Indigenous Cultural Resurgence Through Two-Spirit Teaching and Learning Practices

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki,
the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
We are all Treaty people.

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Dedication Page

As this thesis is being completed in the spring and summer of 2021, an unearthing process has begun, where the mass unmarked graves of hundreds of Indigenous children are being detected at former Indian Residential School sites across Canada. This process is validating what we have always known and had come to accept as part of the legacy of cultural genocide but had not materially confirmed.

Schools should never have graveyards. Places of education, experiences of teaching and learning, are meant to be sites of invitation for us to discover who we are and what gifts we hold, so that we can go forward into the world and offer them.

While this process unfolds it has been a time of retraumatization, of healing, and of resurgence in our communities. Stories are being told that have never been told, action is being taken by those who have previously been too restrained, afraid, or frozen to act in the past, and emotions and memories are coming forward that have also been buried for too long.

This paper is dedicated to all the little ones who were stolen from our communities and placed in these "schools." It is dedicated to not just those who died, but to those who survive(d) and continue(d) to carry the weight of what happened, of the hate they endured and the love they never received. This includes many of my own family members.

Especially, this paper is dedicated to those little ones who were separated arbitrarily by genders that had never been assigned to them before, who were stripped of their culture through being given gendered haircuts, and language, and clothes, and names, and tasks, and rules, and all those whose experiences of abuse altered their healthy relationships to gender and sexuality.

May this recent confirmation process be another major step along the path in reclaiming what was lost and stolen and uncovering what can no longer be ignored.

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Abstract

Historically, Indigenous people who embodied diverse genders and sexualities (Two-Spirit) occupied sacred and integrated roles within their communities. A devastating impact of colonization is the attempted erasure of culturally situated expressions of gender and sexual diversity in Indigenous communities. The welcoming in of Two-Spirit people is part of a healing and decolonizing process. While LGBTQ+ community initiatives strive to increase Two-Spirit representation, it is representation of gender and sexual diversity within Indigenous communities that provides space for cultural healing to occur. This includes the representation of Two-Spirit knowledges in Indigenous education.

Using a blend of Indigenous and Western methodologies, including storywork and narrative autoethnography, this thesis explores how Two-Spirit educators use cultural values to connect with Indigenous communities and revitalize Two-Spirit concepts. The findings in this research support integration of Two-Spirit knowledges into Indigenous education, further restoring the relationship between Indigeneity and gender and sexual diversity, thereby advancing Two-Spirit resurgence.

Acknowledgements

The writing of this thesis took part mostly from my home, which is situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), and Qayqayt First Nations.

In acknowledging these lands, I would like to acknowledge specifically the Two-Spirit people of these lands. There is a strong Two-Spirit presence and resurgence amongst Coast Salish nations which has influenced the writing of this thesis. As an uninvited guest on these territories, I offer my deepest gratitude for the cultural teachings that have been so generously shared with me. I endeavour to continue learning Coast Salish teachings and defer to the practices and perspectives of the Coast Salish Two-Spirit peoples doing good healing and helping work through research, ceremony, and cultural practices.

I wish to extend my most sincere gratitude to the four Two-Spirit educators and knowledge keepers who so generously offered their stories, time, and teachings to this project. Their work and ways of being have and continue to invite other Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous people, and our communities into spaces of necessary healing.

Thank you to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judy MacDonald, for your guidance, encouragement, attentive and insightful reflection, and time. Your kind and consistent mentorship helped to ground me along the way and your spirited appreciation for my work invited my creativity and motivation throughout the writing process.

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Thank you to the Indigenous Mentorship Network – Pacific Northwest at the University of Victoria, whose funding support for this project provided me with the resources needed to travel and practice good protocol when engaging my community.

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PART ONE – GROUNDING

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1. Opening the Circle: Who am I in This Work?

My name is Kyle, I am a transgender, Two-Spirit, registered social worker with a professional background in health education, Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Two-Spirit & Queer (LGBT2Q+)[1] advocacy, and Indigenous cultural safety training and consultancy both within a healthcare and academic setting. My cultural background is Irish, Ukrainian, and Tłı̨chǫ Dene from Yellowknife, NWT. The formative years of my life, youth, and young adulthood were spent living in a variety of small arctic settlements in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories and then rural BC.

I currently have the privilege of living in a densely green part of Vancouver with my queer, non-binary spouse, our cat Molly, and our dog Tiger. While I own my home (or at least a small section of it), the lands on which it sits are unceded Coast Salish territory, specifically the traditional, ancestral, and unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) and Qayqayt people.

Racially and colonially, I occupy an interesting space, as I have white skin, an Irish name, and many of the privileges that this affords. I also have a deeply felt sense of the impacts of intergenerational trauma on my family as my mother is a residential school survivor (and many of my aunties and uncles on her side). I was adopted at a young age by my paternal grandparents, but by virtue of the communities we lived in I was raised in close proximity to Inuit and First Nations culture. Because of this I feel most comfortable and culturally aligned in Indigenous spaces, not only because of the familiarity of language and cultural practice but also in terms of my ethics, spiritual beliefs, and worldview.

Any Indigenous cultural teachings or practices that were formally shared with me growing up were through school and community activities up north. At school we learned beading and sewing, how to read & write in Inuktitut, made qamutiiks (sleds) and other land-based tools in shop class, cooked with traditional foods in cooking class, and heard and learned from Inuit stories shared with us by teachers and elders who came to visit. In the community was

where I learned about traditional games and activities like high kicking, dog sledding, igloo building, and throat singing. But there was also the everyday culture of the community, babies being carried in amautis (parka with large hood for carrying a baby on mother's back), gathering with others to wait on the shore in lawn chairs as soon as the annual barge shipment was visible on the horizon (it would usually take another 2 days to dock), catching lemmings to keep as pets, and wandering through a caribou herd as they migrated past town in the fall. I witnessed the way elders were respected, regularly had neighbors come to our door with arctic char or caribou meat to share and saw groups of people connected in joyous laughter at least once a day. While Inuit culture is not my culture it is the culture I grew up with and around, and with culture being land-based it shares many similarities and cultural practices with my home nation.

All these culture specific experiences informed my own personal values in very indirect ways. I recall very few experiences of being explicitly taught what was right or wrong or best to do from an Indigenous perspective, but it was modelled for me regularly, and now as an adult I'm able to reflect and discern which values came from Indigenous contexts and which were sourced in the Irish family and personal values I was raised with. For example, in the Indigenous side of my family there is a constant sharing of resources, when someone comes into a large sum of money it is often shared with others. Similarly, when someone needs money or support like child or elder care, whoever can contribute steps up and takes care of them. Sharing what you have is a high priority in Dene cultural values and this is also true of Inuit values as well. However, this is never framed in any sort of cultural context in my family, it's just how things are, and it continues to influence my own beliefs and actions around sharing and providing and being there for others.

I do still struggle though, with a sense of nervousness in Indigenous spaces, as I'm concerned that I don't look like I belong and worry that I'm taking up space inappropriately. I put consistent effort into not trying to prove or oversell my belonging there, as I believe I would bring disruptive energy with me if I were to engage too much in my worries. Being trans complicates my cultural identity because my 28 years of being socialized as female and felt sense of Indigeneity aren't matched by my external presentation as a white male. I feel that I

embody some vastly divergent social locations. I do a lot of balancing, reflecting, and going back and forth between several worlds.

Living in a small town was an isolating experience as I grew older and so I moved out to the Commercial Drive area of Vancouver where I worked hard to involve myself in queer and trans[2] arts and activist circles, which eventually led me to pursue a degree in social work. The several years spent performing as a slam poet in my early 20's set me up well as an educator/facilitator as I worked hard at learning how to deliver impactful critical statements in short form and developed a passionate appreciation for creating transformative moments with large groups of people.

I've been designing, presenting, and facilitating trainings, community dialogues, and lectures on a variety of topics related to Two-Spirit and decolonizing gender diversity since 2016. My current full-time employment is as an Indigenous Education Consultant at the University of British Columbia. I appreciate the pedagogical freedom that comes with working in an academic environment, my passion and creativity are welcomed and my knowledge as a Two-Spirit person is valued. I love what I do and am confident that I am on the right path in my work as an educator.

Prior to focusing on the topic of Two-Spirit I had been doing transgender advocacy and education work for over 10 years, with my most meaningful position being coordinator of a provincial community capacity building program, working primarily with rural transgender youth and their families and providers. This work brought me great joy through witnessing the resiliency of trans youth as they come become kind, conscientious, and active adults. It brought me great heartache mourning those young ones who were lost along the way to hatred in its various forms (Reynolds, 2016). And it also brought me great purpose working together with my colleagues and my community members to step up to the challenges before us as counselors, advocates, activists, facilitators, educators, and queers caring for our young ones.

I gave myself to this youth work, and after ten plus years and the culmination and wrapping of a 6-year project I felt lost, on the verge of burnout, and not sure who I was or where to go

next. My passion needed to switch gears and find new purpose and I found this in doing Two-Spirit education.

1.2 Introduction to the Topic

Two-Spirit is a culturally specific umbrella term for Indigenous people who embody diverse genders and sexualities. Through a Western lens one might say it is an Indigenous term for being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer, but because of the cultural, spiritual, and historical context, Two-Spirit is much more than sexual orientation or gender identity. A common teaching in presentations, stories, and texts on Two-Spirit topics is that prior to colonization, Two-Spirit people historically held revered positions within their communities, often taking on the role of artists, matchmakers, mediators, warriors, and healers. One of the significant pieces of damage done as part of the colonization and assimilation process was the introduction of homophobic and transphobic biases that have stigmatized, marginalized, and promoted rejection and violence against our gender and sexually diverse community members. Much work has been done in recent years both amongst Two-Spirit people and larger Indigenous communities to organize, gather, and reclaim this sacred and revered place that was once held. Or at the very least, reintegrate as valued members of our communities (Baskin, 2016; Hunt, 2016, Pruden, 2016; Ristock et al. 2019; Shaughnessy, 2018; Sparrow, 2018; Wilson, 2007, 2008).

However, one aspect of Two-Spirit ways of being that is consistently overlooked is the contemporary sacred roles that they occupy. It is common to hear of the achievements and talents of today's Two-Spirit people, but popular media's tendency to solely focus on their professional, entrepreneurial, academic, and artistic successes is aligned with a capitalist version of success. This view is not consistent with an Indigenous worldview which places greater importance on humility and relationality, (Baskin, 2016).

This master's thesis research focuses on movement towards restoring and re-membering (Denborough, 2014) the sacred and instrumental roles that Two-Spirit people once played in our Indigenous communities. Through bringing a diversity of Two-Spirit educator voices to the forefront to share their personal experience stories of the work they do; I explore the

ways that Two-Spirit educators are honoring tradition and doing necessary and important healing work to move their communities forward.

1.3 Why am I Doing this Cultural Work?

When I entered the social work field one of the things that thrilled me most was hearing the career trajectory of my first practicum supervisor who went from being a child and youth advocate, to a women's shelter counselor, to a hospice coordinator. She said that the flexibility offered by a social work degree is what made it possible to avoid burnout as being a social worker means having a passion for making a difference, and when you have that you can take it wherever you want.

In the five years that I have been involved in Two-Spirit teaching and learning work I have been witness to and experienced many healing moments and interventions. They have taken on many forms; young people coming in (Wilson, 2008) to a Two-Spirit self-concept, Indigenous leaders acknowledging and denouncing high-levels of rejection of gender and sexual diversity in their communities, elders sharing teachings and language on what gender and sexual diversity has looked like historically on these lands, and esteemed colleagues and mentors taking it upon themselves to revitalize Two-Spirit concepts within their nation when that history is nowhere to be found.

In presentations, workshops, and community dialogues, in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous spaces, a moment of transformation occurs, the energy in the room shifts, when a correlation is made between healing from colonial violence and embracing gender and sexual diversity within our Indigenous communities. There is a clear connection made between the devastating impacts of intergenerational trauma and the rejection of our gender and sexually diverse people. When we cease to "other," to reject, to ostracize our gender and sexually diverse people, we take one giant step down the path to reclaiming our culture, our humanity, our spirituality, and our power as Indigenous people.

I witnessed a similar process in those I worked alongside as colleagues and clients. A shift in wellness, in self-awareness, and in felt sense of purpose seemed to occur when naming

themselves as Two-Spirit, as this became linked with an intentional process of reconnecting with culture and cultural responsibility.

I had the opportunity to be mentored into co-facilitating public talks on Two-Spirit history and wellness. Eventually I went on to develop online clinical education tools and resources for non-Indigenous service providers and co-lead intergenerational dialogue sessions on gender and sexual diversity in rural, remote, and on-reserve communities. I now regularly deliver conference presentations and university guest lectures on decolonizing gender and sexual diversity. It feels like sacred work to help make the connection between embracing Two-Spirit people and decolonial practice, and I feel honored to be involved in these conversations.

As I continued my own journey into the role of Two-Spirit educator and witnessed the incredibly meaningful teaching experiences of others doing this work I became curious about how our role as teachers fit into the notion of healing work, for and within our Indigenous communities. It wasn't until I'd been doing this work for about a year alongside seasoned Two-Spirit teachers, writers, and community organizers, that I began to name myself as Two-Spirit, previously opting to describe myself as a queer, trans person with Indigenous background.

The concept of Two-Spirit is often defined as occupying a revered role in one's nation or community and I didn't see myself in this way, I didn't recognize myself as having any gifts or special skills to offer my community. It wasn't until I began receiving invites to present on the topic of decolonizing gender and sexual diversity, developed my own presentation content, and came to see that I had my own unique perspective to offer that I began to name myself as Two-Spirit. I felt that I could finally identify something that I had to offer.

As part of my own coming in process as a Two-Spirit educator I began taking risks with sharing my own ideas- non-Indigenous application of blood quantum politics, rejecting Two-Spirit "inclusivity" in LGBTQ+[3] communities, and legitimizing the use of the clinical language in the terms "homophobia" and "transphobia" within the context of intergenerational trauma and same-sex sexualized violence. The safest place to take these risks was in academic environments. I wanted to know more about Two-Spirit existences, the

roles that we play in our communities, and how we fit into the larger scheme of decolonization work. This was the journey that led me to this current research project.

1.4 Research Questions

In beginning this research project, I felt confident, based on my own transformative experiences and those I witnessed in others that the education work being done by Two-Spirit people was healing work. I had felt healed by it. I've seen others go through personal transformation processes through being involved in this work as well. I just wanted to know more about how exactly it was happening, what was so magical about it? How was learning more about the connection between Two-Spirit and decolonization creating such pivotal moments not just in individual people, but in entire communities? In alignment with the research objectives, the guiding questions that I chose for this research project are:

- How do Two-Spirit educators see themselves playing a role in the larger healing process of Indigenous communities?
- How does taking on the role of an educator on Two-Spirit knowledge and history, both within and outside of Indigenous communities, impact the educator's own connection to culture and overall sense of purpose as a Two-Spirit person?
- Are there Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning that Two-Spirit educators are using or specific Indigenous values that are guiding their education style? What are they and how are they being used?

A complete list of questions and prompts used in conversations with educators can be found in APPENDIX A.

1.5 Preparation

Dr. Margaret Kovach (Cree) writes about a process leading up to an Indigenous research project which is referred to as "researcher preparation" (Kovach, 2010, p. 49), this process is described as connecting with one's inner self and sense of belonging. Kovach (2010) explains that from a Cree perspective, "attention to inward knowing is not optional" and that "participating in cultural catalyst activities are all means for accessing inward knowledge" (p. 49-50). This inward knowledge and personal awareness are instrumental in the self-

reflexivity required to do relational research work. These researcher preparations often involve immersing oneself in culture by visiting their home community or other site of cultural and personal significance.

A significant part of the journey I took in preparation to do this research and write this thesis was to educate myself in all ways possible on what it means to be Two-Spirit, for myself and for others. Where have Two-Spirit people been and where are we going now? What roles have we, do we, and will we occupy in the variety of worlds we walk between? What gifts do we bring and how can we be of use and service in our communities, our families, and in our own lives? Not only was it important to me to immerse myself in whatever Two-Spirit teachings and experiences I could, I specifically wanted to increase my own understanding of Two-Spirit teaching and learning experiences by growing my own knowledge base.

In the preparation process I've said yes to everything, research advisories, events, community collectives, workshops, facilitation partnerships, contributing to publications, expanding my knowledge to be able to speak on new topics relevant to Two-Spirit ways of being. I've worked hard to form good relationships with other Two-Spirit educators, scholars and community organizers.

However, my approach to Two-Spirit work has been from a very broad and pan-Indigenous perspective. This is largely because my entry point for learning about Two-Spirit ways of being was through LGBTQ+ work and community, so my idea of Two-Spirit was centered around gender and sexual diversity not the specifics of distinct nations and cultures. So, it was also important to me to connect further with my Dene culture specifically, this meant travelling to where I was born and where I come from, Yellowknife, NWT, to participate in whatever programming was accessible to me at the time at Dechinta Dene Education and Research Institute, and bring whatever knowledge that I have on Indigenous gender and sexual diversity that may spark helpful dialogue in the teaching and learning community there. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that broke out during the same winter I planned to travel to Yellowknife, my trip had to be cancelled and my opportunity to engage with my community of origin, participate in cultural activities, and connect with Dene

researchers and teachers was delayed indefinitely- beyond the timeline of this thesis writing process.

I have continued to approach this thesis as an example of a person of mixed European and Indigenous background who is disconnected from many of the traditional aspects of their Indigenous culture. And it is with great dedication and humility that I've done what I can to connect myself from afar. This has included reading the works of Dene scholars and writers, participating in educational events offered online through Dechinta, using the Dene Laws as guiding principles in how I conduct myself in my relations to others and myself, going through old family photos and artifacts to help myself remember the stories behind them, learning Tłı̨chǫ words via educational apps and online resources, and viewing Dene focused film and video content. I was happy to discover that there is a twelve-episode TV series dedicated to this purpose exactly, Dene: A Journey, which follows a variety of young people with Dene backgrounds who are disconnected from their culture as they go on journeys within the community to connect with their culture.

Just as I have learned to practice social work by way of online education throughout my bachelors and master's degrees, I am learning more about what it means to be Dene from online and print resources, so this is a familiar challenge I was prepared to meet.

1.6 Invitation to Humility: Running Forward, Stepping Back

One of the problematic aspects of placing Two-Spirit within a Western LGBTQ+ framework, is that what is centered is gender and sexuality, experiences of homophobia and transphobia, and liberating ourselves from the restraints of a sex negative binary society, and this is all devoid of cultural context. When we gather and name ourselves in this way culture comes second and sets us up for a pan-Indigenous view of Two-Spirit ways of being. In reality the stories, language, roles, and presentations of gender and sexually diverse Indigenous people are rooted in culture and can vary greatly from nation to nation. When working to build relationships with Two-Spirit communities across the city and province where I live, I hadn't fully grasped the importance or the cultural significance of rooting Two-Spirit experiences and wisdom within not just an Indigenous-first perspective, but a nation-specific context. I had missed the importance of centering local Indigenous Two-Spirit knowledge.

Indigenous or not, being a good guest on territory you are not from is important and looking back on my preparation process I would have made different decisions now. In this last year of working at UBC, a university that was built on stolen xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) lands, I have come to understand the importance of centering the nations whose lands we are guests on. I also now understand the importance of consulting with, building relationship with, and deferring to the protocols and wishes of these host nations when doing Indigenous focused work in their territories.

One of the most impactful components to my researcher preparation process was participating in the Coast Salish Two-Spirit Collective which was organized by xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Two-Spirit community helpers and leaders. In this collective we processed two owls together that were gifted to the group, we learned to bead the owl feathers as giveaway gifts for a community event, we made elk hide drums, we ate together, we shared personal stories and heard traditional stories from community leaders and elders. It was in this space that I learned some of the most integral teachings about being Two-Spirit. However, the topic of being Two-Spirit very rarely came up itself, as this space was primarily focused around engaging Two-Spirit people in cultural practice, and we were welcomed and celebrated there for being Two-Spirit, in all the many ways this can look. I learned the most simply by observing how others carried themselves and related to others, with gentleness, patience, irreverence and humanity, but most of all humor. My face and stomach would always be sore from laughing each time I left a gathering.

While invitations to speak or write on Two-Spirit topics have slowed down a bit because of the pandemic, I have now begun to redirect requests first to Coast Salish Two-Spirit community leaders and educators as I don't believe that as someone of Dene background, I should be the first to speak here, unless I am invited to do so by a Coast Salish Two-Spirit person. I am also currently engaged in a reach out process, connecting with Coast Salish Two-Spirit people, to acknowledge that I may have over the last several years accepted opportunities that were not mine to run towards without first consulting or redirecting to the local community.

1.7 Influential Works

Several specific articles, texts, books, bodies of work, and other graduate theses were influential in the writing of this paper. Among them were Dr. Alex Wilson's (Cree) concept of coming in (2007, 2008, 2019), a process wherein Two-Spirit people connect further with their Indigenous culture as part of adopting a Two-Spirit identity and doubleweaving, a concept applied to Two-Spirit experiences by Dr. Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee) (2010, 2016), referring to Two-Spirit people's dual and intersecting realities of being both gender and sexually diverse and Indigenous. Q'um Q'um Xiiem/ Dr. Joanne Archibald's (Stó:lō) (2008) concept of Indigenous storywork, witnessing and working with the stories of Indigenous people, guided my methodological process, as did Dr. Margaret Kovach's (2010) text Indigenous Methodologies. And great inspiration was found in the work of Coast Salish Two-Spirit scholars and researchers, Saylesh Wesley (Stó:lō, Tsimshian) (2014), and Corrina Sparrow (Musqueam, Pentlach) (2018), both of whom have dedicated their efforts to connecting further with history and embodiments of Two-Spirit from a nation specific lens.

A recurring point that is made not only in this paper but in the work of nearly all these above-mentioned scholars and researchers is that historically and too often Indigenous focused research has been done from an outside-in approach, by non-Indigenous researchers. So, it is with great appreciation and satisfaction that I can name each of these influential researchers and scholars who are all Indigenous and utilized Indigenous methodologies in their work, which was done with the purpose of contributing to the cultural and epistemological revitalization of their communities.

1.8 Thesis Overview

This thesis has been divided into three parts. The first part, Grounding, provides foundational knowledge and concepts for being able to thoughtfully engage in the stories shared by educators and the ideas that emerged. Just as when Indigenous people first meet one another, it's common practice to name where you are from, meaning your relationships to land, culture, and lineage, Part One attempts to provide context to the research project, including the perspectives held and called upon by the researcher. It includes this introductory chapter. The second chapter in Part One is a review of the current and recent literature published on

Two-Spirit knowledges and experiences, Indigenous teaching and learning methods, Indigenous perspectives on cultural healing, and an overview of theoretical frameworks called upon throughout the paper. The third chapter in Part One is a description of methodologies used in the research project, spanning from preparing for the research process to relationship building with Two-Spirit educators who joined me for conversations about their work, and the theories applied while making sense of the stories that had been shared with me.

Part Two, Meaning Making, combines research findings with discussion in what Kovach (2010) describes as utilizing a mixture of Western data interpretation and application of Indigenous epistemologies to make sense of what has been shared by participants. This section blends both what is typically described as the data analysis and discussion into one chapter, by sharing excerpts from stories shared by Two-Spirit educators and the researcher's reflections on them, both from the perspective of personal experience and grounded in research on Two-Spirit and Indigenous concepts of teaching and learning, and cultural healing.

Part Three, Moving Forward Together, moves previous knowledge and reflection shared into a place of communal action between both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as well as Two-Spirit and non-Two-Spirit Indigenous people. This chapter includes the researcher's perspectives on opportunities for further research and recommendations for ways that various sites of education (public education systems, professional development) can meaningfully integrate and expand to include further Two-Spirit knowledges and representation.

Footnotes

[1] The acronym "LGBT2Q+" is being intentionally used with the inclusion of a "2," representing "Two-Spirit" for the purposes of denoting instances where Two-Spirit people are participating in the larger LGBTQ+ community.

[2]The term "queer and trans" is being used mostly synonymously with the acronym LGBTQ+ (see below). One slight differentiation is an increased tone of politicization, as "queer" is an historically derogatory term being reclaimed by gender and sexually diverse groups.

[3] The acronym "LGBTQ+" is being intentionally used without the inclusion of a "2," representing "Two-Spirit" for the purposes of delineating between gender and sexually diverse communities that organize within a Western framework of gender and sexuality.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The construction of a culturally nuanced lens through which to view Two-Spirit education, as well as its value and it's cultural and historical context is part of laying the groundwork for seeing Two-Spirit work as healing practice. This literature review is broken down into four areas of focus: further description of what the concept of Two-Spirit means and how it is culturally situated both within Indigenous and LGBTQ+ communities; an examination of the ways that healing and resurgence is taking place within Indigenous and Two-Spirit contexts through connection to culture; brief exploration of the culturally-specific ways that teaching and learning takes place within Indigenous spaces; and finally a review of the theoretical frameworks that inform the approaches taken to this research project.

2.2 Two-Spirit

Two-Spirit is an Indigenous specific concept incorporating both diverse genders and sexualities and is distinct from simply being LGBTQ+ and Indigenous. Two-Spirit identities have spiritual and cultural components unlike LGBTQ+ identities and are more integrated into Indigenous culture than segregated off, as many LGTBQ+ communities are from the mainstream dominant and heteronormative society (Frazer & Pruden, 2010). Historically most nations across Turtle Island had Two-Spirit people in some capacity with some nations recognizing up to six and seven genders such as masculine man, feminine man, masculine woman, and feminine woman. Two-Spirit identities, while holding some similarities, were unique to each nation with variation between the roles they played in communities, the language used to describe them, and the origin stories associated with them (Hunt, 2016; Pruden, 2016).

2.2.1 Definition and Cultural Context

The term Two-Spirit was first put into the community vernacular in 1990 by a group of community members (which included educators, organizers, service providers) attending the Third Annual Inter-Tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American

Conference, being held in Winnipeg that year. Those gathered proposed its use based on the Anishinaabemowin term niizh manidoowag, meaning “two spirits” (Fewster, 2021).

It must be noted however, that “Two-Spirit” itself is a pan-Indigenous term, an all-encompassing umbrella term, similar to the word “queer,” which blankets a wide nation-specific variety of terms and descriptors for our community members who hold diverse sexualities and gender expressions and roles. Driskill (2010) explores the use of this pan-Indigenous term: “like other umbrella terms — including queer—it risks erasing difference. But also, like queer, it is meant to be inclusive, ambiguous, and fluid” (p. 72). Cree community organizer and scholar Harlan Pruden has captured nearly 200 terms used by a variety of nations to describe their Two-Spirit people such as ayahkwêw (Cree) (Pruden, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that any research or community organizing work done around Two-Spirit people take into consideration the rich variations in what this means from nation to nation.

Two-Spirit is distinct from terms such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer, because of the Indigenous-specific cultural and historical context that it holds (Baskin, 2016; Cameron, 2005; Wilson, 2008). As Baskin (2016) states:

> Two-Spirit has multiple meanings, which vary depending on the context and community. But what is clear is that, since it is applied to Indigenous Peoples, it must be considered within Indigenous frameworks and worldviews…those who identify with this term are linked to an Indigenous identity that secures a place of uniqueness, but also perhaps separation, from mainstream LGBTQ communities, thereby rooting gender identities to community and history. (p. 247-248).

Another distinction is that in Western frameworks sexuality is often defined by attraction to another person’s biological sex whereas many traditional Indigenous notions of sexual attraction are based on attraction to a specific gender regardless of biological sex. In that way, within this cultural context sexual orientation could be better interpreted as gender orientation. As Dakelh researcher, Michelle Cameron (2005) states, “gender orientation is not based on physical sex characteristics, but rather on the roles a person chooses to align with” (p. 124).

Not all people who are Indigenous and LGBTQ+ identify themselves as Two-Spirit for a variety of reasons. Some may not know the term and are more familiar with Western concepts of LGBTQ+. Others may choose not to align their gender or sexuality with a cultural identity, a result of internalized racism, as they attempt to distance themselves from Indigenous self-concepts or practices. For others, they may feel a need to develop a stronger connection with their Indigenous background and/or identity in order to claim this term for themselves, possibly seeking to find a way that they are able to give back to their family or community and live up to the responsibilities that come with taking on the role of a Two-Spirit person. Dr. Alex Wilson has named this process of Indigenous people actualizing a cultural connection to their gender and sexuality as "coming in" (Wilson & Haste, 2007).

Two-Spirit is not an identity that can be taken on by people who are non-Indigenous to Turtle Island. Because Two-Spirit is a concept specifically linked to North American Indigenous culture, history, and reclamation it is considered an act of cultural appropriation for anyone non-Indigenous to take this on. As Cameron (2005) explains, in the context of Indigenous understandings of sharing and utility, in that something may only be used by one person at a time, gender and sexually diverse Indigenous people are currently using the term Two-Spirit to describe ourselves. The term is in use and not available for any other purpose or population at this time, when we are no longer using this term, it will be available for others to use. Cameron states, "when people do not see the harm in 'sharing' the term, they are missing the point, and refusing to recognize that by appropriating the term, they will inevitably alter its cultural context" (Cameron, 2005, p. 126), explaining that the term loses is cultural and spiritual meaning if applied in contexts where this culture and spirituality are not present (e.g., non-Indigenous cultures).

Most nations who acknowledged their Two-Spirit people as holding distinct roles in the community had origin stories that connected them to their land, practices, and spiritual beliefs. For instance, in Dene culture, Two-Spirit people are thought to be manifestations of an "opposite gender" spirit of someone who has passed on and then entered the womb of a pregnant mother (Jacobs, 2005). In most nations Two-Spirit people were either highly revered members of their community or otherwise fully included and valued, often holding ceremonial roles and other integral roles as healers, weavers, matchmakers, and mediators.

Not all nations have stories about their Two-Spirit people, and there are a variety of ideas on why this might be. Possibly these stories were lost in the process of colonization, a by-product of losing language, ceremony, and cultural traditions as part of the genocide that took place. In some other instances nations may have had gender and sexually diverse people but this seeming invisibility could be due to a history of total integration and acceptance of gender and sexual diversity, not something that was considered remarkable. So, there may not have been specific language to name them with as they were simply members of the community living out a diverse range of genders and sexualities. Reflecting on the lack of Coast Salish Two-Spirit stories, Sparrow (2018) writes: "it is suggested there are no Two-Spirit stories on the west coast, because gender and sexual fluidity were always openly accepted in our communities here" (p. 40).

2.2.2 Coming In

The Western concept of coming out, (short for "coming out of the closet") is largely used, experienced, and talked about by mainstream society as an LGBTQ+ person disclosing their gender or sexual identity to oneself, family, friends, co-workers, and community members. Coming out is often done with some anticipation of rejection and yet also with the expectation that one now belongs to a separate community of supports based around LGBTQ+ identities (Wilson, 2008). The idea of coming out is not tied to any ethnocultural experience and tends to be considered quite universally.

For Two-Spirit people this process can look much different and has been referred to by Dr. Alex Wilson (2007) as "coming in." Coming in defines the process that an Indigenous person may go through as they find themselves stepping toward their culture because of taking on a Two-Spirit identity. "Two-spirit identity is one that reflects Aboriginal peoples' process of 'coming in' to an empowered identity that integrates their sexuality, culture, gender and all other aspects of who they understand and know themselves to be" (Wilson, 2007, p. 85). Adopting a Two-Spirit identity can be a time of intentionally creating a deeper understanding of self in relation to culture and embracing the traditional teachings, roles, and gifts that a person has to offer their family. As Wilson (2008) states, "Two-Spirit identity is about circling back to where we belong, reclaiming, reinventing, and redefining our beginnings, our

roots, our communities, our support systems, and our collective and individual selves. We 'come-in.'" (p. 198).

2.2.3 Impacts of Colonization on Two-Spirit People

To fully understand the sociocultural context in which Two-Spirit people live today, it is also necessary to understand the impacts of colonization on Indigenous, and more specifically, Two-Spirit people. The Christian values imposed upon the Indigenous people of Turtle Island considered gender and sexual diversity to be a sin. Because of this perspective many Two-Spirit people were killed and forced into hiding or assimilation (Baskin, 2016).

One of the most effective tools of colonization utilized by European settlers was the Indian Residential School System, which used gender policing as one of its assimilation tactics. At residential schools there was physical segregation of boys and girls into separate dormitories and classes, this practice also allowed for further control over language and cultural practice retention as it helped to increase distance between male and female siblings. There was an assimilation of gender expression amongst children in the schools, as they were forced to adapt their clothes, hair, gender roles, and behaviours to what was deemed appropriate for European boys and girls (Hunt, 2016). This, and the punishment that ensued when these new gender norms were not adhered to added increased trauma for children who expressed their genders in ways that were considered non-normative by European standards.

This detailed account in Wilson (2008) provides an excellent example of the consequences that young people faced for straying outside of new gender norms:

> 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 my 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 another 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. (p. 195)

The imprint of these harmful beliefs around gender and sexual diversity have introduced and perpetuated high rates of homophobia and transphobia in our communities to this day. Many

Two-Spirit people feel a need to leave their home communities for larger urban areas in order to feel safer and more comfortable in their gender and sexual identity (Hunt, 2016; Kia et al., 2020; Ristock et al., 2019). Leaving one's home community is not just a geographical change, it further distances Indigenous individuals from cultural practices, family, and land. Therefore, when we enter conversations about healing for Two-Spirit people we must begin the conversation around decolonization. Likewise, when doing decolonizing work, acknowledging Two-Spirit people and the roles that they played in our communities as well as their attempted erasure needs to be part of that discussion (Pruden, 2016). This healing process is not only for our Two-Spirit people but for our Indigenous communities as well who have had healthy and respectful relationships to gender and sexual diversity stolen or associated with traumatic experiences.

Homophobia and transphobia are not traditional values, they are by-products of colonization and cultural genocide, they are leftovers of the violence initiated at first contact (Shaughnessy, 2018). As much research has shown, overall health and wellness outcomes of Two-Spirit people is lower than the general LGBTQ+ or Indigenous populations, due to the intersection of homophobia, transphobia, and racism that they face (Frazer & Pruden, 2010; Hunt, 2016; Ristock et al., 2019).

2.2.4 Two-Spirit Representation in Academic Literature

Current research on the health and wellbeing of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous people predominantly centers around risks, harms, and disparities experienced by this population. Only recently is the dominant narrative of Two-Spirit people, specifically youth, being "at-risk" being challenged in health research and by community organizations (Hunt, 2016) by appropriately locating risk factors (such as homophobia, transphobia, and colonialism) as originating within a social context and focusing on the resiliencies of young Two-Spirit people instead. Research that focuses on the wide service gaps, complex health issues, and lack of accessibility for Two-Spirit people provides the opportunity for health leaders and policy makers to respond through improved policy and program design, so it does have utility, whether it is empowering or not. Focusing on narratives that speak to the gifts and cultural roles of Two-Spirit people serves to contribute to a much-needed body of work

centered around healing and carves out space for Two-Spirit people to exist beyond a problematic dominant discourse of risk and illness that is based in colonialist perspectives (Wesley, 2015).

As part of a 2019 literature review of 15 Canadian publications focused on the topic of Two-Spirit, it was noted that:

> Only three studies (e.g., Meyercook & Labelle, 2004; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011) discuss the positive experiences and narratives of resistance of Two-Spirit individuals, while other studies examine(d) Two-Spirit issues from a health- or service-based framework that treat Two-Spirit people as ill and marginalized…researchers need to conduct Two-Spirit research within the framework of resilience, rather than solely within the context of health-based needs (Morrison et al., p. 165).

2.3 Healing and Resurgence

Since the late 1980s, there has been an increase in Two-Spirit activism, community organizing, and representation, largely within the context of the wider LGBTQ+ communities. However, in recent years there has also been an increase in the recognition of Two-Spirit individuals within specific nations and honouring of their history and current involvement in Indigenous communities. There are a variety of Two-Spirit artists, performers, public speakers, healers (practicing both traditional and Western medicine), ceremonial leaders (sweat lodge keepers, for example), educators, as well as political figures and prominent change makers who are gaining and inviting greater visibility for Two-Spirit ways of being. This resurgence differs from that of queer liberation movements, because it is part of a return to, embracing of, and centering of traditional cultural knowledge (Frazer & Pruden, 2010). Return to cultural practices is a core component named in many Indigenous-led approaches to community healing work (Lavallee & Poole, 2010; Chandler & Dunlop, 2015).

2.3.1 Decolonization, Indigenization, and Reconciliation

The terms decolonization, indigenization, and reconciliation are used quite interchangeably or in close proximity with one another to describe ways that colonial perspectives can be

removed or decentered (from a discipline of study, from an institution, or from a professional approach), and Indigenous perspectives can then be incorporated or centered. However, these three terms are actually quite distinct and describe different aspects to a complex, non-linear, and nuanced process.

Cull et al. (2018) defines decolonization as "the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches…for non-Indigenous people…dismantling structures that perpetuate the status quo and addressing unbalanced power dynamics" (p. 7). This is a process that requires a critical lens, investigating, questioning, and exposing the underlying colonial values systems on which our society is based.

Indigenization is then the recentering of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives where these colonial approaches had once dominated. Within an academic context, Kuokkanen as cited in Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) describes indigenization as "represent(ing) a move to expand the academy's still narrow conceptions of knowledge, to include Indigenous perspectives in transformative ways" (p. 218). However, the concept of indigenization is not without critique, as it is one that can at times be unintentionally misguided. Shortt & Hibbert (2020) challenge:

> to "-ize" something is to give it a quality or put it into a place. In this case, when you engage in Indigenizing you are "giving an Indigenous quality" to something or situating something in an Indigenous place. This raises the questions: Who is bestowing those qualities? Who is saying it has those qualities? Who can say when you're "all done" adding those qualities?

Shortt & Hibbert (2020) further explain the importance of placing decolonizing work ahead of attempts to indigenize, as otherwise we take the risk of simply placing Indigenous perspectives over top of or alongside colonial concepts without critique.

Reconciliation could be considered a crucial motivator in the actions of decolonizing and indigenizing as it is an intentional move towards acknowledging and mending immeasurable harms done to Indigenous peoples through the colonization process. As Cull et al. (2018)

notes: “the work of indigenization (and decolonization) is a growing focus in this era of reconciliation, which has been driven forward by the Truth and Reconciliation Common of Canada, a multi-year investigation of the residential school system” (p. 11).

For Two-Spirit people, decolonization and indigenization may look like de-centering Western LGBTQ+ frameworks, which place them inside of a colonial concept, and instead emphasizing and prioritizing the cultural and historical context of what it means to be Two-Spirit.

2.3.2 Healing

Healing within an Indigenous context is typically characterized as a movement towards holistic (body, mind, spirit, heart) wellness, not just for the individual but also the family, community, nation, all nations, and lands. As Lavallee & Poole (2010) describe, Indigenous healing is:

> inextricably bound to colonization, identity, the broken spirit and an awareness of body, mind and community. An Indigenous healing model admits that the wounded identity of Indigenous people needs to be addressed by allowing people to learn about their spiritual and cultural traditions, instilling Native pride so people will want to self-identify and learn about their culture, and most importantly, passing this healthy behaviour down to the next seven generations… Healing also means engaging in the specific cultural and spiritual practices of one’s nation with joy and pride. This embracing of Indigenous knowledges and teachings, this restoring of Indigenous identities and this recognition of strengths and cultural pride will not only move Indigenous people beyond the limits of (Western recovery models) toward authentic healing but will impact the next seven generations (p. 279).

Part of the reconnection with Indigenous knowledges and belief systems is the revitalization of Two-Spirit teachings, stories, and ways of being. This reconnection process is made possible through the teaching and learning experience, and within the context of this project, teaching and learning being facilitated and participated in by Two-Spirit people.

2.3.3 Culture as Medicine

Because Indigenous cultural knowledge and practice is the precise thing that the colonial project intended and attempted to eradicate, reconnecting with culture can be the catalyst to bringing healing and restoring wellness in our communities (Chandler & Dunlop, 2015; Gone, 2010; Gone 2013). Aaniiih-Gros Ventre scholar Dr. Joseph P. Gone has done extensive research on the use of cultural practice and ceremony in healing and recovery from mental illness, addiction, and underlying historical trauma among First Nations and Native American service users. In his writing Gone often shows the positive impacts of this approach through telling stories of individuals and cohorts going through treatment programs that centre around traditional healing:

> As a function of her engagement in treatment at the Healing Lodge, Diane soon learned to participate in cultural activities such as powwows, sweat lodge ceremonies, and fasting camps. Most significantly, she explicitly linked such participation to shifts in First Nations cultural identity, belonging, and purpose that essentially constituted her healing journey (Gone, 2013, p. 696).

His rationale for how this healing takes places is that:

> participation in Indigenous cultural practices is widely recognized as a form of anti- or counter-colonial repudiation of long histories of Euro-centric domination that instead reaffirms the value and vitality of Native life…the purported explanation for change is not habituation, cognitive reframing, or unmediated alterations in brain chemistry, but rather spiritual transformations and accompanying shifts in collective identity, purpose, and meaning-making" (p. 696-697).

These points made by Gone validate the notion that centering and revitalizing cultural practice is integral to our overall healing process. Culture was taken away, leaving trauma and sickness in our communities, and when we invite culture back in it becomes the medicine needed. The restoring of our Two-Spirit people is implicated in this as well. By applying an Indigenous worldview to concepts of gender and sexual diversity we re-introduce and revitalize traditional ways of relating to one another.

2.3.3.1 Culture as Medicine among Two-Spirit People

This notion of re/connecting with culture as a step towards healing, thriving, and wellness is especially true of Two-Spirit people, particularly because of the role that colonization has played infusing rejecting values into our communities where they did not previously exist (Pruden, 2016; Ristock et al. 2019; Shaughnessy, 2018; Sparrow, 2018; Wilson, 2007, 2008). Baskin (2016) states: "to counteract homophobia (and transphobia) within Indigenous communities and services, we must ensure the availability and awareness of Indigenous based knowledges, and Two-Spirit histories and narratives as necessary beginning steps" (p. 264).

There are also unique and specific ways that re/connecting with culture plays a role in healing within Two-Spirit communities, one of these being the very act of naming oneself as Two-Spirit:

> Self-identification as Two-Spirit has allowed Two-Spirit persons to reclaim the Indigenous traditions that were negatively affected by colonialism and Christianized ideas of sexuality and gender. This also permits Two-Spirit individuals to create a space within their own communities, rather than in the colonial state. Robinson (2017) indicated that the process of cultural continuity (i.e., transition of principles, Indigenous values, practices and identities from one generation to another) lessened the deteriorating effects of social discrimination on Two-Spirit individuals' health. (Morrison, 2019, p. 161).

The circumstances where there is a lack of community history, stories, or teachings on Two-Spirit people or embodiments of gender and sexual diversity can be a challenging part of the cultural re/connection process. However, the re-storying and reinventing of these ways of being can be an incredible site of cultural healing and revitalization. Stó:lō and Tsimshian educator, scholar, and junior elder, Saylesh Wesley, dedicated her PhD research to uncovering historical knowledge of Stó:lō gender and sexual diversity, hoping to identify language used to name Two-Spirit people and any associated cultural practices. However, unable to find any, Saylesh went about creating this history herself by consciously investing in her relationship with her grandmother, who had originally struggled to accept Saylesh as a

transgender woman. Through this intentional relationship building Saylesh's grandmother passed down many cultural teachings, most specifically a weaving method, and in time, gifted Saylesh with a Halq'eméylem word "Sts'iyóye smestíyexw slhá:li," which translates to "Twin Spirited Woman" (Wesley, 2014, p. 343).

2.4 Approaches to Teaching & Learning

Experiences of teaching and learning in Indigenous communities can differ greatly from the formalized, formulaic, and structured approaches of Western education. As is foundational in the learning journeys depicted in Carpenter & Scott (2013), experientiality and relationality are core elements of Indigenous teaching and learning, and span across multiple teaching methods such as mentorship and storytelling. As Mi'kmaq social worker and scholar, Dr. Cyndy Baskin notes, "from an Indigenous perspective, knowledge does not focus on writing, but rather on making live connections within complex, multifaceted contexts and relations" (p. 305).

Knowledge transferred through relational means is not limited to technical skills or topical information, a major focus of knowledge shared in Indigenous contexts centers on cultural teachings. Archibald (2008) defines teachings as "cultural values, beliefs, lessons, and understandings that are passed from generation to generation" (p.1).

Exploring the role of Indigenous people using cultural teachings within a decolonial context, Wilson (2019) ideates that when teachings are reflective of Indigenous worldview in their content but are then shared and enforced dogmatically, the same way for instance, the Ten Commandments are often used as a control mechanism, there is a need for further reflection and further questioning on what internalized colonial practices may still be at play (p. 134). When we are including Indigenous knowledges and perspectives, they need to be shared and taught in a way that is consistent with Indigenous values.

2.4.1 Cultural Teachings

Cultural teachings are lessons, beliefs, and values that are passed on from one person to another, often from elders or knowledge keepers to young people or others in the community. There are individual teachings such as Hands Back, Hands Forward, shared by late

xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Elder Tsimilano, Vincent Stogan. This teaching encourages us to receive and embody the teachings of our ancestors, while also sharing these teachings with others, particularly young ones, as a way of helping the teachings of our ancestors to continue to help guide our communities in a good way (Archibald, 1999).

Teachings are also presented in the context of ethical frameworks such as values systems, and sets of cultural laws. There are the Seven Grandfather Teachings, or Seven Sacred Teachings (Ojibway), the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit or Inuit Societal Values, and the Dene Laws, to name just a few. These frameworks often include a set of principles for how to relate to others with utmost love and respect, care for yourself, engage ethically with "nature, creatures, and people" (Verbos & Humphries, 2014, p. 3), and honour your culture and community. In reference to the Seven Grandfather Teachings, Kading notes:

> The Teachings are an important guiding framework for wellness research in Anishinaabe communities. Respected Elder from Red Lake, MN, the late Larry Stillday noted, "the Seven Grandfather Teachings are gifts or blueprints for living a good life. Each Teaching is a gift of knowledge for the learning of values and living by those values" (personal communication, February, 2014). While not used in all Anishinaabe communities, the Teachings are commonly taught to guide positive wellness behaviors" (2019, p. 29-30).

These cultural teachings are not just spoken of directly, they are modeled in everyday conduct, they are modeled in the ways that teachers interact with learners while at the same time teaching specific skills such as animal processing or beading.

> RESEARCHER'S VOICE: I recently participated in a rattle making workshop being taught by a local knowledge keeper and artist. While the focus of the session was on teaching a technical skill, the teacher consistently offered cultural practices around spirituality when referring to the type of energy we should bring to the rattle we were making, and she modeled patience and non-judgment as all of us as learners worked hard to pick up on the techniques she was sharing (for the first time over Zoom!).

> My strong memory of the teacher's patience, encouragement, and non-judgment comes from my bold decision at the end of the second day to unstitch my rattle, so that I could repair some of the bunching of sinew that had occurred when the hide dried between sessions. She gave me a quick tip to trace the pattern when I resoak the hide, which I took in but didn't think much of, I was just unstitching the sides and would be putting it right back together, no need to go that far back. Once all my sinew was pulled out, I came to the realization that given the hardened and curved shape of the dried hide, I wouldn't be able to stitch it back up without starting over entirely, soaking the hide, stitching it up, filling it with sand, drying and turning it in the sun for a week or two.
>
> Knowing the teacher wasn't concerned with my decision to undo the stitching, I took her lead, laughed at myself, and decided that this rattle, when complete, would represent to me that I don't need to be afraid of starting over, and that mistakes are part of the creative process.

2.4.2 Mentorship

Through a Western lens, mentorship is highly focused on the imparting of technical knowledge from one person with a significant amount of experience to someone of lesser experience. Broughton (2019) notes that there is a need to decrease focus on "advancing technical proficiencies" (p. 317) and increase focus on the relational and intentional aspects of mentorship by attending to the values and principles associated with effective mentorship:

> Individual characteristics, such as honesty, consistency, and transparency, lie at the core and are fundamental to building the trust required for an effective mentor–mentee relationship. Effective mentors are often self-aware, self-developed, and they do not underestimate the time and energy required of the relationship. In other words, effective mentors are intentional (p. 317).

This description closely aligns with Indigenous methods of mentorship, rooted in relationality and experiential learning (Carpenter & Scott, 2013). Often mentorship within Indigenous contexts is done by elders and knowledge keepers inviting in adults, youth, or

children who are wanting/needing to learn a particular skill or cultural practice. First this learning is done by observation and little by little taking on the task themselves, as they are ready and under the encouragement of the elder or knowledge keeper. Great attention is paid to the relationship between teacher and learner, both by the ways that elders and knowledge keepers, treat the learner with patience and caring attentiveness, and the ways that the learner shows respect for the elder or knowledge keeper. The teaching process is not limited to the specific task or skill being shared, but often as the work is being done stories are told by the elder or knowledge keeper that provide further insights either on other specific skills or cultural values in general. In this way, mentees are learning not only a particular skill but also possibly stories or songs that they will now be able to share with others, and equally important, they will learn ways of being by observing the patience, teaching style, or outlook being held by the elder or knowledge keeper (Archibald, 2008; Baskin, 2016; Carpenter & Scott, 2013).

As noted in Slutchuk (2002), Two-Spirit adults provide mentorship for youth who are lacking in knowledge and traditional teachings of Two-Spirit ways of being, by helping them to understand the cultural role that they play, and the historical context of their attempted erasure and now resurgence. It was observed that this mentorship is being done from a place of hoping to offset the harms being done to Two-Spirit youth by discrimination that they face due to their vulnerable minority status.

2.4.3 Storytelling

Storytelling is often used as a vehicle for sharing cultural teachings and reflect the cultural belief system (Archibald, 2008). As Baskin (2016) states: “Indigenous ethics are rooted in the context of oral history and storytelling. Indigenous ethics are framed within a process rather than as a specific code” (p. 126).

Stories usually come in one of two forms- traditional stories and stories of life experiences (Archibald, 2008), and both are often used to “teach young children about life and reciprocity” (Baskin, 2016, p. 303). The telling and receiving of stories also play a significant role in holistic wellness as “some stories remind us about being whole and healthy and

remind us of traditional teachings that have relevance to our lives. Stories have the power to make our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together" (Archibald, 2008, p. 11-12).

Storytelling is a commonly used data collection method used in Two-Spirit research being done by Two-Spirit researchers focusing on community resiliencies, and is referred to as storywork (Archibald, 2008). Further examples of this can be seen in Sparrow's (2018) conversations with their Coast Salish Two-Spirit relatives, in Cree researcher Dana Wesley's (2015) talking circles with Two-Spirit youth about their experiences of living in urban locations, and in Wilson's (2007) work in gathering Two-Spirit people together to tell their stories about coming to a place of Two-Spirit identity, of coming in. Using storywork in her article, Twin-Spirited Woman, Saylesh Wesley has revived Two-Spirit knowledge, and created new teachings to be carried forward. It is through this writing and research that utilizes storytelling as a teaching tool that I was able to gain a deeper understanding of Two-Spirit ways of being and knowing.

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks

Several theoretical and practice frameworks were applied in the preparation, data gathering, and meaning-making processes of this research project, and a Two-Eyed Seeing perspective consistently informed the balancing of these frameworks. While there is a combination of both Western and Indigenous perspectives applied, Indigenous frameworks such as decolonial practice and Indigenous worldview were prioritized, and further so when they incorporated understandings of gender and sexual diversity.

2.5.1 Two-Eyed Seeing

Two-Eyed Seeing is a research approach, most often used in the sciences, particularly environmental sciences, but overall can be and is applied in most if not all areas of study. The term and idea were first coined by Mi'kmaw Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall. It is the concept of taking both Indigenous ways of knowing and Western sciences and holding them in a harmonized approach to research and study.

> Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk in Mi'kmaw) embraces "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other

> eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all," as envisaged by Elder Dr. Albert Marshall. (Reid et al., 2021, p. 243).

Often when we think of incorporating Indigenous perspectives in our work, we think of ways to add Indigenous elements to non-Indigenous concepts. But, when we do this, we are still prioritizing non-Indigenous ideas, and asking Indigenous people, Indigenous ideas, to fit themselves in somehow. When we use a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, we work from the perspective that both Indigenous and Western worldviews are valuable and necessary in terms of understanding and conceptualizing. But they work simultaneously, side by side. One doesn't fit into another (Hatcher et al., 2009).

2.5.2 Anti-Oppressive Practice

Strier (2007) defines oppression as "the systemic subordination of specific social groups through the institutionalized use of unjust power and authority" (p. 860). This definition is supported by Baskin (2016), who states that an anti-oppressive framework contends that:

> present-day society is characterized by many social divisions, such as class, race, gender, age, and ability, which personify and produce inequality, discrimination, and marginalization. Society is characterized by differences that are used to exclude certain populations since relationships among us are created through the use of power on individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels (p. 76).

By identifying, addressing, and dismantling, the structures and values that uphold inequality, discrimination, and marginalization, we can work towards resolving the resulting societal problems such as poverty, illness, addiction. (Mullaly, 2002, as cited in Baskin, 2016).

In working with Two-Spirit people, it is imperative that we apply an intersectional lens, recognizing the interrelation between various sites of oppression (Crenshaw, 2016; Hopkins, 2019), for instance, seeing the ways that Two-Spirit people are affected not only by homophobia and transphobia, but also by racism and colonialism. This perspective identifies this intersection as its own social location as opposed to focusing on multiple individual

experiences of oppression, for example, someone who is gender diverse will experience racism differently than someone who is cisgender.

Recognizing the relationship between social location and power and privilege, engaging in critical reflexivity, is a major component to anti-oppressive practice, particularly on an individual practitioner basis as we see ourselves in relation to others, our clients, our students, and those we engage in our research. Anti-oppressive research, according to Strier (2006), should utilize methodologies that themselves center critical reflexivity, and seek to address the impacts of social oppression.

In connecting anti-oppressive frameworks to Indigenous methodologies, Kovach (2010) states: "decolonizing methodologies demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation within Indigenous research" (p. 33). However, Baskin (2016) notes that while anti-oppressive frameworks support decolonial practice, they are still placed within Western perspectives.

2.5.3 Decolonial Practice

In Smith, Tuck, and Yang (2019), Eve Tuck describes a common problematic centering of whiteness within the concept of decolonial practice and theory, noting as well that movements toward reconciliation are often movements towards a re-stabilization into settler norms. But it is quite the contrary, decolonization, specifically within the academic setting, "means (institutions) sacrificing privilege, power, and control" over their practices and perspectives (George, 2019, p. 75). Therefore, it is imperative that the concept of decolonization be brought back to focus on Indigenous sovereignty, as "decolonization is not obliged to answer questions concerned with settler futures" (Smith, Tuck, and Yang, 2019, p. 15).

Consistent with Tuck's views, at the heart of this thesis, is a strong desire to contribute to a process of stripping away the colonial harms that have been imprinted on our Indigenous communities through the subversion of gender and sexual diversity and restoring a sense of reverence and sacredness to the ways we relate to our Two-Spirit people. Indigenous theory and decolonizing practice are at times intertwined with queer theory within this paper, and

references that hold a primarily decolonial and secondarily queer agenda have been prioritized (however, queer theory as a standalone framework was not applied).

As is noted by Driskill (2010), decolonization is an "ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation." (p. 69). Queer theory, while not rooted in Indigenous worldview, seeks to deconstruct the categorization of identity into binaries such as male/female, straight/gay, seeing the enforcement of these binaries as socially constructed and ideologically motivated. Queer theory challenges dominant norms by validating and exploring non-normative embodiments of identity (Valocchi, 2005). Relatedly is the concept of "queering" something, referring to "unsettling complacencies, for making something strange" (Parker, 2016, p. 73).

The parallels between these two frameworks of decolonial and queer theory (both focusing on resistance and reconceptualizing), invite opportunity for a collaborative approach in Two-Spirit research. In their 2015 article, Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics, Tłaliłila'ogwa/ Dr. Sarah Hunt (Kwagu'ł) and Dr. Cindy Holmes, engage in exploratory conversation on the ways that decolonizing perspectives can work in concert with "queering" activist and scholarly work as "active, interconnected, critical everyday practices that take place within and across diverse spaces and times" (p. 156).

2.5.4 Doubleweaving

The concept of doubleweaving denotes the constant negotiation that is done by Two-Spirit people who must navigate both experiences of racism and colonialism at the same time as homophobia and transphobia, alternately, navigating both their lived experiences as being Indigenous people and as gender and sexually diverse (Driskill, 2016).

> Native and queer studies, when conceptualized as intertwined walls of a doublewoven basket, enable us to see the numerous splints — including Native politics, postmodern scholarship, grassroots activisms, queer and trans resistance movements, queer studies, and tribally specific contexts — from which these critiques are (and can be) woven. Such a weaving, then, moves beyond a concept of intersectional politics. Though

intersections do take place in doubleweaving, the weaving process also creates something else: a story much more complex and durable than its original and isolated splints, a story both unique and rooted in an ancient and enduring form. The dissent lines of Native studies and queer studies can be used as splints to weave what I am calling Two-Spirit critiques. It is from this stance that I wish to look a bit at "the new queer studies" in order to put these analyses in dialogue with Native studies and build stronger alliances between our disciplines (Driskill, 2010, p. 74).

While doubleweaving is a dance between these two frameworks, it is rooted in Indigenous worldview, and challenges "queer studies to include an understanding of Native queer/Two-Spirit resistance movements and critiques in its imagining of the future of queer studies itself" with Driskill further inviting "all of us engaged in queer studies to remember exactly on whose land this is built" (Driskill, 2016, p. 23).

Within the blending and collaborating of these frameworks is ample space for furthering critique. Alex Wilson avoids using the term "decolonization" as she feels it places the focus on colonization, and Indigenous peoples' proximity to it, instead Indigenous resilience, resistance, and survival. Wilson further explains that when we talk about decolonizing, much of the focus remains on the material or tangible signals of Indigeneity such as clothing and food, and not the spiritual aspects such as values systems and philosophies, which are inherently tied to relationship with land (Wilson, 2019).

2.5.5 Indigenous Worldviews

A worldview is a set of cultural beliefs, ethics, and values that inform the way an individual or group interprets and interacts with the world. Holding an Indigenous worldview is to hold a holistic worldview that sees and emphasizes connection; both connection between self, community, land, animals, and culture and connection between the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of self (Baskin, 2016; Kovach, 2010; Joseph, 2016). Alex Wilson also notes that Indigenous (Cree) worldview and culture are not static, they are "responsive and dynamic- they are alive" (Wilson, 2019, p. 135). This is furthered by Blackfoot researcher, Leroy Little Bear (2000), who notes that while everything is in

constant cyclical motion, such as seasons and migrations, we must then take a step further back to observe the whole (p. 2).

These worldviews are the foundation of Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, theory and epistemologies. As Kovach (2010) states, "tribal epistemologies are the centre of Indigenous methodologies" (p. 25), because they inform how we engage with knowledge, with one another, and with how we translate and distribute our learnings.

While there are many commonalities (such as those listed above) between Indigenous worldviews, they can and do vary from nation to nation. Much of this can be attributed to the differences in geographic locations between nations and therefore a different way of relating to land and climate (University of Alberta, 2017) which is then also reflected in language (Kovach, 2010; Little Bear, 2000).

There are many ways that Western and Indigenous worldviews align, however the framing of concepts differs. For example, the practices of critical reflexivity that are prioritized in anti-oppressive approaches, within an Indigenous worldview this critical reflexivity is framed more as self-reflection (Kovach, 2010). More broadly, Baskin (2016) states that:

> in order to find meanings in the world around us, we must continually explore our inner selves. Indigenous worldviews incorporate ways of turning inward for the purpose of finding meanings through, for example, prayer, fasting, dream interpretation, ceremonies, and silence. Our ancestors left us these methods through the generational teachings that are passed on by our Elders and through our blood memories (p. 90).

Kovach echoes this sentiment:

> as Indigenous people, we understand each other because we share a worldview that holds common, enduring beliefs about the world. As Indigenous scholar Leroy Little Bear (2000) states, "there is enough similarity among North American Indian philosophies to apply concepts generally' (p. 79)" in (Kovach, 2010, p. 37-38).

2.5.5.1 Contrast and Comparison with Western Worldviews

Worldviews are deeply held and reflected in language, as Little Bear (2000) states, “language embodies the way a society thinks” (p. 2). In the context of stories, Archibald (2008) acknowledges Acoma Pueblo writer Simon Ortiz as reminding us that “the oral tradition reflects the belief system and consciousness of a people” (p. 25). One can learn quite a lot of the differences between Indigenous and Western worldviews based on the literal translations of words between languages. In telling of his experience learning to speak Dene Zhatié, Greenland (2019) recounts:

> I recently watched Gwitch’in elders have difficulty translating the English word “power.” They could not agree to a translation because the Western concept of “power” was too foreign to the Gwitch’in worldview. The Gwitch’in connection to the land and understanding of the human relationship with it is so beautiful and different from Western thought. Even when we say “goodbye,” the Gwitch’in translation is more like, “Until I see you again.” To me, these are examples of the unique worldview in which our ancestors perceived the world. I fear if we do not learn these languages, or at least attempt to, these worldviews and cultures might be lost (p. 17).

Based on the writing of Mead (2002), Kwakwaka'wakw author and educator, and hereditary chief of the Gayaxala clan, part of the Gwawaenuk Nation, Bob Joseph, names eight differences between Indigenous and Western worldviews. Indigenous worldviews are spiritually oriented, are subjective and hold many truths, see society as interconnected and operating relationally, view land as a sacred gift from the creator, see time as cyclical and non-linear, believe happiness and comfort are based on the quality of your relationships, that human beings are equally important as all living things, and that accumulation of wealth is for the benefit of the community. The dominant Western worldview is scientific and requires proof, sees truth as objective and based on law, society is highly compartmentalized, views land as a resource to be developed and extracted from, sees time as linear and future oriented, believe happiness is based on goal achievement, sees human beings as superior to plants and other organisms and sees wealth accumulation as being for individual benefit. (Joseph, 2016).

Similarly, Baskin lists many of these values and includes several others such as Indigenous cultures seeing children as gifts, having respect for elders, and keeping a focus on patience, while the dominant Western cultures see children as property, value youthfulness, and is focused on action.

2.5.5.2 Holding and Balancing

It seems clear that Indigenous scholars must have a firm understanding of both Indigenous and Western worldviews in order to navigate and succeed in academic environments. In his poem, Academic Indian Job Description: Have To Know, Cree scholar Dr. Cash Ahenakew (2016) acknowledges the pressures that many Indigenous academics face to embody values held by both Indigenous and Western cultures, a pressure applied by the Western academy. "Have to know /western knowledge and education/plus the critique of /western knowledge and education/have to know/ indigenous 'culture' and education /plus the critique and the critique of the critique of/indigenous 'culture' and education" (p. 325).

When sharing an understanding of the need for Indigenous academics to balance both their positionality as a community member and as an academic, Joanne Archibald (2008) calls on a teaching she received from Kwulasulwut/ Elder Dr. Ellen White (Snuneymuxw):

> To young people my grandparents always said, "you'll do all right if your hands are both full to overflowing." One hand could be filled with the knowledge of the White man and the other could be filled with the knowledge of your ancestors. You could study the ancestors, but without a deep feeling of communication with them it would be surface learning and surface talking. Once you have gone into yourself and have learnt very deeply, appreciate it and relate to it very well, everything will come easily. They always said that if you have the tools of your ancestors and you have the tools of the White man, his speech, his knowledge, his ways, his courts, his government, you'll be able to deal with a lot of things at his level. You'll not be afraid to say anything you want…When your hands are both full with the knowledge of both sides, you'll grow up to be a great speaker, great organizer, great doer, and a helper of your people [(Quoted in Neel, 1992, P. 108) Archibald, 2008, p. 41].

Both examples capture this need to constantly balance and simultaneously hold Indigenous and Western worldviews in academic environments. The structure of the institution itself is rooted in Western concepts of teaching and learning, hierarchy, and achievement, so it is unavoidable to be engaging in Western frameworks even as an Indigenous scholar doing Indigenous focused research.

2.6 Conclusion

As is referenced throughout the above sections on teaching and learning, application of Indigenous cultural teachings and worldview is something that increases with experiential learning. However, this brief but in-depth exploration of the literature on Two-Spirit ways of being and Indigenous ways of knowing should help set the stage for not only meaningful understanding of the following stories shared by Two-Spirit educators, but resonance and curiosity around the researcher's process of making meaning as they were listened to and reflected on during the learning and writing processes.

Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Consistent with a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, a mixture of Indigenous and Western qualitative research methodologies were utilized in this project, and Indigenous worldview was applied throughout the data collection process.

> [I]t is not the method, per se, that is the determining characteristic of Indigenous methodologies, but rather the interplay (the relationship) between the method and paradigm and the extent to which the method, itself, is congruent with an Indigenous worldview. (Kovach, 2010, p. 40)

While I have chosen to utilize both Indigenous and Western methodologies, as an Indigenous student engaging Indigenous educators around topics of culture and cultural identity, my commitment to choosing Indigenous methodologies and applying an Indigenous worldview throughout this thesis is very intentional. Blackfoot Scholar Betty Bastien claims that "to continue practicing research outside of one's culture and attempting to develop research to questions from experiences based on the Western paradigm, continues to create dependency among tribal peoples" (1999, as cited in Kovach, 2010, p. 53). Given the focus on the revitalization and resurgence of culture-specific identities in this thesis topic, it is imperative that Indigenous worldview be reflected in the way the work is done as well- not just the 'what,' but also the 'how.'

It was also important to me to apply a Two-Eyed Seeing approach in this work, one that is based in Indigenous theory and Mi'kmaw worldview but holds intentional space for Western worldviews. The concept of blending and harmonizing worldviews interested and intrigued me, as it reflected elements of walking in multiple worlds, which is such a consistent theme in Two-Spirit work.

Narrative inquiry, autoethnography, storywork, reflexivity, and conversational method informed many of the specifics in terms of how conversations themselves were conducted, while Nehiyaw (Cree) epistemology guided the overall process of preparing for research, engaging educators, and maintaining an Indigenous centered approach to the work. The

methods by which this research project have been carried out intend to exist/operate as an extension of the healing process by prioritizing relationality, validating a sense of purpose in this teaching work through stories and questions explored with educators, and time spent in conversations articulating this work through the lens of healing.

3.2 Research Questions

Questions were refined over time to capture stories relating specifically to ways that Two-Spirit education work is contributing to an overall healing process within and on behalf of Indigenous communities and educators themselves. One distinct refinement was the framing of this education work as healing as opposed to decolonizing or indigenizing. A decolonizing approach involves dismantling colonial and/or Western systems and perspectives while also centring and holding up Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing. To indigenize something is to apply an Indigenous lens to it, approaching a topic or process from an Indigenous perspective, and applying Indigenous ways of knowing (Cull et al., 2018). While healing is an inherent and intended outcome of decolonizing and indigenizing processes, it is not the primary focus. A key component to this healing is reconnection with traditional Indigenous values, practices, and belief systems. The idea of shifting from a decolonizing to a healing lens was first proposed by one of my thesis committee members, Gail Baikie, after further discussion we both felt that the idea of healing was more aligned with Indigenous sovereignty and cultural revitalization, rather than the stripping away of colonial ideals. This prioritization of healing over decolonizing places more focus on the restoration of Two-Spirit than the rejection of Western frameworks of LGBTQ+.

My personal experience as a Two-Spirit educator myself played a significant role in the development of questions as I have felt both a healing process take place within myself and witnessed what seemed to be healing experiences for wider Indigenous communities through participating in dialogue around decolonization and gender and sexual diversity. It was also important to me to intentionally locate this education work within an Indigenous healing context instead of a Westernized "diversity training" context. The guiding research questions were:

- How do Two-Spirit educators see themselves playing a role in the larger healing process of Indigenous communities?
- How does taking on the role of an educator on Two-Spirit knowledge and history, both within and outside of Indigenous communities, impact the educators' own connection to culture, and overall sense of purpose as a Two-Spirit person?
- Are there Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning that Two-Spirit educators are using, or specific Indigenous values that are guiding their education style? What are they and how are they being used?

Based on these research questions, a conversation guide consisting of 15-17 prompts was developed, and adapted to each educator based on their specific method of education and any topics that generated the most resonance with them in the first meeting or early conversation process. For instance, if during first meetings, stories relating to mentorship, family connectedness, or self-advocacy consistently emerged, educators were invited to share stories relating to this theme, yet still connecting back to the overall research question and theme of healing and education. An integrated version of the conversation guide can be found in APPENDIX A.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry captures the way that educators perceive their lived experiences and apply meaning in relation to the world around them (Green 2013; Haydon et al. 2018). Educators being asked to share their experiences as part of this process were invited to "reconstruct their stories to convey a specific perspective of an event: it is meaning - not truth that is conveyed in the form of stories" (Green, 2013, p 63). For this research project, I was most interested not in the simple facts about educators' experiences of teaching and learning, but in the meaning they make of their work and how it contributes to their cultural identity. I was interested to hear how they made sense of their role as a Two-Spirit educator.

In keeping with the prioritization of relationality, narrative inquiry was the best suited Western methodology to the recruitment, data collection, and analysis process as this

approach “provide(s) both researcher and participant with a foundation to engage and to develop connections; hence a broader understanding of the phenomena under investigation is established” (Haydon et al., 2018, p. 125).

Because Indigenous knowledge translation and exchange relies heavily on stories of both personal experience and mythological nature (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010), as a research methodology narrative inquiry syncs well with Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Ware et al. 2018). Quayle & Sonn (2019) state that “creating settings for storytelling and counter-storytelling has therefore been a central strategy for decolonization…storytelling as methodology is central to learning and understanding colonial histories and legacies but also in constructing identities in the present” (p. 48). However, narrative inquiry differs from Indigenous storytelling approaches is that “in an Indigenous context, story is methodologically congruent with tribal knowledges” (Kovach, 2010, p. 35), whereas within a Western framework, storytelling does not have a distinct cultural connection.

3.3.2 Storywork

Storytelling is a key practice of knowledge exchange and translation in Indigenous communities, both historically and contemporarily. As Kovach (2010) states, “stories are vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practices that can assist members of the collective” (p. 95). Storywork is a theoretical framework developed by Stó:lō scholar Q’um Q’um Xiiem/ Dr. Joanne Archibald, based on Coast Salish practices of teaching and learning through sharing and witnessing story. Using storywork as a guiding methodological framework, educators were invited not just to answer questions in the conversation guide, but to share stories that connected to the question topic.

In her 2008 text, Indigenous Storywork, Archibald speaks of seven principles she learned from Elders she engaged in her research, in relation to using story as teaching and learning method; “respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy.” (Archibald, 2008, p. IX).

The use of Indigenous frameworks and methodologies in this study is an intentional and

meant to (re)centre Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge transfer; an extension of the study's purpose to bring culturally specific identities and experiences to the forefront. As Quayle & Sonn (2019) state, "Creating settings for storytelling and counter-storytelling has therefore been a central strategy for decolonization. Storytelling as methodology is central to learning and understanding colonial histories and legacies but also in constructing identities in the present" (p. 48).

3.3.3 (Narrative) Autoethnography

My interest and passion in pursuing this topic is based in my own experiences as a Two-Spirit educator, and so it is important to me that I be able to share my own stories of teachings I've received, moments I've witnessed, and inner shifts that have occurred along my journey of coming into this role as not just an educator, but a Two-Spirit person. Autoethnography provides this opportunity as it "allows for the understanding of how an idea or theory works in practice from an 'insider' source" through the sharing of researcher experiences and insights (Farrell et al., 2015, p. 975). Narrative autoethnography further fosters opportunities for rapport building between researcher and participants through the mutual sharing of stories and thoughts during the conversation process, as well as between researcher and reader, through the researcher's disclosure of personal reflection and experiences alongside those of participants in the writing produced (Berger, 2001).

As Kovach (2010) identifies, the self-in-relation approach of autoethnography also requires ongoing critical reflexivity, which is "the researcher's own self-reflection in the meaning making process" (p 32). This requires ongoing critical examination of my own role in the research and meaning-making processes, and how my positionality has impacted not only collection of data, but its interpretation.

There is also vulnerability in the autoethnographic process (Farrell, 2017) which is aptly paired with the humility required of Indigenous researchers, the "understand(ing) that one is equal to, not greater nor lesser than, everyone else" (Verbos & Humphries, 2014, p. 3). Additionally, the prioritization of relationality, particularly through the sharing of personal stories and narratives characteristic of narrative inquiry is consistent with "Indigenous traditions of honoring and learning from personal stories" (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2007).

Autoethnographic components of this thesis are reflected both in the very intentional location of myself in relation to this work provided in the Introduction chapter, and also as they appear as Researcher's Voice segments throughout the paper, with a majority of these being in the Meaning-Making section. While they are included to provide additional context for the reader on my own perspectives and connections to the topic or at times to provide experiential knowledge that informed my meaning-making process, they are not considered to be part of the data.

3.3.4 Conversational Method and Yarning

There is a close connection between conversational method, which Kovach (2019) describes as a means of gathering information on a given research topic through meaningful dialogue that both lacks the formal structure of standard research approaches and adheres to Indigenous-specific traditions and protocol, and the Australian Aboriginal concept of yarning, which Bessarab & Ng'andu (2010) refer to as "an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study" (p. 38). Both are culturally appropriate methods of engaging in meaningful conversation with Indigenous participants and community members (Coombes et al., 2018; Kovach, 2019).

Keeping relationality at the forefront, yarning is "a process where the researcher develops a relationship that will be held accountable to First Nation people" (Coombes et al., 2018, p. 362). Bessarab & Ng'andu (2010) describe four distinct types of yarning; social yarning, the informal and unstructured conversation that takes place prior to the research yarn; collaborative yarning, where two people engage in exploring research ideas on a given topic; the research topic yarn, where information is gathered through unstructured or semi structured conversation on a given research topic; and the therapeutic yarn, which involves disclosure of "traumatic or intensely personal and emotional" information and requires that the researcher shift into a more supportive listener role in the conversation (p 40-41). This concept of yarning very closely resembles the conversations that were had between myself and the other Two-Spirit educators both as part of our first meetings and our recorded conversations. The first meeting conversations contained a lot of colorful and collaborative

dialogue on our ideas for Two-Spirit education and theories, and components of personal disclosure as part of the getting to know each other, or "catching up" process.

Kovach (2019) refers to conversational method as "relational at its core" (p. 124) and highlights the relational aspects to conversational method by describing it as "a relational process that is accompanied by a particular protocol consistent with tribal knowledge identified as guiding the research" (p. 127). Kovach goes on to note the relationship that is built between two people through taking on the roles of storyteller and listener, and that as these roles are carried out a collaborative process takes place (Kovach, 2019).

3.4 Sampling and Recruitment

3.4.1 Population and Criteria

Educators I spoke with were Two-Spirit people who worked in some capacity as an educator, either directly or indirectly sharing teachings around Two-Spirit identity. Those invited were asked to self-identify as Two-Spirit educators, and based on a description of the study, if they felt they fit the population base.

Initially criteria included having developed their own education materials, but this criterion was later dropped to ensure educators who may be new to the field could be included. However, the four educators I spoke with had developed or co-developed their own educational and workshop content.

The education activities and methods of each educator I spoke with were varied, including teaching cultural performance workshops to Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth and adults, delivering academic lectures and public presentations to community members and health providers, and providing diversity training to youth and adults. All educators were living and working in northern and lower mainland BC. In terms of Indigenous background, there was strong representation of Cree educators, as well as Wet'suwet'en and Taino, and some had mixed European background as well.

3.4.2 Sampling Method

Recruitment was done using a purposive sampling method, allowing me to identify a diverse

range of educators based on my knowledge of them as Two-Spirit educators (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). As Kovach (2010) describes, the spirit of qualitative research is to invite educators into the study based on what they can uniquely bring to the project. Via this sentiment, those who have a passion for education work and a strong connection to their cultural identity were invited. I also kept in mind the diversity amongst educators' teaching methods, variations in their lived experiences that brought them to teaching, and differences in gender expression to create as rich and unique a collection of stories as possible.

As teaching about Two-Spirit identity is a clear requirement to name oneself as a Two-Spirit educator, it is assumed that there was some degree of expertise and knowledge about Two-Spirit identity, history, and embodiment by virtue of being a Two-Spirit educator.

3.4.3 Instrument

The research flyer that was emailed to people who may potentially like to be involved during the recruitment process was a PDF file that provided details about the project including criteria and topical information and details about myself as the researcher. Given the long and harmful history of research being done within both Indigenous (Killan, et al., 2019) and LGBTQ+ communities by non-Indigenous, non-LGBTQ+ identified researchers, it was important that I locate my positionality as a community member and colleague. While the flyer was not the first point of contact with educators, it was presented early in the relationship building process. While two of the four educators were well known to me as colleagues, the other two had very little prior knowledge of me as a Two-Spirit person, Indigenous person, and educator. The two educators who were colleagues are people I had previously done education work with, learned from, and maintain professional and personal relationships with. While I have collaborated with them on other projects, I had not taught alongside either of them in the year prior to asking them to participate in this study. Although, this would not have changed my decision to invite them to be part of the project.

Having a pre-existing relationship with two of the educators was also a motivator to ensure I invested time in getting to know the other two educators and inviting them to get to know me better. I wanted to minimize any disparity in depth between conversations that could possibly

be skewed based on my prior knowledge of my two colleagues' stories and experiences, or these other educators' comfort level in sharing with me.

3.4.4 Recruitment Process

Initially this study intended to include educators from BC, Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories. Extensive efforts were made to connect with educators in northern areas via social media, reaching out to local LGBT2Q+ community organizations, and through academic channels. Unfortunately, given the niche area of this work there were little to no leads developed and the participant base had to be scaled back. Educators in the study were recruited from large cities in BC's northern region and lower mainland.

I reached out to educators through connections I have made as a graduate student and community member, and by recommendation of existing contacts. Educators were invited in person, via email, and social media. Early in the recruitment process, after the initial (less formal) in-person invite, all educators were emailed a copy of the recruitment flyer and formal invitation letter to participate in the study. Given that the sample population for this research is limited to a small number as it is an emerging area, in almost all cases I had pre-existing relationships with or knowledge of those included in the study. Holding pre-existing relationships with educators, in terms of Indigenous research, is a common and accepted dynamic (Kovach, 2010).

3.4.5 Informed Consent Process

Informed consent forms were typically sent to educators about 48 hours prior to our recorded conversation, after our first in person meeting. Hard copies of the informed consent forms were signed in person before beginning the conversation and were accompanied by a debriefing sheet (see 3.5.2). The informed consent forms included contact information for both the researcher and academic supervisor, a general description of the research project and approach as well as participant criteria, and further information about the researcher and their connection to the topic being studied. An overview of the research process was provided including Indigenous protocol and lens being considered such as meeting before conversations to share a meal and get to know one another, as well as the role that

storytelling will play in the research process. Further discussion of building relationships with educators through meeting and sharing a meal can be found below in the early conversation and protocol sections.

The form also included other standard elements such as explanation that data will be analyzed and used to inform the writing of this thesis and potential future publications or secondary analysis by the researcher, and that data will be encrypted and securely stored. Possible risks listed to educators included potentially being identified by readers based on details they disclose in conversations, and possible surfacing of traumatic memories from sharing stories of past experiences. Indirect benefits outlined included having their teachings honored in the writing of this thesis and future publications, as well as an opportunity to reflect on their professional and cultural experiences during storytelling sessions within the framework of healing, as well as the direct benefit of receiving honoraria. Details of their rights and expectations around withdrawal from the study were given, such as being able to withdraw their participation at any point but that ability to extract information they've shared may become increasingly difficult as the writing process continues.

The consent form provided additional information on cultural protocols and relational considerations that were integrated into the study, including the research approach, compensation practices, and confidentiality & anonymity parameters.

3.4.6 Research Location

Locations chosen for meetings and conversations varied throughout the study, were based on educator availability and personal preference, and all took place in the cities where educators currently live. Meet-ups were consistently held at local restaurants or cafes over lunch or dinner. Recorded conversations took place in four types of locations: a rented community meeting space, an educator's home or private office, and the researcher's hotel room. Three educators lived in the same city as the researcher, and one lived in another area of the province, which the researcher travelled to for three days to complete the meet-up and conversation process.

3.4.7 First Meetings and Early Conversations

Part of engaging in this process of storytelling and sharing with one another is focusing on good relationship building between researcher and research participant. As Archibald (2008) states:

> If researchers don't follow cultural protocol and don't take the necessary time to develop respectful relationships…but instead begin to pose questions, they may find that the teachers answer the questions indirectly or not at all…they must begin their job by getting to know the teachers and by learning to listen and watch before engaging in the challenge of making meaning and gaining understanding" (p. 38).

Similarly, according to Kovach (2010), "in order for story to surface, there must be trust" (p. 98). In this study, this was done through building relationship with participants prior to our recorded conversations by sharing a meal while talking about our personal and professional backgrounds and sharing stories about our lived experiences as Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+, and Indigenous people. Educators were sent a copy of the conversation guide before our first meeting or early conversation, to inspire our conversation. This time together before recorded conversations served a secondary purpose of providing me with the opportunity to see what stories educators held that would speak to the purpose of the project, allowing me to ask them "to tell me the story of…" in their recorded conversations.

I engaged in this process with three out of the four educators. The first educator was very well known to me, and given our tight schedules, was given the option to skip this portion of the process, which we did. Two of the educators who are in a couple relationship met with me together, and we had a conversation among the three of us. My decision to propose this option was threefold. Firstly, because neither of them knew me at all and I felt that meeting as a group may make the process more comfortable. Secondly, relationality is at the heart of all Indigenous work, and I wanted to take the unique opportunity to also engage these educators' relationship as part of our time together. And thirdly, because of not only homophobia and transphobia faced outside LGBTQ+ communities, but also a strong centering of individualism within LGBTQ+ communities, I personally feel a firm

commitment to honoring and making visible the loving relationships that we are in as LGBTQ+ people.

The fourth educator is also very well known to me, and as I had travelled to their home community to record our conversation, our early meeting provided a good opportunity not only to pre-engage in the questions but also to catch up after not having seen each other in several months.

3.4.8 Protocol

Walter Lightning describes protocol as “any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by an ancient tradition that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request” (Lightning, 1992, p. 216 in Archibald, 2008, p. 37-38). Protocols served exactly this role in my research process, as an important step in establishing a good relationship. As Kovach (2019) states:

> We need only to look to the importance of protocol within Indigenous communities to recognize that it matters how activities (i.e., methods) are carried out. 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 ought to apply to research (p 124).

It is with great complexity that I attempted to integrate cultural protocols into my engagement with educators. For the majority of the time I have been aware of such things as cultural protocol, I have been living on Coast Salish territories and participated in ceremony and practices led by xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Stó:lō, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), W̱SÁNEĆ elders and community leaders. I have been mentored into my work by Cree, Wet’suwet’en, Mohawk, Métis, Maori, Stò:lō, and Kwagiulth scholars, knowledge keepers, and community members. I grew up participating in Inuit culture and relating to Arctic lands. So, the cultural teachings and protocols that are closest to me are a patchwork of meaningful practices, gestures, and approaches from various nations that have been taught to me over years.

When beginning a learning, collaborating, or consultative process with Indigenous community members, it is good practice to begin this process by sharing a meal. Feasting is an important part of the acts of coming together, building relationship, and going on any sort of journey. At the beginning of all workshops and community consultations I co-led through my paid work in the several years prior to this research project, we always began our time together by sharing a meal. This was often prepared by members of the community, and usually included some element of traditional, cultural, or locally sourced foods such as bannock, deer stew, and Indian tacos. Because of this, I chose to include sharing a meal together as one of the first aspects of building good relations with educators. So, all first meetings or early conversations were done over lunch or dinner out somewhere recommended by educators.

Offering tobacco is a gesture of acknowledgement and gratitude for teachings being shared by those it is offered to. I was taught to make tobacco ties by a good friend and colleague during a work trip we went on to consult with various Indigenous communities around Two-Spirit inclusion and healthcare access. Tobacco is wrapped in fabric and tied up with string or ribbon, often in colors representing the four quadrants- black, yellow, white, and red (but this is not a strict expectation). It is important for the person making the tobacco ties to be thinking good thoughts about the request they are making and the process they are embarking on while making the tie [Kihêw Mahihkan Âtayôhkan Iskwêw (Eagle Wolf Spirit Woman)/ Jean Baptiste, Wet'suwet'en Nation (Laksilyu Clan), personal communication, March 2018; Carleton University Centre for Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.].

The fabric I chose for the tobacco ties was leftover royal blue fabric that was used in several decorating features for my wedding in 2013. This fabric was gifted to my partner and I by an "uncle" in our LGBT2Q+ community, who went on to offer his planning and coordinating skills throughout our entire wedding process, including making backdrops and table coverings from this fabric. So, this textile meant a great deal to me and lent some extra special, queer meaning to the protocol I was participating in.

The process of making tobacco ties myself, keeping these friends and community mentors in my heart, and the ways they have supported me in my various journeys, was a particularly

meaningful one and important for me to take part in fully. To be able to offer tobacco to educators, some of whom have supported me a great deal in my own work and learning process, was very special to me and felt like a mentorship experience of my own coming full circle.

When inviting Indigenous community members to participate in community events it is also common to offer gifts. Sometimes this can be promotional items related to the event or program such as mugs or t-shirts but it is most appreciated and meaningful when these gifts are unique, handmade, or locally sourced by Indigenous artists or entrepreneurs. Some of my most precious items were gifted to me as a presenter- for instance, a cedar jewelry box that holds my beadwork and other Indigenous made jewelry like ivory and soapstone pendants that I wear to signify my cultural affiliation. While I did not make the gifts provided in this study myself, each of them was made or featured artwork by local Indigenous artists and were picked out uniquely for each educator.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Recorded Conversations

> Within the research relationship, the research participant must feel that the researcher is willing to listen to the story. By listening intently to one another, story as method elevates the research from an extractive exercise serving the fragmentation of knowledge to a holistic endeavor that situates research firmly within the nest of relationship. (Kovach, 2010, p. 98-99).

The sharing of stories and narratives is a primary method of knowledge transfer in many Indigenous communities. Educators were not just asked to provide answers in response to my questions, but to use questions and prompts as a guide to share stories from their lived experiences that provide insight or connection to the topic. To make this process more fluid I modified the prompts and questions slightly for each educator, based on some of the rich stories that they shared with me in prior meetings, as part of our getting to know each other.

In keeping with the conversational method and yarning frameworks these recorded conversations were much less like invitations and responses and more dialogical. I as the

listener consistently reflected back pieces of their stories that resonated with me and shared my own stories in response. Some of this was organic and spontaneous, some of the stories I shared were purposefully placed with the intention of guiding our conversation in a particular direction or segueing to a specific story of the educator's that I wanted to hear. This is something that I acknowledged with educators prior to our recorded conversations that I would be mindfully doing.

I have struggled throughout this research and writing process with finding the most appropriate language for the components involved. The term "interview" feels so cold, so clinical, it diminishes the intentional relationship building aspects of what took place during "data collection," as well as how genuinely enjoyable the process was. I feel similarly about the term "participants."

I chose to refer to my recorded sessions with educators as storytelling sessions, but still even this felt so performative, so prescriptive. The term "conversation," as used by Kovach, seems the most resonant of the time I spent listening to and sharing stories and ideas with educators, "conversation is a non-structured method of gathering knowledge…the term interview does not capture the full essence of this approach. For this was very much a combination of reflection, story, and dialogue" (Kovach, 2010, p 51). As my personal and professional relationships and level of familiarity was different with each educator I spoke with, I've been unable to find the most natural way to refer to them as a group, so I have chosen to refer to them based on their relationship to this project and continued to say "educators I spoke with" or "Two-Spirit educators" in ways that it is clear I'm referring to those I had conversations with as part of this project.

It was through preparing this methodology chapter that I learned about the concept of yarning (Coombes et al., 2018; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). It resonated with me very strongly in terms of the types of conversations I typically have with friends- conversations where we both discuss theories and concepts around decolonizing gender and sexuality, share intimate details about personal experiences and thought processes, and tell stories of past learning moments and hilarious situations we've found ourselves in. While yarning is an Australian Aboriginal concept and methodology, and therefore not the method I am prioritizing in this

work, it has been hugely influential in developing a greater appreciation and understanding of how exactly relationships can be and are built through a research conversation.

3.5.2 Debriefing

After our conversations ended and recording was stopped, we (educators and myself) discussed the process and how they were feeling about the session we'd had. I reminded them of the debriefing sheet that they had been provided with at the beginning of the session and the types of resources they would find listed as well as encouraging them to connect back with my supervisor or myself should anything come up or linger for them in the days following that they'd like to discuss. At this time educators were also reminded of next steps in the process such as having transcripts completed and sent back to them for verification.

This was also a time where the two of us would share words of gratitude for having shared so many meaningful stories and teachings, with each session I felt truly blessed to have witnessed these stories and educators would often let me know that they felt safe and comfortable sharing them with me, and grateful to have had the opportunity to share.

It was at this time where I would also provide the cash honoraria, obtain signature for it, collect any receipts for educator parking costs, and then offer them a gift of appreciation for taking part in this work with me. One of the educators invited me to stay and open their gift with them, which felt like a particularly special moment in our process together and I was honored to share in that with them.

3.5.3 Transcription and Verification

Digital recordings were sent to a third-party transcription service based in Ontario, files were uploaded directly and securely through their website. A confidentiality form was provided to the transcription service (and signed and returned by them) verifying the destruction of audio files upon completion of the project. Once transcripts were received, I reviewed them for accuracy based on my memory of our conversation as well as spelling of culturally specific terms and place names. Something I was dreading in this process was the additional labour request of educators when needing to correct and verify many culturally specific terms, such

as band names or traditional language terms. But this was not the case, as the transcription service had accurately identified and transcribed about ninety-five percent of them.

A copy of their individual transcript was emailed to each educator, generally requesting their approval and verification of our conversation, with some highlights on sections that required further clarification or spelling guidance. I requested that educators get back to me within 2-3 weeks and stated in the email that if educators were too busy or not interested, I would take their lack of response as approval of the transcript, but also be in touch later in the writing process to update them or request further verification if needed. I heard back from two of the four educators, and only minor changes were requested for the purposes of anonymizing transcript content.

While this process of transcript verification is commonplace in all research approaches due to concerns of liability and validity of data, this is part of a greater relationship building ethic within Indigenous frameworks (Kovach, 2010). Because there is a history of harm done by outsider-in research in Indigenous communities, it was important to me that educators felt included, respected, and considered in the data collection and interpretation process as much as possible.

3.6 Data Analysis/Meaning Making

Tying together both traditional qualitative and Indigenous research methods, both elements of interpretative meaning-making, and narrative analysis were used.

The two narrative models applied throughout the analysis process were thematic and interactional. Thematic narrative analysis focuses more on the “what” is said by educators than “how” they say it (Riessman, 2002, p. 2), and through this, a list of themes surfaced between and across transcripts. Once themes were identified, they were broken down into groups and subgroups, until a cohesive storyline emerged that could be interpreted for discussion. Interactional analysis is often applied when data methods used are based in storytelling and conversation between participant and researcher, as it provides a framework for analyzing the co-construction of stories and information shared (Riessman, 2002).

As Kovach states, “the use of procedures that organize knowledge to Western terms limits Indigenous cultural inquiries” (2010, p. 132). The meaning-making and interpretation process was done by aligning the emerging themes with Indigenous worldview and specific cultural epistemologies. I recognized a similarity between what was surfacing in the stories of educators, and specific cultural values and codes of conduct, and continued to build meaning from this place.

Once the meaning making chapter was completed, I connected back with educators once more, offering to provide them with a list of the quotes of theirs that were shared as well as the context I’d written around it. They were invited to offer further reflection or interpretation on how I’d made sense of our conversation, and any other basic edits. Part of the relational aspect to Indigenous research, to ensuring this work has been done in a good way, is verifying that I have captured the spirit of their message accurately and in ways that they feel comfortable with. Two of the four educators involved in this study chose to review a list of quotes used from our recorded conversation, and one provided some further edits, clarification, and insights on what they had shared and how to best frame it in the paper.

3.7 Limitations

3.7.1 Loss of Cultural Knowledge and Connection

Due to the attempted erasure of Indigenous gender and sexual diversity as part of the colonization and assimilation process there is an overall dearth of knowledge on Two-Spirit topics. There has been increased interest over the last thirty years in the health issues faced by Two-Spirit populations, but much of the writing and research on Two-Spirit people so far is quantitative, deficit based, and presented through a Western LGBTQ+ lens. So, the base of literature and research that I must draw on to prepare for this work is limited. Further limiting, is that much of the knowledge on Two-Spirit topics is not held in books and online spaces, but in the stories and memories of community members, of knowledge keepers. So, in order to cultivate a fulsome breadth of knowledge on the roles and gifts of Two-Spirit people, many more conversations and time in community is needed. My lack of traditional Dene knowledge also leaves me with a lack of epistemology rooted in my own culture, and

I'm therefore working with a patchwork of methodological approaches that I have learned from various sources.

I attempted to close this gap in available cultural knowledge through my preparation process; participating in community events and processes, connecting with other Two-Spirit people, and of course, coordinating a trip home to connect with other Dene people around topics of gender and sexual diversity. My efforts in participating in Two-Spirit community events and processes brought me more knowledge, understanding, and connection to this work than I could have anticipated. Time I spent (and continue to spend) connecting with community has brought me a sense of personal healing in and of itself. I imagine that having the opportunity to spend time in my home community would have brought me the same sense of connection and preparedness, in applying a Dene lens to how I make sense of these conversations I've had. The entirety of the time spent writing this paper has been during the COVID-19 pandemic, so provincial health guidelines around social distancing have impacted my ability to participate in community gatherings in person, however, the few ways I have participated online have been extremely helpful in staying grounded in cultural perspectives and teachings needed to guide this work.

3.7.2 Varied Previous Knowledge of Educators

While I have a deep and relational understanding of the teaching styles and content of two educators, the other two I do not. It was originally intended for this study that I would witness teaching events by all educators in the weeks prior to our conversation. This was intended to be both part of the relationship building process and provide me with the opportunity to observe some of the gifts that each teacher brings to their work (and may not be able to name themselves during the conversation). However, as educators did not always have an opportunity for me to observe readily planned or scheduled, it wasn't feasible to make this part of the data collection plan. In order to keep the project timeline and scope manageable, this aspect of the study was taken out.

My bias here was that my previous experience in witnessing two of the educators in teaching roles inspired this project and informed specific aspects of it such as the conversation guide. In order to bridge some of this gap, I dedicated more time in early meetings to getting to

know more about teaching work that these two educators have done, especially their journey into this work and what it means to them on a spiritual level. I also spent some time between early meetings and recorded conversations researching other educators' teaching and writing online via YouTube videos and blogs. This helped me to gain a sense of their work and what gifts they bring as teachers; however, it was not to the same level as the other two.

This also posed a barrier because it limits how much I can reference some of the teachings I have received from the educators whose work I have seen in action, as I attempt to curb any imbalance in my knowledge between the different educators.

3.8 Summary

Relationality is a foundational aspect to any type of Indigenous community work, and especially Indigenous centered research. As Kovach (2010) states, "the centrality of relationship within Indigenous research frameworks, and the responsibility that that evokes, manifest themselves in broad strokes throughout research in the form of protocols and ethical considerations" (p. 98). Great care was taken to ensure that I was engaging and have continued to engage with research educators in humble, authentic, and transparent ways, and am treating their stories with respect and importance. Part of this has been ensuring that the methods that I've used to seek out and engage educators, journey with them through the conversation process, and make meaning of the stories they have shared with me align with Indigenous cultural values and principles.

PART TWO – MEANING-MAKING

Chapter Four – Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In recent years there has been increased visibility and representation of Two-Spirit people in mainstream media, LGBTQ+ community initiatives, and within Indigenous centered spaces, however, there is still a long way to go. Only now are Two-Spirit people becoming visible (to Western society) through an ethnocultural lens and not just an extension of the (predominantly white) LGBTQ+ community. Relatedly, we (Two-Spirit people) find ourselves in a variety of places within our Indigenous communities, some of our community leaders and elders are holding us up more than ever as gifted and valued community members, while some are in a place of turning a corner- beginning to question some of the colonial, hate-based values that have been used against us and working hard to unlearn and invite us back in, and there are of course some for whom that unlearning process is still to come.

While some specificities of the Two-Spirit experience have been explored in formal research, such as homelessness, addiction, interpersonal violence, and migration (Ristock, 2019; Scheim et al., 2013), little of this has highlighted the gifts and sacred roles they play in their communities or focused on nuanced facets of being Two-Spirit. However, an area where one will find unique, transformative, and empowering stories of Two-Spirit people is from Two-Spirit researchers, scholars, and writers themselves, such as Corrina Sparrow (2018), Saylesh Wesley (2014), Michelle Cameron (2005), and Alex Wilson (2007, 2008, 2019), to name just a few.

So, it was both an honor and an intentional attempt at further contributing to the work of those Two-Spirit authors I respect so deeply, that I was able to speak with four Two-Spirit educators about their journeys as teachers and as Indigenous people playing an esteemed and sacred role within their families and communities. My hope for this research project was to explore and thicken the narrative of the gifts of Two-Spirit people, particularly those who

have found themselves in teaching roles within, alongside, and on behalf of their Indigenous communities.

4.2 About These Two-Spirit Educators

Two-Spirit people who participated in this study varied in age and in stages of their careers and personal journeys as educators, knowledge keepers, and community leaders. While all four participants were living in so-called BC at the time of data collection, only one was from a nation within the province. Therefore, while this research has geographically taken place on Coast Salish territories, and has been influenced by Coast Salish (specifically Musqueam) teachings, it is not specific to Coast Salish peoples. Rather it is pan-Indigenous in approach, while simultaneously being informed by Dene and Cree epistemology, as I have made consistent efforts to learn as much as possible about my own nation's (Dene) worldview and have also relied greatly on the work of Margaret Kovach (Cree).

Participants used a variety of Western terminology such as gay, queer, cisgender, and transgender to describe themselves, all of them additionally named themselves as Two-Spirit, and when known, also by nation specific terms denoting gender and sexual diversity, such as "ayahkwêw" (Cree).

The practice of acknowledgement is a major component to building good relationships within Indigenous communities, specifically naming where one has learned a skill or had a teaching or story shared with them. Because of this, it was important that educators who participated in this project have the choice to be acknowledged by their names and nations for the knowledge and stories that they shared or be referred to by a pseudonym. Of the four educators who participated one chose to be named while the others I have used pseudonyms for and omitted other identifying information such as nation and family lineage.

Originally, this study had sought to focus exclusively on the experiences of those Two-Spirit educators who were engaged in teaching specifically on the topic of Two-Spirit (in the context of diversity training). In the process of recruitment, the definition of "Two-Spirit educator" was expanded to include members of the Two-Spirit community who are engaged

in other Indigenous teaching and learning work but nonetheless holding teaching and learning space as Two-Spirit people.

As part of the recorded conversations educators were asked to introduce themselves, their nation, describe their gender and sexual identity, and note which pronouns they use. This aligns with common protocol to introduce oneself by identifying the nation they are from and their family lineage, as well as common practice in LGBTQ+ communities of locating themselves in terms of gender and sexuality as part of an introduction.

One of the four educators identified as transgender, two named themselves as cisgender. However, Two-Spirit identities are fluid and go beyond these Western descriptors, so I would challenge readers here to prioritize participants' own stories and reflections of fluidity over counting how many used the word cis or trans in their introduction.

4.3 Meaning-Making Process

What I expected to find going into this study was a collection of stories about inspiring teaching experiences and tangible "a-ha" moments wherein Two-Spirit educators really felt a healing shift taking place amongst themselves and learners, hoping that I could categorize these into a series of teaching tips.

In making sense of the stories that were shared with me and as I engaged in the coding of these transcripts, identifying, and beginning to group themes and patterns, what I discovered instead was a set of cultural teachings emerging through common principles being enacted consistently across all educators in some way, shape or form. These principles formed a values framework rooted in cultural teachings and were less about how to teach but more so how to conduct yourself, and how to respectfully engage with others, with yourself, and with land. Values that when embodied, create space for healing to occur for both themselves and learners by way of cultural reconnection and revitalization. The group of educators I spoke with seemed to consistently guide their work with the following 6 values principles: humility, fluidity, relationality, authenticity, generosity, and using culture as medicine.

> RESEARCHER'S VOICE: I was first introduced to the idea of cultural principles as a Two-Spirit educator, having them acknowledged and modeled intently by mentors,

having them framed for me after the fact by colleagues when I would ask them how they knew to take a particular approach when holding a discussion or setting the tone in a workshop space. In the process of me learning about these frameworks, I developed a healthy decision-making workshop for Two-Spirit youth, focused around looking to Indigenous values frameworks for guidance and reflection. I chose to do this because personally, these teachings have served as a guiding ethos for me not only in my research work and my paid work (such as providing consult on the development of ethical frameworks for professional development strategies), but also in my personal conduct in general.

4.4 Humility

The concept of humility is often referenced in Indigenous contexts in relation to how we as community members engage respectfully with others, with land, and with culture. As one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, humility is described as "understand(ing) that one is equal to, not greater nor lesser than, everyone else" (Verbos & Humphries, 2014, p.3). Humility is also referenced in relation to how we hope others will hold themselves when engaging with our communities, knowledge, and histories. This form of humility can be seen in the concept of "cultural humility", which has become a commonly used term in recent years in health education, building on previous approaches where the term "cultural competency" was more frequently used (Danso, 2016). In this regard cultural humility embodies such actions as "being able to forgive oneself, especially when mistakes are made, and the ability to be open to listening and learning from others" (Kading, et al. 2019, p. 29). Additionally, humility in general denotes a certain level of willingness to not take oneself too seriously, to be able to joke around both with self and others, but always coming from a place of love, good faith, and mutual respect. Humility surfaced in these conversations with Two-Spirit educators in the forms of: lack of ego or pretention, humour, and respect.

4.4.1 Lack of Ego or Pretention

In honestly and respectfully seeing oneself in equal relation to others, all educators I spoke with noted regularly evaluating, naming, and accepting what they do/do not know, or what skills they do/do not have personally and professionally. They each spoke of giving a clear

appraisal of their own strengths and offering up space to another who may know better or who could teach them. While they all had different ways of describing it, the sentiment remained the same. This showed up in the ways several of them recalled times where an invitation to teach didn't match their skillset, or naming that they weren't able to answer a question or speak to a particular topic they lacked knowledge of:

> *I never want to try to act like I know something that I don't know, or to stand-up and say that I have some knowledge or special knowledge on something or to make myself out like someone that I'm not.* (Leanne)

> *I don't know and I'm not going to make-up an answer for you. Let's learn it together. Let me ask someone.* (Sam)

Not only was this type of ownership over what educators did and didn't know common practice, but it was also considered a firm belief and ethical priority:

> *I don't have some traditional story to share about what Two-Spirit means, so I don't know. I can't do that and I'm not going to pretend that I do.* (Leanne)

This humility was not limited to general knowledge or teaching skills, but also to cultural practices or traditional ways of teaching such as singing, drumming, storytelling, and beading:

> *I don't sing, you know. Singing is not my (thing) – but I love policy. That is my wheelhouse.* (Jarred)

> RESEARCHER'S VOICE: an observable impact of cultural genocide has been a tendency for Indigenous folks to experience both insecurity and criticism from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people over the amount of traditional knowledge they hold. In hearing the comfortable confidence that these educators shared about their lack of traditional knowledge or skills, I was quite struck. This can be a particularly risky admission for those working in Indigenous focussed programming and practices, as there is the chance that they could be seen as "not traditional enough" or

experience lateral violence for not being "Native enough" (Matheson, 2020, p7; Almahmoud et al. 2015).

This act of owning one's limitations or parameters was also closely linked with mentorship and welcoming, as a decline to participate in certain ways or answer particular questions was often followed with a recommendation for someone else who may know the answer, possess that skillset, or play that specific role in the community. At times, the person or people recommended to step in were new to teaching and learning work, and this recommendation was as an invitation to them to step further into a new role - one where they could apply and share their unique knowledge and experience, which in turn, bolsters the strength of the Two-Spirit community:

> *Every time I (get) a request, I always ask myself - am I the right person? And if there's someone better, I defer and refer and share. I don't have to be the person to do the work, but I can tee-up other folks to do the work. And so, it's (not) only recognizing my own limitations, but also understanding my own gifts, what are my blind spots? I could step-up and do the work, but then we're not building capacity within our own community for other people to do the work. It just adds to the richness to the whole dialogue or discourse, right?* (Jarred)

This lack of ego or pretention was not only enacted by the educators I spoke with but was also appreciated by them when witnessing others enact it towards them, particularly in the context of their elders or mentors:

> *She is an elder and she is such a revered person, and she always took the time. If she didn't know about something, she would sit and have a really honest conversation with you and be really vulnerable about it. So, when I came out as trans she was like, "Let's go for coffee," and she just – she had a conversation about it. She was like, "I don't really understand what it means, and I really appreciate you sharing your stories. And I know that these things are really important in our community, so I want to talk to you about it.* [Kihêw Mahihkan Âtayôhkan Iskwêw (Eagle Wolf Spirit Woman)/ Jean Baptiste, Wet'suwet'en]

4.4.2 Humor

"For those who have never experienced life in a Native community, know that they like to tease" (Greenland, 2019, p. 16-17).

The use of humor as an extension of humility is well described by Ojibway comedian Don Kelly (2008):

> It's all about the teasing… fact is, we can laugh at ourselves better than anyone else can. Some of the best (and worst) Indian jokes I've ever heard were told to me by Indians. The other characteristic of Native humor is a tendency towards self-deprecation. A lot of Native humor is about taking ourselves down a peg. The joke's on me. In one way this is just the other side of the teasing coin-teasing turned inwards. Now, we can stretch a bit and make a cultural connection by tying teasing and self-deprecation to our Trickster legends. (As this is an article on Native humor, I am legally obligated to make a trickster reference.) …In our Ojibway trickster stories we call him Nanaboozhoo. Nanaboozhoo is a mischievous, sometimes foolish spirit, but always creative. What I remember about our Trickster stories is that Nanaboozhoo always plays games with people that makes them look silly, that embarrass them. And, in turn, the minute he starts feeling a little too proud, he'll slip and fall into the dung heap… The message in many of these stories is, basically, don't get too full of yourself. Don't take yourself too seriously. There's only so much we can control, and the rest is nature (p. 62-63).

Most of the educators I spoke with talked about their intentional use of humor as a delivery method for important lessons through storytelling. This was often done to connect with young people or others who may typically express resistance to a particular topic or lesson and draw them into the discussion:

> *When I was younger I would be listening to stories, Trickster stories. The elders said "Okay, here's the story. Now embellish it the way you need to. Change it and make it yours. If Trickster did this, how would you see Trickster doing it?" Because stories*

change, they're supposed to transform depending on who you're talking to, your stories have to adapt. The beginning and the end have to stay the same because the teachings are there, but inside, whatever Trickster does, you can make it funny…because Trickster, you know, was very vulgar. He would fart really loud. He would talk to his butt (laughter). You know, there are so many different stories like that, but elders said that if you need to change your story, embellish it so that your message is conveyed, then do it that way. (Sam)

Jarred spoke of how he used humor and teasing to break down homophobic stereotypes held within Indigenous communities. In this context Jarred was addressing an assumption expressed in a men's discussion group that a one's masculinity is being called into question if a gay man is attracted to him:

And some other guy goes, "I've never been hit on." I'm like, "Honey, because <u>you're</u> not masculine <u>enough</u> (laughter) but <u>you</u> (however)…" (Jarred points to another man in the group) Those are the teachings that are done very humorously, but for the men also to look at who they are and how are they showing up has been really kind of cool. (Jarred)

RESEARCHER'S NOTE: This was a very animated story involving several hand gestures and verbal inflections, emphasis and descriptors have been added to help capture the full essence of what was being shared.

At this point in the above story Jarred had already spent a great deal of time with these men, candidly speaking to them about gender and sexuality, including his own positionality and experiences as a Two-Spirit person. The timing that goes in to teasing those in the group is quite carefully chosen as it pushes comfort levels just one notch further but still within a safe enough container as the topic had already been on the table for several hours as they gathered.

Being able to laugh at one's own shortcomings, mistakes, blunders, is an extension of using humor in humility. In her essay, Teasing, Tolerating, Teaching, Fagan (2008) recounts the opening chapter in Greg Sarris' Keeping Slug Woman Alive, where the writer tells a story

about a time he made a mistake while preparing dinner with his Auntie who then teased him, saying the way he wastefully peeled potatoes was “just like a white man!” (p. 24). By opening his own book in this way, and “making himself an object of ridicule, he subordinates his position to the communal values represented by his elder” (p. 24). Not only being humble about one’s own skills and abilities but being able to laugh at past experiences while still showing love and respect for self was a common thread in the conversations I had with educators:

> *I go back and look at some of my early work and oh, my god. It was sooo bad (laughter). SO bad. It’s embarrassing if I think back on some of my early, early, early presentations, but that’s okay. It’s an evolving process and there’s kindness within that I have to invoke “yes, I was just working that question out.”* (Jarred)

The humor that Jarred is using above in the men’s group is not only consistent with the type of teasing that is often part of Indigenous community interactions, but it also brings queerness into the room beyond the comment he is making as Jarred embellishes his own flamboyancy as a gay man and playfully invites these straight men into his multi-cultured world. These learners have come to respect Jarred as an Indigenous man, so can they go one step further and join him in his Two-Spirit-ness as well? This is something he explores further later in the conversation and is discussed below as part of the value of humanity and vulnerability.

Humor is an often-noted characteristic within queer communities as well. One of the community narratives around the connection between LGBTQ+ people and holding a sharp wit is that we’ve used humor as a protective mechanism and survival tactic in the face of cultural trauma. Garrick (2006) explores the use of humor among trauma survivors and war veterans who would describe experiences of relying on absurdity and funny anecdotes in times of extreme stress and noted that infusing humor into traumatic memories made them easier to process in a therapeutic setting. In her Netflix special “Nannette,” queer Tasmanian comedian Hannah Gadsby makes a direct linkage between trauma and humor, using the comedy stage as an intentional space for genuine commentary on the impacts of trauma as a result of homophobia (Holmes, 2018).

RESEARCHER'S VOICE:

> Although I have always used humor in my own teaching style, after having witnessed the teaching styles of and being mentored by several Two-Spirit educators I came to see the use of humor, silliness, and teasing as a strength in my own approach to facilitation. I often crack jokes about some of the ways that my body changed as a part of my gender transition ("all the new hair I got settled on my back, when I go swimming it looks like I'm giving a piggyback ride to two drowning muskrats") or share stories about some of the awkward moments that come up when learning a whole new set of rules in using men's bathrooms such as avoiding eye contact or speaking. When I do this, I've found that it removes a false barrier that can exist between teachers and learners and finds the common ground of humanity between myself as a trans/queer/Two-Spirit person and those who don't have this lived experience.

4.4.3 Respect

A primary way that respect is enacted in Indigenous communities is adhering to cultural protocol. As discussed in the methodology chapter, protocol often involves showing appreciation and respect towards elders, acknowledging the work and teachings of others, paying respects to land and creatures, and honoring cultural traditions and practices.

While showing respect could be considered its own separate identified value, I have chosen to include it under the value of humility because these two seemed closely linked in the times and ways I observed it and the ways respect was talked about and enacted was an extension of humility shown by educators. Acknowledging land, acknowledging ancestors, and acknowledging the source of teachings received were three consistent ways that respect showed up in the conversations we had:

> *I'm also really conscious of who's land I'm on, we all have so many ancient trade routes and relationships and ways of being together, or not being together, depending on how we wanted that to look, it's also honoring them and their ancestors and the spirits that live on that territory because really, they're allowing me to be there. If I*

wasn't welcome and if I shouldn't have been there, then you know, they would have told me. (Jean)

Part of acknowledging ancestors is also acknowledging family lineage and family history. While all educators I spoke with took time at the beginning of our conversations to speak to where they came from, some of them also dedicated a significant amount of time centering and honouring the teachings shared and work done by their family members before and alongside them. This was closely tied with the concept of relationality as a part of showing respect:

My relationship to my community is through my family. (Leanne)

Humility absolutely is knowing self and what self means in relationship to everything else in the situation and being really truthful and honest about what that is. So, I'm being seen as a knowledge-holder and at the same time, it's a not an ending process, its super reciprocal process, I'm sitting in relation to chiefs and elders, and you know, people who are experts and knowledge-holders in their own right. So, being really – really truthful and really honest about that relationship. (Jean)

4.5 Fluidity

I feel like I can almost transform into different roles as I'm needed. (Sam)

Integral to any discussion of Two-Spirit ways of being, particularly those speaking directly to cultural, sexual, and gender fluidity, is the concept of doubleweaving (Driskill, 2010). Doubleweaving refers to the ability of Two-Spirit people to hold multiple spaces simultaneously; surviving and thriving as (often) racialized and (de)colonized people within queer spaces, while also fulfilling queer roles and living in queer bodies, as Indigenous community members.

All educators I spoke with conceptualized themselves within an Indigenous-first framework, seeing their gender and sexual diversity positioned within an Indigenous worldview (rather than LGBTQ+ people with an Indigenous cultural background). Fluidity emerged in our

conversations as a notable asset, a gift, something which enhanced and added to the healing capacity of their role as a Two-Spirit person:

> *I primarily understand my gender and sexuality through culture, by relating (sexuality and gender) to the role that I play in community, all I have to do is just try to live my gifts and my roles and be a part of community and whatever that means for my gender, I don't know.* (Leanne)

4.5.1 Cultural Fluidity

Cultural fluidity surfaced both in educators' approaches to their work and in their sense of belonging and connection to their Indigeneity. In work, some of them referred to calling on both Indigenous and Western methods of teaching, either by way of materials used or ideas incorporated and shared.

4.5.1.1 Approach to Work

> *We end off with this big lunch and sometimes they get certificates from their community, or we give them certificates for completing this hoop dance thing. And that kind of comes in with Western, so there's that balance, right?* (Sam)

> *Sometimes they only want modern music, they have a group that they love, and we always make sure that the song, if it's modern, says something in that song. We don't just choose anything. And then also, if they want pow-wow, we get that song. If they want a fusion, there's DJ Shub, A Tribe Called Red, or we just mix it ourselves, depending on what they're feeling.* (Sam)

> *When I sit with elders, it is a lot of storytelling, and it is a lot of non-direct communication. And with kids, you always do this blended style because they live in this very blended world of being immersed within their Indigeneity if that's their history, that's who they are, and also being exposed to colonized ways of being, which you know, isn't a bad thing, it's just a very different style. And so, being exposed to those two worlds, you know, you got to blend and see what works and what doesn't.* (Jean)

This concept of bringing in both Indigenous and Western concepts is consistent with a Two-Eyed Seeing approach in that it "intentionally and respectfully brings together our different ways of knowing, to motivate people to use all our gifts so we leave the world a better place and do not compromise the opportunities" (Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 146).

4.5.1.2 Belonging and Connection to Indigeneity

A sense of cultural membership and ability to maneuver back and forth between Indigenous and Western ways of being arose in a couple of conversations. This surfaced with Jean describing their felt sense of connection with a nation that is not their home nation, and their perspective on their own cultural agility that came about because of their lived experience:

> *My relationship with my nation is interesting, I'm definitely more Lheidli by geographic location, I've lived here my whole life. Most of the elders that I've connected to are Lheidli and my hometown is – or my mother's hometown… it's farther away.* (Jean)

> *Being adopted, I think I have a really cool opportunity to connect with different cultures in different ways and have very different perspectives on things.* (Jean)

4.5.2 Gender and Sexual Fluidity

Fluidity in gender and sexual diversity was apparent not only in the way that educators introduced themselves and described their lived experiences of gender and sexuality, but also in the ways that they performed their gender and sexuality. Most educators chose to describe themselves using both Western and Indigenous frameworks:

> *I would describe my gender is, within my own language is ayahkwêw and my sexual orientation is also, would be ayahkwêw and/or Two-Spirit, so Two-Spirit for both, and that is within an Indigenous framework. The way that I show-up within a Western world, and we flip back and forth between the two, man would be my gender, and for my sexual orientation, I'd be identified as gay. And so, I waffle between those all the time.* (Jarred)

I identify as a Two-Spirit, non-binary person. Mostly, I just identify as Jean, as a Two-Spirit person, but mostly – I feel a lot of people don't understand the finality of that answer, because Two-Spirit just is in our community, but I feel like when it's gender and sexuality, I'm also a non-binary person, I'm also mostly gay. (Jean)

The ways that educators described performing their gender and sexuality, and how the role they play as a Two-Spirit teacher is intertwined with their gender and sexuality spoke directly to the purpose of this research project. It highlights the gifts and complexities that these revered and intersectional ways of being bring to the teaching and learning dynamic:

I don't go out shelter-building. I don't really like running around in the woods (doing bushcraft). That's not me. When (the men) do that, I'm like, 'I'm going to go and bead. Good-bye.' But they let me do that. And so, I (move) back and forth, I provide that little space for the Two-Spirit people. And so, that's been a major shift within my activism and where I'm taking the education for my straight brothers and sisters is to remind them, or to teach them this existed and it's a decolonizing or de-colonial work… to say that, you know, we've always been here, and we will always be here and to remind them of our rich history. (Jarred)

I do say that I am Two-Spirit, but at the same time, I don't really call myself Two-Spirit and then I give the explanation of I'm your teacher and I want to be whatever you need me to be that day. If you need me to be your brother or your sister or your mom that day, I'm there. So, we kind of go on that and I see myself as Trickster, which is always changing and I see that as – that's kind of how I am, is I flow differently, depending on who I'm talking to, depending on who I'm with. (Sam)

In his talk on decolonizing gender and sexual diversity, Pruden (2016) notes that many of the gifts that Two-Spirit people have historically (and contemporarily) brought to their Indigenous communities has been through their ability to "walk in both worlds." Because of this they were often in specialized roles that not only called upon but were benefitted by their fluidity, such as marriage counselors and mediators, as they were thought to be able to see both sides of a situation, particularly scenarios where gender roles were a factor (Pruden, 2016). This fluidity can influence gender roles and dynamics in family context as well:

I'm kind of whoever my nieces and nephews need me to be, sometimes they refer to me as uncle, sometimes they refer to me as auntie. And they ask me each time, they're like, "Are you my auntie or my uncle?" I'm like, "What would you like me to be today?" (Sam)

4.5.3 Doubleweaving

Masculinity and femininity are not the only two worlds that Two-Spirit people find themselves balancing, walking between, and living in. They also have lived experiences as Indigenous people and as gender and sexually diverse people. The process of first exploring and then coming to define oneself, of coming in (Wilson, 2008) to a Two-Spirit identity, is one where this experience of living in multiple worlds is notably profound:

> *I had to have been 18 or 19 and that was during a time where I was still figuring out my gender identity. I was still figuring out my identity as an Indigenous person, especially being adopted. Probably, until my mid-20s, I had this narrative of "I'm not Native enough," and then being in queer spaces, entirely white, and usually I was the only racialized person. (With) the queer community and the Indigenous community there was huge divide and there was absolutely no crossover in-between and so I had to accept it because where was the queerness in my Indigenous community, right?* (Jean)

Doubleweaving also means learning to apply various lenses to the same experience. For instance, Jean spoke about what in a (non-Indigenous) queer setting could be portrayed as erasure, could simply be seen as being fully included and seen as whole within an Indigenous community. Jean holds this within the greater context of intergenerational trauma- while there may be perceptions of erasure or transphobia within Indigenous communities, we also need to see the inherent colonial nature of ascribing queer and trans identities to Indigenous ways of being. Jean goes on to reflect on how we can still validate the queer identities of our youth, without applying that label again of being "not Native enough" (Matheson, 2020):

> *And so, in our communities, when we don't talk about and we're just like, "Yes, you're you. That's great. We're going to hold space for you. We're going to love you*

anyways; we were never going to look at you any differently." You know, I think that the silence is just as accepting, probably more accepting than having that name in that space.

Further along in our discussion: --- *I think it's due to the influences of having a queer Western community, you need to have an identity, you need to be out, you need to be different than, and you know, I think that really influences our lens of what acceptance looks like.*

I appreciated last night that we were talking about how naming something – like, when talking to elders about trans identity, what is gender diversity, you know, they inherently know this. They inherently know that they have gender diverse cousins and aunts and uncles and elders. You know, and there was a traditional name for it and having a Western English word can be really triggering because of their experiences of residential school and needing to learn English.

It probably isn't the most comfortable thing seeing your young ones take on identities that don't feel similar to yours and your community's. That can't be a comfortable experience.

It also is just as valid for our young ones to want names and want spaces, and they want the steps of you know, "My name is such-and-such. My pronouns are such-and-such," and identify in that way. That is just as valid as people in our communities who just exist. (Jean)

The nuanced territories Jean can navigate in this one statement seamlessly draw in complexities of both queer and trans experiences and Indigenous worldviews. A very clear example of doubleweaving can be seen in this conversation.

The ability to do this work of doubleweaving is also fed by those lived experiences where one gets to truly experience a sense of joy and belonging by being present in both worlds at once. Jarred calls on his first memory of being in a Two-Spirit space, reflecting on the fact that when he enters a space, he often feels the need to note how many others are like him,

either due to racialization in queer spaces, or gender and sexual identity in Indigenous spaces:

> *And I went to the Two-Spirit gathering, and it was late Saturday afternoon and I realized that I had not counted once. That here was a space that was totally affirming of my Indigeneity, as well as affirming of my sexual orientation, as well as my gender identity and gender expression and was rooted in culture and supported in culture.* (Jarred)

4.6 Relationality

As often as you will hear references to humility as an Indigenous practice and way of being, you will hear of centering relationality. The teaching and learning experience within an Indigenous worldview is centered around relationality. This value was consistent among Two-Spirit educators in terms of their teaching styles and their own learning experiences:

> *A really important piece is the intention of the room. The sweat lodge (is) such an easy way to illustrate just what relationships look like within teaching spaces. There's someone who holds the space and so, the person holding the space has a role and the space that you're held in has intentions and meaning and sacredness and sometimes there's things woven in amongst it. Some things are intentionally put there. Sometimes things are unintentionally put there. And everyone sitting in the circle is all in relationship to one another. You might not listen to each other, you might not see each other, but you're still in a relationship to the person – you're still in as tight relationship as you are to yourself, as you are to the person sitting next to you, as the person who's sitting across from you, and that's sort of the easiest way to illustrate just how all of those energies and intentions come together to create what we want. what needs to be brought up is a collective agreement, between all of those elements.* (Jean)

4.6.1 Creating Community, Building Relationships

Drawing on Driskill's (2010) concept of doubleweaving and Pruden's (2016) observation of Two-Spirit people's gifts of being able to fluidly walk between multiple worlds, it makes

sense that Two-Spirit educators would prioritize bringing people together and creating welcoming space for all to feel included, represented, and seen. This gift is strongly represented in the way that Two-Spirit educators spoke of times where they had brought various groups of people together and experiences of bridging across difference in doing so.

Calling on one's own ways of being to bring community together is reflected in other Indigenous values frameworks as well, such as the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Principle of Tunnganarniq, which refers to "fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming and inclusive" (Government of Nunavut, 2013, p. 4). At times this value showed up in the ways educators would bring together different groups from within the same community:

> *Bringing elders and youth together was our main focus because there was always such a lull and a gap there from the youth and elders. So, we wanted to bring them together and going through theatre was how my parents saw that happening.* (Sam)

Jarred spoke to bridging across difference both within himself as a Two-Spirit person and non-Two-Spirit community members, utilizing Indigenous principles of relationality to break down colonial barriers of homophobia and transphobia:

> *No longer am I working with just Two-Spirit people, I'm now broadening it out and working with straight cis Native brothers and sisters. And I've been embraced and welcomed and be a part of the community.* (Jarred)

So much of this ability to bring people together relied on a spirit of welcoming and inclusivity, both in terms of actively inviting community members in and creating low-barrier, accessible learning environments:

> *The first thing is you have to make sure that all the participants are fed… because food is very important. You need that to fuel yourself and it makes you feel good, and I don't know what your lifestyle is at home, and I'm not going to judge anyone if they didn't get to eat at home…I have a lot of family members who would come over and they would have food at our house, and our house was always open. So, that's the first thing is making sure that everyone's fed. The second thing is making sure that*

the community feels welcome. What I want to convey to people, is "… if you're here, you're supposed to be here. This is where you're supposed to be."

Further along in our discussion: --- *I always like to work with all ages. I do not discriminate against ages. I think if you're an elder, if you want to dance, I'll teach you. ..if you're first starting to walk, I'll teach your baby, I'll give them that first hoop. You know, let's start there.* (Sam)

I've always wanted everyone to feel (included) no matter what background you come from. Because I know what it's like to be poor. I know what it's like to not have money. I know what it's like to, you know, not eat for a while. (Sam)

And this is not limited to just learners, this is also something that educators demonstrated towards one another. A welcoming and inviting spirit is also closely connected to the humility and lack of ego or pretentiousness shown:

I don't have to be the person to do the work, I can tee-up other folks to do the work. (Jarred)

RESEARCHER'S VOICE:

A way that doubleweaving has featured in my own work has been the transferring and calling on my own learned skills and experiences as a gender diversity educator in my work as an Indigenous education consultant. One of these skills is in creating welcoming and warm invitation to learn. Both roles that I have held have benefitted from and been influenced by my multiple identities as a trans and Indigenous person, my identity as a Two-Spirit person. In working with resistant or otherwise reluctant or nervous parents of transgender youth, I was aware that I was working with people who held a tremendous amount of power over the wellbeing of a vulnerable person and should this parent's interaction with me result in them feeling alienated, it could put that trans youth at risk. I came to understand in my job as an educator and social worker that working in the best interest of these youth was to create a sense of safety, comfort, and connection with their parents. This allowed a greater uptake of crucial

> information and allowed them to truly tune in with an open heart as I helped them understand the needs of their own child.
>
> In my work as an Indigenous education consultant, I am also meeting with people at a crossroads, the majority of them are big hearted and motivated to learn more about integrating Indigenous perspectives in their work, but also in a tender place of worrying they're going to offend, mispronounce, make a cultural faux pas. Anything I do to confirm these fears or expand this worry narrative, is likely to shut eager learners down. My priority is on increasing the representation of Indigenous peoples and perspectives in my workplace. In order to do this, it's imperative that those who have the power to push this agenda forward feel welcomed into that process. So, I work to create safety in mistake-making, connect to learners' humanity with my own, and look for ways to simultaneously stir passion in their hearts about Indigenous topics. Had I not done this delicate work with parents of vulnerable youth I would not have the same skill to authentically connect, which is now my greatest asset in institutional change work.

A major component to this work of creating an inviting, inclusive, and safe space for learners relies on the very heart of relational work, which is relationship building itself. Building good relations both with individuals and communities was a major component to the ways that Two-Spirit educators did transformative work. This was something educators were mindful of in the beginning stages of their work:

> *They don't know who I am. They don't know where I come from, so they're trusting me with their kids and their kids are very important and they're very important to me because I have nieces and nephews, and my nieces and nephews mean everything to me, they're like, my children almost. So, I want the community to feel safe.* (Sam)

As well as during the learning process:

> *And it's always good to create a rapport with your group. You're not just teaching these people, but you're actually getting to know them individually. And by the time*

> *my workshops are done, I know all of them. I know how they work. I know what their energy is like.* (Sam)

Interestingly, Jean described how they used teaching itself, through storytelling, as the tool for building relationship with a young person they were engaged with. Jean spent time talking with a young person in distress, sharing their own experiences as a Two-Spirit person coming from the same Indigenous community:

> *I was able to share things that I knew about their community and being like, "Hey, you know, this was my experience there, how about for you?" And they're like, "Oh, yes, you know, that's the same." And it's a big learning experience for them (in terms of) the basics of "do I trust this person?" …the cool thing about storytelling and the cool thing about relationship is learning about self and being able to transmit what that means from me to another person is education.* (Jean)

In another story about how building relationships can provide opportunities for education to take place, Jean shared a story about a family they've stayed engaged with over time:

> *Even just existing as a Two-Spirit person, is an education because there's this family that I've known for years and their young one is Two-Spirit, and the family has come a long way in loving and accepting them and having them as part of the family. It took (grandmother) a long time to get over her fear of her grandchild being trans and being Two-Spirit. And there's a fear of not being accepted in a community and being run out of the community and being bullied and murdered…so, I've stayed connected with this family over the years and I just happened to run into her a year and a half ago and as soon as she saw me, she just burst into tears. Because she also saw me through my transition and she was like, "Oh, my god. This is what my grandchild can look like."* (Jean)

4.6.2 Mentorship

Unsurprisingly, one of the most consistent and integral ways that the value of relationality surfaced was through mentorship relationships. Mentorship was prominently featured in the stories educators and myself shared with one another over meals in the relationship building

aspects of our time together. So, this was a topic I was able to invite further reflection on during our recorded conversations. Mentorship is central to Two-Spirit ways of teaching and learning because it invites teachers to reflect on their own experiences as learners, and to call their own teachers into the stories being shared.

RESEARCHER'S VOICE

> Much of the learning I have done in Indigenous spaces has been intentional because the elder or knowledge keeper has been conducting themselves with purpose, but at the same time unintentional because it was not necessarily the focus of our time together or planned. I'm recalling an experience about 10-15 years ago, sitting around the kitchen table with a bunch of my Indigenous aunties and cousins, one of my cousins shared some painful experiences she was going through and began to cry. My aunties responded to her with loving affirmation, didn't distract or change the topic, they encouraged her to keep talking and treated her with non-judgement and dignity. My cousin moved through her feelings, and we came back around to laughing and talking about other things.
>
> It was quite a profound moment for me to witness and will always serve as a reminder to open myself up more, and that emotional expression is a healthy part of life. My aunties were being quite deliberate in how they cared for all of us, but they had not intended to be teaching us anything in that moment necessarily, yet, I've come away with a deeper understanding of what love and respect look like in the most difficult of moments.

Within the context of this research project, mentorship is defined as a circular and non-hierarchical practice of individual people sharing specific skills and gifts with one person or entire groups of people (Ferguson et al., 2021, p. 13). Educators shared stories of the approaches they use in mentoring others and of those who have provided mentorship and teachings to them, not only as educators, but as cultural beings.

4.6.2.1 Mentoring Others

Some of the educators I spoke with had been doing this work for decades and have not only used mentorship in the context of large groups of learners, but also through guiding other Two-Spirit educators in their own process of coming into a teaching and knowledge keeping role. Something that was quite apparent was the great amount of joy and purpose that educators felt in their work, in their role as teachers and mentors:

> *So, everything that I did was to make sure that, as much as I was having a good time, the people watching were having a good time. And then the teaching part came…I just love teaching. And if someone can't do something, I want to help them strive and be better than even myself. So, if I can see potential in someone I'll be like, you know, "You're going to be a great hoop dancer, let's try it. Let's make up some hoops. Let's get dancing. Let's do this."* (Sam)

Speaking specifically of mentoring other Two-Spirit people into roles as teachers and facilitators themselves, Jarred described exactly as above, a combination of both relationality and experiential learning. And in this experiential learning, allowing and encouraging mentees to identify their own gifts and skills to bring to this work:

> *The first time we went out (they) did four slides and we scripted it all out. (They're) up to around 11 slides, but what is cool is providing a platform and as (they) get more comfortable with public speaking, they're coming to life. The script is no longer the script. (This mentorship is taking place) through support and letting them – and yes, they would, within their presentation, they frame things differently and like, that's cool, because that's their story… their humanity begins to shine. There is that attentiveness to (the) relationship…there is that support…it is experiential…it's no different from hunting. I can give you a book…but to be a good hunter, you have to do.* (Jarred)

4.6.2.2 Being Mentored

Stories about receiving mentorship carried very strong themes of being taught by community member or by elders and knowledge keepers from within one's own family. One thing that is

very consistent across all conversations was experiences where they had spent a certain amount of time in observation, and then came the moment where they had to teach or lead or do a task on their own:

> *My mom was my voice, I would do everything that she was saying, I was acting it all out with my hoops and conveying that to the people that were learning, but she was always on the mic, so I never had to talk…I remember it was my first workshop that I did solo, and I walked in and…I was standing there. And I was like… "Oh, yes. Of course. I have to talk now."* (Sam)

Like the experience of finding oneself put on the spot to begin performing a task they'd been mentored into, Leanne shared a story about going through a whole process with her uncle. This process brought Leanne from a place of insecurity to firmer understanding of her identity and cultural protocols. The tough love approach being used by elders is not unique to Leanne's story but is a common experience and one that tends to be a part of the rite of passage experience when receiving mentorship from elders. Examples of being lovingly pushed to take a next step into a new cultural practice is a consistent theme in the experiences featured in Dene A Journey, where young Dene people being taught traditional skills by elders would be encouraged to do a part of animal processing, beading, or building a structure they were nervous about. In the stories featured in this series, those being mentored were never discouraged by elders or knowledge keepers for having made mistakes, they were encouraged to keep going as practice and imperfection was part of the process (Carpenter & Scott, 2013).

> *I always had issues with my identity and one way that I felt valid as a Cree person would be if my uncle and my cousins accepted me because I felt like they were valid Cree people because they grew-up on the reserve… I did get that validation, but at times I didn't get it…I wanted to be told that I was (Cree), but I think he was challenging me on purpose for that because of the fact that I'm mixed and because I will receive that resistance from some people. So, I need to be able to assert it myself. I need to be able to know who I am…he would (say) "you can't be in the middle. You have to decide that you're Cree and you have to live it every day." And he brought*

me along to some elder's gatherings and places where he was speaking about wellness and about suicide in our communities….he would go to a table and introduce himself in Cree and then talk to me afterwards about what he had said and how he said his name and who he was and then he also said his father's name and where he came from and all that, emphasized the importance of that to me, he said it to me in a way that was like, this is how we used to introduce ourselves, you know, as political leaders or as people meeting people from other nations. So, he both expressed to me how it wasn't just something new, but traditional to introduce ourselves that way, that it's the right thing to do. And that prepared me, it might seem odd in the moment, but it's important to be who we are. (Leanne)

While many stories of receiving mentorship are focused on intentional teaching opportunities, some these experiences shared by educators were of intentional, yet unplanned teachings received from observing the decision making and other pivotal life moments in their elder family members:

Both of my moms played such a big role in my teaching, where my adoptive mom showed me what chosen family meant. What it meant to hold space for people who are struggling or needed extra help, (what did that look like? what does openness looks like?) My bio mom, she gave me the gift of the teaching of truly looking at others before you need to look at yourself, knowing when to be that selfless is a really important teaching that I think not everyone gets the opportunity to experience. (Jean)

Leanne shared with me the about the healing role that education played in her grandmother's life, as her grandmother went from attending a residential school to later completing a PhD, and how through teaching by example, this came to influence Leanne's decisions to be an educator herself:

I've always learned from (my grandmother) that education is this way of being able to articulate our experiences and to explain them to other people and to argue for our humanity, yes. Because that's what she did in her research in school and she had all white supervisors and people who weren't trying to let her do the research that she wanted to do too, where she had to argue with them, and get almost no support within

> *the academic system. But she was determined to understand what had happened to us and to her, to what residential schooling was, and what of our culture had been lost.* (Leanne)

Leanne later when on to describe the ways that her mother carried on in this influential role, further contributing to Leanne's inherited teaching style. Although it isn't the way Leanne described it, this could be seen as similar to the ways that individual families or clans can be keepers of specific roles, stories, and knowledges within a community or nation that contribute to the larger groups' wellbeing:

> *My mom is not a big talker and educator in that way. She's not really a storyteller…it's more in the way that she holds space for other people. Yes, she's a caretaker and a listener and she always holds that space in acceptance for everybody else... she teaches me that there's more than just the words that we speak, but the way that we hold ourselves and the way that we hold other people.* (Leanne)

Unsurprisingly, humility resurfaced though stories of receiving mentorship, showing that this value is something passed down through the teachings and examples of elders and knowledge keepers:

> *One of the things that I really appreciated about (my uncle) was he allowed himself to not be a perfect person, because I think when we have mentors, when we have people in our lives whom we look up to, it's really easy to put them on like, they're this perfect person, they're on this pedestal…I'm an addict and he's an alcoholic, he always tried to mentor me and share his experience of that with me, and he was also very open…he used to beat his wife and he would never justify his actions. He would never say, you know, "She beat me up, so I beat her up," and those kinds of things. He was like, "No, I beat my wife. I put her in the hospital. She did the same to me, and neither is okay." And so, I think it was really cool to see that and hear that and know that it's – you can be a community leader, you can be a fantastic person and still have an imperfect past. So, - also, because he's a speaker, he really helped me along - he would introduce and I would introduce, and so, he would give me feedback just about… what are some of the ways to engage with people.* (Jean)

In speaking about another elder, the value of humility surfaces again as Jean shares about the role that mentorship can play in learning about what cultural roles and responsibilities exist within a particular nation or clan:

> *He was always really open about telling the story about how he was mentored into being – he never said he was a medicine-person, he always said he was a helper. He was someone who held stories and he held medicines and he held ceremonies, but he was never – he wasn't a medicine-person. But he was always open about sharing his stories about that, so he also was very humble in his way of being. So, I was his Oskâpêwis[1] for, probably three years.* (Jean)

4.7 Authenticity

> *I think the major part of (Two-Spirit) work is for people to see me – to witness my humanity and the only way that I can have that is if I make an invitation of "here I am, and I am a person."* (Jarred)

A sincere ability to make true human connection with learners is a gift that these educators have called in to their teaching spaces in numerous ways. There is a common discussion topic that arises in queer and trans communities around our abilities to reflect deeply and connect with those most authentic parts of self, and how this must be a result of the amount of questioning and soul searching that goes in to the self-discovery and definition process of naming one's self as queer and/or trans. Related to this, the question of being authentic within oneself is a regular consideration particularly within gender diverse communities (Bialystok & Stewart, 2013). Similarly, the concept of being connected to one's inner truth, engaging in cultural activities with good intentions and a clear heart, is a consistent theme amongst many Indigenous values and teachings (Baskin, 2016).

4.7.1 Truth in Oneself

In reflecting on the relationship between trans identity and authenticity, Bialystok & Stewart (2013) describes authenticity as "living in accordance with some metaphysical truth about (oneself)" (p. 124). Truth is named as one of the Seven Teachings. Verbos & Humphries (2014) define truth in this context as "to have integrity in all things, especially as it relates to

oneself and the people…and to speak the truth" (p 3). While arriving at a place of embracing one's true self is certainly not unique to Two-Spirit people, it is an understandably constant narrative, and seemingly experienced as a rite of passage leading to deeper understanding of one's gifts and skills as an educator.

Truth showed up in the stories of all Two-Spirit educators' experiences of recovery from life traumas and addictions, and oftentimes being described as non-linear and cathartic journeys, involving deep self-reflection and brave decision-making:

> *As soon as I got rid of "the entity," I started teaching more. I started dancing more, smiling, joking, actually being able to be with people….2018 to 2019, has been the most transforming and changing and coming from here to there…for nine years I was in this weird purgatory that I didn't even know that I was alienated from my family (and) friends… thinking about it and reflecting the more I go… "Holy man. Like, what the hell was I doing all that time?"* (Sam)

> *I reached a really low point in my first year of university. And then, after reaching that point, I was like, I need to do something. So, I signed up to volunteer for everything and I went to a bunch of random meetings, just to keep myself busy and to find something that I cared about. I ended up doing these fossil fuel divestment meetings and then I actually became part of it, …I started out just sitting at the back, but they were having conversations about how to be in solidarity with Indigenous people and how to bring that conversation into climate work.* (Leanne)

For Jean, their story of recovery was intertwined with their identity as a trans and Two-Spirit person. With Jean's care plans being grossly mishandled by the health system, derailing the medical aspects of their gender transition, they came to a decision to no longer participate in the medical system and de-transitioned[2]. This was even though they had already been well established and connected within the trans community:

> *In that de-transitioning there was also this rejection of self because I was trying to be myself so hard and it just kept being rejected. Essentially, the government and this medical system was like, you had to prove your identity, you know, and they had so*

> *much power over what my body looked like and how I wanted to engage with my body. That level of powerlessness in that system really made me reject a part of myself because I was like, you know, I can't be me. And if I can't be me, then I'm going to do something else instead. I never really stopped identifying as Two-Spirit. It was a couple of years where I just had to lose myself, that was when I got into addiction and homeless and I got married and into a relationship that was super abusive. Being an educator, you can know the things and you can teach people the things and you can stand up and you can present and talk about all of this stuff in such a distant way. Distant from self, that really, I didn't start doing true connected education, meaningful education until I was able to be in a place where I could accept myself…to this day I have no idea how I lived and survived through that, because I almost died several times throughout that.* (Jean)

This time spent not honoring self, of rejecting self, became a pivotal and necessary journey towards recovery that informed Jean's ability to truly bring their full human complexities into their work, and honor their gifts as a teacher:

> *(I've recognized) that those times and those experiences also contribute to the way that I hold space now, of no judgement, of meeting people where they're at and also, just having a pure experience of "yes, you're in a super shitty situation. I'm going to hold that space for you and I know that you're capable of whatever you think you're capable of and probably more and odds are more guaranteed more." …also, where's the fun in having a super boring life story as an educator and you share that stuff?... it informs my education because learning how to survive is just as valid of an education experience as getting an education at a university…I think it also made me really appreciate just what learning experiences are and expanding on what that means.* (Jean)

Years later this journey was validated when Jean had a chance to once again work alongside a colleague who had known them from this time of rejecting self. While this colleague had always known Jean as someone who did incredible work and was gifted in their ability to build relationships, she noticed something different about them in this recent interaction:

> *As she was walking out, she just couldn't stop smiling and right before we left, she was like, "You know, this is the happiest I've ever seen you in your life." And I was like, "Nailed it."* (Jean)

For one to come in (Wilson, 2008) as a Two-Spirit person is an act of stepping into their authenticity, with a simultaneous focus on claiming their gender and/or sexual diversity and stepping into their cultural identity as an Indigenous person. Coming to a place of seeing and knowing oneself as Two-Spirit is itself a process of self-discovery and inner truth:

> *I had a dream where an elder stood me up and was talking about me and said, "She's Two-Spirit." And even in my dream I was like, "Wait. What did you just say?" and then that was it. That was the whole dream. That's all I remember, was this elder saying that I was Two-Spirit and telling that to other people.* (Leanne)

And the understanding of one's own experience as a Two-Spirit person in teaching spaces can be crucial in the ability to hold a transformative moment for learners:

> *It's really funny how when holding Two-Spirit workshops and doing education, all of sudden everyone in the room is queer and they were just like, "Oh, my god. I didn't know there was a word for it. (Because) I had felt that way my entire life and I didn't know that was queer and it's really cool to see that finding of self as well (for others)" and I think to hold space for those moments, it's also really important to know what the journey looks like for yourself. (I'm) finding more about Two-Spirit and finding more about my self-identity and I'm also learning how to communicate, (this) is a really big piece…being able to put words to feelings, and it's validating to know that…what you're feeling is real and it has a place. It has a space and it has a relationship to other things and being a queer, trans Indigenous Two-Spirit person, there aren't many of us and there aren't many of us who are out and not many necessarily live passed the age of 18. And so, you know, odds are you're not going to come across another person like you and for a very long time. And – at least back when I was young, now it's a lot more common and people are much more aware of… needing that connection.* (Jean)

RESEARCHER'S VOICE: As an educator and facilitator, I feel a tension in the room when I know that due to my tone of voice, body language, topics of conversation, and overall topic of the workshop, people are reading me as non-normatively gendered, or as gay in some way that they may not be able to quite describe. Allowing this (my way of being) to hang in the air, unaddressed, can create in me a feeling of "othering" and of distance between myself and the learners in the room. To alleviate this tension and allow space for us to connect on a human level, I feel it's necessary to name myself as Two-Spirit, as transgender, as queer or gay. Otherwise, I'm concerned that I become a spectacle of curiosity at the front of the room.

Teaching can be compromised when I have an anxious inner dialogue going on (an inner dialogue often informed by previous harmful experiences, wondering to myself if my body is being examined, if the pitch of my voice is being analyzed, if guesses are being made about my relationship configurations), and learning can be difficult if there is a cause for distraction. Even if I were to prefer not to "out" myself on that day, I would perhaps name that learners may be wondering how I fit into today's topic, and that is a story that is just for me today, but maybe in our next meeting I will share more.

4.7.2 Humanity and Vulnerability

Each of the Two-Spirit educators I spoke with demonstrated incredible passion for teaching and sharing cultural knowledge and perspectives, and a remarkable ability to truly bring themselves into their work. When referring to love as one of the Seven Sacred Teachings, Baskin (2016) notes that love "has a different connotation than it has for mainstream society. In Indigenous worldviews, love is about connectedness" (p. 141). The conversations I had with these educators each provided stories with beautiful examples of connection through showings of their own vulnerability and humanity:

> *I noticed in my presentation today I would be shaking. I'm at the front of the room and I'm talking, and my legs are shaking, but I just – just keep doing it anyway.* (Leanne)

> *At times when I (had) a rowdy classroom (I would) go into this deeper mode that would bring everyone else into this deeper mode with me of being like… "it's really special to me to be able to be here with you in educational setting in a school after my grandmother went to residential schools and those experiences that we've had in education that were so violent. So, to be invited into your classroom to talk with you about our knowledge and about who we are is so special to me." And so, going into that more real space really drew kids in, even when they had been disrespectful. I think by being that personal with it too.* (Leanne)

These generous offerings of self would not only create space for connection, but also for transformational work to happen in learning spaces:

> *To stand in front of a bunch of straight men, they were all men, and to have the belief in yourself. And I was the only Two-Spirit person there---what I did was rather than shying away from that scaredness or that fear and making it shrink is I just owned it. I was like, you know, I'm not supposed to be here, and you all would probably beat me up, there is some risks. But I have to be here if I want to take on the conversation of homophobia and transphobia. Then, let's have the conversation and so, I shared my fears ---that cannot be accomplished inauthentically. It cannot be done through charts. It cannot be done through stats. And it's an invitation and it's also me modelling what I want. And so, - and what I have found is that the more authentically I show up and being true to who I am, is the more rewards and people lean in…I think the transformation that you've seen is by me standing authentically, an invitation of this is who I am, they then don't see me as "Jarred the Fag," … I don't become a label, I become Jarred. And if they can do that with me, they can do it with any other relative and any other person.*
>
> *I have to model that by becoming an open book and standing authentically and an invitation extended…I want to be in relationship with you. Because I think once you stand in relationship with someone, where they don't become "the fag," or "the dyke," "the sissy boy," "the queer," those are all with negative connotations, there is – they then show their humanity... if they can see me as a person they can't*

> *turn around and call someone else a "fag," because I become likened with all other Two-Spirit people… chances are you're not going to come to a place of loving them, but if you can witness their humanity and then you can operationalize respect…you don't have to love someone to respect them.* (Jarred)

There is an incredible amount of vulnerability that goes in to doing this work of sharing your humanity and that doesn't come without its risks or calculations. Jarred spoke of the way that he is mindful of what he shares and how when it comes to his own stories, sharing both with purpose but also with respect for his own process:

> *I share things that I think that are going to meet and accomplish (human connection)…the things that I do share are things that I have taken the time to heal and to work through…I share as much that I'm comfortable with…It's stuff that I have, thought about and so, I'm incredibly comfortable with what I share, a part of who I am, and my own personal story. So, I think that's where the protective factors come in. Things that I'm still working on, they're still works in progress. Those are things which I will work through in a supported way with my own support network. Until I have worked through them, they're things that are not for public discourse.* (Jarred)

When revisiting the idea of mentorship there is a question of how to mentor someone into cultivating this same level of connection:

> *I know that my work is deep healing work and I see it – it's also transformational where I've witnessed and experienced and seen so many people with that transformation, both straight and within Two-Spirit communities themselves, but I don't know how to teach that, I don't know whether or not it can be taught…how do you teach someone to show-up authentically? How do you teach someone to be open so that there is a possibility for love or for someone to witness your humanity? I think (the person I am mentoring) is just leaning in and so, I just see every time that we go out, they become more and more comfortable sharing their story. And when they share their story, they become human.* (Jarred)

4.8 Generosity

> *And I was like, "I have to create other space like this." And so, I immediately went back (home), founded the (Two-Spirit Community Group) and started that work.* (Jarred)

Typically, the concept of generosity has to do with sharing of material goods or resources, however, generosity showed up in all my conversations with Two-Spirit educators as a generosity of self. They all demonstrated a capacity for sharing of their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual resources, of responding to calls for action by and within their communities. They all came to this work from a place of being called on to give of themselves on behalf of their communities. Whether that be by providing direct service to their communities through education and cultural revitalization or by broadening out on behalf of their communities to create increased understanding of Indigenous cultural teachings and Two-Spirit ways of being.

This type of generosity is reflected in various other values systems such as the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, or societal values of both Pijitsirniq, meaning "serving and providing for family or community, or both" and Qanuqtuurniq, to be "innovative and resourceful" (Government of Nunavut, 2013, p. 4). Similarly, the overarching Dene Law of sharing what you have speaks to the same level of generosity to share with others what you have as they might need it for their own survival (Dehcho First Nations, 2021). Much of this generosity showed up with educators stepping into places of leadership when that was needed. However, this does also come with risk of being exploited or tokenized, which were some of the stories also shared.

4.8.1 Stepping into a Role: Passion, Necessity, and Leadership

There were a variety of paths that were taken by educators stepping into roles of leadership, some of them urgent responses to community needs, others were slow and evolving processes as they built skills and broadened interests. Passion, a sense of natural calling, being invited in through community and family, were all motivators:

When I first started teaching it was as an activist, as very strictly an educator in a very academic strict sense of the word. And you know, as time went on and as, you know, I got more experienced in doing those types of things, I really learned so much about holding space and what that means in terms of how to do that in a good way.

And I think in learning how to do things in a good way inherently goes back to learning more about my culture, inherently goes back to learning about myself and learning about my community and also, learning about the other people who are in the room as well.

I'm thinking about times, when I first started, I had no sense of my identity, I had no – I was such in this place of flux and that reflected in my education, where I was super strict. There were slides and this and you got to learn this, and it was – it didn't have a lot of room for flexibility.

…As I got to connect more with learning about my identity, …learning about what being Two-Spirit is, in a very broad sense and then within – within a Wet'suwet'en context, but also what it means to me in a very individual way is – helped to really ground that.

… I've always been really, really curious about connecting with culture, especially as someone who is adopted. (Jean)

Leanne describes an early experience participating in an environmental activism group at her university where there was a large amount of resistance among group members to considering Indigenous perspectives in land protection:

I just ended up running an Indigenous solidarity workshop at a retreat and …it was never something that I thought I would do, but just having those conversations and feeling very strongly…just led me to…even though I don't like to – even though I never liked to talk in front of everyone, I just couldn't stop myself. it still happens a lot of times, where if I'm in a room and I just feel like something needs to be said, I just can't stop myself… my heart starts beating fast and I just have to say something, and I've learned to sort of pay attention to that because of the fact that I don't like to

> *talk in front of people and I don't like to speak out that when I have that feeling, I need to follow it.* (Leanne)

As Leanne continued to do this work, she developed a growing sense of confidence:

> *I was always really quiet, and I would never have thought that this is what I'd be doing now, that I would ever be standing in front of people to speak about things. …I think a lot came out of just needing to say something… I hate confrontation but there were so many times when things felt wrong and no one else seemed to see it (Leanne)*

> *I have the power here to talk about this, and not in – not in a confrontational way, but I did feel very in my power at that time because I felt like I could navigate the energy in the room* (Leanne)

Necessity as a catalyst to stepping into action or leadership is not a new concept in gender and sexually diverse communities. It is only in recent years that (limited and fortunate) numbers of us have found ourselves in paid roles that draw very specifically on our self-taught advocacy and community organizing skills. As queer and transgender people, we have been supporting and educating ourselves and each other for decades, grassroots activism. It is a relatively new concept to be paid to lead community support groups or deliver LGBTQ+ diversity trainings. So, it was no surprise that when conversing about providing education and support on Indigenous and Two-Spirit topics or to Two-Spirit people specifically, the educators I spoke with had all found themselves called into this work partly because of a community need that had surfaced:

> *We have a family performing arts company. My parents started Kehewin Native Dance Theatre in '91, the year I was born. So, from there they saw that using theatre in communities could help with, not fixing, but just showing them a solution of how a lot of the things that are negative in the community can be changed into a positive…So, we brought in theatre and by doing that, we showed them different life skills through games, being able to just talk to people, voice your opinions. Bringing elders and youth together was our main focus because there was always such a lull and a gap there from the youth and elders.* (Sam)

We wanted to bring them together and going through theatre was how my parents saw that happening. And they also started that company because of bullying that was happening at the non-Native schools where my siblings were going… they figured, sometimes we can't always go to the parents, but maybe we can go into the schools and show them kind of what we do as Indigenous people, as Indigenous people are adapting to Western society and we're not just living in teepees. (Sam)

In Smith, Tuck, and Yang's 2019 text, Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education, Dr. Alex Wilson shares a narrative of coming to this work out of necessity, during their early years in university, running a group for LGBT2Q+ youth. After going home for the summer, Alex returned to campus in the fall, only to find out that all the Native American youth participants in the group had completed suicide. Traumatized, Alex began searching the literature for any research that had been done on Indigenous LGBT2Q+ youth and suicide but there was none to be found. It was at this point that Alex began their scholarly activism work, researching and connecting with work that needed to be done in Two-Spirit communities (Wilson & Laing, 2019). This is similar not only to the stories of the educators I spoke with, but my own stories as well.

Necessity was not just defined by community crises but also a lack of alternate sources of information or resources. Two-Spirit educators were called on as the only people to meet that need, given their experiential knowledge:

I came into this out of necessity, there was no resources…there was absolutely nothing around gender and there was absolutely nothing around racialized identities. So, yes– once I learned about myself and came into my identity, first as a trans person, I started doing trans education around the community. And then through my studies at school, I started studying Two-Spirit, the idea of it. How it related to reincarnation, how it related to my nation, and through that I started being able to connect with other Two-Spirit people and sharing that information. (Jean)

4.8.2 Stepping into Risk

Placing this need solely on the shoulders of one community member can also add layers of vulnerability for tokenism and exploitation, as it did for Jean:

> *After that people started getting in contact with me and being like, "Hey, we're looking to learn about this, this, and this. You're with the Pride Centre, you know, we can fund you with this." And so, there also is that dual relationship of having the skills taught and mentored and then the community invitation of "this is something that we need, this is something that you can provide, can you do this for us?"*
>
> *The second part of it was the community inviting me in to take on this role, because when I was working at the Pride Centre, it was absolutely terrible. I think that was when there were sit-ins and there was the Occupy Movement, everyone was super radicalized and we're activists and we're educators and I got asked to speak because I was the only "articulate Native" that they knew.*
>
> *At the time I didn't really understand just the depth of they said and I'm kind of grateful for that because, all of a sudden that launched me into being a super public storyteller and educator---I think back then, I was probably even just a little bit excited about it, because I was like, "Oh, my god. You have a use for me." "Oh, my god, there's something that I can be accepted by this community because I can be useful for you." Now as an adult it's really sad and they still should've known better. And I feel like they're – also, at the time, there wasn't a lot of ways to be called in or invited in on different ways of being.* (Jean)

Despite risk, this work is always done from a place of love, commitment, and obligation to our Two-Spirit communities:

> *I think the hardest teaching that I've always done is when folks are taking shots at me, I then dig down deeper and I don't respond directly, I let my work respond. That's sometimes so hard, because you want to just scream and yell and say, "That's not right and what you're saying is not true and what you're saying hurts," but I always just let my work respond, which then, I'm always running around crazy and*

doing it because that's my response. Say what you want. Do what you want, but at the end, I have these stories to share of how my work is impacting the community and (I always ask myself) "is there a potential or an opportunity through my participation and work to yield a better day for my Two-Spirit relatives?" (Jarred)

4.9 Culture as Medicine

When we consider that the source of intergenerational pain and trauma are a result of cultural genocide, and that when this trauma and pain are experienced it is by entire cultural communities, it validates the statement made by Chandler & Dunlop (2015), that "cultural wounds require cultural medicines" (p. 3). The remedy to ease this pain and return to a place of balance and wellness is to bring back those cultural practices that were taken and to address healing within these communities through a cultural lens.

These Two-Spirit educators that I spoke with act as catalysts for healing by re-introducing cultural teachings and decolonizing curriculum and concepts. Some educators did this by directly sharing cultural teachings and practices, others did this by embodying those teachings and practices in how they taught other topics and skills.

So much of this work began with the self in preparation for offering healing space to others. Educators took part in their own journey of (re)connecting with cultural teachings, stories, practices, and a clear next step in their healing process was to share it back with community members.

4.9.1 Experiences of Healing Within the Self

> *Learning how to do things in a good way inherently goes back to learning more about my culture, inherently goes back to learning about myself and learning about my community and also, learning about the other people who are in the room as well.* (Jean)

As previously referenced in relation to authenticity, each of these educators have been fully engaged in recovering from their own trauma, addictions, and other harms that have come into their lives. Connecting with cultural teachings, practices, and perspectives has played a

huge role in these experiences. Sometimes this was done through the intentional reflection work of their own initiative:

> *I wrote a lot about my grandmother thinking about intergenerational healing and then she's on the phone talking to me about that, about intergenerational healing, and I was like, "This feels like a magical moment."* (Leanne)

At other times recovery was a clear and inevitable outcome of engaging with healing practices and participating in ceremony:

> *I didn't have a voice, and hoop dancing gave me this voice that I could express myself on stage and I could express myself not with just the music, but with different imagery and then it was all about making the imagery fun to watch.* (Sam)

For Two-Spirit people there is added complexity to reconnecting with culture as cultural settings can often be a site of rejection of gender and sexually diverse Indigenous people. This is a direct result of the impacts of colonization on traditional values and the way it has infiltrated beliefs around ceremonial practice, belief that gender and sexual diversity is immoral and has no place in Indigenous community spaces (Cameron, 2005; Wesley, 2014; Wilson, 2012; Pruden, 2016; Shaughnessy, 2018). For instance, those assigned female at birth are often pressured to wear skirts when in the sweat lodge (Wesley, 2015). So, to be fully accepted, the way Jean describes, as a gender diverse Indigenous person within a ceremonial space, represents not only a safe healing space for them as an individual, but also signs of healing taking place within the community:

> *When I was going fasting two years ago, that was the most diverse camp I've ever been to. There were trans people, there were other trans Two-Spirit people. There were little people and there were people of different body types and there were also non-Indigenous people who were fasting with us and it was this really – it was like a huge camp of so many different people. And no one questioned my space, no one questioned my place, and I was expecting there to be pushback. I was expecting to need to validate myself and say, "This is who I am. This is my space. Blah, blah, blah," but that didn't happen. Because they're just like, "You know your place in the*

> *circle. You know your spot in the sweat lodge and we're going to trust that you know that."* (Jean)

Similarly, the possibility for Sam to begin a dancing style typically done by men highlights not just an opportunity for Sam to (re)connect with cultural practices, but also their community and family creating space for this to occur:

> *Instead of dancing the female dance styles, I got into grass dancing, and that was a huge journey for myself. I was age 10. I made a decision that I would stop doing female dances and I wanted to go straight into a male-dominant dance, such as a grass dance, which was – you know, they were the protectors of that dance arena. They made sure everyone was safe and made sure that everyone that was there had, you know, someone looking after them, even if they didn't have someone at home. That's what a grass dancer was for. So, I got into that style, got initiated into that grass dance style.* (Sam)

4.9.2 Facilitating Healing Within Community

Stories of teaching and learning within a variety of community spaces is where educators spoke of creating healing opportunities. When in settings with mostly Indigenous communities this looked like reconnecting with culture while simultaneously making themselves visible as Two-Spirit people. When the space was primarily non-Indigenous community members or service providers, it looked like making invitations to participate in reconciliatory practice through supporting Two-Spirit people and making theoretical connections between decolonization and embracing gender and sexual diversity. Dedicated Two-Spirit spaces that provided healing opportunities were largely focused on (re)connecting with cultural practices and celebration that provided opportunities for Two-Spirit people to see themselves as gifted and sacred members of the community.

Sam goes on to describe hoop dancing as healing practice, and it was clear that facilitating healing in community is also an extension of healing within self:

> *Once you learn it, once you've experienced it, once you felt those hoops and you've had that relationship, then I feel like that's healing. Because circles play such an*

important part; it's balance, its equality, it's making sure that your level and your hoops – I tell people they're not inanimate, they're animate… They're a living entity and once you touch those hoops, you get that energy from it. And you work together to create a story that you want to convey. It's almost like when you have a pen and a paper and you're writing something down and then you go to scribble it out because that's not really what you meant to say.

Like anything, the more mistakes you make, the more you learn. And with hoop dancing, you get to see it visually… I feel that I'm healing because I learned something.

And with hoop dancing, it was formed as a healing dance. That's the main focus of hoop dancing– if this community isn't going through a good time, they're going through a rough time, hoop dancers would go in, and they would try to uplift them the best way they can by showing them all this wonderful stuff around…

There's just so much hoop dancing can do– hoop dancing is like a hug. When you get that really good hug from that person that you're like, "Ah," and it's finally, like the end of the day and you get to rest. That's how hoop dancing is to me. (Sam)

At times, there are opportunities to see healing taking place for others the way it has for them:

Before we even started, this little girl was like, "Can I say something before we go on?" I was like, "Of course, you could say something." So, before we started, she went out and she talked about her experience with this dance. She was in a foster family at that point, and she talked about how hoop dancing was her saviour.

And I resonated with that because hoop dance was my saviour as well. I don't know what I'd be doing at that point in time if I didn't have hoop dancing. And I felt like, "Finally, someone gets it. This girl, this woman, this young woman gets it, and she gets it to where, it's – she sees it as her dance," and I was like, "Yes, I did it. It's her dance and she sees that. It's not like I'm the teacher and she learned this dance. No, she made it her own." (Sam)

Two-Spirit educators were also helping to reawaken teachings and stories around gender and sexual diversity that had been forgotten or were sleeping as Jean puts it:

> *Folks were asking me as a storyteller, what are our stories? Where do they exist? And I think that because Two-Spirit is something that is coming back and something – well, you know, it isn't something that went away, it's one of our teachings that when something needs to be held inside – in a really specific way, for it to continue to be held in that way sometimes those teachings just need to go to sleep and they will come back when they need to and they will come back as they need to.*
>
> *So, I think this is that time where we're starting to pick those things back up and it's starting to reawaken in our communities and it's a time of people re-finding and re-invigorating these teachings and redefining them. What does it mean in this context and this time? Because, you know, we're never going to go back to the days of not having a relationship with colonization and intergenerational trauma and experiences of genocide and continual genocide, genocidal acts… There's never going to be a time where it's the same.* (Jean)

The revitalization of stories and traditional understandings helps to provide a cultural context within which gender and sexually diverse Indigenous people can see themselves:

> *I provide that little space for the Two-Spirit people, for them to know and to learn of a framework, of the history, and how they are and where they come from, and it's just instilled greater cultural pride.* (Jarred)

And through gaining this sense of cultural pride, a healing shift can occur:

> *And then there was also pow-wow dance classes and social cultural activities in which we created spaces to come and celebrate your Indigeneity, come and celebrate your Two-Spiritness. Once they started feeling pride in themselves or cultural pride, what we found is then people would make healthier decisions.* (Jarred)

This healing work of connecting Two-Spirit people with traditional teachings and language around gender and sexual diversity is one that is taken very seriously but is also a source of joy for Jean:

> *I've been really grateful that when people find these youth, they call me, when it comes to being able to learn about where you come from and re-remembering our sacredness and re-remembering how magical they are. I think it's also learning that it's okay to feel that way about yourself.* (Jean)

Jean also used their role as educator in the community to connect with others to revitalize Two-Spirit stories:

> *For a period of time, I was really mourning this particular story of how the Wet'suwet'en, lost our word for Two-Spirit people and I was like, "Oh, my god. I feel this death. I feel this sadness because I know that we're in lack of." And then what we did this past year, actually in Smithers, was me, another Two-Spirit person, and Chief Grey Wolf, we got together, and we created a new word for Two-Spirit people.* (Jean)

> RESEARCHER'S NOTE: Jean has since shared with me that the new Wet'suwet'en word that has been created for Two-Spirit is deda'ats'ten, it means "people of the rainbow."

This is like the work done by Saylesh Wesley, who was gifted a word in the Halq'eméylem language for Two-Spirit, (Wesley, 2014).

But sometimes these teachings around Two-Spirit ways of being are not overt. The simple act of existing authentically in who you are provides connection to cultural knowledge and practice that can be a source of healing for others:

> *Being a Two-Spirit person and existing and being visible is also an education process because it's a really new thing for a lot of people and it shows the young ones that you can grow-up to be a person, you don't have to die, you don't have to complete suicide. You don't have to take-off to large urban centers and get lost in the urban-ness of it.*

> *You can exist in your community, and you be solid in your community, and you can be yourself in a safe way. And that's also a really big learning for their parents and their grandparents and supports as well… I think that is a really powerful teaching that I think just existing and being connected to self (comes) back to that healing work of - if I wasn't able to accept myself, then the kiddo and their family wouldn't have known that it was okay for them to be that and for them to be safe in their community.* (Jean)

Framing conversations around gender and sexuality for non-Two-Spirit people, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, within a decolonizing context was a transformative and political act by many of these educators. They're also creating space for cultural healing to take place by working to restore the ways that Two-Spirit people are seen- not as an add-on to the LGBTQ+ community, but through a specific cultural lens:

> *We want to frame this whole conversation about gender and sexuality through talking about colonization.…I said "if you think about residential schools, how people are taken from their families and then brought into these schools where they're sorted into men and women and then men have their braids in their hair cut off and then they're taught in a very violent way how to live in this society and how to be a good Christian. Playing this role of woman where you're subservient to your husband, everyone gets married to someone of the opposite gender, they only have sex when they're married, then they have kids, they live their whole lives (married) to each other, and they never leave each other and all these norms that come along with that. That's what it means to be a good person in this society and to play your role correctly. And all of that is bound up with homophobia and transphobia and it comes from colonization, and it affects all of us, not just Indigenous people.*
>
> *It's a way to frame the whole rest of the conversation because now we've changed it from being like, we're creating these new things to describe these ways of being and just saying, "Actually, colonization created these boxes that we have to fit into and what we're doing is trying to undo those boxes and say there's many ways for people to be." And people are coming up with ways to describe the natural ways that they are.* (Leanne)

This conversation stands to provide healing for everyone in the space when it is done within their own Indigenous communities. Sending a message that to hold up our Two-Spirit community members as Indigenous people, is a decolonizing act (Pruden, 2016).

> *Where for my straight brothers and sisters is to remind them, or to teach them of this, that existed and it's a decolonizing or de-colonial work, but it's to say that, you know, we've always been here, and we will always be here and to remind them of our rich history. And so, it's a different – it's a slightly different conversation.* (Jarred)

4.10 Summary

Each of these educators did healing work in their various and diverse bodies of work. While not all their work was specifically focused on the topic of Two-Spirit, each of them were fully represented in their work as Two-Spirit people. Their lived experiences of doubleweaving, walking in multiple worlds- masculine/feminine, Two-Spirit/LGBTQ+, Indigenous/queer, lends richness to the teaching work they do both within and outside of Indigenous communities. It provides space for healing the damage done by racism, by colonial shame, by cultural genocide.

Sam does this through being an auntie, a brother, a mom, a dad, or whomever is needed in the room that day, as they taught hoop-dancing. They enthusiastically and intentionally welcome all who come into their teaching space, providing learners with the opportunity to connect with cultural practice.

Jarred does this in his humorous, authentic, and no-nonsense approach to speaking on the taboo subjects impacts of colonization on the gender, sexuality, and colonization. This works to remove the colonial shame that threatens to stand in the way of Two-Spirit wellness and joy.

Jean provides healing through their carefully crafted yet intuitively guided use of cultural teaching and knowledge translation tools. They do this by sharing their stories (both traditional and personal), songs, and drumming, all while making consistent connections back to Two-Spirit teachings and ways of being.

Leanne brings healing through her commitment to speaking truth to power and creating intentional space discussions that must take place around the environment, feminism, and gender and sexuality. She constantly applies a decolonizing lens, and shares cultural teachings passed down through her family.

While none of these Two-Spirit educators teaches alongside one another it is easy to envision their collective efforts as a loosely connected network of gifted teachers working towards a similar goal. The goal here is restoring our Two-Spirit community members to a place of culturally relevant reverence and simultaneously working to undo the harms that colonialism has enforced with limiting and shame filled views of gender and sexuality.

My expectation going into these conversations was to come away with a set of specific teaching points and topics that could be utilized by other Two-Spirit educators. However, being able to place the ways that these educators carry themselves in their teaching and in their embodiments as Indigenous people, seems a far more valuable framework through which to see this healing and necessary work.

Footnotes

[1] Oskâpêwis means elder's helper or a helper in ceremonies. (Kihêw Mahihkan Âtayôhkan Iskwêw (Eagle Wolf Spirit Woman)/ Jean Baptiste, Wet'suwet'en, personal communication, May 2021)

[2] Turban et al. (2021, p. 1) define "de-transition" as meaning for a transgender person to "go back to living as their sex assigned at birth."

PART THREE – MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Chapter Five – Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

I brought passion and purpose to this research project rooted in a felt sense/awareness that the Two-Spirit educators I had the privilege of working alongside and learning from were contributing to a much larger healing process within our Indigenous communities. This came from the dozens of "moments" I had witnessed during presentations, talking circles, and community dialogue sessions, where myself and other Two-Spirit educators would share our knowledge and lived experiences, witness stories, and hear teachings from other Two-Spirit people, community members, and elders.

Many of these teaching and learning experiences began with myself and another Two-Spirit educator entering a space where ideas of gender and sexual diversity existed in isolation from Indigeneity. Stories of homophobia and transphobia witnessed and experienced were common, and sometimes the notion of having cultural context surrounding gender and sexual diversity was rejected from a place of cultural disconnect and internalized colonial attitudes. There was so much opportunity for healing work to occur, not just because of what we brought to a space, but because of the community stories and language that was already there and waiting to be unearthed through discussion. A transformation process would unfold within these spaces as community members stepped in with their stories of appreciation for their gender and sexually diverse family members, elders brought forward teachings of the sacredness of gender and sexually diverse people, and Two-Spirit community members would share about the work they were doing to bring visibility and create space for Two-Spirit ways of being. We as educators would share stories and knowledge that connected homophobic and transphobic values to colonial belief systems, drawing attention to the ways in which the act of embracing our Two-Spirit people is a way back to cultural balance. By the time we left these teaching and learning spaces I would consistently feel that I had just taken part in a pivotal and healing moment. This work was healing for me, as an invitation to not only see myself within a distinct cultural context, but also in providing an opportunity for

learners, witnesses, and community members to (re)connect gender and sexually diverse lived experiences to an empowering cultural history and practice.

I wanted to know what specifically was happening in these teaching and learning spaces: what were Two-Spirit educators doing to create a transformative experience? The response to this inquiry has consistently come back to culture; acting on cultural beliefs and values, sharing cultural teachings and knowledge, and inviting others into cultural practice. When our concept of Indigeneity includes Two-Spirit we revitalize cultural knowledge and practices, we invite healing from the intergenerational trauma and cultural genocide that were the intended by-products of the colonial project.

5.2 Moving Forward

The term Two-Spirit was coined for the purpose of reclaiming the culturally specific context for gender and sexual diversity within Indigenous communities. To continue down the path of cultural healing and reclamation, Two-Spirit knowledges must continue to be placed within and shared from an Indigenous framework. The following recommendations for change and further research are being put forward from this understanding, based on the meaning I made of the conversations held with Two-Spirit educators. While there are a wide variety of opportunities across many sectors for the lived experiences, history, and resiliencies of Two-Spirit people to be made more visible, I will continue to focus here on the realm of education in several settings: public schooling, academic institutions, and professional development training.

Teaching and learning play an impactful role in reconnecting Indigenous peoples and Two-Spirit people specifically with cultural teachings and practices that provide opportunity for cultural healing. Similarly, education is also the key to broader reconciliatory work between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As we increase representation of Indigenous voices, perspectives, and practices - including a more culturally nuanced understanding of gender and sexual diversity - we come to a greater understanding of how to move forward together.

In recent years, health professionals and educators of all levels have come to understand their obligations to reconciliatory work with Indigenous peoples. When suppression and

persecution of gender and sexual diversity is seen as an act of cultural genocide, it becomes clear that embracing and supporting Two-Spirit people is a necessary part of the cultural healing work to be done. Providing Indigenous cultural safety curriculum (which includes topics relevant to Two-Spirit ways of being) as part of ongoing professional development is a clear step towards mending the damage done by colonial violence.

RESEARCHER'S VOICE: Addressing Tensions in Worldview

Just as I learned in my years as an LGBT2Q+ youth advocate to walk in multiple worlds of connecting with resistant parents and other adults as a way of supporting young people, being able to influence decision makers in a boardroom setting during the day and later that night facilitate an engaging youth drop-in, I have learned to navigate multiple cultural settings in my work as an Indigenous educator. This is something that Ahenakew captures very intently in his poem Academic Indian Job Description: Have to Know (2016):

> have to know
> when and where to use indigenous literature and style
> and when and where to use the Western canon and style
> to build legitimacy and credibility for indigenous thought and experience…
>
> have to know
> how to educate 'your people', liberal allies, immigrants, rednecks,
> colleagues how to relate to gang members, business sponsors, elders,
> politicians
> how to speak with the crows, the trees, the sea, and the media (p. 326)

This is the same cultural fluidity and agility that Two-Spirit educators spoke of and shared stories about in our conversations as part of this study. As fluidity plays a valued role in teaching practices of Two-Spirit educators, it also plays a valued role in this research. The previous chapters and sections of this paper have been written in a way that invites readers into Indigenous ways of knowing and of approaching the concepts of teaching and learning. This has been done from a place of deep reflection and introspection, using the principles of reciprocity, humility, and honesty as a

guide. The tone of this paper makes a noticeable shift in the final section, as it moves toward a focus on prescriptive concrete calls to action on behalf of all levels of education. This is largely due to the fact that the change work that needs to take place lie at a policy level within educational institutions, which translate to shifts in those institutions' culture and priorities.

5.2.1 Insider Research

There needs to be more Two-Spirit focused research done by Two-Spirit researchers that utilizes Indigenous methodologies and is centered on our gifts, teachings, and experiences of cultural healing. For this to happen there also needs to be increased opportunity to learn about Indigenous research methodologies available to all students.

Much of the research done to date around Two-Spirit experiences is based in vulnerabilities such as abuse, violence, addiction, mental illness, and homelessness. To recommend that writing and research place more focus on the sacred roles and gifts of Two-Spirit people is not to deny or downplay the overwhelming amount of harm and oppression faced by Two-Spirit people due to intersecting vulnerabilities. It is meant as a response to this vulnerability, an attempt to counteract suffering, isolation, and discrimination. When the representation of Two-Spirit people is limited to deficit-based research, which is typically quantitative and led by non-Indigenous research teams, it curtails possibility for Two-Spirit people to flourish and expand beyond this narrative.

To move forward, we need to reconnect with our stories, or at least gain greater insight into why these stories may not exist, as Saylesh Wesley, Corrina Sparrow, and Jean Baptiste have all done. This is possible when these narratives of exploration, discovery, and revitalization are shared. Those outside of Two-Spirit communities must also carry these narratives of healing forward, utilizing Two-Spirit literature and research that is produced and curated by Two-Spirit writers and researchers, so that even in the times where we are not involved, our voices continue to be present in the production of new knowledge.

There must be an increase in opportunities for Two-Spirit stories of cultural healing to enter the academic landscape so that they can be built upon by other Two-Spirit researchers.

Increasing Indigenous-led and Two-Spirit-led research and knowledge translation requires the creation of dedicated funding opportunities both through Indigenous-led and mainstream funding initiatives - and by making these funding priorities widely known through Indigenous faculty and student recruitment initiatives, and other invitations for contribution.

5.2.2 Educational Integration

"It is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and miseducation of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation." (Sinclair, 2014, p. 7).

From what has been learned in this study, it is clear that Two-Spirit knowledges, experiences, and perspectives have a place in all levels of education on Indigenous topics, including K-12, post-secondary, and professional development.

A key segment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 Calls to Action focuses on recommended changes to all levels of education (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). The Calls to Action in Education include the need for truth-telling in our education system about Indigenous peoples and history in Canada, this includes critical reflection on the mechanisms and impacts of colonization. It is also recommended that there be greater opportunities to provide this education.

This teaching work cannot be selective and needs to include information on both the historical and contemporary experiences of Two-Spirit people - including pre-contact community roles, impacts of colonization, social vulnerabilities, as well as gifts and resiliencies. In many nations, gender and sexually diverse people were historically either situated in highly revered roles or simply integrated members of the community. To ignore or omit the roles and existences of Two-Spirit people in our curriculum is to uphold and prioritize those very colonial beliefs that nearly eradicated Two-Spirit people (the belief that gender and sexual diversity is immoral and should be assimilated into a Western, heteronormative, binary model of gender and sexuality).

5.2.2.1 K-12

Bringing Two-Spirit stories and teachings into K-12 settings isn't simply a matter of creating a more "inclusive" curriculum but requires a culture shift towards incorporating Indigenous worldview in our classrooms, and this begins at the post-secondary level, in Teacher Education programs. The current practice standard in Teacher Education programs is to provide optional workshops or hold extra-curricular guest speaker events once per term, often timed around an LGBTQ+ period or event of significance such as Pride month, Transgender Day of Remembrance, or some other university-based initiative.

This culture shift can start with Two-Spirit topics being integrated throughout course materials via readings, guest lectures, and speakers in Teacher Education programs. As is evident in the educators I spoke with as part of this project, Two-Spirit people have many skills and knowledges to share beyond Two-Spirit cultural safety training. In this group of educators alone there is vast knowledge on hoop dancing, beading, environmental activism and land protection, sexual health, and child and youth mental health. Having Two-Spirit educators offer their wisdom on a variety of topics provides opportunities to not only increase visibility of Two-Spirit people, but also to receive teaching on these topics and skills from a Two-Spirit perspective.

In strategizing to integrate Two-Spirit knowledges throughout Teacher Education Program curriculum, Two-Spirit teachers can be brought in at all points in the academic year. While increasing Two-Spirit representation in LGBTQ+ celebrations and times of significance (such as Pride weeks) builds Indigenous visibility within queer and trans spaces, solely relegating Two-Spirit education to LGBTQ+ centered dates and events continues to place Two-Spirit as an extension of Western concepts of gender and sexual diversity.

Currently, much of the space being held for Two-Spirit topics in K-12 environments is happening within LGBTQ+ focused spaces and curriculum such as SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) initiatives and LGBTQ+ units in social justice courses. Although there is resistance against binary forms of gender expression and identification within these spaces, placing Two-Spirit knowledges and perspectives within an LGBTQ+ platform continues to center Western frameworks for gender and sexual diversity.

Connecting SOGI initiatives in public schools with Indigenous programming and training SOGI contacts and facilitators (typically teachers and school-based service providers) on decolonial practice prior to connecting will help to create an Indigenous foundation for understanding Two-Spirit content.

5.2.2.2 Post-Secondary

Like the recommendation put forward for K-12, creating stronger connection between faculties and programs teaching on topics of gender and sexual diversity such as Critical Studies in Sexuality with faculties and programs focusing on Indigenous education such as First Nations & Indigenous Studies promotes a cultural shift. This increases opportunity to highlight Two-Spirit knowledges from an Indigenous perspective instead of being seen as an extension of LGBTQ+ focused studies. Again, engaging faculty in gender and sexuality focused departments in decolonizing scholarship prior to connecting, will help to ground Two-Spirit perspectives in an Indigenous framework.

Promoting the work of Two-Spirit scholars and creating invitation to focus on this area of study can be done though making this a priority in post-secondary environments. Greater support for those furthering research and expanding/introducing curriculum on Two-Spirit topics creates visibility within the university. For example, library materials such as research guides, are developed in the process, and research projects are promoted through communications strategies such as department newsletters and funding announcements. Often this work is done off the side of Two-Spirit people's desks, either integrating gender and sexuality work into their Indigenous roles or integrating decolonizing frameworks into their LGBTQ+ focused projects, with little recognition or support.

However, this work cannot just lie with those faculty who are Two-Spirit identified. Non-Two-Spirit, but still qualified faculty (perhaps under recommendation of Two-Spirit staff and faculty) need to be encouraged to do this work as well, from their own social positioning. This means having a thorough understanding of Indigenous worldview and seeing one's own relationship to Two-Spirit communities within this, as is demonstrated in the article Everyday Decolonization by Hunt & Holmes (2015).

5.2.2.3 Professional Development

By integrating Two-Spirit topics into professional development offerings that focus on Indigenous topics, such as cultural safety and humility trainings, there is a foundation laid for engaging in Two-Spirit topics through an Indigenous lens.

While there is a growing number of opportunities for social workers and other health professionals on providing culturally competent services for Indigenous and LGBTQ+ people, there are currently very limited professional development offerings for working effectively with Two-Spirit populations. This is evident in the 2021 programming at the Canadian Association of Social Work Education conference where there is a substantial number of Indigenous topics being presented, but nothing specifically on gender and sexual diversity. There is only one mention of Two-Spirit people, in a presentation focused on GBMSM (gay, bi, and men who have sex with men) populations, which is likely to approach the topic from a Western lens. This is by no fault of the conference organizers, just a reflection of the current landscape of practice, as I'm certain that abstract submissions on Two-Spirit topics would be wholeheartedly embraced. It simply leaves a question of what work is supported and what work is not, and therefore who is able to dedicate time to developing their practice, drafting a conference proposal, conducting, and publishing research on Two-Spirit topics.

Again, the situation comes back to funding, even more so in the world of health services where funding is typically short-lived and must adhere to specific deliverables and outcomes that meet mandates set out by funding bodies. Because of this, much of the work done with Two-Spirit populations stems out of short-term LGBTQ+ program funding, often focused on topics of vulnerability such as addiction, mental health, homelessness, and violence. When programming is supported by inconsistent funds, it forces those service providers holding the work to continuously adapt and re-adapt their project vision to meet funding application criteria. This in turn slows down the progress of meaningful community work each time a project is reinvented, potentially excludes service users from continuing to take part on future iterations of a project due to changing scope and contributes to an overall devaluing of Two-Spirit people and their wellbeing.

RESEARCHER'S VOICE: Again, thinking back to the original expectations of this research study, that I would come away with a prescriptive list of tips and tricks for Two-Spirit educators on how to best do this important cultural work, I am left humbled by my own learning journey while completing this study. The idea of presenting recommendations for other Two-Spirit educators hasn't sat right with me since I began to make meaning of the recorded conversations. In reflecting on this discomfort and in further exploring the concepts of humility and relationality, this discomfort began to make sense.

In my own process of stepping into a role of Two-Spirit educator I have had incredible learning experiences while working alongside skilled and gifted colleagues, I have made mistakes and had mentors follow up by modelling these same actions in a better way (more aligned with specific cultural values). For example, I once nearly cut off an elder who was sharing in a discussion because my anxiety as a facilitator was getting the best of me, I wanted to keep to the itinerary and ensure everyone shared equally. This was early in my understanding of protocol around showing respect for elders. I was able to pick up on the feelings of gratitude and invitation coming from my co-facilitator as this elder shared, and sensed that I needed to relax. Sure enough, what that elder shared turned out to create a pivotal moment in our discussion, and deep appreciation was expressed by everyone present.

I share this to say that of all the ways I have learned my most valuable lessons in doing this work, it has never been in response to a recommendation being made. This work is relational and introspective, and the ways of learning to do it are relational and introspective as well. So, I have not provided recommendations for Two-Spirit educators. Instead, my hope is that helpful insight and motivation can be gained from reading what I've written about my conversations with Two-Spirit educators, and that this teaching role be seen as one of many types of sacred work a Two-Spirit person can offer.

5.3 Ideas for Future Research

Within the realm of training and education on topics related to Two-Spirit, unlike conversations around embracing gender and sexual diversity, discussion doesn't need to centre around gaining societal acceptance and liberating ourselves from homophobia and transphobia. When we centre the discussion around decolonization and reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and cultural practice, embracing gender and sexual diversity can naturally enter the conversation. Situating Two-Spirit education within an LGBTQ+ "diversity training" context places the focus on gender and sexuality instead of culture, which invites a pan-Indigenous view of Two-Spirit, largely devoid of nuanced cultural and historical context. By continuing to prioritize nation-specific research on Two-Spirit topics, on exploring the histories and current realities of Two-Spirit people within their own nations, we contribute to a growing culturally centered understanding of gender and sexual diversity.

There continues to be so many unanswered questions, lost language, songs, and ceremony, and forgotten stories about Two-Spirit people. Any research that focuses on uncovering these cultural specifics moves us forward in healing amongst our Two-Spirit community members, by creating increased opportunities for connection and cultivating a sense of purpose and great worth. It also creates healing possibilities within our larger Indigenous communities, as we turn back towards our ethical frameworks of love, respect, relationship, community building, in learning more about our specific histories and embrace traditional teachings around gender and sexual diversity.

5.4 Closing the Circle

Two-Spirit resurgence relies upon the exchange of knowledge- knowledge of cultural practices and skills, knowledge of stories and ideas, and knowledge of values and belief systems. This knowledge exchange taking place through the teaching and learning process happens in several deliberate and naturally occurring ways. Those who take on deliberate teaching roles within their communities are taking intentional steps towards restoring and reinvigorating and moving a collective cultural healing process forward.

We restore culture in the ways we teach, allowing our values to guide us and the processes we invite others into. And we restore culture by way of the specific things that we teach, connecting others with cultural knowledge that may have become lost to them, connecting others with big ideas and critical perspectives on what it means to be Two-Spirit, and how reclaiming our Two-Spirit people is integral to a healing process.

The subjugation of gender and sexual diversity within Indigenous communities was not simply a stripping away of personal identity or self-expression, it was a stripping away of cultural practice, cultural values, belief systems, and spirituality. So, we must root this healing process in culture, moving forward together as Indigenous people first, Two-Spirit and not, as the circle is still broken without this relationship being intact.

There is no complete mending process taking place when we leave our Two-Spirit people out of the narrative, and there is no true healing of our Two-Spirit people when we do so outside of the context of colonization. The key to healing both for us as Indigenous people and Two-Spirit people is reconnecting with and reclaiming cultural teachings and practice. Reclaiming culture means reclaiming our Two-Spirit people and offering full acknowledgement of the gifts they bring and have always brought to our communities, families, and nations.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
Inspiring Minds

STUDY NAME

Two-Spirit Teaching and Learning as Coming In

RESEARCHER	**SUPERVISOR**
Kyle Shaughnessy	Dr. Judy MacDonald
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Questions represent the intent and general themes of conversations had with participants, however, the exact wording of discussion prompts varied slightly among participants. This was due to both the reciprocal and dialogical nature of conversations and variations between preferred topics of interest to each participant, which were identified during early and first meetings.

Interview Questions

1. Can you please tell me more about who you are?
    a. What is your nation and your relationship to it?
    b. How would you describe your gender or sexual identity?
2. Can you briefly describe what Two-Spirit education work you do?
3. Who do you teach primarily- youth/adults, Indigenous/non-Indigenous?
    a. How does your approach change depending on who you're teaching?
4. Where do you gather new knowledge for the trainings you do?
5. How did you come to be a Two-Spirit educator?
6. Who were your teachers, the people who influenced you to do this work?
7. Why this is important work?
8. How is the work that you do as a Two-Spirit educator, healing work?
9. Do you use traditional values or methods in your teaching?
10. Did your relationship to Indigenous culture changed in your journey as an educator?
11. Do you feel called to a particular role in your family or community as a Two-Spirit person?
12. Tell me about some of the biggest lessons you've learned in this role…
13. Tell me about the most challenging teaching experience you've had…
    a. What helped you through?
14. Tell me about your most rewarding teaching experience so far…
    a. What was rewarding about it?
15. Is there a question that I haven't asked you?

APPENDIX B: Research Consent Form

STUDY NAME

Two-Spirit Teaching and Learning as Coming In

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RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to take part in a research project called "Two-Spirit Teaching and Learning as Coming In." This research project is being conducted by Kyle Shaughnessy, a graduate student in the School of Social Work at Dalhousie University. This research is part of the thesis requirement in the Master of Social Work program, through the School of Social Work at Dalhousie University. The information below tells you about the research and what you will be asked to do. It also tells you about any benefits, risks, inconveniences or discomforts you might experience.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to determine three things:

- Have Two-Spirit educators experienced a notable impact on their sense of cultural connection and purpose as a result of assuming an educator role?
- What, if any, traditional approaches are being used by Two-Spirit educators in their teaching (including research, preparation, and delivery)?
- Do Two-Spirit educators see themselves as playing a role in the larger project of decolonization, with the teaching work they are doing?

WHO IS BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participants are being selected based on the following criteria:

- Two-Spirit adults
- Working or volunteering in established roles as educators, speakers, presenters, or facilitators on the topic of Two-Spirit history and wellness
- Have developed their own educational content and designed their own delivery method

Approximately 8-10 participants will be invited to take part in this research. Participants will be invited from a variety of nations, and geographic areas, including at least 5 provinces (BC,

Alberta, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan) and 2-3 territories (Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Yukon).
Participants are being selected based on the researchers' own contact with Two-Spirit educators, his own knowledge of Two-Spirit educators, and through contacting community organizations that offer trainings on the topic of Two-Spirit history and wellness.

WHO WILL BE CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH?
Interviews will be coordinated, facilitated, recorded, and analyzed by the researcher, Kyle Shaughnessy. Kyle is a transgender, Two-Spirit person of mixed Indigenous (Dene) and European (Irish) ancestry. Kyle has been supporting trans and Two-Spirit youth since 2001 and is currently employed as an educator with the public health system, for a transgender health program, where his focus is on Indigenous communities and children, youth, and families. Kyle has developed a wide variety of curriculum on Two-Spirit history, health and wellness topics, and regularly delivers in-person trainings and lectures on Two-Spirit resurgence.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO
Participants will be interviewed in-person, either in their community of residence, or in a community to which they have travelled to deliver a training or presentation. Interviews will take approximately 60-90 minutes.
Prior to the interview, participants will be contacted by the researcher to set up interview arrangements and discuss the project, as well as invited to share a meal together the day before the interview to get to know the researcher and discuss any ideas for stories to share in the interview. As the research is focused on in-person education, the researcher will attempt to schedule interviews around a time where participants may be delivering a training that can be attended. When this is not possible, other arrangements can be made (such as viewing past or present webinars, etc.).
The researcher will be drawing heavily on the use of storytelling during interviews and is hoping to not only hear participants' answers to questions, but to hear personal accounts of their experiences as educators. Stories about how participants came to be educators, what holding a Two-Spirit identity means to them, journeys of connection or reconnection to culture through teaching, and how they see themselves as contributing to a larger process of cultural revitalization are strongly encouraged.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION GATHERED
Stories and responses shared will be analyzed for common and recurring themes such as experiencing an increased cultural connection or using humor as a teaching tool. Analyses will be synthesized and written into a larger thesis document, with the intention of publishing some findings at a later date.

POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS
This study presents minimal risk to participants. However, due to the small size of the community being interviewed, participants may be identifiable to their colleagues, regardless of no identifying information being shared. Because of this, participants are asked to be aware of the risk of lateral violence that may occur if someone from within the same community does not agree with some of the information being shared. Information that is

shared during the interview that could potentially negatively impact the reputation of a participant, the researcher, or a colleague (even when anonymous), will be omitted from the study. In the case that participants feel it is helpful to have their accounts verified and validated by other community members, the researcher will do their best to make these arrangements.
Should an experience of lateral violence occur either between participants or in the wider Two-Spirit community as a result of participating in this research, the researcher will do their due diligence to mitigate harm, clarify information, and mediate as necessary, and commits to conducting themselves in a good way, according to the seven grandfather teachings of respect, love, truth, humility, bravery, honesty, and wisdom.
Additionally, as interviews will invite stories about connecting the work participants are currently doing with the larger issue of intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, and cultural erasure, some topics discussed could bring up difficult emotions or memories that require additional outside support. While the researcher is not a trained trauma therapist, they will make themselves available for supportive debriefing of the interview experience and any emotional discomfort that may arise as a result of discussing personal details during the interview. Additionally, a list of resources for accessing support are supplied along with the consent forms.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS
Participants may benefit indirectly from participating in this study by having the opportunity to reflect on the contributions they are making to decolonizing work on behalf of their community, as well as possibly feeling increased sense of connection to others doing similar work (the researcher).
Direct benefits include participants having their teaching practices recognized in a published work at some point as well as knowing they are contributing to an increased number of publications that frame Two-Spirit knowledge within a meaningful and traditional context. Other direct benefits include receiving honoraria and small gift for participation. Participants will be invited to engage in a network with other Two-Spirit educators, similar to a community of practice, which is to be created as part of this research project. During the final writing of the thesis, a fact sheet or job aid will be created for Two-Spirit educators, which contain useful information for developing and presenting content on Two-Spirit history, identity, and wellness. Participants will be recognized on this document if they wish, and this fact sheet will be distributed amongst all participants and accessible to the general public.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
It is your decision whether or not you want to take part in this research project. If you do take part, know that you can leave the study at any time for any reason. There will be no negative consequences to yourself.
Limitations on withdrawing from the study include possibly being unable to remove some of the data collected during your interview once it has been aggregated, as it will have been blended in with responses from other participants. If there is a particular question or topic that comes up during the interview process that you prefer not to comment on for personal or other reasons, there is no obligation to speak to it. Participants will be given a copy of interview questions prior to the interview. Participants will also be provided their interview

transcript for review and verification once transcribed, at this point, participants are welcome to correct information shared or have it omitted from the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

All information you give to the researcher will be kept private. When project findings are used to create a written graduate thesis (which will be made available to you) only interview results and design of the study will be discussed. This means that it will not be possible for you to be identified. Any identifying information about you (like your name) will be kept in a separate file, in a locked cabinet or password-protected, secure file.

However, best practice when working with Indigenous knowledge is to acknowledge and offer thanks to those who have passed down their teachings. Equally important is the ability to stand with one's word. In this case, if you would like to remain connected to what you have shared and have your reflections, stories, and teachings remain identifiable so that the researcher is able to acknowledge you as the source in the final thesis, this will be made possible.

COMPENSATION

Participants will be offered a $50 honorarium in recognition of the time and teachings that they have offered. The offering of this honoraria is also a part of basic Indigenous protocol.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THE RESEARCH

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about your participation in this research project, please contact me, Kyle Shaughnessy, kshaughnessy@dal.ca, 604-916-8738 or my academic supervisor, Judy MacDonald, Director, School of Social Work, judy.macdonald@dal.ca, (902) 494-1347.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please fill out this consent form and return it to the researcher via e-mail. We are happy to share our results with you in by sharing the report with you before it is made publicly available. The researcher will contact you via email once the report is ready for preview, sometime in Fall 2019.

SIGNATURE AND CONSENT
I have read the explanation about this study. I understand what I am being asked to do and my questions about the study have been answered. I agree to take part in this study. I know that participating is my choice and that I can leave the study at any time. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. I have been given a copy of this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

By providing my signature below, I indicate my consent for the following:
[ ] Audio recording of interview
[ ] Use of direct quotations from interview content
[ ] Being contacted post-interview for follow-up clarification and verification of information shared

PARTICIPANT NAME	**PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
RESEARCHER NAME	**RESEARCHER SIGNATURE**	**DATE**

APPENDIX C: Post-Interview Resources

STUDY NAME
Two-Spirit Teaching and Learning

RESEARCHER
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DEBREIFING
Sharing stories related to your work as a Two-Spirit educator and connecting these stories to a larger experience of colonial violence, could bring up difficult memories or emotions. While these experiences are honored in the interview session and will be treated with dignity and respect, feelings of distress or discomfort may persist beyond the interview space. If you feel a need to access support after the interview, this resource list may help you to find that support.

If you feel a need to further connect with an elder or trauma-informed counselor after participating in this research, please contact the researcher, and you will be connected with the appropriate support in your region.

KUU-US Crisis Line Society
First Nations specific crisis line available 24/7, regardless of where individuals reside in BC. Toll-free: 1-800-588-8717 - Youth Line: 250-723-2040 - Adult Line: 250-723-4050.

Indian Residential School Survivors Society
The Indian Residential School Survivor Society (IRSSS) has a wealth of experience delivering wellness and healing services to Indian Residential School Survivors and intergenerational Survivors throughout B.C. IRSSS provides essential services such as crisis support, counselling, and educational workshops to Residential School Survivors, their families, and to those dealing with intergenerational traumas.
reception@irsss.ca or 1-800-721-0066

QMUNITY- BC's Queer Resource Centre
Non-profit organization based in Vancouver, BC that works to improve queer, trans, and Two-Spirit lives. We provide a safer space for LGBTQ/2S people and their allies to fully self-express while feeling welcome and included.
reception@qmunity.ca or (604) 684-5307 ext. 100

Dancing to Eagle Spirit Society Trans positive and inclusive ceremonies led by Tsleil-Waututh, Two-Spirit and trans elder on Tsleil-Waututh Territory. Contact Sandy Leo Laframboise at:
dancingtoeaglespirit@gmail.com or 778-319-3965

Two Spirit Sweat Lodge Sweat lodge held on Squamish Territory (North Vancouver) for Two-Spirit folks and allies. Contact Bon Fabian at:
bonsfab@gmail.com or 604-700-6751

NATIONAL RESOURCES

Indian Residential School Survivors and Family
Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day for anyone experiencing pain or distress as a result of his or her residential school experience.
1-866-925-4419

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line
The Hope for Wellness Help Line offers immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention to all Indigenous peoples across Canada.
Online chat counselling available at https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/
1-855-242-3310, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Trans Lifeline
Trans Lifeline is a non-profit dedicated to the wellbeing of transgender people. We run a hotline staffed by transgender people for transgender people. Trans Lifeline volunteers are ready to respond to whatever support needs members of our community might have.
1-877-330-6366 - www.translifeline.org