does it have to be based on gender?” Billie’s recount of this story reveals some insight into why washrooms are unsafe for those who are not heterosexual and digress from the norms.

Billie admitted knowing that these spaces must change to help youth who are also Queer or Two-Spirit: “I know there are going to be kids like me and they’re going to experience the same stuff that I did, I didn’t like it, I was very confident when it came to sports but when it came to that stuff in washrooms, I just wouldn’t stand up for myself.” Billie does, however, share that when in the boys’ washroom this spaces is more comfortable and feels empowered, “I can go into the guys’ washroom and be bro’ing it up with them.”

At this point, our interview became more of a conversation, and Billie became curious about my own experiences and asked me, “what was it like for you growing up?” I get a little nervous at first because I wasn’t expecting this, but I’m quickly reminded of how I wanted the interview to always be more of a conversation, a sharing of who we are. The nerves went away and I shared a short story of how I looked very androgynous growing up and I used my real name ‘Lindsay’ more often and so did people in my family, and how other boys from different communities would flirt with me and I found it kind of funny yet nice at the same time. This is when I started to realize that how I felt and thought was different from other boys. I can tell by Billie’s body language and facial expressions that there is understanding in what I’m saying, Billie goes on to share a similar story about how girls would pursue Billie but Billie never pursued the girls out of fear. I recall feeling a sense of respect forming between Billie and I, even though this was an opportunity for me to learn from Billie. The whole interview became a reciprocal exchange of our experiences. We were learning form each others stories.

Jack

Jack said that there were some benefits of being Two-spirit Snd that there are some perceived advantages to being oppressed. He shared, “When I put proposals into conferences people eat up Two-spirit stuff it’s not an area that’s researched too much but now a day it’s starting to get researched.”

Jack also shared how being Two-Spirit can help him foster relationships with students who experience oppression on campus. He likes being able to meet people on their level and that in some way or another his identity intersects with someone's else's:

It's pretty awesome being able to understand where they are coming from. But it's an advantage because I think, I'm more sensitive to oppressions that other people have to face. For example, someone with reduced mobility, I'm able to see that these stairs would not be good for these individuals. And looking at people who fall out of the gender binary and going into a washroom and seeing that they are gendered. I'm able to be like 'hey, people wouldn't be able to come use this washroom if the needed to because they have to choose.' So, being able to see the inequalities in our society, I think is one of the advantages of having these interconnected identities.

Jack also shared that he saw some advantages to being Two-Spirit and Transgender within academia, particularly with funding opportunities. He said people come and they seek his expertise. For example, he shared:

I'm going to be sitting on two national research opportunities that are coming up talking about Two-spirit stuff, Aboriginal stuff, and Queer stuff as well, which I think is really awesome to go and do that. And councils, I find that the councils I sit on, my voice is heard a bit more 'cause there like this voice needs to be heard because it hasn't been heard before. So being able to do that, those are more like perks now that I think about it.

Reflecting on his current experiences, Jack is mindful of how his story of accepting his identity as a Transgender, Two-Spirit, man has helped others understand how oppression operates.

Jack said that sharing his story with others provides a sense of ownership in how he understands his interconnected experiences rather than have society tell him how he should feel about himself. He said, "Being able to take that ownership and to renegotiate First Nations ceremonies so that they're back to being inclusive. Talking with other First Nations people about ceremonies, letting them know that I kind of feel like I can't fit in here, in the way that things are set up, I want to be involved." Jack said, that is important

for him to accept his identity and that he should be seen as how he wants to identify, and to take part in ceremonies as a male is important to him.

One of the ways that Jack has been able to take part in ceremonies such as a sweat lodge ceremony was on campus. He and some students who work at the Pride center and the Aboriginal Students Center organized a gender inclusive sweat with the guidance of the Aboriginal Student Center's cultural advisor. Jack finds that he is able to reimagine how culture can be an empowering outlet for those who are Two-Spirit and Queer. He said:

Being able to renegotiate culture in that way and it feeling right, like it feels right to me to do this and when that happens people don't question it. You're following your intuition, your following what feels good and that's what First Nations culture is about, if the creator puts it out there and gives you this path than do it.

The positive views Jack has about himself and his contribution to making campus a safer space for queer students is valued by friends. Jack said that when he is challenged or unsure about creating change he reminds himself of the really dark times that he experienced.. He also said that being diagnosed with severe depression while dealing with a mental illness was difficult:

I came from a really sad time, it's good to be prideful but also remind myself there are people who are going through their struggles. I have to help alleviate those in some way, whether or not I'm going out there and talking about mental health issues as a Two-spirit person and showcasing that I am a Two-spirit person and people should be able to be seen as themselves in society.

Jack adds that he wants to help Two-Spirit people be seen, heard, and validated for who they are and that many people in his life have helped on his own journey. He feels empowered that he can give back to the Queer and Two-Spirit community.

Tim

I asked Tim to reflect on his current experiences in post-secondary and how he feels safe in his sexuality, race, and gender. Tim, felt safe in attending the Aboriginal Student Centre on campus because of his prior experience at the University of Saskatchewan. He identified this as ne of his safe spaces as a student: "I first started going to the University of Regina." He said:

I went to the Aboriginal Student Center because I remember, from attending the University of Saskatchewan, when I went to school there. I remember how awesome everyone was there, so I went to the University of Regina's Aboriginal Student Center and that's where I met all my friends. I felt completely safe being Aboriginal and being able to hang out with other Aboriginal people. I could open up and talk to people, and we get to know each other. That's where I felt safe enough to let my peers know that I am gay.

Tim also said that while attending the University of Regina he gained some insight into how his experiences with oppression could be viewed positively and was able to express empathy for other minority students who were being oppressed:

I remember two years ago there were two girls who were being forced to go back to their country because they were working outside of the university and they didn't know they weren't supposed to do that. So they hid in a church and were in there for over a year because they didn't want to go back to their country. I just remember it created a huge debate around everybody who went to the university, the girls should be deported they should have known better, other people were, 'oh no you should be more understanding they honestly didn't know what they were doing,' I was just able to ...ah, what's the word...I was just able to put myself in their shoes, what if that happened to me so I felt very sorry for them.

There is an understanding of how being a minority can have its challenges but that these challenges can help develop one's perception of themselves in a positive manner.

Tim also reflected on other experiences in University that impacted his perception of himself:

Most of the people I met have told me they are totally cool with me being gay. So like most of my friends have told me that they are okay and people that work at the university have told me that they understand that's who I am and it's totally fine. Aboriginal people who are traditional have told me that it's okay and they understand that's part of who I am.

His peers have made an impact on how he views himself as well. He shared:

“I have a friend he is in Education and will be done this year as well. He lives traditionally and he grew up with a traditional life style and all that stuff. When I first met him I wasn’t sure how he was going to respond. But he said he is totally fine, he says he likes gay people and jokes that I use to have a crush on him. We are good friends now we go to the gym together and we still talk and stuff.”

There are certain spaces that nurture a positive understanding or view of one’s sexuality and for Tim, this was through his Aboriginal peers, having an Aboriginal space for students, and finding common understanding with other minority students.

North

When talking about her current experiences attending the University of Saskatchewan North said that she felt confident in her in sexuality when surrounding herself with people who are just Queer as well. She also mentioned that she felt good about herself when she was with people who were accepting of her sexuality even though they were straight. Being involved in gay-straight queer events on campus was also a way that North gained a positive perspective of her sexuality. North also said the Pride Centre was a place where she could connect with like-minded people:

It connects me with people in that area and in the sexuality sense. Sometimes it’s hard to meet people who are Queer in straight places, and I personally believe, I like hanging out with queer people over straight people because we are not judgemental. We are so open to everything, it just seems heterosexual people put everything in a box and if you are not in that box you are an outsider or judged. I just find that conversations are better in spaces like that and you learn more.

North also felt that another inclusive space for her to connect with people on campus was the Women’s Center. She said, “The other day I was talking to someone at the women’s center, and having conversations with people who are involved in movements that sort of stuff just opens your mind to different worldviews.” North said that spaces like the Pride Center and the Women’s Center on campus were comforting to her: “I’ve found that I’m hanging out with a lot of queer.” The ability to be in space that brought people together with a collective understanding influenced how North felt about her sexuality in a positive way. North also perceived that an advantage of having

interconnected identities was the ability to see experiences from others perspectives.”

North shared:

“Yeah, advantages, seeing things from a broader spectrum. I guess from like male and female. For me if I choose to do feminine activities or if I want to dress up and do the shopping thing I can. And almost every male dominated job I liked. I like learning all those types of things, learning how to build a house or build a car and talk about modern technology for vehicles with the guys, and be able to have a conversation with guys and sit around with them and also to be able to do that with the girls. So the advantage is I can relate to more people.”

Grateful for the support, North also gave herself credit in accepting the different aspects of herself. Mentioning that a lot of it was “self-realization and self-acceptance.” She also expressed that she is reconnecting with her Aboriginal culture and developing her spirituality.

BILLIE

Billie shared that their identity as a First Nation person and as a Two-Spirit person are connected with their gender and sexuality, “I see them all connected cause that’s what I am but I know they’re not. Because they’re all their own little things, they all have their own unique experiences.” The sense of being unique can be an empowering experience depending on the how the people you are around validate you as a person. Billie is able to see the value in all the experiences with their gender, sexuality, and culture.

Billie said that despite knowing this about their experiences, society s doesn’t always see the value:

I was doing some research for a class assignment and I interviewed this lady from Standing Buffalo and she was Dakota. She told me that my kind of people were treated like gods, if we couldn’t have kids we were given one, she told me how on the reserves we were treated good, in ceremonies we were valued.

There was a tone of frustration in Billie’s voice and that current perceptions of Two-Spirit people are not aligned with what this lady was sharing. Billie also mentioned that when it comes to ceremonies today, they are not safe for Two-Spirit people. Billie shared:

The things that bothers me as a First Nation/Two-Spirit person in when I’m going into these ceremonies and that’s the biggest thing, is when your forcing me,

you're forcing me to put on a dress and, what happened, the Elders were praying and after the ceremony I was standing by the tipi and warming up by the fire and the dress I was wearing caught on fire.

This sense of unsafety mirrors the homophobic views that were taught in residential schools and that the "right" gender prescribes admission to take part in one's culture. Billie added:, "never again did I wear a dress, it was the creator ways of saying that I should not be wearing a dress." Billie elaborated that this story has been shared a lot and that it is important that if:

"I think of myself as a Two-Spirit person, then the Elders and people running the ceremonies should honor that. I don't want to people to interpret who I am and tell me how I should be in these ceremonies, I like going to the ceremonies as a Two-Spirit person and I should be able to continue that."

This experience was instrumental in how Billie viewed their sense of being Two-Spirit and how having access to cultural ceremonies that respect and validate Two-Spirit people is important.

Billie goes on to recount another experience of a ceremony on campus where Billie was told not to go near the food and gifts because Billie was not wearing a dress. Billie was yelled at by a staff member in the teaching program that Billie was in, and it hurt Billie:

I wasn't wearing a skirt and looking like a girl, nobody noticed expect [name removed] she noticed...I felt sad but I understand the protocol, but I don't identify as female but boom that's what they put you in as.

Despite some of the efforts Western institutions have made to incorporate culture into the university atmosphere these initiatives fail to affirm or see that many First Nation students, who are Two-spirit and do not feel safe when it comes to ceremonies being heteronormative and exclusive. In some cases, there is re-victimization by enforcing colonial gender binaries which as Billie said, put you in a category that doesn't feel right or good." Many institutions need re-examine Indigenous focused initiatives and how not to further oppress Two-Spirit students.

Billie also mentions how there are many rules and regulations when it comes to wanting to participate in culture: "It's like, geeze you're restricting me on how I'm

supposed to sit, girls have to sit like that and can't show your legs or they can't be crossed." The rules do not take into account Two-Spirit experiences or knowledge that they can add to these ceremonies and teachings. Even though Two-Spirited people were once recognized in their communities that is not the case today. Billie recounted some positive teaching by sharing their stories: "We just got to continue to be proud and be who we are, many people do not know about Two-Spirited people but if we can share our experiences that may change."

In addition, sports really helped build confidence in Billie early in their life. Billie doesn't recall connecting with any openly out gay people or knowing many gay people, or attending pride events. Billie mentioned that these just weren't significant, but sports and athletics were. Billie also clarified that being Two-Spirit is just one part of who Billie is and that it's an important part but there are other aspects that make up Billie's identity.

CALICO

Calico shared that the Aboriginal Student Center on campus is helpful by providing a space for her to smudge, they are supportive and nurturing the Cree aspects of her identity. However, a perceived area for improvement is that they can be stronger in supporting Queer issues. Calico added that the University, other than the Aboriginal Students Center need more safe spaces: "This aspect of being a person of color and having that respected, affirmed, and protected, I feel the university has a long way to go in that." Calico added that her perspective of 'safe and protected' includes spaces where students can address their experiences with oppression and not fear that they will be punished:

I was at this meeting and a key decision maker a gate keeper said 'well white people aren't the only racist people, native people are some of the worst racist people I know and you should hear some of the jokes they tell.' I looked at her, and in my head I was thinking, should I debate this, because she was kind of being aggressive about it and she clearly doesn't understand racism and how this works? I was the only nNative person there and if I pursue this I'm going to be put in this stereotype of the angry Indian and then I'm being racist ``cause I'm pointing this stuff out so I didn't because I didn't feel safe and have the support of anyone else at the table.

Calico added that a perceived advantage of being Two-Spirit is that you have multiple perspectives and there is overlap between yourself and many different individuals in society:

I think it gives you a unique perspective because you're not bound in that binary way of thinking. Well it could be frustrating too, in the sense that you have multiple perspectives but that isolates you. If you're talking with people that have maybe one or two perspectives, your opportunity for understanding and engaging with that person becomes limited 'cause they can only go so far.

When reflecting on what supports nurtured a positive understanding of her identity, Calico added:

Cree culture has encouraged a positive understanding about myself and that perspective and everything about the Cree value system is reflected in that ethic of Wahkohtowin, we are all related not just human beings, everything is all related, interconnected somehow. So for me the Cree value system affirms my identity in very fundamental ways.

Calico's perceptions of who she is, as a Cree person includes the ability to relate and connect with others around her while being seen in the way that she wants to identify.

Future Experiences for Two-Spirit Youth

Tim

When asked to share some thoughts about how schools can support Two-spirit students, Tim felt that leaders in schools need to make an effort to let students know who they can talk while affirming their identities. He said:

"I think that people who are in an official position like principals, vice principals, and even teachers should say that they have support groups and that it is okay to be like that and you know just as long as someone who has an official position says it's okay than I think most kids would have an easier time talking about it."

Similarly, Tim also sees a future for Two-spirit youth that are able to be valued in their First Nation communities. He said:

I think there should be some type of youth group meeting that high school students can go to and a support group there. Yeah I think for sure a group like that is needed because there are so many kids and youth who live on the reserve and are trying to live their lives based on what society tells them to be. Most kids that live on the reserve commit suicide `cause of stuff like that, so I think it's very needed for sure.

There is a perceived disadvantage that for Two-Spirit youth there are not enough supports on reserves for them. Education for the community on what being Two-Spirit means was thought of when considering how reserves can become more supportive. Tim mentioned, "Definitely education, there is not enough education living on reserve for gay people and the education that I know on my reserve, they don't talk about sexuality, gender, and races and I think just more light on that would be better." When reflecting on how campuses can be supportive of Two-Spirit post-secondary students, Tim saw a future where universities help Two-Spirit students connect with each other in safe spaces. He said, "There should definitely be a group specifically for gender and sexually diverse First nation students, just to ease them into the university world and to show them that there are other people like this too." Affirming identities and experiences is central in creating a safe space for Two-Spirit students.

Tim shared that his mother wasn't accepting of his sexuality right away because she grew up on the reserve. He said, "She thought it was wrong and she didn't want me to be gay. It took her a long time to accept who I am. My dad still doesn't want to believe that I'm gay, he still lives on the reserve and he's from a different generation." Tim felt that he could understand why his Dad wouldn't want to have a gay son and said it was because he was not educated to believe that Tim was born this way and that it's not a choice. Tim felt that educating people who live in a First Nation community would be a great way for people to see what it's like for their community members who are gay, hoping it would create understanding.

Tim sees a future for the Two-Spirit youth where their communities validate their gender and sexual identities while remaining connected to the culture. Looking into how Two-spirit youth can become part of the discussions in teaching their communities and families about their lived experiences.

Jack

Jack looks at the possibilities of Two-Spirit youth being supported by their schools by showcasing Two-Spirit role models. He feels visibility of Two-Spirit people in a positive light is important for youth to thrive. He said:

``I know there's our Two-spirit poster we have for the Pride Center, which showcases that a person is welcome in the ASC and the Pride Center regardless of your gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or cultural background as well you should be able to go and flow between these two organizations, so that's one way that we have been able to do it. So I think that's something that can be reflected in high schools is actually having posters for the youth to physically see it and books, books would be really awesome.``

High school curriculum needs to be inclusive of Two-Spirit people and their unique history. Jack felt that subjects like Native studies would be a good fit for teaching the youth about Two-spirit history but that teachers should look for other areas that they could integrate such content. Jack recounted his experience in high school:

I was actually in Native studies over at Nutana, and we had to do our big project on an Aboriginal issue in Canada. I chose to do it on Two-Spirit history and they had never heard of anything on the subject, the teacher included. I did this presentation; their minds were just blown. Today, I take that presentation and it's my skeleton to all my other presentations. This is one way to show high school students that are Two-Spirited that their identities matter and there are other people just like them, that's what they need to be taught.

Further, Jack said that when it comes to incorporating Two-Spirit issues into the curriculum that Two-Spirit people need to be part of those discussions. Jack also said that there are resources out there that teachers can use to help them with this like the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. Jack also felt that Two-Spirit leaders such as Albert McLeod and Richard Jenkins are invaluable resources that teachers can utilize if they were to make their classrooms Queer and affirming spaces for Two-Spirit youth:

``Both of them are veterans for Two-Spirit activism they started out in the like the early 80's so to hear about their stories regarding how hard it was for Two-Spirit

individuals back then and the amount of fighting they had to do both in the Aboriginal communities and in the Queer communities has been eye opening.``

When thinking about what an inclusive curriculum would like, Jack said that terminology of gender and sexual diverse identities is a good place to start for teachers. Resources such as the gender-bread person is a good tool to use with all age groups and is one way for teachers to understand the basics of gender and sexual diversity.

Jack also felt that an objective of an inclusive curriculum should be to teach students that being Queer is just another identity.. He said that Queer students need to also see themselves in society and that was one of his struggles in high school, not seeing himself anywhere. He said that visibility would have helped him feel less isolated:

“I felt very alone and isolated like I couldn’t connect with anyone but now I’m like seeing and speaking with other Two-Spirit individuals, I’ve never been happier. And seeing what the youth at Sakewew High School are doing in North Battleford with their GSA. That would be awesome if I knew I would have been able to start at GSA over at Ermenskin. I feel like I would be supported to do that but I just did not have the confidence to do that at the time and I didn’t have any actual representation at my school where people we’re showing they were on board to create safe spaces for queer youth. Just being able to feel safe in school makes a huge difference.”

Looking at how the campus climate can be more inclusive for Two-Spirit students, Jack shared that the Pride Centre spearheaded a proposal to amend an university policy on student safety that includes Two-Spirit identities. In addition, Jack felt that another way universities can support Two-Spirit students is to keep having gender neutral sweats and gender natural pipe ceremonies because that creates a safe space. Jack stated:

“With the policy change this gives the opportunity to have those gender neutral sweats and gender neutral pipe ceremonies continue without opposition because this is important for Two-Spirit people. I think it’s important for me to feel safe in cultural ceremonies regardless of where they are. More importantly, if I’m having them at the University I should be able to feel respected in those ceremonies. So that is one of the things that is being offered right now is that you can’t stop them and if you try and stop it right there that is discrimination.”

Jack also felt that the means of educating people about gender and sexual diversity should be relatable and accessible. He said:

“I did my work with the Pride Center and going out there doing talks for other people I always brought up the gender-bread person and it made sense for them like, oh I fit this scale and that scale but your over here and over there, oh`, okay well that’s cool but making it so accessible was very important to me because people who come to the University of Saskatchewan come from very small towns and this is the first time that they’re living in a relatively metropolitan area, if we can call it that and they come with these views of what the world is supposed to be so we need people to educate and showcase the diversity of life and experiences.”

Jack mentioned that leaders in First Nations communities could make a difference in the lives of Two-Spirit people and the youth if they supported policies that ensured their safety in the communities. He said that the chiefs and councilors can do more in educating themselves about gender and sexual diversity, and about Two-spirit identities.

Further, Jack felt that written support from band leaders is important and spaces that offer gender neutral sweats within First Nations communities would be helpful. Jack said one-way that he felt supported by his community is the acceptance he received from his grandparents who are leaders in the community. He shared, “They don’t call me granddaughter anymore they call me grandchild, they stopped giving me blouses as gifts which I think is really awesome.”

Jack also mentioned that medicine people in the First Nations communities need to educate themselves on Two-Spirit people and issues. There also needs to be education around how some ceremonies are influenced by colonization:

“We need to decolonize our ceremonies and one of the ways for us to decolonize our ceremonies is through the gender neutral sweats and pipe ceremonies. We can showcase the fact that before colonization were more accepting of Two-Spirit individuals and we need to get back to that because there never was and never will be or should not be closets in tipi’s”.

Jack also said that their needs to be more conversation in the communities about Two-spirit issues because if there aren't any future generations of Two-Spirit youth will continue to face violence.

North

When reflecting on what kind of future Two-spirit youth should grow up in, North shared that more education was needed:

More education the school population and the importance of having spaces like GSA's and pride centers here. Education geared towards showing that we are people too and not degrade people who are different. To teach them not judge those people as well, or people with mental illnesses like those are psychological things not everyone can control.

North felt that smaller communities and towns need to open their minds when it came to understanding difference and diversity. Feeling that students who are part of these communities can benefit by learning to accept those who are gay, disabled, or have mental health challenges.

North mentioned that one of the benefits of being on campus was the Red Dress project which brought attention to missing and murdered Indigenous women in the country. She hoped that Two-Spirit youth living on the reserve have opportunities to connect with other Indigenous students and learn about issues that impact their lives. She said:

It's definitely a statement, educational and informative to people who may not know what is actually going on because it hasn't really been in the news. There are also programs that the Women's Centre is doing because of it and that affects them as well. There are people in the Queer Center that are pretty open kind, you have the ASC (Aboriginal Students Center). You have so many different safe places that can support Two-Spirit youth if they wanted to come here.

Billie

Billie mentioned that schools need to pay attention to making washrooms safer for those who are Two-Spirit or are perceived to be gay, lesbian, transgender. And that schools do not need to be segregating students based on gender binaries. For example: "Boys have to be masculine, and girls need to be sensitive, you can be all those things as

a boy or girl, you can be all of that.” This is an example of normalizing heteronormativity in schools and can cause a lot of stress and anxiety in students who don’t identify with male/female gender binaries.

Billie shared how while on a teaching internship Billie made sure that when teaching Physical education class that teams had both genders. Billie was making sure the skill levels on both teams were equal so the not so skilled students could learn from the more skilled students on the team. Billie insists that the education systems ‘needs’ to be taught that those who identify with the spectrum of Queer are born this way and never asked to be treated differently: “people need to be educated on this stuff, we weren’t asked to be born this way, we just are and even in elementary you can teach this stuff and let them know that it’s okay.” There is an emphasis on a need for more education in schools around interconnected identities, and multiple forms of oppression. Early education around acceptance and understanding of those who identify as Queer is a perceived area for improvement.

Teachers and schools need to be vocal in addressing the homophobia and violence in schools. Billie mentioned that teachers are not talking about homophobic views and that when it does surface it is silence:

“Teachers need to start talking it can be hush, hush, that is the way things are right now. We need to educate them and bring people into classrooms to share what it is like, and you know once students see their teachers talking about it you might have student in the class early on learning or knowing that it is okay to be this way.”

In our conversation, how universities incorporate Indigenous culture was brought up and the university needs to do more to have inclusive teachings that support Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous students. Billie said “Consultation is huge, they need to ask Two-spirited people to lead and teach some of these ceremonies and ask the students what they need to feel comfortable in these ceremonies.” Billie also mentioned, “We need to be acknowledged.” Thinking about areas of improvement for Two-Spirit students, Billie urges that Universities learn from the experiences of the Two-spirits students, “They don’t understand the lives we go through just to be here and they don’t see what we see and they never will until they can put themselves in our shoes.” Billie’s insights were

centred around awareness and education to make campuses more affirming for Two-Spirit students.

In addition, the teachings in First Nation communities need to include the experiences of Two-Spirit people, Billie advocates that the Elders need to be part of this, “They need to learn as well. The youth are acknowledged as people who can teach the Elders and vice versa.” Billie emphasizes that the whole community needs to be part of creating a safe space for Two-Spirit people and that more education is needed in all spheres like universities, schools, communities, “It’s hard but it is getting easier we will be able to change things with the reserves, with the protocols with the universities just little steps at time, and we need our role models.” Billie also mentioned that spaces needs to make visible the Two-Spirit role models as well, in initiatives that high light cultural leaders, there needs to be recognition of the work and strengths that Two-Spirit people bring to their communities.

Billie also shared that, Two-Spirit representation and visibility is important that there needs to more two-spirit role models and that there needs to be some way of reaching out to communities that don’t have any, like role models going to the communities and speaking to the youth, letting them know there are resources:

We need better teaching material that speaks about who we are, maybe we can come up worth something, because something needs to be done I don’t want any more suicides or deaths on reserves because people feel like there is something wrong with who they and can’t be who they are.

Current and future Two-Spirit youth need resources that nurture their interconnected identities, as Billie explained in the previous quote, people are the best resources. Summarizing this portion of the interview Billie reflected on their hopes for how they future Two-spirit youth:

“Most people wait their whole lives to find love because they are scared of the consequences and they end up alone because they are scared. My hope for the younger generation of Two-spirit youth is that they can love themselves, even if society continues to judge them. Heck, I hope that the youth don’t even have to ‘come out’ this is just something that is seen as a strength.”

As Billie expressed Two-Spirit youth in the future who assert their identity is more than just stepping 'out of the closet,' but rather viewed positively and as a strength.

Calico

When thinking about the supports Two-Spirit students need, Calico said that people need the language and terms so that they can have respectful conversations with Two-Spirit or Queer Indigenous youth. She said, "I think people are curious and I think generally want to understand difference, but there is a lot of fear around talking about it." Calico felt that the campus does a good job at creating spaces for students to talk about sexual diversity but has a lot of work to do around racism and suggested that training in cultural competency for staff and faculty is an important step.

When thinking about how high schools can be safer for Two-Spirit youth, Calico felt that teachers and staff need intervene when bullying is taking place. She said, "When I was in high school back in grade 7 none of the teachers or staff were intervening when bullying was happening or there was no educating going on." In addition, Calico mentioned that from her experiencing working with parents they are very touchy when it comes to issues of sexuality, gender and race issues:

It can be very contentious ground to walk over, so I don't know if cultural competency training or programing would be supportive or effective if parents are in opposition to it. The kids would be getting one message at school and then at home that message would be torn down by parents who are not in support of it.

Calico felt that in universities students are adults and there is more opportunity to help unpack some of the oppressive attitudes they learned while in high and elementary school. Calico felt that inviting people to experience what it is like for someone who is Queer can be done in ways that isn't forcing people, such as creating safe spaces where people can have respectful conversations, adding that "Legislation and policy creates a space where the possibility for more people to feel safer in exploring differences."

When thinking about how First Nation communities can be safer for Two-Spirit youth Calico said that re-institutionalizing the role of Two-Spirit people reconnecting the community to the ceremonial roles that Two-Spirit had would be a positive effort. Calico shared:

Winkte is one traditional name for Two-spirit people in Lakota, Winkte was male bodied and the Winkte would cut down the central pole for the Sundance. That was their responsibility and they would also name children and if you had a child that was named by a Winkte that child was seen being doubly blessed.

There were other roles and traditional names of Two-Spirit people that Calico was familiar with and shared the significance of some of their roles. Calico said there were the *Nadleeh* Two-Spirits who were Najaov. Adding that the nadleeh had a lot of roles in the community that were specific for them and no one else in the community could perform these roles when it came to certain ceremonies.

Reflecting on specific Cree Two-Spirit roles, Calico mentioned that a lot the traditional roles here in Saskatchewan may have been forgotten due to the colonization that had taken place here:

There have been a lot of internalization of Western perspectives of men's and women's roles and behaviors and the clothing that goes with it. And a lot of elders that are passing on teachings are residential school Elders so their teachings are based on from what they learned from the Bible and missionaries. And they kind of adapted it.

Calico added that:

“One of the Elders on my Rez mentioned the creator won't recognize you if you don't wear a skirt during ceremony, you know what that reminds me off? In Leviticus there is a passage that says women should not wear the clothes of men and men should not wear the clothes of women, it's an abomination in the eyes of the lord. She went to residential school.

Calico added that this makes her wonder just how much of the teachings that are being passed off as 'traditional' are actually just modifications of Western teachings.

Calico shared a story of attending a pow-wow in Saskatoon and seeing a pride flag in attendance, the experience was uplifting to see and Two-Spirit people were registering for dances:

There was a male bodied an Ayekkwew who registered for fancy dance and that was fine no body made a big deal. And then I went to TCU the FSIN pow-wow again a couple years ago, in the rules it said that you had to be female to register

in the women's dances. Something happened for that rule to be changed and how do rules change? Rules change when people point them out.

Calico said this was troubling to see because the previous year people were recognizing Two-spirit people as integral part of the communities and rejecting the colonial perspective on sexualities. This recognition shifted to not being honored at all. Calico expressed sadness as she knew an Elder who saw this change, as the Elders' daughter identified as Lesbian, Two-Spirit. Calico said that the Elder had told her that, "There is no precedence in our teachings to create this sort of false dichotomy over men and women and police the boundaries like that." Calico added:

Our traditions were never about oppression, our culture is not about oppression and it's not about policing other people, its complete opposite of that. To me that is part of the process of decolonization and understanding whose perspective you are utilizing when you are rejecting Two-spirit people.

Calico felt that First Nations communities can be proactive about re-integrating Two-spirit people into the communities, and this was important if they want to be whole communities that support all of their members, even those who identify on the spectrum of gender and sexuality. Two-Spirit people remind their communities of the fluidity and diversity that is part of being Indigenous.

CHAPTER SIX: THEMES AND DISSCUSSION

Introduction

In this section, I discuss and interpret the collective voices of the participants I interviewed according to three broad themes that emerged during the data analysis. These themes were Building Positive Relationships in Safe Spaces; Perceived Strengths and Benefits of Being Two-Spirit; Giving Back to Community as a Form of Resilience. I came to the themes by using a variation of voice-centered relational method to sort the data. I listened to each story four times each with a different intention. This process allowed me to identify my own relationship to the story, how participants talked about themselves, and their relationships with the person/people in the story, and finally listening for how the stories are connected to the research question: *How do Two-spirit or Queer Indigenous students at Universities in Saskatchewan conceptualize their interconnected identities?* As themes arose I connected the results of the research with Alex Wilson's work on coming-in theory (1996; 2007) and Qwo-li Driskill's (2010) work on Double weaving Two-Spirit critiques. Both of these theories are aligned with Indigenous knowledge's that center relationships as part of how we come to know ourselves, and work at destabilizing various forms of oppression. The notion of weaving these two forms of theories with the individual stories helped answer my research question/s.

This section is concluded with a discussion of the findings and educational implications. I provided an analysis of the educational implications with an Anti-oppressive frame work that troubles educators to think and act towards various intersecting oppressions that students navigate.

Building Positive Relationships in Safe Spaces

Relationships with family, friends, and community were an integral part of participants learning about their gender, sexuality, and race. Many of the participants felt that people came into their lives to teach them something about accepting their sexuality,

and this was perceived to be invaluable support in building a relationship with themselves.

Relationships are central in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, though the participants had varied experiences as First Nation students, they had a common understanding that fostering positive healthy relationships meant they could thrive in all aspects of their lives. For example, Billie spoke about the positive influence that hearing Two-Spirit people's experiences had. Particularly, hearing stories of oppression and struggles around one's gender and sexuality taught Billie the significance of helping others through challenging times. Billie expressed:

Sometimes, I still have challenges and issues with accepting my gender and sexuality but I like to hear other people's stories. I may not have that same experience or maybe I don't get what they have been through, but I'm always willing to listen. I find it helpful for me to just be there and listen to them, I don't need to say 'hey this is how we do it! Or you're Two-Spirit so you should do this in a ceremony,' I think we all just learn to accept whatever it means for us, and give others the space to love themselves.

Respectful relationships with Two-Spirit people meant being present, and willing to listen without feeling the need to tell another two-spirit person how they handle situations. Similarly, other participants mentioned how they came to appreciate the safe spaces they moved about in, because in these spaces they were introduced to a range of diverse people who identified as Queer or Two-Spirit.

For North, one of the highlights of being a student at the University of Saskatchewan was going to center's such as the Pride Center, Women Center, and the Aboriginal Student Center. These spaces were perceived to be a great support in North accepting her gender, sexuality, and cultural identity:

What I love about going to the centers are the different people. I have conversations with people that see me. For example, I was at the Women's Centre the other day and I was chatting with a Non-Indigenous, female, who also shared that she was a lesbian. We were talking about the red dress project and missing and murdered Aboriginal women. I felt heard, while sharing how seeing the

dresses made me feel. I felt connected in that Centre, even though I was the only visible Indigenous person there.

In this case, these relationships helped her feel valued and accepted. Being able to connect with others while navigating inclusive spaces was perceived to be an advantage to having multiple intersecting identities while being a student on campus.

Having opportunities to connect with others in safe spaces was also common in Jack's experience while attending a queer youth group and learning to drag. In this youth group he was able to meet a transgender male who shared with Jack his own Journey of coming to terms with his identity. Jack's relationships with this individual left a significant impact on him as it gave him insight into his reality of dealing with gender dysphoria yet at same time inspired him to begin identifying as a transgender male. Jack expressed:

My whole experience in life just like rang true with his experience. From being forced to wear female clothing and to just feeling utterly uncomfortable in one's body, and feeling uncomfortable with how society saw me. I think that right there was one of the biggest and eye-opening experiences, just like realizing I don't have to be sad and uncomfortable all the time.

Jack has come into an empowered sense of self through this relationship. This interaction, although brief, affirmed Jack's perception of his interconnected identities. He was able to confront the negative perceptions that he felt society had of those who did not meet male/female notions of gender and sexuality.

Spaces that bring together those who share experiences with oppression are considered safe and welcoming. Stories that highlight how people overcome adversity have helped build a sense of belonging. Many participants felt seen when interacting in spaces that were designed for their particular identity group.

For Tim, his positive experience of the Aboriginal Students Centre at the University of Saskatchewan taught him that he would be accepted in a similar center at the University of Regina. He frequented the Aboriginal Students Centre at the University of Regina expecting to meet other Aboriginal students, he said he was able to form meaningful relationships with his peers who also accepted his gay identity. Having the acceptance of his peers was important to Tim as it helped him persevere in his studies:

I was confident in who I was a gay Aboriginal student but having friends who accepted that part of me just allowed me to become more confident in myself. I think it really helped me when I was doubting myself as a student, I could count on friends who just got me, they listened and that really meant a lot to me.

Although, there was a perception of acceptance in Aboriginal Student Centers and they were thought of as doing a great job in developing the cultural identity of students, Calico felt that the Aboriginal Student Centre could do more to integrate conversations around gender and sexuality. Appreciating the opportunities to connect with her culture through ceremonies like smudging there was a desire for integration of Indigenous perspectives of gender and sexuality within the ceremonies::

I like going to the ASC to smudge it is one of the things that helps me feel safe as a Cree person on campus. I do think that they can expand their awareness about Two-Spirit roles and learn some basics around what language to use when having conversations about gender and sexual identities. For me and I think others, part of feeling safe in our sexualities as First Nation students also comes from our culture and we need to see that here.

Many of the participants viewed fluidity and flexibility in the centers support and advocacy as a major factor in what made the space feel safe. Students navigated many spaces on campus, as Queer Indigenous students they valued being respected as Indigenous students but also valued that their genders and sexualities were respected. .

Perceived Strengths of Navigating Multiple Forms of Oppression

While sharing their stories around their gender, sexuality, and cultural identities many of the participants acknowledged that coming to accept their unique identities was challenging at times but all viewed these challenges as a promising factor in connecting with those who are also oppressed, helping them build resilience, and viewing themselves as leaders in challenging oppression.

Perceptions of oppression were viewed as way to advocate for change with those who are at a disadvantage in society. For instance, Jack expressed that he felt the interconnected identities that he has provides a sense of solidarity with those who experience oppression in other ways:

In some way or another, one of my identities intersects with somebody else's identities which is pretty awesome and being able to understand where they are coming from. But also it's an advantage because I think I'm more sensitive to oppressions that other people have to face. I'm just aware of how our society is set up. For example, someone with reduced mobility, I'm able to see that like these stairs right here this would not be good for these individuals. And also looking at people who fall out of the gender binary and going into a washroom and seeing that they're being gendered.

In relation to being able to empathize with those who are oppressed, most of the participants in the study felt that having interconnected experiences with oppression made them more resilient. Jack and Billie in particular felt that they were able to reflect on the challenges they have faced in accepting their various identities as Queer, Indigenous students and help those who are unfamiliar with their identities to teach this ability to share their journeys with others to make society a better place was empowering for them both. For instance, Billie felt empowered as an educator to share their experiences with how they perceived fluidity in gender and sexuality. Feeling that sharing will make a difference in helping Two-Spirit youth who are contemplating suicide:

I think they should just really talk about it more. It's going to be teachers like me that will have to step up. I'm always going to share my experience; I don't want a kid committing suicide we have so many already. I'm really confident in myself and I want us to come together and share our experiences, I want to help those kids in the community

Similarly, Jack indicated that even though one might view experiences with oppression as having to overcome a lot of challenges, with the support of peers he now sees value in his unique experiences to assist others. When describing who his current supports are in his life, Jack mentioned [name removed]. He equated this with the amount of interconnected identities he has and the amount of experience with various oppressions in society. He said he is often encouraged to use his experiences to teach others how to be more accepting of those who are Transgender, Indigenous, and Two-Spirit. Jack said:

There were some times within society and within my family that I have felt pushed off to the side and not had my voice heard. It's good now to be able to talk and have people listen and follow through with things and heed my words. I pride myself on my humbleness though and I realize I have a lot of learning to do, I don't know everything about Two-spirit stuff and I'm just trying to do right by my heart.

Participants viewed their relationships with themselves as being positive and influenced by their ability to overcome challenges with the support of friends, teachers, partners, family, and community. There was also perceived sense of resilience when the participants reflected on their experiences of overcoming oppression. For example, North felt that she is now in a place of acceptance. She said:

Before I used to be ashamed of being Native, ashamed of being a Lesbian, and being a female, now I have accepted it all. And at some points in my life I thought or wished that my life would be a lot easier if I was a guy. I just understood that part of myself, it was just more me. Now I have just accepted it all. There have been a lot of people who kind of helped me accept those parts of myself.

This sense of acceptance of self is an indicator that many of the participants view their interconnected experience as a journey that taught them about connecting with themselves and others. There was also a sense that having interconnected experiences brings a sense of knowledge or wisdom.

For instance, Billie shared that a teaching emerged from reflecting about their interconnected experiences, "It makes 'us' smarter. Billie feels empowered having the opportunities to learn about topics that society often assigns as Manly. Billie mentioned:

"I didn't know all the girls' things that I should have but I knew all the guy things, I never knew why. So I feel like I have the brain of man the body of girl, it's like I'm trapped in the wrong body. I wish I was guy more than a girl. Now that I'm older I just live with the fact that I have girl body."

For many gender and sexually diverse people, the feeling of not having your body align with how you perceive your gender can be a place of unhappiness and stress. However, as Billie stated, they found a way to accept their body as is, viewed as a form of strength and wisdom.

Giving Back as a Form of Resilience

The participants found that teaching, sharing, and working with Two-Spirit youth or the Queer community was way for them to give back to those who have assisted them on their journeys of self acceptance and healing. This last theme was viewed as a way to continue to build relationships with the communities that the participants felt a part of and was essential and how they have come to relate to themselves in all aspects of their identities. As Billie shared:

With me I'm unique and I can share with my class what I went through.

We all become changed by that. I don't want any more deaths on our reserves because they feel lost. I don't want people to feel like there is something wrong with them. We all deserve to be loved.

Giving back is also a foundational part of Indigenous ways of knowing and nurturing reciprocal relationships with all beings. Many of the participants also felt that there were people in their lives who gave them teachings and understandings that impacted how they accepted themselves and others.

When Billie spoke of their experiences, there was often a sense of pride in what they overcame. Billie spoke confidently about how they're experiences can teach others, "Its going to be teachers like me that influence other people in the community. I'm always going to share my experience to anyone that wants to listen, they might learn something from it." A theme that resonated here was this ability to see value in one's purpose, despite the oppression that a person can experience there is a desire to help and give back.

Mirroring the theme of `giving back,` Tim also envisioned his participating in the research as a way for him to give hope to those who are misinformed about Queer people on the reserve. He said:

I think that kids growing up on the reserve would highly benefit from this research. If they could somehow hear the views from other people who have grown up on the reserve and who are gay, then maybe they could accept that about themselves and other people in the community. Maybe, they wouldn't be so

ignorant and just be more accepting of other people. Then maybe they wouldn't be scared to talk about it.

Asserting control of their identities and experiences was connected to how participants viewed the stories they shared in this study. For some it was clear that they understood their identities were shaped by positive role models who supported them.

One participant stated that their mother was a huge influence in nurturing positive Indigenous and Feminist ways of looking and being in the world:

I think the phrase that comes to mind is 'Two worlds colliding,' right and you try negotiate all the oppressive messages coming from this end and all the positive messages, but there are also negative messages coming from the Indigenous side to. I'm in the middle trying to navigate what all these different messages are. Luckily enough, my Mom was really good at, I say, programing my mind. You know driving home this idea that as a Cree person I had nothing to be ashamed of and that the Creator made me just the way I was. I believed my mother and I believed the messages that she gave to me and they were strong enough to guide me and to keep me anchored.

Similarly, this participant also felt that her mother gave her the gift of acceptance. Calico stated:

"I think that there was that place of acceptance in my family of origin like it wasn't a big deal and my mother always knew I was different, my mother was very smart and she was very sensitive to different things around her, so for her it was never an issue. So she never imposed that on me, so I never learned that, that was something I didn't need to fight for it was just something that was and was accepted."

Calico, attributed her development of her sexual identity to her mothers Cree identity as Swamp Cree, "She really focused on that you know to be proud of who you are" the theme of giving back is evident in how Calico spoke of the gifts thather mother shared around her Cree identity. Calico found ways to give back and said that she found purpose in researching the ways different Indigenous nations represented Two-Spirit people. Calico expressed, that knowing these stories and knowledge of Two-Spirit people is

important in Indigenous communities expressing that there are still a lot of communities hurting from the effects of colonization.

The theme of giving back was carried on with NORTH who also expressed that through her own positive development around being First Nation and Cree that she can use these experiences to educate within her close relationships:

“The reserve I came from like people still make fun of gay people or Two-spired people and no one really talks them about the comments, “that’s so gay” and that can hurt someone that is really actually gay and not feeling good about themselves. I have had to talk to my nieces and nephews you know about how those negative terms can really hurt someone who kind of hates themselves. There is actually one person that is openly gay on my reserve and you know my niece says she is there for him which makes feel kind of proud.”

Sharing teachings and stories was perceived to be an empowering act in asserting one’s interconnected identity. The participants in this study shared their insights into their lived experiences as Queer Indigenous students. It is through these insights that three themes emerged that I envision to be like a braid of sweet grass, each strand or theme embodies a collective yet distinct experience of learning to navigate multiple forms of oppression, finding meaning in ones’ experiences by giving back, and valuing that certain spaces are perceived safe because of the people who established a practice of *Wahkowitzin*.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss the strengths and limitations of this study. I also share insights around how this study contributes to the emerging field of research on Two-Spirit issues with an emphasis on the impact it may have on educational practices and Indigenous communities. Through a process of re-reading transcripts, self-reflection, and analysis this research used a mixed qualitative design that was grounded in Queer and Indigenous research methods. Although an ambiguous approach to the research there were some benefits to structuring the study in this manner. For one, Wilson (2001) points on that “Indigenous people have been subjects rather than authors of research” (pg. 41). With this in mind one of the challenges that I struggled with was how to speak of concepts of our identities in a way that does not further marginalizing participants. My selection of

combining Queer methods with Indigenous approaches to the research helped understand that there is never an easy way to explore concepts of oppression however we can be transparent with our challenges in hopes that those who engage with our work impart how they too have found ways to engage in these concepts of identity in respectful methods. This is where the practice of Wahkowitz assisted me. This practice is reflected in the way I approached the research with participants in the study. I contested with how best to understand other Two-spirit students views of their identities in a way that hopefully made them feel safe to do so, and thus I hoped to convey to participants through the methodology used in this study, gift giving, building on their prior knowledge of participants, and through research preparation such as attending ceremony.

As Kovach (2010) asserts, Indigenous methodologies are purposeful in decolonizing systems of oppression and create space for Indigenous researcher to employ methods that reflect their local, tribal epistemologies. This has resonated with me as I sought out a research method that allowed me explore concepts of gender and sexuality openly and fluidly. Although some hesitation with Indigenous research came from my own experiences with words like “ceremony” and ‘traditional’ and ‘male/female’ roles or binaries – my hesitation was in large part due to how these words policed or restricted my expression of gender and sexuality in my community. Thus, reading academic literature from Indigenous researchers or non-Indigenous researchers who also employed these ways of thinking led me to see that there are still the same binaries in academic spaces.

I am aware of this form of the main research question asked, “How do Queer or Two-Spirit students conceptualize their interconnected experiences?” To provide insight into my inquiry it was essential that the participants identified on the spectrum of Queer or Two-spirit and their stories guide the process of the study. The study benefited by incorporating Indigenous methods that created a safe space for participants to openly share their most inner perceptions of their gender, culture, and sexuality. Reflecting on how I engaged with a practice of Wahkowitz. I continually “checked my heart” (Wilson, 2008) and asked myself what role I was fulfilling in this research relationship?” thus I feel good knowing that I was accountable to those involved in this research relationship.

The mixed qualitative method is a demanding relational method. I wish to discuss how from an ethical point of view, I navigated the difficult relational aspects of using this method. One of the challenges was the changing language of terms in the literature and in the participants' descriptions of themselves. This was difficult to navigate and I wanted to be clear that my goal was never to define terms used by Two-spirit individuals. However, I hoped to gain insight into how Two-spirit people view their experiences while navigating oppressions. At the beginning of each interview I asked participants what terms they relate to and their usage of the terms are incorporated into each synopsis of the participants' story. Collection of the data was carried out via individual interviews 1 on 1 interviews with 5 participants who attended the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina.

As the participants illustrated in their stories, how they think about their interconnected identities is like weaving together distinct yet complimentary experiences. The perceptions that participants shared were heavily influenced by their varied relationships with their families, partners, teachers, Elders, and communities. A key theme that emerged was the notion of teaching others through their lived experiences and this was perceived to be an advantage of navigating homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and racism. This theme suggests that there are positive attributes to being Queer Indigenous or Two-Spirit which is a distinct approach to conducting research with Two-Spirit individuals as previous research tends to emphasize deficit models of victimhood that did not position Two-Spirit people as actively resisting and shaping their identities.

Although many of the participants spoke of violence and homophobia in their Indigenous communities many of them attributed this violence towards gender and sexual diversity to their communities being impacted by colonization. They acknowledge that residential schools and Western religion inflicted values and beliefs that attempted to silence Indigenous values of love, non-interference, and fluidity. Indigenous culture was instrumental in embracing their Queerness. They each had some form of connection with their Indigenous culture and spoke highly of the teachings that they experienced on their journeys, with many of them stating that the way they felt connected to their Indigenous culture was a foundational factor in coming to view their sexual identity as a positive aspect in their development.

As participants navigated spaces that were associated with their identities they strategized tactics of safety that took control of how they expressed their gender and sexual identities as Indigenous young adults. At some point of their lived experiences the participants sought out peers who they could relate to or connected with allies who valued their gender and sexuality. Often times creating safe spaces for themselves was seen as taking ownership and asserting their identities as a way to counter violence or negative attitudes towards the Two-Spirit community.

Many of the participants found a way to practice the Indigenous ethic of giving back in some way. When reflecting on how their experiences shaped their perceptions of the communities they are part of they spoke from a place of inspiration, hope, and strength. This was illustrated most eagerly when they had an opportunity to envision what healthy future would like for two-spirit youth to come. There was a sense of actively doing something for the next generations to come and this was acknowledged to be an empowering method of finding meaning in their challenges yet nurturing fluidity of expression in what it meant to be a Two-Spirit person. Not one participant said there was one way of being a Two-Spirit person but that seeing their gender, sexuality, and culture as harmonious aspects was helpful in exploring their identities.

As the participants shared in this study their views of their interconnected identities is positive and value the ability to see experiences with oppression as a strength in overcoming barriers. They spoke freely of how their sexual identities were challenged at times with colonial views of gender and sexuality but shared a common belief that it was their culture that taught the perseverance needed to reject views that conflicted with their expression. There was emphasis placed on Indigenous communities to continue to center processes of decolonization with understanding how Two-spirit people have been hurt, and to align with Two-spirit people in reasserting Indigenous ways of life. There was an urgency in Elders and community leaders in being vocal in their support of Two-Spirit people as they felt this would help any youth who are struggling with accepting their sexualities.

As stated in my coming in story, this research has been a journey. I talked with many Two-Spirit people, allies, Elders, and instructors about my own struggles with accepting my identity as a Cree gay man. Through this research process and reading literature that

focused on Two-Spirit people I dealt with feelings of anger, hurt, and guilt. There were many times that what I thought I had dealt with surfaced back for me. It was my reflections and smudging ceremonies that helped me during this challenging time. I came to the realization that my body was re-experiencing trauma when I read about particular homophobic experiences that other Two-Spirit people faced. I found it helpful in locating stories written by Two-Spirit people, as they showed me how we are collectively re-storying our nations and communities.

To gain insight into the lived experiences of Two-Spirit students attending post-secondary institutions it was important for me to allow the participants to tell their stories in ways that felt comfortable for them. Often times this was shown by the participants asking me about my own experiences as they viewed me as someone who is also learning what it meant to be Two-Spirit. I have similar experiences to many of the participants and during the interviews, I only shared my perspectives when asked as a way to honor their own inquiry, which was helpful in establishing positive relationships with the participants. What I have found compelling in this process was the attention that I was willing to invest in hearing how the participants spoke about the relationships in their lives. I see that it's their ability to connect with others in meaningful ways that provided understanding of their identities. They taught me that being Two-Spirit does not mean you are ever separated from your families, communities, or the creator, we are always bound in these relationships even if they were once fragmented (Wilson, 1996). How Two-Spirit come to view themselves is interdependent on these relationships, which is why many of the participants felt that the youth needed to have visible Two-Spirit role models. During this process I recounted many of my role models and gaged this by how connected I felt to what I read or met. For example, when reviewing the literature of Qwo-Li Driskill (2010), Saylesh Wesley (2014), Sarah Hunt & Cindy Holmes (2015) inspired me with their words, ideas, and stories of what it means to assert a Two-Spirit identity today. I have had many professors who continued to see my own stories as value and pushed me to carry on. For this I am ever grateful and open to continued learning that comes from these relationships.

Implications of Research

This study contributes to anti-oppressive education and research. Kumashiro (2002) expressed that educational systems should value that oppression is not inherently the sole responsibility of the minority group to actively resist, but that it is also those who are privileged in educational systems that need to challenge the ways they are able to only see one form of oppression. As expressed in the literature, the combined colonial violence and homophobia that Two-spirit people are exposed to puts them at a greater risk of suicide, homelessness, addictions, and mental health challenges (Hunt 2016; Wesley 2015; Wilson, 1996, 2007). I have engaged in a practice of Wahkowitzin in this study by deliberately showing how the participants' viewed their identities as strengths. I have found that participants developed an empowered Two-spirit identity and their perceptions assisted them when overcoming colonial and heteronormative practices in their schools. This was demonstrated when they shared their hopes for how this research could give back to future Two-spirit youth. Some felt that future educators be trained in how to take up racism from an anti-oppressive approach.

An example of this would be when attempting to mitigate racism felt my Indigenous children the solution tends to be incorporating more Indigenous events, food, dances, and ceremonies. However, as the participants have demonstrated these solutions exclude Indigenous students who also identify as Two-spirit or queer. Educational practices that add 'more' Indigenous content to the curriculum can benefit by also adding historical and contemporary experiences that Two-Spirit people have. Many of the participants in this study felt their visibility and recognition of Two-Spirit narratives was needed to heed barriers that heteronormative spaces put in place. It is also essential that educators, counselors, community leaders, and Elders seek out Two-Spirit role models in accurately learning about Two-Spirit experiences. Educational policies that protect Two-Spirit students should also explicitly state that they do support the right for Two-Spirit students to assert their unique expression of ceremony in ways that do not hinder their gender and sexuality.

Leaders in Indigenous communities should also create policies that protect Two-spirit people from harassment and violence that is associated with their gender and sexuality. There was a desire for Indigenous communities to seek out educational opportunities in

how to make their communities safer for Two-Spirit people as there was a perceived influence of religions values that pushed many Two-Spirit people away or taught them to hate themselves. In non-Indigenous communities, this research would assist in establishing practices that are inclusive of culture as a way for also affirming Two-Spirit people's sexualities. There should be continued efforts to have established Two-Spirit teachers who could work with non-Indigenous organizations in mitigating experiences of racism, homophobia and transphobia.

Strength and limitations

As I have shared through my 'coming-in story' in the prologue section of this academic journey has gifted me with an opportunity to share the stories of Two-spirit students in a hopes that the wisdom they have shared can teach us how to engage in research that is congruent with Two-spirit ways of knowing and being. This hasn't been an easy task and I wish to share some of the limitations of the research. I approach this as opportunity for me to reflect on what I have learned. One limitation of this study was that I did not engage the participants in the construction of the I-poems when analyzing the data. This was mainly due to the how long the listening guide process is however, upon reflecting on this choice. I feel that even sending copies of some of the I-poems to participants to review would have provided promising results. One suggestion or adaptation would be to ask participants to read the I-poem and make suggestions for metaphor that could have been used as a title for the I-poem. I believe that by engaging with the participants in such a manner would have enriched this study. In addition, I think that if I were to use the listening guide method again I would like to explore the construction of I-poems with Two-spirit youth and Two-spirit elders. I feel that combining these varied experiences would further demonstrate how generations of colonial views of gender and sexuality are decolonized through relational methods that are aligned with an Indigenous worldview.

A strength of this study is that I was able to structure the nature of this inquiry by focusing on the positive attributes of being Two-spirit while exploring experiences with oppression. There needs to be more scholarly research that emphasizes the strengths and processes that Two-Spirit people employ when navigating racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia. Such research will assist Two-Spirit people in 'coming-in' to their

communities and help restore disrupted relationships. Focusing on strength-based research will also educate the non-Indigenous communities that Indigenous people are rejecting victim narratives that are used to advocate for non-Indigenous approaches to healing and helping. Those interested in conducting research with Two-spirit individuals may benefit by engaging in methodologies that are developed by Two-spirit researchers.

This study has demonstrated that Two-spirit people have invaluable contributions when it comes to recovering from the injustices of heteropatriarchy and colonization. These voices should not be overlooked when universities include ‘Indigenizing’ approaches. This study certainly highlights how ‘queering’ institutions of higher learning is equally as important. Such a method is to look for input from Two-Spirit students and researchers who have their own critiques of colonialism and heteropatriarchy that can be useful in understanding how oppression functions in spaces of higher learning. This study demonstrated that Two-spirit students want their voices to be heard. Looking to Two-spirit peoples’ strengths and resilience can help support the inclusion of frameworks that transform systemic homophobia, transphobia, and colonialism.

Centering on positive aspects of the participants’ identities this study contributes to current research and educational communities. For example, recent studies like *The National climate survey on homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia in Canadian schools* (Taylor & etal, 2011), acknowledged that future efforts needed to focus on understanding and accounting for the needs of Two-spirit youth in Canada (p. 12). The themes: Creating new spaces; Relating through oppression; Giving back revealed promising practices that can assist Two-spirit youth/students in the development of a healthy and positive identity. The education and research communities could apply these practices from this study to promote interest and dialogue around creating inclusive spaces and practices that help take care of needs of Two-spirit students.

References

- Abes, E.S. & Kasch, D. (2007). Using Queer Theory to Explore Lesbian College students Multiple Dimensions of Identity. *Journal of College student development*, Vol 48, No. 6, pp 619-636. Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press. DOI: 10.1353/csd.2007.0069
- Absolon, K. (2011). *Kaandossiwin: How we come to know*. Fernwood Books Ltd. Winnipeg, MN, Canada.
- Archibald, J-a. (2009). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver, B.C. University of British Columbia Press.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing Education: nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich Publishing Ltd. Saskatoon, Sk, Canada.
- Cajete, G. (2000). *Native science: Natural laws of interdependence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Books.
- Cannon, M. (1998). The Regulations of First Nations Sexuality. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, XVIII. 1-1998. 1-18
- Cameron, M. (2005). Two-Spirited Aboriginal people. *Continuing Cultural Appropriation by Non-Aboriginal society*. *Canadian Woman studies*, 24, 123-127.
- Driskill, Qwo-Li. (2004). *Stolen From our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic*. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Volume 16, number 2, summer 2004, pp. 50-64. University of Nebraska Press.
- Driskill, Qwo-Li. (2010). Doubleweaving Two-spirit critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies. *GLQ* 1 April 2010; 16 (1-2): 69–92. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2009-013>
- Fiola, C. (2020). Chapter 7: Naawenangweyaabeg Coming In: Intersections of Indigenous Sexuality and Spirituality. In Forthcoming April 2020: *In Good Relation: History, Gender, and Kinship in Indigenous Feminisms*, Edited by Sarah Nickel and Amanda Fehr (University of Manitoba Press).
- Ermine, W. (2000). Aboriginal epistemology. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds). *First Nation Education in Canada: The Circle unfolds* (pp. 101-111). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

- Giley, B.J. (2006). *Becoming Two-Spirit: Gay Identity and social Acceptance in Indian Country*. Lincoln, NB, United States of America: University of Nebraska press.
- Hart, M.A. (2002). *Seeking mino-pimatisiwin: an aboriginal approach to helping*. Fernwood books Ltd. Winnipeg, MN, Canada.
- Hunt, S. (2016). *An Introduction to the Health of Two-Spirit People: Historical, contemporary and emergent issues*. Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous research methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and context*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto, Ont, Canada.
- Kumishiro, K. (2001). *Queer students of Color and Antiracist, Antiheterosexist Education: Paradoxes of Identity and Activism*. In. K. Kumashiro (Ed.), *Troubling intersections of race and sexuality: queer students of color and anti-oppressive education*. (pp.1-25).Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc. Lanham, Maryland, USA.
- Kumishiro, K. (2002). *Troubling Education: Queer Activism & Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy*. Published by. Routledge Falmer New York, NY
- Lavalee, L.F. (2009). *Practical Application of an Indigenous Research Framework and Two Qualitative Indigenous Research Methods: Sharing Circles and Annishnabe Symbol-Based Reflection*. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol 8, 1, 2009. 20-40.
- Lipkin, A. (2004). *Beyond Diversity Day*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Lanman, Maryland, U.S.A
- Macedougall, B. (2006). *Wahkohtowin: Family and cultural identity in northwestern Saskatchewan communities*. *The Canadian Historical Review*, 87(3), 431-462
- Meyer-Cook, F. (2008). *Two-Spirit People: Traditional pluralism and Human Rights*. In S. Brotman & J.J. Levy (Eds.), *Intersections cultures, sexualités et genres*. (pp. 245-274). Quebec, QC, Canada: University of Quebec Press.
- Michelle, H. (2005). *Nehithawak of Reindeer Lake, Canada: Worldview, epistemology and relationships with the natural world*. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 34: 33-43.
- McNinch, J. Totten, M. & Thompson, S. (2005). *Que(e)rying Inclusive Practice:*

- Exploring and Challenging Homophobia in Curricula and Schools. Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for research into teaching. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Retrieved Oct, 15, 2012 from: <http://www.mcdowellfoundation.ca>
- Morgensen, S.L. (2011). *Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Morrison, M.A. (2008). Navigating sexual and Ethno-Cultural Identities in Canada: Perspectives from Aboriginal and Chinese Sexual Minority men. In S. Brontman & J.J Levy (Eds.), *Intersections cultures, sexualities et genres*. (pp.245-274). Quebec, QC, Canada: University of Quebec Press.
- Passante, L. (2012). *Aboriginal Two-spirit and LGBTQ Mobility: Meanings of Home, Community and Belonging in a Secondary Analysis of qualitative Interviews* (Master of Social Work), University of Manitoba Winnipeg, MN, CAN
- Rickstock, J., Zoccole, A., Passante, L. (2010). Migration, Mobility and Health and Well-Being of Aboriginal Two-Spirit/LGBTQ people: Findings from a Winnipeg Project. *The Canadian Journal of Aboriginal Community-based HIV/AIDS Research*, 4.
- Ryan, B. Brotman, S. Bardman, A. & Lee, E. (2008). The colour of queer health care : experiences of multiple oppression o\in the lives of queer people of colour in Canada In S. Brontman & J.J Levy (Eds.), *Intersections cultures, sexualities et genres*. (pp.360-401). Quebec, QC, Canada: University of Quebec Press.
- Settee, P. (2013). *Pimatisiwin: The good life, global indigenous knowledge systems*. JCharlton Publishig Ltd. Vernon, BC, Canada.
- Smith, A. (2011). Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism. In Q. Driskill, C. Finley, B. Gilley & S. Morgensen (Eds.), *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press.
- St. Denis, V. (2007). Aboriginal Education and Anti-racist Education: Building Alliances Across Cultural and racial Identity. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30, 4. Pp. 1068-1092
- Sullivan, N. (2003). *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. Edinburgh University Press Ltd.

- Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliot, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schacter, K. (2011) Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report. Toronto. ON: Egale Canada Human rights Trust. Retrieved from: <http://egale.ca/>
- Teengs D. O., & Travers, R. (2006). River of life, rapids of change: Understanding HIV vulnerability among two-spirit youth who migrate to Toronto. *Canadian Journal of Aboriginal Community-Based HIV/AIDS Research*, 1, 17–28. Retrieved from www.caan.ca/pdf/CJACBR.pdf
- Thomas, R. (2005). Honoring the oral traditions of my ancestors through storytelling. In L. A. Brown, & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press
- Walters, K. L., Evans-Campbell, T., Simoni, J., Ronquillo, T., & Bhuyan, R. (2006). My spirit in my heart: Identity experiences and challenges among American Indian two-spirited women. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 10, 125–149. Abstract retrieved from www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16873218
- Webber-Pillwax, C. (2001). 'What is indigenous research?' in Canadian Journal of Native Education. 25(2)166-174.
- Wesley, S. (2014). *Twin-spirited Woman*. Transgender Studies Quarterly. Volume 1, number 3. August 2014. Duke University Press.
- Walton, G. (2004): Bullying and Homophobia in Canadian Schools, *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, 1:4, 23-36 Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J367v01n04_03
- Wilson, A. (1996). How we find ourselves: Identity development and two-spirit people. *Harvard Educational Review*; Summer 1996; 66, 2; Research Library Core. pg. 303
- Wilson, A. (2001). *Dashing the Berdache-The Two-spirit race*. A review of the literature.
- Wilson, A. (2007). *N'tacimowin inna nah': Coming into Two-spirit identities*. Thesis submitted to the Graduate school of Education of Harvard University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education.
- Wilson, A. (2008). *N'tacimowin inna nah': Our Coming In Stories*. *Canadian Woman*

Studies; Winter/Spring 2008; 26, 3/4; ProQuest pg. 193

Wilson, S. (2008). Research Is Ceremony. Winnipeg, Manitoba. Fernwood Publishing company.

APPENDIX A – Call for participants



If you self-identify as First Nation, gender & sexual diverse (GSD), or within the range of Queer, you are invited to participate in this study.

Title of Study: *Exploring the lived experiences of queer indigenous and two-spirit students attending universities in Saskatchewan.*

Criteria for this study are:

- Currently a student (undergrad) at the University of Saskatchewan.
- Self identifies within the spectrum of a gender & sexual diverse identity, Two-spirit, and queer.
- Self identifies as First Nation.
- Is comfortable talking about interconnected perceptions of identity
- Will be available for interviews during the summer.

Successful candidates for this study will be asked to take part in two 1.5-hour interview sessions with the researcher. The interview questions will ask participants to share how they view their interconnected identities and may also ask questions related to experiences with oppression.

If you are interested in participating in this study or if you know someone who might be interested please contact the researcher.

Researcher Contact Information:

Lindsay Ryan Jimmy
Educational Foundations
University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK
S7N 0X1
Phone: 306-717-5276
rlj947@mail.usask.ca

APPENDIX B – CONSENT FORM



CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: *Exploring the lived experiences of queer indigenous and two-spirit students attending universities in Saskatchewan.*

Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researcher: Lindsay Ryan Jimmy, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.

Purpose and Procedure: The purpose of the study is to find out how gender & sexual diverse (GSD) First Nation students who attend the University of Saskatchewan perceive their interconnected identities. Additionally, the study will also examine strategies participants' use when navigating multiple forms of oppression. Having this knowledge of interconnected identities from a GSD First Nation perspective is valuable, as it will assist educators to create practices that develop all aspects of a GSD First Nation students' identity.

As a participant you will be invited to take part in two interviews that will be no more than 1.5 hours in length. You may choose to use an alias (alternate name) in this study and a location that you would feel comfortable in during the interview. At any time during the interview you may request that the recording device be turned off. No data will be used in this study without your consent.

The findings of this study will be examined by the researcher and put into themes that will incorporate direct quotations or paraphrases. As such, any identifying information in the interview transcripts will be removed. You will have an opportunity to review and sign a transcript release form. The findings of this study will be used towards the thesis component of the researchers' masters of education at the University of Saskatchewan.

The results of the research data may be distributed in the following ways:

- In the researchers' thesis
- Distribution of research report with findings to participants
- Distribution of research report with findings to the College of Education
- Distribution of research report with findings to communities such as (Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, and Queer) as requested
- Presentation of research findings to research and scholarly community (classrooms, conferences, workshops)

- Publication of findings of research in several articles for publication in scholarly journal.

Potential Benefits: As a participant of this study you will be sharing your perceptions of your own identity and how you have resisted different forms of oppression in your life. Your knowledge of your lived experiences would make a contribution to First Nation communities, educators, and allies by providing them with approaches that help nurture positive understandings of identity for GSD First Nations students.

Potential Risks: Due to the nature of this study that focuses on identity, and asks participants to share their own experiences, beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and motivations, it is estimated that participants might experience minimal risks associated with stress such as psychological discomfort, trauma, loss of privacy, emotional, and spiritual vulnerability as a result of participating in this study. If needed participants will be referred to identified professionals for counseling or additional support from the University of Saskatchewan.

Storage of Data: Upon completion of the research study, the supervisor will store the data in a locked filing cabinet in her office at the University of Saskatchewan. She will store the data at her office, at the University of Saskatchewan, for five years upon completion of my study. After five years, she will destroy the data beyond recovery.

Confidentiality: Your participation will not be anonymous; as the researcher I will know who has participated. Ensuring that identifying information will not be used in the data will protect your confidentiality. After the interview, and prior to the data being included in the final thesis, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts. The thesis will include summarized results and direct quotations. The direct quotations will ensure that identifying information, which could personally identify the participant, will be removed.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed only with the researcher. If you withdraw from the research project at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until the data has been pooled. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researcher at the numbers provided if you have other questions.

Follow-Up or Debriefing:

Participants may find out about the results of this research project through accessing the University of Saskatchewan's thesis collection upon completion of the thesis.

Alternatively, participants can also email the researcher to set up a time where they could go over the results.

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent form has been given to me for my records.

(Name of Participant)

Date _____

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Researcher Contact Information:

Lindsay Ryan Jimmy
Educational Foundations
University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK
S7N 0X1
Phone: 306-717-5276
rlj947@mail.usask.ca

Research Supervisor Contact Information:

Dr. Alex Wilson, Supervisor
Educational Foundations, University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK
S7N 0X1

APPENDIX C – RESEARCH TOOL



Semi-Structured interview guide

Research Question/s: *How do queer indigenous or two-spirit students attending the universities in Saskatchewan conceptualize their identities? What are their perceptions of navigating multiple forms of oppression?*

Semi-Structured Questions / Open-ended Questions:

Interview questions for first interview:

Read the following text and share your own interpretations of it. What stands out to you? Do you agree or disagree with what is being said, explain?

The term two-spirit is a self-descriptor increasingly used by Aboriginal gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Canadians who live within a traditional Aboriginal worldview. It asserts that all aspects of identity (including sexuality, race, gender and spirituality) are interconnected and that one's experience of sexuality is inseparable from experiences of culture and community (Wilson, 2007, iv).

- 1) What term or terms do you use to identify yourself?
- 2) How did you come to know of these terms?
- 3) Do the terms you use change with location, or different spaces you are in, explain how or why?
- 4) How has your culture influenced your understanding of your interconnected identity?
- 5) What are some advantages living on a reserve for GSD First Nation youth? Is there anything else you want to add?
- 6) What are some disadvantages living on a reserve for GSD First Nation youth? Anything else you want to add?
- 7) What are some advantages for GSD First nation and two-spirit youth who move from their reserves to urban towns, cities?
- 8) What are some disadvantages for GSD First nation and two-spirit youth who move from their reserves to urban town, cities?
- 9) What barriers did you face in high school around your identity?
- 10) Can you tell me a story of how your sexuality, race, and gender identity were nurtured in high school? Can you tell me story or time where you felt safe in your sexuality? Branch out into sub questions.
- 11) How has the university supported your interconnected identities?
- 12) What barriers have you experienced because of your interconnected identities at the university?
- 13) Can you tell me a story of how you learned you had more than one identity?

- 14) What sort of differences have you noticed between you and the mainstream queer community?
- 15) How do you feel about having more than one identity?
- 16) What are some disadvantages from having more than one identity?
- 17) What are some advantages from having more than one identity?
- 18) What or who has encouraged a positive understanding of your interconnected identities?
- 19) What are some ways that you think the university can support students with interconnected identities?
- 20) What are some ways that you think high schools can support students with interconnected identities?
- 21) What are some ways that first nation communities can support students with interconnected identities?

Interview questions for second interview:

1. What are some things you have been thinking about since our last interview session?
2. Reviewing the transcripts is there anything you would like to add/share?
3. How do you think the interview/research has benefited you?
4. Who do you think can benefit from this research and how?
5. How do you see this research giving back to your community?

APPENDIX D – TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM



TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

Title of Study: Exploring the lived experiences of queer indigenous and two-spirit students attending universities in Saskatchewan.

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Lindsay Ryan Jimmy. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Lindsay Ryan Jimmy to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher