

REIMAGINING *TWO-SPIRIT* COMMUNITY: CRITICALLY CENTERING NARRATIVES OF URBAN TWO-SPIRIT YOUTH

by

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Abstract

Since its inception in the early 1990s, Two-Spirit has become an identity category that many Indigenous LGBTQ people have taken up as a way to signal both their Indigeneity and their queerness. In the emerging field of Queer Indigenous Studies, Two-Spirit people have become increasingly visible, however, the engagement with youth has been limited and largely confined to the social service sector. Stepping outside of these narrow confines, my research has sought to document how Two-Spirit youth envision their day-to-day lives in relation to their communities. Using an Indigenous methodology to guide the research, I conducted sharing circles in conjunction with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network in order to engage Two-Spirit youth living in Toronto. The sharing circles revealed the limits of Two-Spirit youth's connections to the idea of *Two-Spirit community*. Two-Spirit youth called for an end to homophobia and transphobia within their Indigenous communities and expressed their desire to directly participate in nation-building activities as guided by their communities' elders. The thesis analyzes the ways that Two-Spirit identity gets used in both oppressive and decolonial ways in the context of non-profit and Two-Spirit organizations to show how cultures are built around Two-Spirit identity. However, Two-Spirit youth resist narratives of victimhood created through racist ideas about Indigenous people in their stories as they search for spaces that open up dialogue about the radical ways in which Two-Spirit people can manifest their own futures rooted in Indigenous principles.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Finding Two-Spirit Youth

This thesis examines the contemporary lives of urban Two-Spirit youth in Canada as a basis for questioning colonial definitions and methods of managing Indigenous bodies, and for reimagining and restoring the inclusive terms of Indigenous peoplehood. Two-Spirit people in urban spaces are becoming increasingly vocal about their experiences as LGBTQ Indigenous people. However, the trauma of colonization and heteropatriarchy that permeates many Indigenous communities has made it difficult for many to share their identities as Two-Spirit people. In particular, Two-Spirit youth in urban areas contend with many difficulties, from basic shelter to mental health struggles (O'Brien Teengs and Travers 21), as part of day-to-day survival. Moving through the world as a Two-Spirit youth means daily experiencing the historical legacy of heteropatriarchal colonization while simultaneously trying to navigate the complexities of identifying as a Two-Spirit person within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts. As navigating different spaces becomes a tactic of survival, under these conditions finding a sense of community can be difficult. Indigenous scholars offer theories of the importance of Two-Spirit people that firmly re-insert them within the traditions of Indigenous peoples and, more importantly, that create a space in the present for their belonging within Indigenous communities (Wilson 314; Driskill "Shaking Our Shells" 122; Thomas and Jacobs 92). However, to date, there is very little written documentation of urban Two-Spirit stories. Among extant publications such as academic books and essays and manuals or guides created by social service agencies, few have focused on Two-Spirit youth's experiences within urban centres, with "River of Life, Rapids of Change" (O'Brien Teengs and Travers) and "Two Spirit Youth Speak Out!" (Lerat) being the

notable exceptions. This thesis helps to fill in the gap within current literature by examining contemporary urban Two-Spirit youth's experiences and their understandings of their identities and communities.

Centering urban Two-Spirit youth's narratives in my research brought forth major insights. For Two-Spirit youth, no concrete or uniform idea of *Two-Spirit community* exists, and in fact Two-Spirit is not a category under which most organize or even regularly identify. Yet Two-Spirit youth specifically do want traditional teachings from Two-Spirit elders, as well as social events that are Two-Spirit specific but that are offered outside of *social service* delivery organizations and models. Based on our conversations during focus groups and sharing circles, I understand that Two-Spirit youth revealed to me that for them, being Two-Spirit was more a way of moving through the world than a singular self-definition, and that the future of Two-Spirit organizing would be guided by an Indigenous methodology. These insights emerged from my qualitative research conducted with Indigenous youth who were contacted through their participation in the Toronto-based Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN). Since the founding of NYSHN in 2006, the organization has worked with Indigenous communities to address many issues facing Indigenous youth, with particular emphasis on working with self-identified Two-Spirit youth to fight homophobia and transphobia among Indigenous people. Notably, NYSHN has been at the forefront of supporting Two-Spirit youth in reimagining their LGBTQ and Indigenous identities through reconnection with Indigenous traditions, ceremonies and belonging within their Indigenous communities and nations. I sought out NYSHN's help in inviting urban Two-Spirit youth to participate in *sharing circles* (focus groups based in Indigenous research methodologies) in which participants could share their stories as well as their potential solutions to the problems that they may face. This investigation also emerged out of my

desire to produce Master's research that would be useful, conceptually and practically, to the many communities to which I belong. This desire came out of my recognition that Indigenous communities require concrete information for making real changes towards collective and individual healing, while simultaneously acknowledging that the theorization of such changes should take place within Indigenous frameworks for shared thought and organizing. From this grounding in Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous community-based organizing, my research found that urban Two-Spirit youth offer sharp analyses of the conditions of their lives that, I argue, significantly inform how scholars, service providers, activists and Indigenous communities should respond to them today. To restate, the major conclusions I draw from engaging with urban Two-Spirit youth are that Two-Spirit youth use the term strategically and conceptualize it more as of a wholistic way of being than a sexual or gender category, while simultaneously desiring social support towards building radical Two-Spirit futures grounded in an Indigenous worldview.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

To understand the conditions of life for contemporary urban Two-Spirit youth in Canada, we first must understand the gendered and sexualized histories of colonialism that undergird and shape the lives of all Indigenous people today. Colonial histories also set the context in which Indigenous people who do not conform to colonial gender norms have been defined by outsiders: a process that distorted Indigenous people's lives and required the creation of Indigenous theories of gender and sexuality that can decolonize academic knowledge. Of course, the growth of Indigenous theories of gender, sexuality and identity has created diverse points of view that may appear complementary or conflictual. In this section, I examine works in Indigenous studies on

gender, sexuality, colonization and decolonization with the aim of proposing a theory that is best suited to interpreting the complex experiences narrated by urban Two-Spirit youth today.

Waves of European colonizers, from soldiers and priests to communities of settlers, established their rule in the Americas by aiming all sorts of violence and terror at groups of Indigenous people. Sometimes colonial violence included outright slaughter of large groups of people; other times it involved more sinister forms of violence that intended to control and ultimately break down Indigenous peoples' relationships with their environment and one another. Indigenous scholars, and Indigenous feminists in particular explain that gender and sexuality were crucial to these procedures. Where Indigenous law recognized cultural or political authority among women, colonizers opted to treat with men and subjected Indigenous communities to their rule by requiring leadership that mirrored and was compatible with the patriarchal modes brought by Europeans (Anderson 83; Deerchild 101; Lawrence 46; A. Smith *Conquest* 23). To facilitate their rule, colonizers also coercively imposed Christianization on Indigenous communities, whether through missionization or through forced relocation to Indian villages (in Mexico) or to reservations / reserves and boarding / residential schools (in the United States and Canada) where church authority was paramount and where Christian morality dictated how family relationships, marriage, childrearing, and domestic life would be organized (Anderson 85; Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism" 113; A. Smith *Conquest* 36-37; Ramirez 132-133).

Yet among the many practices that European colonizers targeted, the control and elimination of what they perceived as homosexuality -- a sin so unthinkable that they sometimes could not even bear to write it down -- became a key site of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples. In her essay "Extermination of the *Joyas*: Gendercide in Spanish California," Deborah Miranda recounts the Spanish colonizers' calculated physical, mental, emotional and spiritual

attacks on Californian gender variant and non-heterosexual Indigenous people, whom the invaders disparagingly called *joyas* ("jewels") (257). Spanish priests abhorred the *joyas* and made it clear that the *joyas* as well as all Indigenous people who defended them were sinful and warranted social exclusion, if not execution, for failing to conform to Spanish heteropatriarchal standards of gender and sexual expression (Miranda 259). Spanish soldiers specially bred dogs of war that had acquired a taste for human flesh and were frequently fed live Indigenous people, including any *joyas* they encountered for whom they had little patience (Miranda 257). Essentially, Spanish soldiers and priests instilled a fear and hatred of *joyas* among California Indigenous peoples during a time of colonial terrorization and genocide (Miranda 259).

Similarly, Scott L. Morgensen traces the tactics of discipline and terror enforced by colonizers onto Indigenous people who did not assimilate into colonial systems of binary gender expression and heterosexual relationships. In his essay "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities" Morgensen demonstrates that white settler persecution of people living as *boté* (Crow nation), *nadle* (Navajo nation) and *winkte* (Lakota nation) -- all traditional roles that Europeans perceived as gender nonconforming -- intended to displace, silence or erase those so-identified as well as any Indigenous people who encouraged or associated with them (113-16). Citing recollections of experiences by various Indigenous people, he shows how colonial control moved from outright public execution of people performing or supporting targeted roles to the erasure of their historical existence through public shaming and, sometimes, outright disappearance (Morgensen "Settler Homonationalism" 115). Morgensen argues that "These are the terrorizing acts of a society of normalization," which "[formed] on the frontier of the settler state by controlling Native peoples as populations for the colonial education of modern sexuality" ("Settler Homonationalism" 116).

In their accounts, both Miranda and Morgensen explain that when European settlers targeted non-binary gender and non-heterosexual partnership among Indigenous peoples for social exclusion and elimination, they used terrorization to establish methods of colonial control over entire Indigenous peoples. Moreover, both authors suggest, through the normalization of terror European settlers taught Indigenous people to assimilate or face death. These violent colonial practices were so powerful that many Indigenous people learned to self-regulate by suppressing gender and sexual expression that exceeded colonial norms. The relationships that existed between European settlers and Indigenous people during initial periods of colonial rule continue to have repercussions and are evidenced by Indigenous people's contemporary relationships with the settler society and state.

Each of the mechanisms noted above -- misogyny, homophobia, Christianization and the internalization of colonial norms -- characterized the brutal assimilation of Indigenous people into the Canadian state. Long histories of such practices characterized French and British colonial rule prior to the establishment of Canada as an independent state (Anderson 58, Stevenson 50-55). Yet methods of gendered colonization were regularized and enforced among Indigenous peoples across Canada by the 1876 establishment of the Indian Act. Most crucially, the Indian Act has shaped Indigenous communities both on-reserve and off-reserve through the institutional definition and regulation of Indian identity. The Act empowered the settler state to legislate who can and cannot claim to be an Indigenous person with state recognition, by limiting this to persons granted "Indian" status under the Act (Lawrence 27). State definition of Indian bore no regard for how Indigenous nations within the boundaries of Canada defined and recognized their own identities or membership (Lawrence 27). Yet despite the Indian Act being only a collection of policies designed to define who can or cannot claim status as an Indian, its enforcement also

heavily influences the ways in which Indigenous peoples have come to conceptualize themselves and their communities (Lawrence 25).

The Indian Act was devised to be discriminatory towards Indigenous women in ways that have alienated generations of women and their descendants from their nations. From the time of its passage in 1876, the Indian Act has governed all those who are granted federal recognition as First Nations (Anderson 68). Prior to 1985, women who were status Indians lost all of their rights under the Act if they married someone who did not have status (Anderson 68; Lawrence 54; Ouellette 45). In 1985, in response to years of organizing by Indigenous women in Canada and internationally, Parliament passed Bill C-31 as a measure to reinstate women who lost status through marriage, but the bill still failed to give women the ability to pass on reinstated rights beyond their first-generation children (Lawrence 56; Ouellette 43). Amendments to the Indian Act to rectify generations of discrimination against women still have not addressed the full extent of the problem (Ouellette 45). More recently, Sharon McIvor argued that sex discrimination still existed under the Indian Act because her grandchildren were excluded from having status while McIvor's brother's grandchildren were included (Gabriel 184). McIvor's case caused the Canadian courts to order another amendment to the Indian Act, Bill C-3, but even this amendment does not change the inherent gender discrimination embedded within the Act. Historically, because of institutional gender discrimination caused by the Indian Act, many Indigenous women were forced off their reserves, away from their families and friends (Lawrence 55). These policies placed a tremendous amount of pressure on Indigenous women not to marry non-status men, even as women whose status was revoked were pushed to live in urban spaces. Many generations of Indigenous peoples have lived in urban areas because of the loss of status by a female relative. While this is not the sole reason for Indigenous migration to urban centers, in

Canada, the gendered loss of Indian status is a major element in the historical formation of urban Indigenous communities. The Indian Act makes it clear that Indigenous women are not valued in their communities or in Canada, not just in thought but also in practice. Once the Indian Act established the primary system of governance over Indigenous peoples in Canada, people so governed began to participate in the institutional devaluation of Indigenous women within their families and communities. Of course there was and continues to be resistance to the Indian Act by Indigenous people in Canada, from Indigenous groups that sustain traditional governance in spite of the existence of Indian Act Band Councils on their territories, to the recent Idle No More movement. But the Indian Act still remains largely unchanged.

Like the Indian Act, the history of the Residential Schools in Canada also demonstrates that colonization targeted Indigenous community ties for destruction and sought to recreate Indigenous communities on assimilated terms, with heteropatriarchy serving at each stage as an important tool. Residential Schools were put in place by the Canadian state from the 1890s until the late 1960s (Lawrence 105). Run by missionaries who had already established their presence in many Indigenous communities, attendance of Indigenous children became mandatory in 1894 (via the Indian Act) despite parents' lack of consent (Lawrence 106). Aside from struggling to survive in poor conditions as a result of chronic underfunding, Indigenous children in Residential Schools were subject to physical, mental and emotional abuse due to efforts to assimilate them by suppressing their Indigenous languages and "systemically negating the value of Native culture" (Lawrence 106). The Residential Schools' vilification of Indigenous practices also helped to erase any historical memory of Two-Spirit traditions that may have existed within Indigenous communities prior to colonization (Cameron 124). Part of the assimilation process included normalizing Christianity and equating homosexual sex (and unwed sex) with sin (Anderson 91).

In addition to this, many Indigenous children were sexually abused by people of the same sex while in Residential Schools and came to equate homosexual sex with abuse (Cameron 124). The violent enforcement of Christian values paired with the equation of homosexual sex with sin and abuse created several generations of Indigenous people in Canada that were taught to hate and fear same-sex sexuality and LGBTQ people. The loss of Indigenous culture and the internalization of homophobic beliefs are legacies of Residential Schools that affect both reserve communities and urban Indigenous communities.

Residential Schools also are intimately connected to the adopting-out of many Indigenous children, further severing ties of Indigenous people to their Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities faced endemic intergenerational abuse, alcoholism and other violence as a result of the legacy of Residential Schools (Lawrence 109). To compound the situation, in 1951 the Canadian state amended the Indian Act and made it possible to extend its provincial child welfare services to reserves (Lawrence 112). Status Indian children were disproportionately apprehended by the state en masse, often spending years in the foster care system or being adopted out of province and even to the U.S. or Europe (Johnston 61). This period, known among scholars as "The Sixties Scoop" (though it extended into the 1980s) massively devastated reserve communities in Canada by forcibly removing children and often placing them in non-Indigenous homes (Johnston 59; Sinclair 66). Indigenous adoptees often suffered from identity confusion and had extremely high rates of adoption breakdown (Sinclair 69). The loss of tight-knit Indigenous family structures and the severing of any ties to Indigenous culture (Johnston 60) shaped many urban Indigenous peoples' experiences (Lawrence 115). An Ojibway adoptee, Shandra Spears describes her experience thusly: "...the removal of entire generations of Native children from our communities and families is a genocidal blow to our nations, and we feel that violence in our

bones.” (Spears 81-82) The Sixties Scoop was a particularly tumultuous time for both urban and reserve Indigenous communities, as they attempted to cope with the negative consequences of Residential Schools while their communities continued to be broken down through the forced removal of their children. Currently, the struggle for Indigenous children to remain with their families continues, with over three times more children in the care of child welfare services today than the amount of children placed in Residential Schools at the height of their operations in the 1940s (Blackstock 13).

The legacy of colonialism has violently shaped contemporary Canadian Indigenous communities, from discrimination against Indigenous women via the Indian Act to the severing of familial and cultural ties by Residential Schools and child removal. Yet both reserve and urban Indigenous communities share in having elders to whom they can look for guidance and leadership. Within Indigenous communities, people who are considered elders tend to be older in age and to hold positions of respect and authority on matters of shared concern. Elders are called upon for their historical experiences and cultural awareness, and they are considered to be experts in the knowledge that they share. However, elders within Indigenous communities are not immune to the historical influences of colonialism. It is increasingly clear that those who purport to carry such knowledge and authority on both Indigenous culture and history can sometimes perpetuate the violence of sexism and homophobia. This is evidenced by contemporary accounts by Indigenous women and LGBTQ Indigenous people. In the collection *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival* (Lawrence and Anderson) many contributors tell stories of Indigenous women’s resilience in the face of definitions of tradition that would exclude them. In “Tribal Feminism is a Drum Song,” Rosanna Deerchild writes about how Lisa Fontaine’s artwork challenges sexist instructions from Indigenous elders that should prevent Indigenous

women from touching certain ceremonial objects such as drums (97-105). Nancy Cooper, in "Arts and Letters Club: Two-Spirited Women Artists and Social Change," speaks about how her artwork challenges the homophobic idea held by some Indigenous elders that Native lesbians did not exist prior to contact with Europeans (139). Given the violent histories that led to the adoption of heteropatriarchy within Indigenous communities, it is difficult for both Indigenous women and young Indigenous LGBTQ (or Two-Spirit) people to challenge homophobic ideas held by elders. Most notably it is challenging to go up against elders when Indigenous spirituality and ceremonies are involved (Cooper 139). Often, homophobia and sexism within Indigenous communities are cloaked in the language of tradition and used to discourage or exclude Two-Spirit people, LGBTQ Indigenous people and Indigenous women from ceremonies (Lawrence 164-165). This is especially prominent when Two-Spirit or LGBTQ Indigenous people identify as women, as they experience this exclusion double-fold. These experiences are difficult as the options for such persons are to speak out and risk being further excluded, to stay silent and continue to participate in restricted ways, or to choose to leave the spaces where these exclusions are happening. I argue that the only way that Indigenous communities can be strengthened and can heal the wounds of colonization is by accepting and nurturing all people within their communities. Perhaps this is a critical turning point for many Indigenous communities: to make sure that their women and LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people feel welcomed by their communities in every way possible, including -- most importantly, some may argue -- spiritually.

While all kinds of Indigenous communities continue to struggle with the legacy of colonialism, regardless of where they are situated, there are distinct differences between on-reserve and urban Indigenous communities in Canada. Many Indigenous people find themselves living in urban environments because of the histories of colonial violence stated earlier, such as

adoption, Residential Schools, sexism and homophobia. These urban Indigenous communities are distinct from rural or on-reserve Indigenous communities because they are made of individuals from many different Indigenous groups. Furthermore, they often do not have the same concentration of Indigenous people as rural communities or reserves and therefore have to struggle to assert their identity. When interviewing self-identified mixed-blood Indigenous people about their lives in the urban space of Toronto, Ontario, Bonita Lawrence found that urban mixed-blood Indigenous people continually have to fight assimilation and a hostile racist environment in order to maintain their Indigenous cultural connections (133). She also found that most of her research participants noted the need for communities in which they could decide which Indigenous traditions and ceremonies they would practice in order to maintain their Indigenous identity within the urban setting (Lawrence 164-165). The combination of people from many different Indigenous groups and the reclamation of Indigenous traditional ceremonies and spirituality in urban spaces bears a lot of potential to increase cross-cultural understanding and to strengthen urban Indigenous communities. Indeed, Lawrence also notes that most urban Native organizations in Toronto have an investment in promoting many different Indigenous cultural traditions in order to create a more balanced future for urban Indigenous people (159). Importantly, this urban Indigenous environment with all of its diversity and struggles – as well as the aforementioned colonial violence that has shaped Indigenous genders and sexualities -- formed key historical contexts for the creation of Two-Spirit identity.

1.2 LGBTQ Indigenous People and Two-Spirit Identity

In the early 1990s, Two-Spirit (as a concept) emerged out of an urban context wherein Indigenous LGBTQ people were able to mobilize upon their recognition that the colonial

category berdache¹ needed to be replaced with a term grounded in their own Indigenous experiences. Consequently urban Two-Spirit people began to coordinate efforts to support themselves and their communities around the new term and to create non-profit organizations that would foster safer spaces for Two-Spirit people. Contemporary urban Two-Spirit youth have benefitted from the existence of these established organizations, although such groups largely have been limited to social service delivery. Two-Spirit is a term that offers urban Indigenous LGBTQ youth an affirmation that their existence is valued. However, as with any identity category, Two-Spirit has the potential to be used to police people's behavior in a fashion that resembles a colonial influence more than an Indigenous one, which just adds to the list of difficulties that urban Two-Spirit youth have to navigate.

Indigenous people living in urban areas can encounter racism, sexism and homophobia while struggling to maintain their Indigenous cultural connections. For LGBTQ Indigenous people, large urban areas hold the promise of meeting others like themselves, but that expectation does not always translate into reality once they arrive in the city. In San Francisco, California, the organization Gay American Indians (GAI) -- the first of its kind in the United States -- formed in 1975 in response to the lack of support for Indigenous LGBTQ people within the early gay liberation movement (Gilley 27). Randy Burns, a northern Paiute man and co-founder of GAI, openly discussed how his experiences of homophobia in Indigenous organizations and of racism in mainstream gay organizations led him to see the demand for an urban Indigenous and gay organization (Gilley 27). Burns explains that the histories of colonialism played a major role in creating the homophobia he experienced in some Indigenous communities, such as the exclusion of gay Indians from ceremonial practices like Sun Dances (3). In Burns' experience, it was not

¹ Some scholars choose to italicize or use quotation marks around berdache for emphasis, however I have chosen to omit these.

safe to be gay and Indian; but GAI became an organization based on this shared identity in order to support LGBTQ Indigenous people living in an urban area (3). Two decades later in the Canadian context, many LGBTQ Indigenous people still told stories similar to Burns'. In "Identity Development and Two-Spirit People" Alex Wilson tells a story of urban alienation by recounting her move from a remote reserve in Northern Manitoba to a larger city where she hoped to find "the idealized gay world that [she] saw in the movies" (Wilson 311-312). Instead, Wilson felt that she had lost her place in her Indigenous community by moving, even as she was unable to find a place for herself within the predominantly white gay scene in the city. Wilson explains that in fact she inherited a double alienation, by internalizing the homophobia that she learned from younger people on her reserve, and internalizing racism against Indigenous people that she learned in the city. Later in life, Wilson recounts, she eventually found a Two-Spirit powwow; there she realized the importance of spaces where LGBTQ Indigenous people can express their sexual, gender and cultural identities with a sense of safety among other Indigenous people (315). Her access to a Two-Spirit powwow helped to shape her understanding that Indigenous culture and being an LGBTQ person were not mutually exclusive. Wilson's experience, of being unable to find safer space as a LGBTQ Indigenous person within the larger urban LGBTQ community, is a common story. In fact, Two-Spirit identity would have been a concept that only recently had formed at the time that the encounters recalled by Wilson took place. The experiences of both Burns and Wilson in coming to terms with their senses of self and finding communities of support are relevant to contemporary Two-Spirit people in urban areas.

Indigenous migration into urban centers provided Indigenous people the opportunity to have political discussions and to organize across differences. In *Native Hubs: Culture, Community and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*, Renya Ramirez theorizes that

Indigenous people utilize “hubs,” which symbolize mobility in urban and reservation settings, that serve as “a mechanism to support Native notions of culture, community, identity, and belonging as well as a political vision for social change.” (58) Ramirez supports this argument using urban powwows as an example of a place where Indigenous people collect and then travel along “spokes” to other powwows, activating a network of relationships (64). Ultimately, these hubs allow for urban Indigenous people to “work toward self-determination or sovereignty in the absence of a land-based form of government” and “actively negotiate the dominant society to demand social change” (Ramirez 81). Ramirez positions an urban high school as a hub site by recounting how Indigenous people gathered to successfully retire a high school’s mascot which was a caricature of an Indigenous man (73-79). I would like to extend Ramirez’s notion of hubs to urban Indigenous LGBTQ people and suggest that Two-Spirit arose out of city centers because they were activating their already existing hubs or networks and having critical discussions about white settler anthropologist’s continued use of the term berdache. The hubs that urban Indigenous LGBTQ people would have been accessing would include powwows but also newly emerging non-profit organizations and gatherings in the late 1980s and early 1990s that specifically sought to address urban Indigenous LGBTQ people’s needs.

One such hub, was the first International Gathering of Native Gays and Lesbians. The gathering was hosted by the American Indian Gays and Lesbians of Minneapolis, but also attracted Canadians, and took place in 1988 (Brant 43-47; M. Smith). This gathering set the precedent for the third gathering that took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1990 where urban Indigenous LGBTQ people gathered and discussed their growing dissent toward the category berdache and coined the term Two-Spirit to use in its place (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 2). Participants insisted that Two-Spirit reflected all aspects of a person, but that it would particularly

emphasize the spiritual and ceremonial connections that Indigenous LGBTQ have with all of creation (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 3; M. Smith). Indigenous LGBTQ people followed their spokes to the hub that was the first gathering and continued their dialogue across time and space to culminate in the creation of Two-Spirit, creating social change as Ramirez predicts that hubs facilitate.

The establishment of hubs and sites to negotiate LGBTQ identities and struggles also is connected to the long history of Indigenous peoples being studied by white settlers. A key part of the process of white settler colonization, the study, obfuscation, and appropriation of Indigenous ways of knowing gave rise to mythical romanticizations and outright misunderstandings of Indigenous culture. As noted above, the examination of Indigenous peoples began as European explorers and missionaries kept journals and wrote letters that documented Indigenous people and their practices primarily through culturally European, Christian, heteropatriarchal, cis-male and explicitly colonial lenses. Often these documentations sensationalized certain aspects of Indigenous ways of life, such as sexuality and spirituality, over which explorers and missionaries obsessed in great detail. However, much of this writing lacked a thorough understanding within Indigenous contexts of what they witnessed and generated a host of half-truths and illogical conclusions. One of the many fixations of colonial observers was the concept berdache that later would be taken up by anthropologists of homosexuality.

Berdache was a concept used by early colonizers to describe any Indigenous people whom they perceived as living outside of the strict confines of heteropatriarchy. A French word that referred to a “passive homosexual partner” and that insinuated sex work, berdache was utilized by anthropologists to describe “transvestitism, homosexuality, hermaphroditism, and transgenderism” within Indigenous communities (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 4). Working within

popular colonial discourses contrasting “primitive” to “modern” life, twentieth century anthropologists starting with Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict saw in berdache an example of Indigenous gender and sexual expression that could prove that homosexuality had deep historical roots in human societies (Morgensen *Spaces Between Us* 59-60). By the late twentieth century, an increasing amount of anthropologists published work centered on the term berdache² as the field of gay and lesbian anthropology documented same-sex sexuality and gender diversity cross-culturally, and presented this as evidence for the acceptance of sexual and gender minorities in Western societies and specifically in European settler societies (Morgensen *Spaces Between Us* 63). LGBTQ Indigenous people took note and began voicing their concerns over use of the term berdache. LGBTQ Indigenous activists resisted the romanticized myths and the non-Indigenous word being used to describe them and their ancestors, and instead proposed the use of the term Two-Spirit (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 6; Morgensen *Spaces Between Us* 77; Womack 302). In the early 1990s, LGBTQ Indigenous people, newly mobilized by self-identified Two-Spirit organizing, demanded that anthropologists and other academics be responsible to the communities that they claimed to study. A series of conferences was organized with key LGBTQ Indigenous groups and anthropologists in order to discuss the future of the term berdache (Thomas and Jacobs 91). As Thomas and Jacobs recount, “One of the most important outcomes of the five year conversation among participants was the realization that the term berdache was no longer acceptable as a catch-all for Native American ... gender and sexual behavior.” (91) Instead, participants decided that the new LGBTQ Indigenous term, Two-Spirit was more appropriate as a pan-tribal or transnational North American term that would be representative of

² See Roscoe and Williams.

both the traditional and contemporary sexual and gender diversity within Indigenous communities³ (Thomas and Jacobs 92; Morgensen *Spaces Between Us* 84).

In the wake of changing anthropological discourse, and independently of it, Two-Spirit was adopted quickly by members of many different Indigenous nations in North America as an umbrella term defined by and for Indigenous people who also identify somewhere along the LGBTQ spectrum (Thomas and Jacobs 92). The term proved particularly useful to Indigenous people whose nations either did not have a word or concept for LGBTQ people or whose nations may have forgotten or deliberately hidden those words or concepts because of the violences of colonialism. The English term Two-Spirit was not intended to replace nation-specific concepts for LGBTQ people but rather to make cross-national identification among Indigenous LGBTQ people easier in Anglophone settler societies (Thomas, Jacobs and Lang 3). For some LGBTQ Indigenous people, the term Two-Spirit could be perceived as limited by its relatively new creation within the context of urban centers, or as not needed because of the existence of a term within their Indigenous nations with which they identified. For many other LGBTQ Indigenous people, Two-Spirit identity offered them radical possibilities for expressing their sex, gender, sexuality and more within the context of their Indigeneity.

Although the intentions Indigenous people brought to the theorizing of the term Two-Spirit were complex and carefully articulated, non-Indigenous LGBTQ people sometimes take up the concept in problematic ways. Some non-Indigenous LGBTQ people began appropriating the term and using it to define themselves, thereby removing the Indigenous-specific context that grounded the term and acting contrary to the intended use of the term to resist colonial romanticization of Indigenous people. Michelle Cameron, a Carrier First Nation woman who

³ For a white settler refusal of this shift, see Roscoe (17). For an appreciation of this shift, see Lang (xv-xvi).

identifies as Two-Spirit, wrote about her struggle with a non-Indigenous friend who saw no problem with non-Indigenous people self-identifying as Two-Spirit. Cameron concludes that the use of the term by non-Indigenous people is an act of colonization that “detracts from its original meaning and diffuses its power as a label of resistance for Aboriginal people.” (Cameron 125) Similar to the ways that Indigenous peoples’ sexual and gender expressions were romanticized and subsequently used for non-Indigenous peoples’ sexual and gender liberations, Two-Spirit as a concept was not immune to being adapted to the colonial mindset.

Despite this, Indigenous Two-Spirit people have continued to use the term as a way to resist colonial violence. Many Indigenous people identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or queer have written about their use of Two-Spirit identity as a way to assert their Indigeneity in the context of their experience of gender and sexuality, as in the work of Beth Brant, Deborah Miranda, Qwo-Li Driskill and Michelle Cameron.⁴ The term has proven incredibly effective at organizing Indigenous LGBTQ people across nations, as exemplified in the organizing of Two-Spirit powwows and other gatherings in Canada and the United States by such organizations as Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits (San Francisco), 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations (Toronto), Two-Spirit Society of Denver (Denver), Northeast Two-Spirit Society (New York), Minnesota Two-Spirit Society (Minneapolis), Dancing to Eagle Spirit Society (Edmonton), NativeOUT (Phoenix) and Two-Spirited People of Manitoba (Winnipeg). While not exhaustive, this list shows how many different organizations across the U.S. and Canada have created communities, often focalized within major urban centers, to organize around the term Two-Spirit.

The initial articulation of Two Spirit as a term that is not confined to any single expression of sex, gender and/or sexuality is sometimes forgotten. The issue with any exclusive

⁴ For more Two-Spirit identified writing, see *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literature* (Driskill, et al).

use of the term is not that some Two-Spirit people may use it to identify as such, but that the term was created to show a diversity of sexual and gender identities within Indigenous communities and not to prioritize one. The flattening of the term possibly could be traced back to the historical use of the term berdache by anthropologists, and the subsequent conflation of the two despite their very different origins and definitions. Here, again, the theorizing of the term does not necessarily translate into popular usage. Similarly, the ceremonial and spiritual aspects of the term have been largely ignored within popular usage, perhaps in part because of a lack of spiritual and ceremonial guidance within Indigenous contexts for Two-Spirit people. Despite these limitations, the term remains one that has incredible power for Indigenous LGBTQ people regardless of where they identify along spectrums of sex, gender and sexuality.

In recent decades an increasing amount of social research has emerged that examines contemporary Two-Spirit people's everyday lives. A good example is Brian Joseph Gilley's ethnographic text, *Becoming Two Spirit: Gay Identity and Social Acceptance in Indian Country*, which appeared alongside a range of scholarly works in sociology and social work documenting Two Spirit people's lives and struggles with respect to health and well being.⁵ In this period of time, most publications about Two-Spirit people have emerged from Two-Spirit organizations and have centered on urban Two-Spirit people's immediate needs as a way to help social service organizations provide adequate care. As a result of this, most of the published literature about Two-Spirit identity suggests that Two-Spirit people, as a marginalized group, require assistance with their most basic needs. This reflects the fact that Two-Spirit people who work within the service-delivery field publish the majority of the literature; however, this also limits how Two-Spirit people are conceptualized as a group.

⁵ See, for example: Meyer-cook and Lebelle, Walters et al, and Brown.

2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations in Toronto is a non-profit organization that focuses on providing HIV/AIDS education, outreach, prevention, support and counseling services. The organization formed in 1989 in response to the needs of Indigenous people living with HIV, especially LGBTQ Indigenous people, and from this basis it quickly took up the term Two-Spirit and articulated it with its primary mission of supporting physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being among Indigenous people living with HIV (Deschamps 12). In 1998 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations published two resources that are available for download from their website: "We are Part of a Tradition: A Guide on Two-Spirited People for First Nations" (Deschamps) and "Nashine Ginwenimazawin: Constant Care" (Vanderhoef). In "We are Part of a Tradition" Gilbert Deschamps focuses on terminology, LGBTQ legal rights in Canada, Two-Spirit identity in a contemporary and historical context and the effects of homophobia in regards to HIV/AIDS, and he includes resources for First Nations to utilize. In "Nashine Ginwenimazawin" Shelly Vanderhoef created a manual for service providers who wish to provide culturally appropriate assistance to Aboriginal people living with AIDS that require palliative care. 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations went on to publish "Voices of Two-Spirited Men" (Albert, Monette and Waalen), "Two Spirit Women 2nd Edition" (O'Brien Teengs) and "Our Relatives Once Said: A Wise Practices Guide Voices of Aboriginal Trans-People" (Stratton). They also went on to collaborate on a project called "The Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project" and published two reports of data collected from both Winnipeg, Manitoba (Ristock, Zoccole and Passante) and Vancouver, British Columbia (Ristock, Zoccole and Potskin) that reported broadly on the effects of migration and health. While 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations remains a valuable resource for service providers who are seeking educational materials

on LGBTQ Indigenous people, none of their publications address urban Two-Spirit youth. Further, none of the publications question the use of Two-Spirit as an identity category.

While to date, no peer-reviewed research exists that was designed by and for contemporary urban Two-Spirit youth, community-based research does exist that portrays the phenomenon of Two-Spirit youth: that is, LGBTQ Indigenous youth who came of age amid the circulation of Two-Spirit identity and of literature characterizing the lives of Two-Spirit people as a distinctive social group. How does this literature compare? One of the earliest community-based reports I found in my research is a 2004 publication by the Urban Native Youth Alliance in Vancouver, British Columbia, entitled “Two Spirit Youth Speak Out!: Analysis of the Needs Assessment Tool” (Lerat). Focused on the experiences of Two-Spirit youth in rural areas of British Columbia, including Prince George, Nanaimo, Trail and Kamloops, the study asked participants (all aged 24 or younger) about their experiences of coming out, state of mental health, perceptions of other people’s understandings of alternative sexualities, knowledge of HIV/AIDS, personal safety and rates of risk, and perceptions of community, education and schooling (Lerat 18). The report concludes that the “general profile of a Two-spirit youth” included struggling with mental health, fearing homophobic reactions that result in physical violence, desiring Two-Spirit elders to be more available and visible, and wanting to be educated on Two-Spirit history (Lerat 18). In both its questions and conclusions, this study illustrates that, by the early 2000s, Indigenous community-based organizers and social workers sought to document Two-Spirit youth as a social group. The report tended to focus on the immediate needs of Two-Spirit youth in point form rather than from direct quotations. However, in one quotation that was not actually analyzed but merely included in the “Two-Spirit History” section before the listed findings, a youth participant states, “I do not label myself as a Two-spirited [person]

because I'm not sure what my tradition is from my people as a Two-spirited person." (Lerat 6)

The placing of this quotation in the Two-Spirit history section seems to imply that Two-Spirit youth merely need access to Two-Spirit literature in order to feel connected to the term Two-Spirit. However, I believe that this quotation really reveals that some Indigenous LGBTQ youth do not feel connected to the term because it is relatively new; Two-Spirit simply does not have a long history that youth can look to as a basis for traditions in a nation-specific context. This is important to note because I believe that the questioning of the term Two-Spirit is not limited to rural LGBTQ Indigenous youth. The quotation above gives us a clue as to how Indigenous LGBTQ youth are sorting out whether or how they identify with Two-Spirit, which is a very different concern from previous reports and manuals that make the assumption that the term is fully accepted by all participants.

The limited array of current research aimed specifically at urban Two-Spirit youth does point to several common experiences. Focusing on youth who had migrated to Toronto, Doris O'Brien Teengs and Robb Travers spoke with Two-Spirit youth about their experiences of migration and of Toronto after their arrival. Many urban Two-Spirit youth reported having felt the effects of homophobia within their home communities, whether on- or off-reserve. In cases where they felt homophobia on reserve, respondents tended to report the desire to migrate to larger urban spaces in order to escape perceived or enacted physical and emotional violence (O'Brien Teengs and Travers 21). Yet urban Two-Spirit youth also reported experiencing homophobia when coming into contact with service providers that targeted urban Indigenous communities (O'Brien Teengs and Travers 22). As well, when urban Two-Spirit youth came into contact with service providers aimed at the LGBTQ community, they reported feeling ostracized because of the racism that they experienced when accessing services or attending social events. In

effect, urban Two-Spirit youth have become somewhat lost between service providing organizations that are aimed, respectively, at urban LGBTQ or Indigenous communities. The harsh reality of social exclusion experienced by urban Two-Spirit youth unfortunately is similar to that experienced by Two-Spirit people from previous generations, as evidenced by Alex Wilson and Randy Burns. Yet while this research effectively demonstrates that contemporary urban Two-Spirit youth are in dire need of support, due to their being more susceptible to certain illnesses and social problems such as insecure housing and poverty, it perpetuates a narrative of victimhood and thus overshadows Two-Spirit people's broader experiences of resilience.

To build from and move beyond such studies, I sought in my research to create an enriched understanding of Two-Spirit youth outside of a framework centered on physical health or social risks so that I could learn how Two-Spirit youth choose to frame their own lives from the different starting points of their own stories. In my experiences attending conferences sponsored by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and socializing with urban Two Spirit youth, I did not meet anyone who spoke only about victimization. Of course many of the people I met had survived difficulties that were mentioned in the previous literature: but their stories did not end with their struggles. In effect, my work took interest in what happens after Two-Spirit youth leave the offices of researchers: What self-knowledges, social networks and communities do Two-Spirit youth already form to understand and support themselves and one another? Given the dynamic, resourceful and intelligent people whom I had met, I knew it would be naïve to think that Two-Spirit youth did not already define their own lives and create their own communities in order to survive in the city. This project attends to the voices of urban Two-Spirit youth to hear and interpret how their stories -- whether similar to or different from those in prior studies -- portray the creative and dynamic lives of a new generation of urban Indigenous people.

1.3 Theories of LGBTQ Indigenous Experiences of Community and Tradition

Contemporary Two-Spirit people often struggle with the complexities of their relationships with their Indigenous communities, whether urban or on-reserve; particularly in terms of how their identities as Two-Spirit people fit, or do not fit into their nations' concepts of tradition and ceremony. The possibilities of their belonging to their communities also hinge on how ideas of nation, tradition and Two-Spirit people's everyday lives are theorized. The community-based activisms and studies cited above echo a wide range of works in the field of Indigenous studies, when they indicate that the question of belonging in Indigenous communities is a central concern in Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people's lives. Among the many Indigenous scholars who have written about the resilience and flourishing of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people, I highlight in this section Craig Womack and Daniel Heath Justice as important guides for theorizing the question of Two-Spirit belonging. Craig Womack argues for a redefinition of the idea of tradition within Indigenous communities that would create room for spaces of radical possibility. Daniel Heath Justice proposes the honouring of traditions within the Cherokee nation and other southeastern Indigenous (Mississippian) nations that he calls "anomaly," and of those traditions' relationships to LGBTQ Indigenous people. But given that the question of Two-Spirit belonging depends largely on the degree to which Two-Spirit people are thought of as part of their Indigenous communities or also a Two-Spirit specific community, addressing the question also requires a critical look at the idea of community.

Two-Spirit people have been fighting to be recognized within their communities for a long time, and that struggle has been stifled by the legacies of colonial violence. As previously mentioned, heteropatriarchal ideas of sexism and homophobia are often present in Indigenous communities today. A crucial way in which Two-Spirit people have been and continue to be

alienated from Indigenous communities is through the use of tradition and ceremony. For instance, the claim that Indigenous LGBTQ people did not exist prior to contact with settlers insinuates that the concept, experience or identity of being LGBTQ is rooted in a non-Indigenous context (Gilley 61; Cameron 124). This claim is an attack on the legitimacy of Two-Spirit people's Indigeneity. This myth is perpetuated by the strategic use of tradition to limit any questioning of Two-Spirit people's exclusion, because it also can be considered disrespectful to question tradition (Cooper 139). Another way that tradition can be used to exclude Two-Spirit people is the enforcement of the myth of a gender binary by elders during spiritual ceremonies. In some communities, women are required to wear skirts or dresses during certain ceremonies and requirements like this have been critiqued and questioned as particularly patriarchal (Deerchild 102; Lawrence 164-165; Martin-Hill 114; Simpson 61-62). However, the requirement still stands in many communities, to the point that a woman who outright refuses to wear a skirt will simply be excluded from participating (Deerchild 102; Martin-Hill 114). When Two-Spirit people want to participate in ceremonies such as these but are forced to choose a gender, or are not recognized as the gender with which they self-identify, they are simply excluded. For these reasons and others, many Two-Spirit people often feel alienated from their own Indigenous communities.

The social enforcement of restrictive values in the name of tradition has caused many Two-Spirit people to seek out communities that are completely accepting of who they are as people. For some Two-Spirit people, this has meant moving from their reserve or rural communities to large urban spaces where they can find other Two-Spirit people and share their stories. Two-Spirit people who already live in urban centers often seek out Indigenous-specific spaces that honour Two-Spirit people in order to create supportive communities. However, even in urban areas, spaces specific to Two-Spirit people are not very common. But the spaces where

Two-Spirit people create community have fostered a remarkable reclaiming of spiritual and ceremonial practices (Gilley 42-43; Wilson 314-315; Wesley 348). Two-Spirit people have begun to reassert traditions and ceremonies in which they can participate according to their sense of their true selves. These traditions and ceremonies are not limited to the spiritual, but reflect a wide array of strategies where Two-Spirit people are reinserting their lives into their Indigenous cultures and communities. The reclamation of the term tradition really opens up possibilities for reclaiming Two-Spirit people's rightful places within their nations.

In his book *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Craig Womack, a Muskogee Creek and Cherokee scholar honours Indigenous literatures by interpreting them in relation to their tribally-specific historical and cultural contexts. He argues strongly that tribally-specific interpretation is the best, or at times the only appropriate method for Native literary criticism. This claim has been taken up by Indigenous literary critics, although it also is challenged complexly by scholars such as Lisa Brooks (258-259), and Tol Foster (276) who honour tribally-specific logics while emphasizing the simultaneous need for comparative, linked and transnational analyses. A key aspect of Womack's analysis, however, is revealing the limitations within the term traditional. He starts by explaining that non-Indigenous anthropologists tended to restrict the term's reference to pre-contact practices among Indigenous peoples. This is problematic given, as he argues, that the reason that Indigenous peoples and their cultures survived the violence of colonialism and genocide was through their abilities to adapt and evolve their traditions (Womack 42). Womack then proposes an alternate definition that does not limit traditionalism to pre-contact times, or to something that has remained completely unchanged or must remain unchanged to count as tradition. In quite strong contrast, Womack encourages his readers to think instead about tradition as "anything that is useful to Indian people

in retaining their worldviews, no matter how much it deviates from what people did one or two hundred years ago.” (42) Womack’s definition gives a lot of power to Indigenous communities: indeed, an incredible responsibility to be actively involved in creating their own contemporary traditions.

Given these investments, Womack’s definition proves especially useful to Indigenous LGBTQ people who wish to re-establish their presence, belonging or roles within their own Indigenous communities. With Womack’s definition in mind, Two-Spirit could be seen as a tradition that does in fact fall in line with the needs of Indigenous communities. Two-Spirit identity was defined by contemporary Indigenous people who saw the need for a term that would honour LGBTQ Indigenous people on Indigenous terms as part of the cultural traditions of their nations.

In his essay “Notes Toward a Theory of Anomaly,” Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice builds upon Womack’s new definition of tradition to propose honouring the Mississippian Indigenous category of anomaly. Justice frames his argument by beginning with the banning of same-sex marriage within the Cherokee nation of Oklahoma. He outlines the illogical queerphobic arguments that representatives of the Cherokee Nation used to silence and erase their own LGBTQ Cherokee citizens (Justice 211). Among the queerphobic arguments used, the idea of traditionalism often was brought forth as a way to exclude LGBTQ Cherokee citizens, despite several non-LGBTQ-identified Cherokee citizens having protested these claims (Justice 213). Justice then uses Womack’s definition of traditionalism as a way to resist queerphobia within Indigenous communities:

Rather than require a clear historical precedent for a queer social role or for a recognized status for same-sex relationships, there are other ways we can attend to the intersections of our present with our sociopolitical history and cultural traditions, one that satisfies Womack's standards of usefulness and still very much privileges the best of our tribal values and principles. We can acknowledge the lived reality of queer Native folks who are contributing their many skills to the continuity of their communities, ceremonial practices, tribal worldviews, languages, politics, sciences and arts... And we can draw on a more expansive understanding of tradition to affirm the significance of same-sex desire as a tribal good. (215-216)

With this statement, Justice sets the stage for his invocation of the Mississippian concept of anomaly, which he argues presents a cultural precedent for the southeastern Indigenous nations among whom the Cherokee and Muskogee are included. Rooted in Mississippian cosmology, the concept of anomaly refers to life forms that transcend and bridge Mississippian categorization of beings, and in doing so present as powerful lived embodiment of difference (Justice 219-220). Reaching beyond a strictly Mississippian context but still referencing it, Justice then argues that anomalous beings, including queer Indigenous people, are essential to the determination of the normative because the normative and the anomalous are mutually constitutive (Justice 221). In this way of thinking, the anomalous is powerful. Justice makes a compelling argument, rooted in traditional, nation-specific Indigenous concepts that LGBTQ people are crucial to Indigenous nations. In terms of Indigenous community responsibilities, Justice compels his Indigenous audiences to care for one another because we are all kin, regardless of how we feel about one another across our differences (Justice 209). In other words, we are all related. Caring for one

another, and in particular for the empowerment of Indigenous LGBTQ people presents an opportunity for what Justice calls “a call to arms, a call to love in Indian country” (Justice 208). Justice concludes by affirming that imperialism and colonialism work to simplify the complexity and diversity of Indigenous communities whose strength lies in complicated differences that ultimately reflect inclusive kinship (Justice 232). Both Womack’s and Justice’s writings open the door to a realm of possibilities wherein Two-Spirit people are already part of their Indigenous communities traditions and communities.

In this thesis, urban Two-Spirit youth’s experiences of Indigenous community and everyday life will be interpreted by using Womack’s definition of tradition and Justice’s analysis of anomaly where they appear to be useful. In particular, interpreting the power of anomaly will help to open up the expansiveness of the term Two-Spirit, which is already apparent in the experiences shared by research participants in the sharing circles that really showcase the term’s original, wholistic definition. My interpretation of Two-Spirit specific communities also applies these concepts. By invoking both tradition and anomaly, I intend to show that Two-Spirit communities are ones that are resilient, constantly evolving and radical. However, before going any further in this analysis, a critical discussion of the idea of community is necessary.

Many different Indigenous organizations, scholars and nations use the term community to refer to a cohesive group of Indigenous people whose members share values, lifestyles and viewpoints. Community is often used to present the illusion of homogeneity and peacefulness within the proposed collective of Indigenous people. In order to think critically about community and complex processes of belonging, it is worth noting that all Indigenous people carry the legacy of colonialism with them differently, and therefore bring their varied experiences of trauma and healing into any shared space, collective activity or community of which they are a part. For

instance in *"Real" Indians and Others*, Bonita Lawrence portrays urban Native people discussing identity issues such as blood quantum and the reclamation of Indigenous spirituality and ceremonies, with some arguing that an element of collectivity was important to their survival (Lawrence 156). However, Lawrence does not explicitly interrogate the concept of Indigenous community but rather leaves it to the reader to imagine what community would look like based on participants' accounts. This quality also shaped my own research. My initial plan for research with Two-Spirit youth intended to ask them about their experiences of, or their desires for community, whether this referred to the Indigenous nations with which they identified or to networks of Two-Spirit / LGBTQ Indigenous youth. Yet as I explain in my analysis of their responses, Two-Spirit youth fractured my expectation of their relationship to community when their words creatively and critically troubled all proposals of community that had been made to them. It seems that the word community may be so taken for granted as a term for describing Indigenous people that research is able to be pursued without interrogation of the term: even in work dedicated to revealing the lateral colonial trauma of exclusion of Indigenous people by Indigenous people.

According to Cris Shore, in sociology "community" is understood in the most basic terms as "a group of people within a bounded geographical area who interact within shared institutions, and who possess a common sense of interdependence and belonging." (Shore) However, Shore continues, as "one of the most widely used yet vague and elusive concepts in social science, community continues to defy precise definition." Rather than attempt to hinge my analysis on a fixed theory of the term community, this thesis investigates instead *how* claims on community are or are not made by Two-Spirit / LGBTQ Indigenous youth. The thesis then interprets youth's narratives as a new basis for re-entering theoretical discussions within Indigenous studies about

the meaning of community to Indigenous people. In order to take into account the colonial history of Indigenous peoples' individual and collective experiences, I argue that we should approach the term community as a site of constant negotiation and multifaceted membership, and that it should not necessarily be imagined as grounded in one geographical location because of the dispersed and mobile realities of urban and reserve life and of migration. Read in these ways, I propose that the term community may be used to express an increasingly decolonizing concept that does not project uniformity or homogeneity over its constituency but leaves room for diversity of membership and dissent among members themselves and with their leadership. This framing more accurately reflects contemporary networks of Indigenous people. In this thesis, community will invoke this open definition that takes into account the varied ways that shared values or collective life can be expressed with regards to Two-Spirit youth. This definition will refer both to the ways that Two-Spirit youth relate to the Indigenous communities with which they self-identify as members, and to their relationships to other Two-Spirit youth or to their possible identification with Two-Spirit communities.

My theory of Two-Spirit community also applies Womack's and Justice's accounts to craft a multifarious understanding of belonging that captures the myriad ways that Two-Spirit people move through their everyday lives and negotiate meaning and existence. Womack's new definition of traditionalism fits quite well with how Two-Spirit people create and re-make Two-Spirit communities that support them without being limited by stagnant ideas of tradition. That is to say, Two-Spirit communities are adept at navigating Indigenous traditions so as to use them for their survival, while simultaneously creating new traditions that maintain their ties and ensure that they thrive in (sometimes) hostile places. The ability of Two-Spirit communities to utilize Indigenous traditions, both historical and contemporary, adds an element of unpredictability and

opens up to the possibilities of anomaly. Two-Spirit communities, like Justice's understanding of anomaly, are capable of intermittently transcending and bridging categorizations of being, and becoming the living embodiment of difference. This anomalous aspect of Two-Spirit communities is not a permanent state, but rather an aspect of how these communities move through time and space by acting on Indigenous traditions, creating new ones and periodically challenging and radically changing understandings of world order among Indigenous peoples. The existence of anomalous beings both works compatibly within, and challenges Indigenous peoples' comprehension of the universe, which can bring about upset, critical self-reflection or collective reflection and, potentially, growth. But as Justice also noted, anomalous beings are sometimes also punished, even harshly, for their disregard of what others consider to be the natural order of the world; thus they also serve a necessary role in the maintenance of the existing world order (Justice 21). Similarly, Two-Spirit communities can be read as absolutely essential to the persistence and changing realities of Indigenous communities: both to solidify them when presenting as difference, and to challenge their form and push for new possibilities. Among the many ways that Two-Spirit communities manifest, they possess new and old expressions of traditionalism; they present anomalous aspects that make them distinctly Two-Spirit; and they remain essential to the existence of Indigenous communities by both upholding and challenging Indigenous understandings of the cosmos.

1.4 Methodology

To come to this understanding of Two-Spirit people and Two-Spirit communities, it was vital that I used Indigenous methodologies to guide the process of data collection and assessment. Given the glaring gap in both Indigenous and queer studies of explorations of urban Two-Spirit youth's experiences of self and community, this study critically centers their voices as an

important part of broader Indigenous communities. To achieve this goal, the project engages and builds upon the burgeoning field of queer Indigenous studies, a field in which “an imagining of radical, decolonial Indigenous GLBTQ2 critiques demands centering Indigenous frameworks and experiences as sites inspiring theory and practice.” (Driskill et al, Introduction 19) As well, it is critical that an investigation into urban Two-Spirit youth’s everyday lives be grounded in Indigenous methodologies so that the findings are not limited to those found and read within a Eurocentric methodology. This thesis is an intervention into queer Indigenous studies that emphasizes the importance of urban Two-Spirit youth and their communities and in this way moves beyond existing literature that speaks to older generations of urban Two-Spirit people.

This research project came into being through my relationship with Jessica Danforth and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN). After I became aware of NYSHN in the last year of my undergraduate studies, I subsequently invited Jessica to participate in our Aboriginal Awareness Week events in Kingston, Ontario, to give a presentation about Two Spirit people and their histories within Indigenous communities. What particularly intrigued me about Jessica’s presentation was her wholistic description of the concept of Two-Spirit as not being limited to sexuality, unlike so much of the literature that I had read on the subject. In a pamphlet entitled “Sexual Health Toolkit: Sexuality and Relationships,” NYSHN defines Two-Spirit as an Indigenous person who balances masculine and feminine genders within one person and who emphasizes their spiritual and social roles within Indigenous communities, which vary according to a person’s Indigenous nation (First Nations Centre/National Aboriginal Health Organization). While I had known vaguely about the concept of Two-Spirit through many non-Indigenous authors, Jessica’s presentation inspired me to continue learning about Two-Spirit people within Indigenous communities as a basis of my thesis work. While researching the mechanisms

perpetuating homophobia within Indigenous communities and ways that this could be broken down, I took inspiration from organizations such as the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. As stated on their website, as an organization “by and for Indigenous youth that works across issues of sexual and reproductive health, right and justice”, NYSHN is committed to Indigenous youth, Two-Spirit people and the work of decolonizing Indigenous communities. As an example of such work, in 2010 NYSHN launched their “Healthy Sexuality and Fighting Homophobia/Transphobia - Native Youth Photography Project.” Several black and white posters were created to feature Two-Spirit youth and Indigenous allies with positive captions that link Two-Spirit people to Indigenous traditions and healthy living. The posters are readily available on their website where NYSHN encourages people to download, print and distribute them widely in order to bring attention to homophobia and transphobia within Indigenous communities. The work that NYSHN does is invaluable: and to date, no other organization exists in Canada that is founded by and for Indigenous youth and that services Two-Spirit people in the same empowering, decolonizing and sex-positive way. Based on these qualities, I proposed conducting research with them as an organization because my desired Indigenous methodology fell in line with their stated principles, and I was gratified when my proposal was accepted. My research question grew out of my engagement with NYSHN and my own commitment to Indigenous communities: If organizations like NYSHN were helping to fight homophobia and transphobia within Indigenous communities, what were the Two-Spirit youth with whom they worked doing to sustain themselves and thrive in their communities? In order to follow the empowering and decolonizing principles of the organization, I also made the decision to talk directly to Two-Spirit youth about their lives rather than focus on strategies that targeted non-Two-Spirit people’s homophobia and transphobia. In

this way I centered their insights when addressing how they could be better supported within the communities to which they claimed belonging.

While imagining what this project might look like, I came to the realization that it must be one that is framed by my own Indigenous methodology. Because I am an Indigenous person, and view the world as such, I knew I would approach my work in that way, but I struggled to put it into words. After beginning to do some research I quickly realized that I was not alone in my struggle as an Indigenous academic. Many Indigenous scholars have written books on the subject of Indigenous people embarking on research with other Indigenous people within the confines of academia. I sought guidance from their journeys in order to guide my own research design and its implementation.

Indigenous academics must contend with the violent and invasive history that many Indigenous communities have endured at the hands of non-Indigenous researchers. On so many different levels, Indigenous communities have been *studied*: from blatantly irresponsible and reckless experimentation by physical scientists, who stole specimens and never returned them or any helpful information gathered from this theft; to the theft of Indigenous intellectual property and its continued use without permission by academics who made careers of such knowledge (Davis 1-2; Kovach 141; L. Smith 66-67). This legacy of violation by academics has left many Indigenous communities extremely skeptical of participating in academic research, and rightly so (Absolon 20; Kovach 27; Wilson 15). Like many Indigenous researchers who have come before, I worried that my research would replicate a problematic neo-colonial relationship by being more beneficial to me as the researcher than to the communities with which I worked.

Over the last few decades, an increasing amount of Indigenous people have attained their doctorates and produced writing on the subject of being an Indigenous person within the

academy. Out of this context, Indigenous people have begun writing about Indigenous methodologies and their application to contemporary conditions facing Indigenous people who aspire to be the researchers in academic contexts that historically excluded them and their peoples' claims to knowledge. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith began the conversation by taking a critical look at Indigenous peoples' colonial experiences with research, focusing on Maori in context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Smith also broaches the issues involved when Indigenous people conduct research with other Indigenous communities. Smith emphasizes the importance of the Maori concept of *whanau*, which refers to a core social unit within Maori society, and of its grounding within *Kaupapa Maori*, which can refer to a body of knowledge and action taken by Maori people on their own behalf (184-187). *Kaupapa Maori* invokes the epistemological and metaphysical foundations upon which a Maori research methodology rests, completely distinct from Western philosophies. For Smith, keeping Maori forms of knowledge paramount is key to creating an Indigenous methodology for Maori people, a sentiment shared by many Indigenous researchers in North America.

Margaret Kovach, Shawn Wilson and Kathleen E. Absolon (Minogizhigokwe) are Indigenous Canadian scholars who have built upon Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work by publishing their research journeys and their realizations of their own Indigenous methodologies. Each researcher found it to be critical that Indigenous research methodologies be guided by an Indigenous epistemology: by doing so, they are decolonizing, they honor relationality and interdependence, and they reflect a wholistic relationship of research to the Indigenous peoples who produce it and benefit from it. Like Smith's emphasis on *Kaupapa Maori*, these researchers privilege Indigenous concepts and frameworks in their research. Kovach, a Saulteaux/Cree

academic, uses a decolonizing lens to develop a Nehiyaw methodology that is centered on Plains Cree knowledge and on her responsibility to protect Nehiyaw knowledge. Stating that “the purpose of decolonization is to create space in everyday life, research, academia, and society for an Indigenous perspective without it being neglected, shunted aside, mocked or dismissed”, Kovach emphasizes that the creation of space for Indigenous people’s existence and worldviews is central to an Indigenous methodology (85). In his book *Research is Ceremony*, Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson writes, “an Indigenous methodology must be a process that adheres to relational accountability. Respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology.” (77) Wilson argues that a commitment to relationships formed during research is an important aspect of honouring Indigenous identity, and grounding of relationships with the land and people shows the necessity of interdependence for survival (80). Part of Wilson’s Indigenous methodology meant being accountable to all those whom he met on his research journey. Kathleen Absolon, an Ojibway scholar from Flying Post First Nation, details her Indigenous methodology in the wholistic form of the petal flower in her book *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know*. To explain her Indigenous methodology, modeled after the petal flower’s ability to maintain a balanced life in the natural world, Absolon states, “Indigenous methodologies are similar in that they call for the recognition and understanding of the natural and spiritual laws that govern their existence and survival.” (49) She states that, much like the petal flower, “the elements of Indigenous worldviews and methodologies are wholistic, relational and interdependent ... The wholistic nature of Indigenous methodologies is what distinguishes them from non-Indigenous methodologies” (Absolon 48, 52). To be more precise, their nature distinguishes them from colonial methodologies that would ignore, stamp out or replace Indigenous worldviews.

Absolon's petal flower analogy makes critical connections between Indigenous methodologies and the connectivity of people with the other-than-human world within Indigenous worldviews. She also emphasizes Indigenous spiritual laws as an integral part of her Indigenous methodology, something relatively untouched in Kovach's and Wilson's works. The wholistic sense of research that Absolon advocates flies in the face of any kind of positivist Western paradigm that expounds some sort of non-bias, like those critiqued by Western feminists (Haraway 580). As well, Absolon argues, Indigenous methodologies are dynamic and constantly evolving, much like Indigenous peoples: they may change from nation to nation, person to person, and project to project.

All of this literature is helpful in guiding my effort as an Indigenous person working in the academy to make a profound difference in the lives of Indigenous people: and in this case, by forming an Indigenous methodology that is appropriate for research with urban Two-Spirit youth. Urban Two-Spirit youth present a methodological problem in that, unlike the Indigenous methodologies just reviewed, no single tribally-specific epistemology can be followed to address urban Two-Spirit youth's specific, varied and complex locations, identifications and histories. I made methodological choices based on my understanding of urban Two-Spirit youth and my relationship with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. NYSHN was more than willing to take part in this research and agreed to help design the data collection. Given the organization's commitment to decolonization and to the resurgence of Indigenous cultural practices, we agreed that the empowerment of urban Two-Spirit youth -- honouring their voices with culturally appropriate methods -- would be central to the research. My primary research methods included centering urban Two-Spirit youth's experiences and knowledges while honouring Indigenous protocols and ceremonial practices that are shared by the diverse Indigenous people participating

in NYSHN. The research location became Toronto, Ontario because this is where NYSHN was based and because I had formed contacts in the area.

At the suggestion of NYSHN, *sharing circles* were chosen as a primary research method to center Two-Spirit youth's experiences and voices. Sharing circles emerge out of discussions about culturally appropriate and decolonizing ways to gather information, like the use of story telling and oral histories within Indigenous methodologies that are addressed by Kovach, Absolon, Wilson and Smith. Sharing circles are not new to Indigenous people. They are based on creating within a group an atmosphere of respect for each other's words by giving each person, one at a time, the space to speak for however long they need (Wilson 41). Kovach says that sharing circles "provide a forum for people to relate their stories in a wholistic fashion that [is] not fragmented by a structured interview process." (Kovach 99) Sharing circles also contribute to Indigenous methodology by honouring the relationality between researcher and participants and by creating the possibility of privileging participants' words through active listening and non-interruption.

The medium of sharing circles also enabled me to structure my research around Indigenous protocols of gift giving and food sharing, which NYSHN advocated as basic for any kind of interactions where knowledge sharing takes place. Food was made available during the sharing circles, and afterwards honorariums, TTC tokens, sage and sweet grass were gifted to the participants as symbols of appreciation. The gift giving process honours Indigenous protocols of reciprocity in relationships and acknowledged Indigenous spiritual practices that utilize food and sacred medicines such as tobacco, sage, and sweet grass (Absolon 126-127; Kovach 140). Questions to be asked during the sharing circles were looked over by representatives from NYSHN and suggestions were incorporated. To suit the sharing circle format, questions were

open-ended and were also constructed to suggest that there were no singular answers. The sharing circles were conducted and transcribed by myself only and all participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect participants' anonymity. The sharing circles were conducted at the offices of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto at the recommendation of NYSHN, which had found it to be a culturally-suitable place to conduct sharing circles. This decision was very important because the Centre also would be more familiar to urban Two Spirit youth than an academic institution and would create an atmosphere that was more likely to reflect the experiences of urban Indigenous people.

I wanted my Indigenous methodology to yield information that would be useful to urban Two-Spirit youth. As Kovach states, "Indigenous research needs to benefit Indigenous people in some way, shape, or form – that is the bottom line. The whole notion of 'knowledge for knowledge's sake' does not fit an Indigenous research framework at this point." (93) While my methods were designed with this intention, and while my account of the sharing circles in this thesis is written with urban Two-Spirit youth in mind as a primary audience, doing work that was responsive to the youth who participated also forced me to rethink my own analytical categories. When designing research that emphasized the importance of Indigenous identity and Two-Spirit belonging, I expected that there would be many youth who self-identified with the term Two-Spirit and who understood the socio-political and historical implications of naming oneself in this way. I also expected that the topic of Two-Spirit community would be familiar to participants and that they would have put prior thought into it. However, when conducting the research it quickly became apparent that while participants were familiar with the idea of Two-Spirit identity connecting Indigeneity with LGBTQ identities, many did not know much of the intellectual, political or historical underpinnings of this term, and some were unsure about whether it applied

to them. A potential limit of this study, then, is that while its intention was to target LGBTQ-identified urban Indigenous youth, using the term Two-Spirit as an organizing category might have been a limiting factor when recruiting participants. Nevertheless, the fact that NYSHN supported the use of Two-Spirit as a research category, and that some participants whom NYSHN helped recruit were unsure of the term's applicability to them, may reflect that this term is familiar to urban Indigenous youth but also remains a category that they leave open to question while still claiming at least a temporary relationship to it. Furthermore, despite my attempts to ask participants about their experiences of or interests in community, or *Two-Spirit community* in particular, many did not seem to have a concrete idea of what these qualities might look like: most responses were hesitant to claim that a Two-Spirit community existed in any concrete sense as distinct from the other communities with which they identified. Nevertheless, as I will examine in the sharing circle transcripts and argue in conclusion, these very gaps between my expectations and their diverse responses provided rich sources of information about the theories and methods claimed today by urban Indigenous youth in Toronto, and they inspire potential areas of further inquiry. As well, and crucially, the Indigenous methodology employed in this project made space for silences and for the ability to speak freely despite the particular questions asked. This allowed participants to contribute knowledge that they deemed appropriate or even to move the conversation completely in a new direction, which immensely benefited my study. Participants also appreciated the following of Indigenous cultural protocols, from the use of sharing circle to gift giving, and the open-ended questions that were asked. One participant pointedly expressed appreciation that the focus of the research was not necessarily based on investigating experiences of trauma. Through an Indigenous methodology, the participants' agency, resiliency and connections to Indigenous identity were brought forth and generated new and exciting

understandings of urban Two-Spirit youth today. Two-Spirit youth are not waiting to be saved, rather they are theorizing their own lives into futures that center Indigenous concepts of nationhood, traditions, and ceremonies!

Chapter 2

A Gray “Way of Life”: Urban Two-Spirit Youth Theorize their Life Experiences

Participants were asked a specific set of questions during each sharing circle. This chapter is organized around reporting the questions asked and the answers of the participants, all of whom have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Two sharing circles were advertised by NYSHN and the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto to occur on two separate dates during the months of September and October in 2011. The first sharing circle drew three participants: Katherine, Laura and Michael. Michael was late arriving to the first sharing circle and as a result he did not get a chance to answer the first two questions. The second sharing circle drew two participants, Jeff and Lindsay, who both answered all of the questions. At the beginning of each circle, all of the participants were asked to introduce themselves in a manner that they felt was appropriate: this was intended to create familiarity between each participant and myself as the researcher, as well as among each other. As reported below, the questions that followed the self-introductions address the meaning and relevance of the category Two-Spirit to the participants, and their experiences or interests in various forms of community and social support. The final, open-ended question invited additional comments, questions, or ideas from the participants.

As mentioned in the prior chapter, two concepts offer important theoretical guidance to my interpretation of participant responses: Craig Womack’s concept of traditionalism, which I will call *new traditionalism* to differentiate it from traditionalism that is strictly historical; and the concept of anomaly developed by Daniel Heath Justice. These two theoretical claims became

significant to this thesis because, as I suggest in what follows, I found many of the participants' responses to resonate with one or both of them. I consider the degree and extent of these resonances in my evaluation of the results of sharing circles and, in the final chapter, of Two-Spirit identity and community more broadly. I propose that the idea of new traditionalism sits at the foundation of what I will call Two-Spirit communities: that is, contemporary communities of people that gather around organizations and events that are named Two-Spirit, while invoking both LGBTQ and Indigenous self-identification and reclaiming a basis within Indigenous cultures to assert Two-Spirit existence. In these spaces, the Two-Spirit concept can be said to be a site of new traditionalism because it is being used to ensure the survival of Indigenous LGBTQ people while reinforcing worldviews rooted within Indigenous culture, regardless of how recently this term was created.

However, I would like to go further and argue that even as Two-Spirit communities act as sites of new traditionalism -- in being fully contemporary and upholding longstanding Indigenous worldviews -- another force is at work to keep these communities constantly shifting and evolving. Moments also occur or people also behave in ways that may be understood as anomalous, in the way that Justice describes, such that they reinforce the idea of Two-Spirit communities while simultaneously challenging the terms of their existence. Justice theorizes that queer Indigenous people can be anomalous within the cultural logics and social practices of Indigenous communities when they bridge or transcend normalized categorizations of social being. I would like to extend this analysis to an arena where Justice did not apply it: to the internal logics and practices of contemporary Two-Spirit communities. I argue that Two-Spirit communities, as I defined them above, also present a *natural order* that produces normative understandings of what is acceptable and unacceptable within them, as decided by their members

and by those who hold positions of power within or over them. In other words, once organized around an identity category, Two-Spirit communities produce their own social norms, and as a result they too become vulnerable to co-optation by anyone who considers themselves to be their elite or vanguard. If Two-Spirit communities ever become spaces in which normative practices and ideals remain unchallenged, then those spaces can become hegemonic: not inherently so, but as readily subject to this power relationship as any other community based around identity politics. Yet, to follow Justice again, I would posit further that anomalous moments and beings appear *within* Two-Spirit communities and that through their actions, those communities' capacity to exert hegemony is challenged. Anomalous challenges force Two-Spirit communities to evaluate their practices and constituencies: yet, simultaneously, they also may be strengthened if they are able to identify and engage with the difference of an anomalous being/action and thereby further clarify the boundaries or limitations of their communities. In this way, anomalous beings are necessary to the existence and dynamism of Two-Spirit communities. Taken together, these concepts of new traditionalism and anomaly, as drawn from Indigenous critical theorists, can help to reveal the complex ways that Two-Spirit communities are created and recreated as evidenced by the examples given by participants in the sharing circles.

Crucially, my analytical framework is inspired in many overlapping ways by the claims of urban Indigenous youth. My commitment to Indigenous research methodologies directed my analysis of participants' words to recognize urban Indigenous youth as theorists who communicate unique Indigenous knowledges from their everyday lives. As their interpreter, I took the participants' words as guides to my own thinking. But letting the words have this effect shifted my original thinking to the analysis I now offer. The analytical framework I explained above arose only *after* the sharing circles ended, once I began studying their results and asking

myself how the participants' words resonated with, challenged or moved beyond existing theories of Indigenous gender, sexuality and epistemology. The shift in my analysis is made clear by the content of the questions I asked during the sharing circles, and by their contrast with the participants' distinctive responses. My original research questions meant to track the use and meaning of the term Two-Spirit as an identity category, which came from my interest in Two-Spirit organizing and specifically in the work of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. But the results of the sharing circles led me to reflect on the usefulness of the term Two-Spirit and even on the assumption that a Two-Spirit community existed. When I wrote the questions for the sharing circles, I followed two main assumptions: that participants would identify strongly as Two-Spirit and that they therefore would understand themselves to be a part of a Two-Spirit community. Yet the sharing circles demonstrated that urban Indigenous youth often have a precarious relationship with identifying as Two-Spirit. Furthermore, the participants did not seem to hold to a notion of Two-Spirit community in the sense of a physical place, or even of ways of gathering around Two-Spirit identity outside the context of service delivery organizations. Because these two assumptions inhered in the questions, the sharing circles directed participants to speak to the same assumptions about identity and community. Yet the critical agency of the participants, and their understanding of the stakes in our discussion, quickly became apparent. Through direct statements or evasion of the term Two-Spirit, participants answered questions on distinctive terms that were not necessarily bound to the questions and that raised new lines of thought. The following subsections are titled with the original questions to show the reader how those questions and their presumptions elicited broader and nuanced responses. By using their agency to answer questions as they saw fit, the participants demonstrated unique understandings of identity, community and their own experiences, which my analysis draws out and builds in to

this project's conclusions. As we will see, the key overarching question participants directed me to consider a question that I examine at greater length in the third chapter: Do Two-Spirit communities exist and if they do, on what terms?

2.1 What does Two-Spirit mean to you?

The question "What does Two-Spirit mean to you?" was meant to elicit responses that would give insight into everyday understandings of the concept of Two-Spirit. I wanted to ask what this concept meant to each participant because of the seeming disconnect between the academically-defined description of the word and the lived realities of this identity. The responses to this question varied in meaning but generally described Two-Spirit as a concept that linked Indigeneity and LGBTQ identity. Only one participant, Lindsay, did not explicitly cite Indigeneity as crucial to the meaning of the term. Some participants noted that Two-Spirit was not the only term with which they identified, and one participant had a rather shaky relationship with the term. Another participant also connected the meaning of Two-Spirit to their personal experience of living in spaces that are not easily defined.

In the first sharing circle, Laura's response to the question reflected on varying definitions. She stated:

I do identify as Two-Spirited but there is debate that I hear around it. I always feel like I need to kind of add an asterisk beside it or something. I also identify as queer, lesbian, dyke fairly interchangeably. Claiming it [Two-Spirit] is a kind of political project, operating as part of the wider queer community just to create that visibility. I've had other Native people questioning themselves, saying they don't choose Two-Spirited because they don't understand the traditional roles behind it, so they don't want to

prematurely claim it. But at the same time, that term in the English language only came to be in, like, the early '90s. I also have that understanding that like the kind of combined gender roles, and it's difficult to try and differentiate gender performance versus sexual orientation, but I feel it does kind of go hand-in-hand. I can read it through a sort of broader queer lens the same way that I was the tomboy growing up. I date women and I identify as a woman. I've seen surveys circulating within the Native community where, it's like "check off one gender: male, female, or Two-Spirited." I normally end up just checking female and Two-Spirited. I don't know whether that's ok but I still feel socialized as a woman, but not necessarily "feminine."

Laura talks about the ways that she understands Two-Spirit in formal terms and then how it relates to her in terms of her own lived experience. She also mentions that she equally identifies with Two-Spirit and the terms queer, lesbian and dyke. Her response shows that, for her, Two-Spirit is a useful identifier on some occasions but can be equally as useful as other terms to describe sexual and gender identity. In this context, Laura also identifies with the category "woman," states explicitly that she feels that she was socialized as a woman, and expresses her desire to date women. Laura's depiction of herself as a child includes identifying as a "tomboy," which infers that she did not fit neatly into the gendered stereotypes set up for children who were assigned female or who identified as girls. She reiterates that as an adult, she still does not identify with the concept of femininity. In the same breath, she recounts a story about a survey circulated among Indigenous people that she recently encountered. The survey reveals a great deal about how Two-Spirit is popularly conceptualized when the options it provided for identification by sex were "male," "female" and "Two-Spirit." This language fails to comprehend

that the Two-Spirit concept was not meant necessarily to refer exclusively to sex, but rather to many different aspects of a person's social identity. By appearing to have assumed that Two-Spirit people do not identify as either the male or female sex, the survey reveals another place of tension between the original conceptions of the term Two-Spirit and popular understanding of it today. Laura expresses her frustration with the limitations of these options by considering the fact that she identifies as both a woman and as Two-Spirit, although she does not identify with markers of femininity.

Laura's story highlights the dangers of limiting the definition of the term Two-Spirit and how it can affect Two-Spirit people's access to community services. When Two-Spirit is only understood in terms of gender rather than wholistically as many expressions of Indigenous genders, sexualities and spiritualities, then it effectively excludes many people from identifying as Two-Spirit. This would mean that service providers unintentionally fall short of recognizing a large portion of people who identify as Two-Spirit who are accessing their services. Nevertheless, when Laura responded to the survey's strict definition by deciding to check off all that applied to her rather than just one, she blurred the boundaries of gender and exploded the survey's presumptive definition of Two-Spirit people. Laura's understanding of the term also references its inception in the early 1990s, showing that she is somewhat familiar with the way in which the term came into existence: she was the only participant to reference the term's origins in that sense. With that in mind it is important to note the Laura calls the use of Two-Spirit a "political project" that is about visibility. Since the original conception of the term was to highlight a person's Indigenous and LGBTQ identity, it would make sense that Laura would call the use of the term political. As noted above, one of the political aspects of the term's initial definition was to allow for some of the flexibility Laura expresses, and her response reflects the evidence that

even when Indigenous LGBTQ people take up the term some do not identify as Two-Spirit exclusively (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 3-4). Yet Laura also indicates that she felt comfortable enough identifying with the term to respond to a call for sharing circles designed for Two-Spirit urban youth. Because this project originated with the idea that many urban Indigenous youth would identify strongly as Two-Spirit, questions were framed around this concept. But a response like Laura's, which indicates the flexibility or exchangeability of the term for one who uses it, was elicited by centering this project around the term. This indicates that, at least for Laura, familiarity with the more expansive early meaning of Two-Spirit being reduced within social services does not prevent her from recognizing herself in the term or claiming it in her own ways.

Interestingly, Laura notes that other Indigenous people feel hesitant to use the term Two-Spirit because they do not understand the Indigenous practices or teachings that are assumed to go along with claiming that identity. Here her words invoke an assumption that there are particular roles associated with being Two-Spirit and that in order to use the term one would need to know the responsibilities associated with it. Arguably, there are no specific responsibilities associated with the term because it was designed to refer to Indigeneity and queerness, and to the ceremonial and spiritual roles that may be associated with this quality in the specific cultural traditions of a person's Indigenous nation. The existence or nature of any responsibilities would depend on the nation of the person identified as Two-Spirit. This would make it nearly impossible to find Indigenous cultural teachings that are specifically Two-Spirit. But given that some Indigenous people seem to assume that the term itself refers to specific roles and responsibilities, the possibility exists that this expectation -- and the inability to meet it -- might lessen the likelihood of people self-identifying with the term.

In the second sharing circle, Jeff related his understanding of Two-Spirit by sharing a personal story about his historical sense of identification. Jeff stated: "I've been described as a contrarier by family members ever since I was young. There's negative connotations to it, but I just see it as everything is gray completely, so it's just a way of life. I don't know what our roles were traditionally but I know that in the future our roles are going to be very important." By referring to "gray" as "a way of life," Jeff appears to be describing the experience of living within spaces that are not easily defined. As well, I argue, his identification with living in "gray" spaces defies definitions or categorizations that would limit his potential to define his own "way of life," which now includes being comfortable moving through life in an undefined manner. Jeff then states that he is unaware of traditional roles, but that he feels a change coming in the future where people like him will be increasingly valued within Indigenous communities. While the question specifically asked about the term Two-Spirit, it is important to note that Jeff doesn't actually use the term in his response. Instead, he invokes "our," which points to some affinity with a group of people similar to him, perhaps others who also would describe experiencing the world through a "gray" lens or "way of life." Although Jeff says that he is unaware of "traditional roles" for people like himself, his gray way of life potentially could be read as a contemporary expression of traditional roles for Indigenous people who identify similarly to Jeff. In Jeff's recollection, we see him link his ability to navigate gray spaces with his having been identified by his family at a young age as a "contrarier". He said that while this was perceived initially as a negative attribute, over time he re-imagined it as a positive attribute. With the word contrarier Jeff suggests that his family identified him as going against conventions, not adhering to the social norms they may have upheld, in contrast to Jeff's sense of self. Jeff's narrative inspires me to think about how within an Indigenous social context, being labeled a contrarier -- going against popular opinion

and social conventions -- may be understood as an aspect of living a gray way of life. I submit that the *gray spaces* of which Jeff speaks should be thought of in a wholistic sense, as not bound by the physical and always including the mental, spiritual and emotional ways that people experience life. As I take up again in conclusion, Jeff presents an example of living a gray way of life in Indigenous communities that can and should be recognized, honored and valued.

2.2 Do you feel that the term Two-Spirit reflects you and your experience; and if so, how?

In the first sharing circle, Katherine and Laura talked in relation to one another about their experiences of the complexities of identifying with the term Two-Spirit. Katherine's relationship with the term was tenuous and led to her using it only in particular instances. In response to Laura's comments about the history of the term, Katherine stated:

Yeah, cause you're right, Two-Spirited is a recently created term. It has existed in the past just under different words or understandings, so this is kind of a very modern term. I have a really strong tie to the queer community as a queer person, as I kind of understand my role within that. I understand my role as a First Nations person too and I've had lots of Two-Spirited girlfriends and relatives as well. But finding myself in the niche that bridges the both of them is something I understand. I'm not fully there yet in committing myself to the term, so I understand that it applies to me, but I don't know how to make it my own just yet. In that way I use that term when I want to be specific about what culture I come from. Being an Aboriginal person and meeting another, you kind of have to qualify who you are and where you're from, so that's kind of a good way to bridge

myself into that conversation. Also finding where I belong in the spectrum of being both First Nations and being a member of the queer community.

With these words Katherine speaks with enthusiasm, but also ambivalence about applying Two-Spirit identity to her life. She says that living in “the niche that bridges” a queer identity and an Indigenous identity “is something I understand”, and that as a result she recognizes that the term Two-Spirit “applies to me”. She also suggests that in her Indigenous circles, her “Two-Spirited girlfriends and relatives” link her intimately to people who may be described by the term. But by hesitating to use the term Two-Spirit she remains reluctant to present as “fully ... committing” to the term, even as she notes that it is very useful for introducing herself to other Indigenous people in a way that makes her queer and Indigenous identities explicit.

In the second sharing circle, Jeff addressed the degree to which Two-Spirit reflected his life by speaking about the importance of artists who deal with Two-Spirit subject matter. Jeff stated:

There’s this artist Kent Monkman who did an installation called “Dance to the Berdashe”, and as he described it, they would dance around a Two-Spirit person as some kind of ritual. Their roles were cemented in that society as people who had dual roles so that they could ... do certain ceremonies ... and I just looked at his website. There’s a time that’s erased from history because of colonialism and there’s people nowadays who don’t have a Two-Spirit belief which is sad.

Jeff draws a connection to understanding Two-Spirit as referencing history through the artist Kent Monkman's depictions of an era in which Two-Spirit people were honored with dances and specific ritualized roles by their peoples. Jeff argues that colonialism played a part in erasing this history from Indigenous peoples' knowledge, and he laments that this then translates into the contemporary erasure of those histories and potentially of Two-Spirit people within contemporary Indigenous nations. Importantly, Jeff's understanding of the historical roles he recounts for Two-Spirit people reference a sort of duality: although he does not go into detail about what this entails, he suggests that Two-Spirit people performed some form of dual role within particular ceremonies within Indigenous communities. Jeff's response also shows the importance of Indigenous artists in creating visibility for Two-Spirit people and issues of Indigeneity and sexuality that Jeff then would use as a way to describe how he related to the term Two-Spirit. Jeff speaks revealingly about how Kent Monkman's art is valuable to him for having helped him articulate his ideas about Two-Spirit people and their fit within Indigenous communities, both historically and in the present.

In the first sharing circle's conversation, there was more of an emphasis on the idea that identifying as Two-Spirit involves some sort of bridging of Indigenous and queer communities, and that this role can be difficult. Although no specific names are offered, each participant mentioned the personal significance to them of understanding that Two-Spirit persons or roles existed in Indigenous societies of the past under various names. The second sharing circle focused more on discussing both historical and contemporary ceremonies within Indigenous societies that were specific to Two-Spirit people. While again, participants made no mention of knowing the exact roles that Two-Spirit people may have taken historically, there was an emphasis in conversation on the ways in which Two-Spirit people's roles within Indigenous

communities would be more highly valued in the future. The participants' answers in both circles points to the vagueness around the understanding of Two-Spirit roles historically. This vague understanding translates, for Katherine, into a tenuous relationship with identifying with the term in the present. However Jeff's identification with Two-Spirit was only fortified by finding art that inferred that Two-Spirit people held special roles historically within Indigenous communities. In these different reactions to the lack of historical specificity of Two-Spirit roles we gain further insight into the intricacies of identifying as Two-Spirit and the complexities of creating Two-Spirit community. While the desire for specificity of Two-Spirit narratives ranged between participants, the need to connect to historical Two-Spirit contexts remained consistent. LGBTQ Indigenous youth identify with the term with varying degrees of commitment and with different points of reference, due in part to the importance the term places on tradition even as its ability to refer to many Indigenous nations leaves the specific traditions to which Two-Spirit people might connect open to question.

2.3 In what kinds of communities do you feel you are a part?

The third question asked in the sharing circles resonated strongly with the participants' opening words, when each circle began by asking participants to introduce themselves in whatever way they felt comfortable. In this section I combine data from the introductions with answers to the noted question because participants did not always identify their nation, community or other affiliations simultaneously in the beginning of each sharing circle. In what follows, the affiliations that each participant named will be listed, but given that the participants in the first sharing circle had much more to say to this question than those in the second, their words will take up the majority of my discussion. In an Indigenous context, situating oneself is an Indigenous way of acknowledging "who you are, what you're doing and why." (Absolon 71) This

practice helps other Indigenous people, and people in general to place where another person belongs in the world and, correspondingly, to know something about the positions from which they speak. Participants in the sharing circles identified with a variety of communities, which gave a more complete picture of the kinds of spaces that they frequented and provided relevant information for interpreting how each one framed their worlds and identities. That each participant identified as part of a variety of communities is indicative of the complex ways that contemporary Two-Spirit people create their worlds and negotiate belonging. However, as I will examine, no participants named Two-Spirit community as one in which they lived their lives: a realization that sparked me to reflect on the very existence of such a community. Eventually I would begin to think more seriously about my assumptions about Two-Spirit community reflected the rigidities of colonial boundary-making rather than the fluidity of Indigenous ways of knowing.

Katherine identified as Ojibway and Dene and as part of a “Native community” and a “queer community”, a “new residents of Toronto community”, and a “university community”. Laura identified as Ojibway and part of a “D.I.Y. mechanic community”, “fine arts community”, “graduate student community”, “experimental music jazz community”, and as a community of Ontarians. In these responses, the use of the word community was explicit. Participants listed other groups and organizations to which they belonged but did not explicitly label them as communities. Michael identified as Ojibway and said he was definitely a part of his reserve community in northwestern Ontario. Jeff identified as Cree but did not specifically state any of the groups to which he belonged as a community. All of the participants, with the exception of Lindsay mentioned their Indigenous ties, whether those were to specific nations or to less formal groups. Lindsay was the only participant to solely identify herself by noting the importance of the

sexual and gender identities of her friends. In answer to the question, Lindsay stated: “I have a lot of friends from different backgrounds but most of my friends are gay or transgendered. I don’t really know what community.” Lindsay answer is important because it shows that the concept of community belonging is not always intelligible. She, like Jeff, does not explicitly name belonging to any communities but instead situates herself through her relationships with her friends. This is interesting because it shows that while many Indigenous youth who participate in activities sponsored by Indigenous organization choose to identify as a member of an Indigenous group, not all perhaps feel the need or feel comfortable enough to introduce themselves in this way. As noted in the first chapter, there are many reasons why Indigenous people, and particularly LGBTQ Indigenous people may not feel a strong connection to their Indigenous community, however that manifests; Lindsay’s answer to this question may reflect that lived reality.

My reading of participant responses to questions about community belonging suggest that feeling connections to different communities and being able to name them are as important analytically as feeling a disconnection from certain communities or leaving them unnamed. The omission of particular communities from participant responses is significant to my analysis. While an omission does not necessarily connote negatively, it is important to recognize it as either a lack of recognition or an intentional silence. The fact that none of the participants mentioned that they felt a specific connection to a Two-Spirit community is important because it suggests either that, for the participants, such a community does not exist, or that they did not have a strong enough affinity to this notion for it to be worth mentioning when asked about community belonging. The most important piece of information here is that participants felt that some groups, organizations and identifications warranted being called a community while others were not. This insight into their responses reflects the idea that community is an elusive concept

that is context-specific and difficult to define. In fact, it is even worth asking the question of whether or not participants would have referred to community at all, had it not been specified in the question being asked.

Michael pointed out the limitations of his experiences within Toronto's mainstream gay community. He stated: "The gay community doesn't really have much of anything... to be honest it's more just sex for me. I can't really find a gay friend that I can have as a friend, they always want something more... so... it's really hard that way too to find a gay friend." Michael's anecdote relates interestingly to the stories of Randy Burns and Alex Wilson (as noted in chapter one) in which they spoke of their negative experiences within mainstream LGBTQ social spaces and movements. Burns' story of feeling ostracized by acts of racism and Wilson's sense of never having been fully accepted by the mainstream, urban LGBTQ social spaces are probably ones that Michael could understand, based on his stated feeling of disconnection. For Michael, Toronto's mainstream gay scene is limited to sexual gratification and makes it incredibly difficult for him to form platonic friendships: an admission on his part that sounds remorseful because of his emphasis that "the gay community doesn't really have much of anything." While sexual gratification is important and is a need that is being met by that community, Michael's story makes it clear that a multifaceted connection that includes friendships would be ideal in seeking out communities of support. Whereas participants felt supported by the different communities to which they named connections, they also noted that no single community fulfilled all of their needs.

Participants tended to express that different communities fulfilled different needs. Each named community supported participants in a variety of ways that ultimately fulfilled some stated need. The needs of each participant were unique, but the limitations of those communities and

their capacity to meet participants' needs are also important to take into consideration. Some participants alluded to such limitations, while others more directly identified them. For instance, Katherine put the limitations of community very succinctly: "I guess the communities, when you list them off like that, they fill different parts of my life. I mean mostly why I'm part of them is because I feel supported. I feel a sense of belonging in some kind of way. You know, it's not always complete." Although Katherine's need to feel belonging within a community appears to have been satisfied by her continued participation within certain groups, she is quick to note that her sense of belonging is not completely fulfilled by one community alone but required participation in multiple communities. She felt a certain sense of acceptance in each group that might be limited, but that remained valuable.

Laura also noted that she appreciated opportunities, such as events where she would feel surrounded by Indigenous people because of how rarely she experienced that while growing up in a city. Laura said:

As a city Nish, I've never lived on the rez, so I never experienced a feeling of being surrounded that feels comfortable. When I do get those moments, like this queer radical Indigenous take over of Ottawa at the beginning of July 2011 at the Women's World, it was hilarious and ridiculous and awesome. I think a lot of communities that I am a part of do respect and acknowledge other parts of my identity.

Laura expressed that as an urban Indigenous person, getting the opportunity to experience the feeling of a strong Indigenous community, particularly a community of queer Indigenous youth, made her feel incredibly happy. The convergence of queer Indigenous youth created a community

that fulfilled Laura's needs. She also stated directly afterward that many people in the communities to which she belongs were accepting of her identifying as both Indigenous and queer. Having just described her experience of Indigenous queer community, Laura shows here the importance to her of the acceptance of all aspects of her identity by other Indigenous people. Interestingly, however, Laura does not describe this community to which she refers as a Two-Spirit group, but specifically as a queer Indigenous convergence. This is another instance in which the respondents did not privilege Two-Spirit over other identity categories, even as they attested to the importance in their lives of communities that supported linking their sense of identity as queer and Indigenous people. As well, responses to this question indicated the importance of belonging to multiple communities for nearly all participants in the sharing circles.

2.4 How do you want to see your communities further supported?

This question was meant to elicit responses from participants about specific ideas that they might have had in regards to how their stated communities could be supported. The question assumed that the idea of a Two-Spirit community existed for each participant, and that asking how their communities could be supported also brought to mind how those communities could support them as individuals. Some participants answered by addressing their experience searching for Two-Spirit friendly spaces, while others seemed to be reflecting on this question for the first time.

In the first sharing circle, Michael reflected on his experiences since moving to Toronto, which included feeling like there were many resources available to support him. Michael referred to "the gay community" and "the Native community" in his response:

To be honest, I think both communities in Toronto are pretty well supported. I can only think of the two, the gay community and the Native community. Quite a bit in Toronto. I think it's elsewhere, like on our reserves, where we need more support. No one's ever come out on my reserve, and when I came out there was a few people that came out after me. But in Toronto, personally, I think we're pretty well supported. I guess I just moved here, so I don't really know, but I've gotten quite a bit of support since I've been here.

While Michael's response to this question suggests that he perceives a significant amount of support in the city, his response is framed by his experience of living on-reserve where he feels that not many resources exist for LGBTQ Indigenous people and where he feels that such support should be directed. Michael's indication that he was the first person he knew who had come out while living on his reserve suggests that other LGBTQ Indigenous people may not reveal their identities in reserve communities, because of a perceived absence of other LGBTQ Indigenous people, a lack of social support for this decision or other factors.

Katherine's response offered some direct and concrete recommendations for creating support for Two-Spirit people, even as her response highlighted the ambiguity of determining what a Two-Spirit community would be or would need. She stated:

I think the things that are really helpful to communities is the idea of having a safe space, especially if we were trying to build a Two-Spirited community. Having some place to go that is yours and you know is inclusive of who you are in creating a sense of comfort is really important in order to be able to start identifying with that community. I think it's really helpful. Finding some ways to identify the community as well, if I was looking for

a Two-Spirited community in Toronto... I know that the 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations is an organization, but what if I want to meet friends to hang out with? How would I go about finding those friends being a new person in Toronto? The idea of networking is also really important. But not necessarily, I mean some people don't want to network or meet people for various reasons.

Katherine directly suggests creating opportunities for people who identify as Two-Spirit to socialize in spaces that also would incorporate ideas of safe space in order to foster an environment that would make participants feel welcome and comfortable. She also notes that the Two-Spirit organizations that she believes exist in Toronto are limited: in the case of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, which is an organization based on social service delivery and particularly on HIV/AIDS-related services, Katherine implies that this would not be a place she feels she could go "to meet friends to hang out with". Katherine appears to be seeking a Two-Spirit space outside of service delivery that focuses on fostering networking and relationships among Two-Spirit people. At once, Katherine's words appear to acknowledge that Indigenous people will take up Two-Spirit identity if social contexts exist to facilitate doing so. By arguing that "if we were trying to build a Two-Spirit community ... creating a sense of comfort is really important in order to be able to start identifying with that community", Katherine acknowledges that not all Indigenous people for whom Two-Spirit identity could be an option currently identify that way. At the same time, she implies that the degree to which people will take up this identity will depend on how much the identity is given a sense of community. In Katherine's words about the current tenuousness of Two-Spirit community, we see the relevance of Two-Spirit identity to her sense of self, the open question of the degree to which this identity will connect to other

Indigenous people, and the way that this question hinges on whether spaces exist that invoke Two-Spirit identity as a community.

Laura's response spoke to a "feeling of isolation" that contextualized her efforts to make connections with other Two-Spirit people across many social geographies. Laura stated:

Two-Spirited community is something I was looking for in Toronto and now that I'm older and a bit more comfortable, I've got a better idea of how to reach them. But I don't think it was until I added Jessica Yee on Facebook that I actually figured out what's happening. Now I know about this place [the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto] and awesome stuff is always happening. I knew the Native Canadian Centre existed, but on their website there really wasn't much about the youth program, so it can be hard to find until you already meet people. Some friends say "You're the only Native person I've ever met," so there's a feeling of isolation. Toronto is one of those cities that you have to dig hard for a while until you find what you are looking for eventually, but it might take a long time. I know I could find people in Ottawa. In smaller cities -- I like to complain about St. John's a lot, but friends have also looked at me like, "Yeah you actually are the only one." I think about coming back to Toronto for the week, and I'm like "radical Nish everywhere" and it's awesome! But in St. John's, I'm one of three Nish.

Laura talks first about the difficulty of her search for Two-Spirit community in Toronto. While being "older" helped her to feel more comfortable about her identity and about seeking out resources, she says that connecting online to Two-Spirit advocates and activists (like Jessica [Yee] Danforth from NYSHN) helped her become more aware of what other Two-Spirit people

were doing around Canada. Laura's reference to having to "dig hard" indicates that for her, Two-Spirit connections in Toronto were not easily accessed. Laura's comments on Indigenous presence or visibility in cities highlight the encompassing reality of Indigenous erasure in Canadian society, and the need for a critical mass of Indigenous people to exist for Two-Spirit resources to form. Her reference to the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto's youth program is important because here she indicates that where an Indigenous critical mass exists and Indigenous organizations form to serve it, the question of whether service organizations are welcoming of Two-Spirit people remains open in the absence of any visible markers of acceptance.

As well, the compounding of Laura's feelings of isolation by her non-Indigenous friends insisting that they did not know any Indigenous people other than her corroborates Indigenous scholars of Indigenous migration. As Bonita Lawrence and Renya Ramirez argued, the experience of Indigenous absence or erasure forms a push factor for Indigenous migration, not only from reserves to cities but also from smaller, regional cities (St. John's) to national or global cities (Ottawa, Toronto). Laura's words also affirm Randy Burns and Alex Wilson by indicating why and how LGBTQ Indigenous organizing has taken shape first, or most visibly, in the largest cities of settler states: not only are pressures of life in a colonial society pushing urban migration, but the subsequent critical mass of LGBTQ Indigenous people in large cities also pulls Laura, and presumably other people, who seek a sustainable and dynamic LGBTQ Indigenous or Two-Spirit community. In other words, Laura's story joins Michael's in suggesting that when self-identified Two-Spirit / LGBTQ Indigenous resources do not exist in a city, patterns of migration caused by the social invisibility elsewhere of Indigenous people, or of LGBTQ Indigenous specifically, lead LGBTQ Indigenous youth to seek or invent those resources as part of what it means to arrive in a city and make it their home. In sum, Laura's story also suggests that Katherine's

recommendations for a well-established Two-Spirit environment that fosters safe space would be very beneficial to Two-Spirit youth in Toronto or other sites of youth migration. A Two-Spirit specific place for networking and socializing most definitely would address Laura's feelings of isolation and her need to dig for Two-Spirit resources.

2.5 How would you like to see Two-Spirit communities supported?

Participants shared their desire for all organizations to be accountable and make "pro-Two-Spirited" commitments in order for Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people to know that they are supported. In light of the environment of heteronormativity witnessed by participants in Indigenous social media spaces and sexual education initiatives, one participant was relieved to discover literature created by Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people that could help her think in new ways about community. In these ways, participants are re-imagining their participation within Indigenous spaces by inserting themselves into ceremonies and traditions in innovative ways that challenge their erasure and normative understandings of gender and sexuality.

In the first sharing circle, in answer to "How would you like to see Two-Spirit communities supported?" the initial responses included Laura suggesting dance parties, Michael suggesting a dating site, and Katherine stating that she would like it if First Nations communities took the initiative to build on-reserve communities that are supportive of Two-Spirit people. The discussion then led to a few more statements that focused on the relationships of Two-Spirit people to their broader Indigenous communities or nations. For instance, Katherine extended her comments by examining why she thinks it is important that organizations state explicitly that they are Two-Spirit positive:

Urban related, I would love it if everyone took a stand and was pro-Two-Spirited people, whether it's at the national, provincial, regional level, or service delivery level. If they created a positive space, then people would feel more comfortable to be themselves and not have to migrate to the cities to feel at ease being Two-Spirited. I don't really know if that's the case for this generation, but my uncle he is Two-Spirited. He's been living with my uncle [named redacted] for however long, but their story is that they had to go to an urban center because staying in Yellowknife was not an option because it was just too dangerous for them to be there. There was too much gossip, too much old-school Christian values, and too much of a misunderstanding of what it is to be Two-Spirited, gay, lesbian... I would like it if everyone took a hard-line stance of being pro-Two-Spirited.

In this response, Katherine touches upon the realities of migration for Two-Spirit people, by speaking of the generation before her: in order to express and live the life of Two-Spirit person, it was absolutely critical to move to an urban center to find a less threatening environment. Before this story, Katherine also noted that she is not sure if this migration pressure is felt the same way for her generation, but it most certainly was the case for her Two-Spirit uncle and for others in older generations, as exemplified by the writings of Burns and Wilson.

Katherine's statement was followed by Laura addressing her sense of heteronormativity within Indigenous communities and her excitement at the emergence of Queer Indigenous studies in academia. She states:

I see a lot of heteronormativity happening even within marginally-progressive Native communities. People who get the loudest voices are often the ones that will be blogging about their dating life and how they need to find a good Native man. Sometimes it just starts feeling like “blah blah blah straight blah blah blah” pretending that [Two-Spirit] doesn’t exist ... I’ve never lived on the rez so I’m not sure, but you see queer youth community stuff happening at places like the 519 [Project in Toronto]. I haven’t really seen any sort of the same discussions happening in academia, but I did a whole happy dance when *Queer Indigenous Studies* got published, just published a couple months ago, because before that it was all by white German guys. It’s hard to say exactly what we need, but I think having a Two-Spirited youth group would be a big start. Also making sure that it’s well publicized by putting it on the websites of Native organizations. And not that that it’s not important, but it’s always like “hey Native kids, if you’re hooking up make sure that you use a condom” and it’s always framed in a very hetero way.

Laura’s response talks about the inadvertent alienation of Two-Spirit people from Indigenous communities when the latter erase the existence of Two-Spirit people. Whether or not this alienation is identical to what Burns and Wilson described, the effect is similar in that contemporary Two-Spirit youth do not feel entirely welcome in some Indigenous communities. Whereas Burns experienced outright social exclusion, Laura is telling a story of how Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous youth experience erasure through the assumption of heterosexuality. This is further reiterated when prominent Indigenous bloggers frame relationship discussions as occurring only between men and women, and when sexual health campaigns aimed at youth are framed by assumptions of heterosexual desire and sexual practice. Laura’s excitement about the

publishing of *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* (Driskill et al) is because the book offers her insight into how LGBTQ Indigenous and Two-Spirit people are theorizing themselves into their Indigenous communities, rather than being erased.

In the second sharing circle, Jeff and Lindsay responses spoke predominantly about the relationship between art and visibility for LGBTQ Indigenous people. Jeff extended his prior comments to emphasize how artists and musicians act to transform Indigenous subjectivity and cultural practice:

Artists, musicians, people who are really going out of their way to do innovative stuff and trying to find a new language, that's the people that I respect. Maybe breaking rules and stuff, I know personally I've kind of done things on the fly with my hand drum, singing like a woman on a hand drum. And being really artsy, like people like Kent Monkman, and just being really bold-faced and opening up conversations and discussing people who are doing innovative things.

Jeff's response to this question provided an important moment of reflection on his appreciation of boundary-breaking actions as significant to his sense of self and to the way he relates to LGBTQ or Two-Spirit Indigenous experience. By invoking his acts of "[doing] things on the fly with my hand drum, singing like a woman on a hand drum", Jeff names a specific instance in which he acts to make gender boundaries more flexible within Indigenous cultural practices that resonate as tradition, in the senses discussed in Chapter One. Through such acts Jeff is showing that for him, gender roles are fluid and non-binary; and by offering this argument in context of the sharing circle he suggests that it is important to him in terms of supporting Two-Spirit people or the

possibility of Two-Spirit community. As well, Jeff's reference to "breaking rules" is important because he then directly references an example of what he might call living in gray spaces, to use the language he originally invoked as part of his self-introduction. In many Indigenous communities there are rules governing ceremonies that dictate what kinds of songs and instruments are permitted for men or women to use. By briefly mentioning that he has, on a whim, sung "like a woman" on his hand drum, Jeff indicates importantly that his participation in ceremonies includes new and dynamic ways of thinking about and practicing tradition. In the moment that Jeff decides to cross those boundaries, he enters and performs within a new gray space. In this way, the ideas of "breaking the rules" and living a gray "way of life" can be associated with one another: new traditions are being made within the spaces that Two-Spirit people decide are open to them. This is a deliberate way that Jeff is creating community spaces where Two-Spirit people can express themselves without hesitation.

2.6 Other comments, questions or ideas?

Participants used this question as an opportunity to explore the thoughts that they had in the sharing circles a little further. This question really highlighted the topics and conversations that the participants were most interested in discussing. Participants argued for both queer and Indigenous communities to see identity as fluid rather than linear. They shared their personal experiences witnessing a critical shift in Indigenous communities around the acceptance of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people that had not been experienced by previous generations. They spoke about the complexities of being LGBTQ Indigenous and Two-Spirit people in the context of Indigenous community ceremonies and traditions. While acknowledging the people that came before them, Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous youth are continuously assessing their environments in ways that theorize their belonging into the present and the future.

In the first sharing circle, Katherine spoke about the need for different communities to connect so that they could create encouraging spaces for Two-Spirit people:

What is really needed is a sense of openness in partnerships that are created. I mean the only way that we can create a safe and positive environment for Two-Spirited people is through a sense of partnership and through bridging the gaps between Indigenous people and the queer community. If we sought to develop relationships between each other that does not place people in different boxes, but sees fluidity and the many layers and community lenses that exist, that would be something that could be very positive.

In this statement, Katherine reiterates the importance of acknowledging the multiple layers and the fluidity that exist within communities of identity, and the need to address this complexity when thinking about how distinct communities can work apart or together to support Two-Spirit people. Katherine recognizes that in order to bridge queer and Indigenous communities, both communities must begin by exploring the possibility that identities intersect with other communities and are not defined solely by one category of being. She sees the positivity in both the fluidity and diversity of these communities, which Justice already told us in Chapter One is the strength of Indigenous communities fighting imperialism and colonialism. Katherine's observation also is reminiscent of the fluidity of Jeff's idea of living a gray "way of life" because it acknowledges that identity is not easily defined. Thus, her imagining of Two-Spirit futures as bridging communities is rooted in an Indigenous methodology.

Michael followed from this statement by talking about his perception of increased acceptance of Two-Spirit people:

I was thinking about community acceptance ... and I was really surprised when I came out less than a year ago, because I was terrified to come out and I was so scared. I knew everyone would be fine with it and when I did come out everyone was more than accommodating. Everyone was like, “Ohhh” and “I knew that,” or “That’s so awesome, Michael,” or “I’ve never had a gay best friend”... I was really surprised by how many people were so accepting of it and open about it. There was maybe five people in my community that were kind of scared, but even now, they don’t care. Talking about community and trying to get it to be more accepting, my community is very accepting. My community’s very small though, tiny, like maybe a hundred and fifty people, but I find nowadays that they’re usually pretty good on the rez, like they are getting more and more accepting of it ... all the ones I can think of anyways.

Michael’s story portrays a reserve Indigenous community that he experienced as being very supportive of the coming-out of an Indigenous gay man. Michael’s story particularly resonates with Alex Wilson’s story of her Cree family’s acceptance of her identity as a lesbian woman (312). Much like Wilson, Michael’s fear of coming out on his reserve was larger than the reality of rejection as evidenced by his community being “more than accommodating.” In stating this, Michael admits that his community was more than just tolerable of his sexuality, but that people even made comments about their excitement of his proclamation. Like Wilson, there were a few people that were uncomfortable or afraid of having a LGBTQ person in their community but they ended up being in the minority (312), and in Michael’s case they even reached a place of

ambivalence. And although he does not name them, Michael extends this level of acceptance of gay Indigenous men to all the Canadian reserves that he has experienced.

Michael goes on to reflect on how his (mis-)perception of the level of acceptance he could expect from his reserve affected the timing of his coming out:

I think the time I chose to come out was probably like a year or two late; but I mean ten years ago, I don't think it would have been as accepting. It would have been a lot harder, that's why I stayed in the closet the whole time. I was finally at the point where I was like, "I think I can do it now, it's gonna be alright if I do it now." When I came out, I was pissed at myself that I didn't come out earlier, you know. After seeing how good it was. I was like "Oh well, it happened now." Perfect timing, I guess.

Carefully weighing the situation for years, Michael considered the level of safety that he felt as a gay Indigenous man who wanted to be open about his sexuality. Michael's story reflects that fact that, in the past ten years, the homophobia in his reserve community has rapidly decreased to the extent that it is palpable for him as a gay Indigenous man. Eventually coming out and having the vast majority of his experiences as overwhelmingly positive, his only regret lays in not doing it sooner. Michael's sentiment about the dangers of being visible as a gay Indigenous man was already confirmed by Katherine's previous story about the difficulties that her uncle experienced years prior being a gay Indigenous man in Yellowknife.

Michael's story signals a shift, at least in his region in Canada, where Indigenous on-reserve communities are becoming decreasingly homophobic. Generational differences were

again confirmed by Katherine, who added to Michael's story by noticing a shift in levels of acceptance of Two-Spirit people. She stated:

I went to this Two-Spirited gathering maybe three four years now. But I remember that I was one of very few youth there. It really kind of illuminated the difference in generations, there's a huge difference. People there fought really, really hard in the seventies, eighties, and nineties, in these environments that were unimaginably difficult for a Two-Spirited person to have faced up against. It was awesome to see the character that these people had because they were gay and they had fought the battles and had the scars to be the person that they wanted to be. But at the same time, they felt a lot of that burden of being something that people can hate. And people from my generation, I don't know ... Everyone in my family put their support behind me and once I had that, I was like full throttle ahead, I'm going to be whoever I'm going to be! I never really encountered any kind of weirdness from them. But I find communities now are really getting really more understanding and it's more of a sense that if members of your community are Two-Spirited, then they are also family, they're connected way back and you love them anyways. It's not to say that it's not always scary, but it's not as scary.

Katherine's story reiterates that Two-Spirit youth are finding that Indigenous communities are opening up and becoming more accepting, compared to the experience of previous generations of Two-Spirit people. While youth share an element of fear at the initial coming-out process, for the most part, after coming out they found acceptance.

Katherine continued with an example of her changing perceptions of Two-Spirit safety in reserve communities:

I just got back from Ginoogaming, where I work, and we did a workshop on Two-Spirit teaching for the high school students. For me, it was immensely scary to kind of go up and talk about this to them. I didn't really know how well it was going to be received. I didn't know the interpretations that I had about the north and smaller communities, but I thought that they're going to be very anti-Two-Spirited people or whatnot. We were going to go there and talk to them frankly about Two-Spirit people, transphobia, and those kind of ideas. And it was just awesome, it wasn't a big deal, they were interested in what we had to say, and how we talked about it. They were really engaged and really happy to have those kinds of discussions. And that was that was so huge and you can see that shift that's happening and it's nice to see.

Katherine's knowledge of the experience of her older Two-Spirit relatives, who had to leave their reserve life because they were afraid for their safety, may have influenced her ideas of Two-Spirit safety on-reserve today. Yet her experience of a much more positive perspective on Two-Spirit safety in a reserve community reflects, for her, a shift in attitudes towards Two-Spirit people within Indigenous communities that resembles the one expressed by Michael. At this point I would be remiss if I did not connect this perceived increasing acceptance of LGBTQ Indigenous and Two-Spirit people with the work of Indigenous HIV/AIDS and LGBTQ Indigenous/Two-Spirit organizations. Organizations such as Gay American Indians (in the US) and 2-Spirited People of the First Nations (in Canada) have worked hard to increase the visibility of LGBTQ

Indigenous and Two-Spirit people and combat homophobia. However, as I will examine further in the next chapter, a specific culture is being built around Two-Spirit that also circulated through social services and government programming which has possibly extended into Indigenous reserve communities. Nevertheless, the shift is recognizable by both on-reserve and urban Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people.

In contrast to these stories, Laura added to the conversation by talking about her experiences in urban Indigenous women's gatherings that demonstrated a lack of understanding of Two-Spirit teachings by elders within traditional ceremony. She stated:

You mentioned Two-Spirited teaching, I'm trying to figure out how to access that and I don't know where to go and find these teachings. I've been told that there are elders out there but it's hard enough to find elders and teachings. One thing for me is that I've never felt comfortable wearing skirts. I went to the Minwaashin Lodge Women's Gathering and there's some hostility from some of the elders, and I ended up just not doing the sweat whatsoever because I didn't even own a skirt to bring, and without that skirt I'm just automatically excluded. There's this aggression and I'm ashamed of or uncomfortable with my femininity and they're receiving that in a really negative light. "What do you mean you don't want to wear a skirt?" and "I thought everyone understood that you'd wear a skirt." and it was an uncomfortable environment. I had my mother's support. Most of the other younger people there were thirty-five and under and were wearing skirts, not in that hyper-feminine sort of way, but like they were wearing jeans with a sort of wrap on top just to satisfy the protocols. In retrospect, I would have done the same thing just to blend in, but it's not a way that I feel comfortable at all. My mom had even emailed

before and asked "What's the deal with skirts? My daughter's Two-Spirited," and in a public address the elder singled it out and said "Oh I was like emailed about some Two-Spirited people and I don't even know what that is, I don't know where that fits in the tradition, but you should wear a skirt." She openly said that to the entire crowd of sixty people. If you're a woman you must embrace and adore wearing a skirt. I identify as a woman but not someone who's comfortable with a skirt and sometimes I feel like I'm being policed for that.

Laura's story exposes a moment when Two-Spirit identity is silenced at a gathering for Indigenous women. When the erasure of Two-Spirit identity is allowed under the guise of tradition, we see elders exerting an immense amount of power over the terms of acceptance of Two-Spirit people in Indigenous communities. Unfortunately, in this instance, the elder chose to publically shame Two-Spirit people -- and their families, in the case of Laura's mother -- for inquiring about the strictness of the supposed traditions around skirt-wearing protocol. Rather than discussing the issue with Two-Spirit people, the elder chose to disregard Two-Spirit people's very existence precisely by invoking the terms of tradition. Further to that, other gathering attendees participated in making Laura feel as though it was shameful that she didn't feel comfortable wearing a skirt (as a sign of femininity). Both of Laura's experiences are not uncommon in Indigenous communities, as we learned from Nancy Cooper's (2006) story about Two-Spirit erasure, as well as the enforcement of skirt requirements in ceremonial situations as evidenced by Deerchild, Martin-Hill and Simpson. However, as Katherine and Michael noted, the landscape is shifting towards an increasing acceptance of LGBTQ Indigenous and Two-Spirit people, so it is important to consider that context matters to the level of acceptance granted to

Two-Spirit people. While Katherine, Michael and Laura all spoke of feeling very accepted by their families, instances remain where acceptance of Two-Spirit people within Indigenous communities is much more limited.

However, the participants also highlighted times when Two-Spirit people were welcomed into traditional Indigenous ceremonies and activities. Michael shared a story about a powwow in Wikiwemikong, Ontario:

They had a powwow in Wiki and it was at the traditional one and there was a guy that wanted to go in women's fancy dancer or fancy shawl. So he had asked and they had a big discussion on it. There were fifteen on the council and they voted on it and said, "We're going to allow it," so he was allowed to dress. And they couldn't figure out who it was when they were all dancing, and people were trying to point out who it was because he looked so much like a girl that that they couldn't figure it out! I just thought I'd mention that, it was a pretty neat story when I heard it. I was like "Oh that's good, they allowed him to dance," like you know they couldn't even tell, haha.

Thinking together about Michael's story of the acceptance of a powwow dancer crossing gender lines and Laura's story of struggle finding acceptance within Indigenous traditions and ceremonies, it seems that Two-Spirit people who fit into existing traditions are possibly more likely to find acceptance. The person Michael invoked was able to *pass* as a woman and in that way dance in the fancy shawl category at a powwow without being marked as different from the other women participants. In contrast, Laura identifies as a woman but does not want to be forced to wear skirts in order to participate in ceremonies: her presentation thus challenges the terms of

belonging for women in ceremony. I understand that the visibility of Two-Spirit people becomes a factor in shaping the terms of their acceptance within traditions and ceremonies in Indigenous communities. That is, the more that Two-Spirit people participate in traditions and ceremonies in ways that do not make them visibly different from established gender norms, the more readily accepted they find they are as participants. However, in the instance of the powwow dancer, it appears that they are simultaneously participating in the already existing terms of gender engagement in a powwow environment and expanding and questioning its rigidity. In this way, the powwow dancer can be thought of as an anomalous being that has met a community of people who are accepting of anomalous behaviors, perhaps in part but not exclusively because of the dancer's ability to pass. We also can think of Laura as an anomalous being who is challenging gender binaries in a time and place where, as Justice tells us is possible, the people in power fear and reject such behavior and react with scorn. What these situations demonstrate then is that the real difference in the stories may lie in how much the people in power are practicing rigid or fluid lines of thinking about boundaries around gender and sexuality. Rather than the stories being reduced only to the issue of passing, it is more likely that the dynamic between the anomalous figure and the Indigenous elders or powwow committee members is indicative of their degree of commitment (as Justice reminded us) to diversity and complexity within Indigenous communities. Whereas at the Minwaashin Lodge Women's Gathering, Laura experienced elders who enforced the rigid gender binary by requiring women to wear skirts, reflecting the influence of heteropatriarchy, the powwow committee members that Michael discussed exemplified more fluid and dynamic ways of thinking about gender and sexuality that were more reflective of Indigenous ways of being that accept the importance of anomalous traditions. Thus, while participants talked about the increased visibility and acceptance of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ

Indigenous people, these stories show that this quality within an Indigenous community largely depends on the ways in which the leaders of those communities rationalize LGBTQ Indigenous, Two-Spirit and anomalous existences.

To conclude, taken together, the participants' responses to the many questions asked in the sharing circles uniquely invoked, held open, challenged and potentially transformed activist and academic understandings of Two-Spirit identity and community. Participants in the sharing circles immediately challenged the initial assumption embedded in my research questions about the existence of Two-Spirit community as a definable or closed entity. In fact, through their stories, the participants were hard pressed to offer up any concrete examples of or definitions for a Two-Spirit community. In addition, the categorical power of Two-Spirit identity was challenged, most often through silence -- choosing not to use the term -- but also through a few outright statements that the term is not necessarily something that participants always find to be useful to them. However, when participants directly referenced Two-Spirit community, this often invoked activities or practices that could be recognized as inclusive of Two-Spirit people, even if no significant Two-Spirit contingent were visible within them. The participants shared a general perception that LGBTQ Indigenous and Two-Spirit people receive more support in urban spaces, but that on-reserve communities are becoming increasingly accepting and in some cases (however surprisingly, to the participants) already may have arrived at a point of implicit or full acceptance. Nevertheless, despite these degrees of acceptance, many of the participants' stories point to the idea that Two-Spirit community remains an elusive concept: whether because of confusion around the definition of the term Two-Spirit, or lack of understanding around the traditions potentially associated with the term. The possibility exists that the idea of Two-Spirit community can be invoked only where there are concrete social spaces -- for participants, preferably outside

of service delivery organizations -- that provide opportunities for people identified as Two-Spirit to be in each other's company and share social activities, spiritual ceremonies and stories.

As we consider these lines of thought generated by participants in the sharing circles, I return to think about the possibilities offered by Jeff's ideas about living a gray way of life. Jeff's way of living in the world offers infinite possibilities, indeed boundless expressions of identity that resist being contained by a term like Two-Spirit. A gray way of life means going against popular conventions in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, which would extend as well to LGBTQ communities. Perhaps living a gray way of life also is a way of moving through the world that cannot be limited to any single community of belonging. A gray way of life could include being able to see opportunities for opening up communities beyond their current perceived boundaries, and expressing "gray" moments when conventions and traditions are played with in ways that allow a person to express in whatever way they feel suits them. A gray way of life might be an anomalous way of life: sometimes helping, sometimes challenging, but always keeping people aware of their terms of existence. In fact, a gray way of life might also challenge the necessity of always and only identifying as Two-Spirit. A gray way of life can be thought of as an Indigenous methodology that offers Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous youth the possibility of thinking through their world on their own terms and theorizing themselves into their own futures.

Chapter 3

Two-Spirit Futures: Critiquing the Non-Profitization of Two-Spirit to Make Space for Decolonial Futures

In the sharing circles Two-Spirit youth expressed their desires for social support consisting of Two-Spirit teaching and opportunities to meet other Two-Spirit people outside of social service provision. They also shared their stories about a perceived shift in the increased acceptance of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people within Indigenous communities. The sharing circles provided deep insight into how capable urban Two-Spirit youth are of assessing and theorizing their everyday experiences. One participant in particular, Jeff, even contributed his own theory of moving through the world via a gray “way of life.” This gray way of life presents us with a starting point for considering how Two-Spirit youth are moving into their respective futures. Acknowledging that Two-Spirit community does not exist in a uniform way, and with the words of the participants from the sharing circles in mind, I now move into some observations about the ways in which Two-Spirit organizations navigate Two-Spirit identity. I think this is particularly relevant in relation to the needs that the participants voiced in the sharing circles, which Two-Spirit organizations potentially could address. In this chapter I consider how the cultivation of a specific culture around the term Two-Spirit, particularly in the practice of non-profit social service organizations, potentially works to restrict this term’s meaning or practice and in so doing may enforce colonial boundaries. However, I argue further that despite the vulnerability of Two-Spirit identity to being constricted or transformed to match service delivery agendas, this does not mean that it cannot be utilized by Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQ activists and organizers in strategic ways to build organizations and communities that support

community survival. Inspired by individual and collective Two-Spirit activist work, I argue that if Two-Spirit identity is used by Indigenous LGBTQ people to center decolonization in their activism and organizing, then it is possible to use this category to challenge and not reinforce systemic oppression. Today, in a myriad of ways, LGBTQ Indigenous and Two-Spirit people employ Two-Spirit in their lives to enable decolonizing Indigenous methodologies within their Indigenous nation-building work. In particular, I take inspiration from Jeff's contribution of gray space as a concept that Two-Spirit people can use to guide the process of building their futures on their own terms.

3.1 Non-Profitization and the Uses of Two-Spirit Identity

Non-profit organizations that receive government and foundation funding have come under critique by social justice activists with experience working within them for weakening the ability of social movements to create change that challenges existing power structures. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, edited by INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence, is one of many critical interventions that seek to reveal how non-profit organizations potentially limit social movements by imposing the bureaucracy and political expectations of donors. Contributions to this anthology by Andrea Smith, Dylan Rodriguez and Madonna Thunder Hawk are particularly relevant to identifying how what they call "the non-profit industrial complex" weakens social organizing, if it effectively limits critiques of power structures and shifts the goals of organizing efforts from the grassroots to organizations. In her essay introducing the book, Andrea Smith outlines the history of the non-profit industrial complex. She explains that amid a sharp increase in poverty, violence and the breakdown of marginalized communities in the 1990s, the United States and other countries of the Global North witnessed an increased emergence of large private foundations as

multimillionaires sought tax shelters (Introduction 3-4). As a result, wealthy donors became better positioned to shape the political orientation and discourses of the non-profit organizations that sought foundation funding, so that they would support or at least would not challenge donors' capitalistic interests (A. Smith Introduction 7). According to Smith, this kind of control over the political narratives of non-profit organizations would prove especially valuable in times of political unrest, if organizations were to find that they (literally) could not afford to make critiques of dominant power structures (Introduction 7). Smith exposes how easily non-profit organizations can become controlled by donors' political and capitalistic motives despite their own organizational mandate (Introduction 9). While Smith suggests that non-profit organizations can become surveilled spaces that have little control over their programming and political aims, Dylan Rodriguez writes about the potential ramifications for those who express dissent with the liberal narratives that donors value. Rodriguez discusses *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* by Robert L. Allen as "among the first works to offer a sustained political analysis of how white liberal philanthropic organizations ... *facilitated* the violent state repression of radical and revolutionary elements within the black liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 70s" (23). By using this example, Rodriguez encourages us to think about how a preference for liberal narratives within funding organizations also can serve to create an atmosphere where groups with "revolutionary" or "radical" rather than reformist goals are increasingly criminalized (23). Taken together, these accounts indicate that the non-profit industrial complex is defined by donors pressuring non-profit organizations to create liberal programming and services. Once organizations center their work around meeting donor requirements, they effectively alienate people who express their dissent from existing power structures such as donor influence over activism.

The phenomena examined by Rodriguez and Smith are not evaded by Indigenous non-profit organizations and communities. In her chapter "Native Organizing Before the Non-Profit Industrial Complex", Madonna Thunder Hawk recalls her work in Indigenous communities in the 1970s by focusing on her work with Indigenous women who were associated with AIM (American Indian Movement) and who called themselves WARN (Women of All Nations) (101). Thunder Hawk personally witnessed non-profit organizations in the United States shifting Indigenous peoples' activism away from the wider goals of community-based needs held by Indigenous social movements (such as WARN and AIM) to focus instead on raising money and working within funding parameters (105). The shift in organizing Indigenous social movements from community-based needs to funding-related goals is worrisome, considering how Smith links funding sources to dubious political goals that seek to uphold the status quo, while Rodriguez warns that liberal non-profit organizations can set the stage for labeling all others as militant and therefore criminal because of their juxtaposition against those who do not challenge state repression in fundamental ways.

The aforementioned chapters focus on the ways in which social justice organizing can be limited by utilizing the non-profit industrial complex. However, many have found ways to navigate the system to their benefit when the survival of their communities is at stake. For instance, Indigenous people have struggled to adapt non-profit social services to community-based needs in response to multiple health crises and their colonial conditions. In *Killing Us Quietly: Native Americans and HIV/AIDS*, Irene Vernon begins her account of Indigenous responses to the AIDS pandemic by noting that Indigenous communities have had to contend with substance abuse, diabetes, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS after recovering from initial colonial diseases such as smallpox, typhus and measles, which eradicated entire communities (Vernon 1-

7). Vernon examines how the HIV/AIDS crisis has impacted a variety of populations within Indigenous communities, such as women and IV drug users, but she emphasizes that Indigenous gay men have been among the most statistically likely to be infected (20). In response to the high HIV-infection rates of Indigenous gay men, Indigenous-run health organizations began to target their needs by utilizing the term Two-Spirit shortly after its creation (Vernon 34). By using the term Two-Spirit, Indigenous health organizers reject colonial labels such as berdache, recognize the history of Indigenous LGBTQ people, and affirm their contemporary existence (Vernon 22). This is one example of the ways that Indigenous activists addressing health crises while working within the health care system have made decolonization essential to their organizing, and more specifically to the ways they approach Indigenous sexual and gender identities.

In *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*, Scott L. Morgensen notes that situating the HIV/AIDS crisis within the larger framework of colonization allowed Indigenous communities to fight for their “health sovereignty”, by disrupting settler-colonial power over Indigenous bodies and all their relations and by asserting a right to live that effectively rejects genocide (197). For instance, in 1987, a network of Indigenous community-based HIV/AIDS activists established the National Native American AIDS Prevention Center (NNAAPC) in the U.S. to foster an Indigenist approach to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment (Morgensen *Space Between Us* 199). Recognizing the disproportionate number of gay Indigenous men who were being affected by HIV/AIDS, NNAAPC made a concerted effort to reach out to them by creating programs that used the term Two-Spirit, and eventually this effort also extended to target Indigenous lesbians (Morgensen *Space Between Us* 206). In order to address pervasive homophobia within Indigenous communities and health services, a poster and video series entitled “Together We Are Stronger” was created by NNAACP

in 2006 that depicted Indigenous LGBTQ people and argued that their inclusion within their nations strengthened community responses to HIV/AIDS (Morgensen *Space Between Us* 206).

Morgensen aptly points out that:

in light of long-standing work by health activists to build decolonial and indigenist approaches to prevention of and living with HIV/AIDS ... “Together We Are Stronger” answers past struggles in Native health care by arguing that centering gender and sexual diversity enhances the capacity of Native communities to challenge colonial conditions shaping their health. (*Spaces Between Us* 208)

NNAAPC received its initial funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and continued over the years to be funded by the Ford Foundation, the Gill Foundation, the Silva-Moonwalk Foundation Fund and various other major foundations (Vernon 34). Receiving both government and foundation funding, NNAAPC easily could have fallen into the traps outlined in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. However, the historical record of organizing from within the organization provides many examples of Indigenous people having been able to use state resources to create new collaborations among Indigenous nations to address the AIDS crisis in ways that otherwise might not have occurred (Morgensen *Space Between Us* 210).

Examining the complex tensions between Indigenous resurgence and organizational structures that receive government and foundation funding highlights the resourcefulness and adaptability of Indigenous people to navigate these colonial apparatuses. Organizations that have navigated these systems to ensure the survival of Two-Spirit people in urban centers are a case in point, even as their work also highlights the potential dangers that their work, or that Two-Spirit

identity itself might become part of the very apparatuses of colonial control that they mean to challenge. Brian Joseph Gilley's ethnographic text *Becoming Two-Spirit: Gay Identity and Social Acceptance in Indian Country* is one of the first major texts to document Two-Spirit people's contemporary lives. At once, the grounding of Gilley's study in comparing a pair of Two-Spirit community-based organizations offers the reader an opportunity to see how Two-Spirit people access and run social services designed for themselves. Gilley documents his experiences conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the early 2000's with the Green Country Two-Spirit Society (a pseudonym for anonymity) based in Eagleton, Oklahoma, and the Two Spirit Society of Denver based in Denver, Colorado. After providing a short history of the formation of Indigenous LGBTQ identities in the U.S., Gilley explains how the term Two-Spirit was adopted by many urban Indigenous people to describe their efforts to organize Indigenous and LGBTQ specific programming and services (Gilley 30). Their organizing efforts began to cement Two-Spirit as a term that Indigenous LGBTQ people could use to assert their identity and foster a community around their specific needs. Gilley observed that both the Green Country Two-Spirit Society and the Two Spirit Society of Denver addressed social and spiritual needs and fostered LGBTQ and Indigenous identities among their participants, something that broader Indigenous and LGBTQ communities and organizations could not accomplish at the time (Gilley 89). Both organizations were founded around the time that Indigenous people were becoming more aware of their communities' steadily rising HIV infection rates, reflecting the timeline that Vernon and Morgensen laid out. According to Gilley, the Two-Spirit Society of Denver was founded by a Two-Spirit man after having a vision following his attendance at an International Two-Spirit Gathering in the late 1990s, and it "is solely self-sustaining, using HIV program money, prevention outreach grants, and personal funds to sponsor their travel, meeting, and gathering

needs.” (Gilley 39) The Green Country Two-Spirit Society was created through the Indian Clinic in Eagleton, Oklahoma during the early 1990s out of concern for rising HIV/AIDS infection rates among gay Indigenous men (Gilley 35). In contrast to groups like the NNAAPC and the Two-Spirit Society of Denver, Green Country was created and directly funded by the Indian Health Service, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, rather than being created by community-based activism. Nevertheless, both the Green Country Two-Spirit Society and the Two-Spirit Society of Denver demonstrate that concerns about health, and specifically of disease prevention for gay Indigenous men, have formed an important basis around which Two-Spirit men have met and organized.

The culture that exists around the concept of Two-Spirit can affect the ways in which an organization frames Two-Spirit identity and belonging. LGBTQ Indigenous activists challenged settler-colonial narratives about sexual and gender identities within their communities by creating the term Two-Spirit, and they then took responsibility to defend their communities against the newly emerging threat of HIV/AIDS. The emergence of Two-Spirit organizations became symbolic of the hard work of decolonizing Indigenous communities and supporting Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous lives. However, like many communities organized around identity politics, Two-Spirit organizations do not escape the traps of exclusion. Gilley witnessed the internal politics of Two-Spirit organizing and noted the ways in which Two-Spirit identity is policed through narratives of health and tradition. I focus on these two narratives because they bear on the words of participants in the sharing circles. The narrative of health reminded me that sharing circle participants specifically asked for Two-Spirit organizations to offer socializing opportunities outside of the framework of health services. In turn, the narrative of tradition reminded me of participants working outside of rigid ideas of tradition by perceiving Two-Spirit

experience as a lifestyle of living in gray space. In a chapter titled “The Aesthetics of an Identity,” Gilley addresses the intra-community politics of policing Two-Spirit identity. Gilley observed that members of the Two-Spirit groups he examined had clear ideas of what it meant to be a *good* or *healthy* Two-Spirit person and of how the behavior of individual members would reflect upon the group. The ideals of sobriety and monogamy were valued to the point of excluding those who did not conform: Gilley states that “activities seen as unhealthy or stereotypically gay, such as extensive use of alcohol or drugs, hanging out in bars, having unsafe sex, or being promiscuous, were all seen specifically as not associated with Two-Spirit but more directly linked to gay society.” (Gilley 109) Gilley concludes that, for these two organizations, “the positioning of a Two-Spirit body within unhealthy atmospheres is seen as potentially dangerous to the person as well as the community.” (Gilley 110) At times, these kinds of judgments also were rooted in ideas of being traditional, as when Gilley writes that “traditional knowledge translated for some people into the basics “do’s and don’ts” of Indian society, such as being respectful to elders, not drinking alcohol at Indian events, not drawing attention to oneself needlessly, and not pointing at powwows.” (Gilley 96-97) Gilley provides many different instances in which Two-Spirit group members speak about the inappropriateness of mixing substance-use and ceremonial activities, particularly when it comes to drumming or spiritual ceremonies; some members viewed sobriety as mandatory for participation in spiritual ceremonies and would effectively limit participation to those who avoided substances or did not consume them at all (43, 100, 110). Substance abuse still widely affects Indigenous communities -- as Walters, Simoni and Evans-Campbell, and Duran and Duran argue, often as a means of coping with legacies of colonialism -- and a standard of strict sobriety is often demanded by people within Indigenous communities. However, when looking at how sobriety gets taken up in definition of Two-Spirit community, I would argue that

the real issue is not who is actually healthy or traditional (or not) so much as how these concepts are being defined and policed. When these categories are defined to exclude people from social participation, including from spiritual ceremonies, then community spaces are not being created to draw in so much as to divide people.

In addition, Gilley's examination of the relationship between Two-Spirit and Indigenous HIV/AIDS organizing indicates that associations of the language of risk and health with Two-Spirit identity can be used to exclude people, perhaps even the people most at risk. The problem being identified here is not that the groups that Gilley examined utilized the language of health to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic within their communities, but that this language becomes conflated with what the groups then define Two-Spirit identity to mean. As well, their usage may be traced in part to health-related funding sources that demand it as part of HIV prevention programming. A good example of the mutual reinforcement of health norms and definitions of Two-Spirit identity is illustrated by the groups' attendance at the annual International Two-Spirit Gathering. Convened for the first time in 1988 by the Minneapolis organization American Indian Gays and Lesbians, the International Two-Spirit Gathering has been hosted annually ever since by community-based Indigenous LGBTQ / Two-Spirit organizations at urban and rural locations across North America. The importance to contemporary Two-Spirit people of this event, and other gatherings inspired by it, is summed up well by Gilley:

Gatherings are probably the single most important feature of the Two-Spirit social world in that they represent one of the few places where people feel comfortable being Indian and gay. Gatherings help resolve the seemingly inherent conflict between gay and Indian social worlds. The events such as drag shows, powwows, hand games, and HIV/AIDS

workshops combine the cultural worlds of Indian and gay ... By bringing together gay and Indian social worlds, Two-Spirit people are making sex and gender difference a part of public Indian identity. No other Indian social context provides this opportunity. (44)

Gilley explains that local or regional gatherings attended by members of the groups he studied often were funded by grants from Indigenous health agencies and HIV/AIDS organizations, which then led these gatherings to be centered on health-based issues, or even to equate being healthy with such qualities as a substance-free, monogamous lifestyle (Gilley 43). Here the notion of health that can be so pervasive at these gatherings has been associated by an outside funding agency with being sober and with a limited number of sexual partners, to support decreasing what agencies understand to be risky behaviors like substance use or non-monogamy. Given that Gilley goes on to note that gatherings “provide the social relations important to community and identity maintenance” by emphasizing solidarity among Two-Spirit people (Gilley 45), the normalization of definitions of health at gatherings becomes part of the social atmosphere and an avenue for membership to be encouraged or discouraged if Two-Spirit people who fit this ideal of health are valued over those who do not. While Two-Spirit gatherings present incredibly important opportunities for creating Two-Spirit friendly powwows and traditional ceremonies -- spaces where Two-Spirit people have experienced isolation and exclusion -- exclusion of Two-Spirit people by promoting sobriety and monogamy under the guise of tradition threatens to turn Two-Spirit spaces into sites of exclusion that perpetuate Two-Spirit people’s oppression rather than liberation. Indeed, the danger exists that Two-Spirit organizations with health-based funding mandates will create narratives of Two-Spirit people that are based on perpetual victimhood,

associating them with illness rather than resiliency, which is a colonial association rather than an Indigenous one.

Although donor-demanded mandates may require Two-Spirit organizations to utilize restrictive narratives of health, this does not necessarily mean that people within Two-Spirit organizations believe this as their only truth. Referring to the power of state and nongovernmental agencies over Indigenous health, Morgensen suggests that Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people can “engage that power more complexly than simply considering their participation in state or global health programs to be a form of co-optation.” (*Space Between Us* 196) Read in this light, the efforts on the part of the Green Country Two-Spirit Society and the Two Spirit Society of Denver to utilize HIV/AIDS and other funding sources -- which required them to use particular health-based narratives to secure their continued existence -- simultaneously were defying the settler-colonial logic that Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit people will meet inevitable death. Using funding sources to travel to the annual International Two-Spirit Gathering, or to provide their members with wholistic spiritual and emotional support defies any narratives laid out by funding organizations that define Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people by illness alone. Two-Spirit organizers must strike a balance between navigating the colonial structures that threaten to reaffirm narratives of victimization and illness and keeping Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people in states of non-threatening existence that build from and honour their multifaceted experiences. With this in mind, where and to what degree within funding restrictions does space exist for Two-Spirit liberation, empowerment or radical survival in the face of state repression?

In an unpublished thesis entitled “‘The Mere Fact of Being’: The Non-Profitisation of the Two-Spirit Movement”, Craig Ross examines the roles played by non-profit organizations within Two-Spirit community organizing in Canada, and focused on the Toronto-based organization 2-

Spirited Peoples of the 1st Nations (2SP1N). Like the Green Country Two-Spirit Society and the Two-Spirit Society of Denver in the U.S, 2SP1N emerged out of concerns for Indigenous LGBTQ peoples' high rates of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s. The majority of 2SP1N's funding comes from HIV/AIDS-related initiatives, which reflects its mandate to serve "2-spirited people and others living and affected by HIV/AIDS" (Ross 58). Drawing from Michel Foucault, Ross applies an analysis of governmentality to argue that Two-Spirit organizations define and manage Two-Spirit people's identities and life choices in accord with health discourses, in ways that also influence the larger Two-Spirit movement. Ross states that Two-Spirit non-profit organizations in Canada have become so heavily associated with the wider Two-Spirit movement that they have begun to define this community in the aforementioned terms of health and risk derived from HIV/AIDS prevention funding (65). Such narratives even identify lack of self-esteem as a risk factor, as when Ross explains that in requests for expenses related to the 2003 International Two-Spirit Gathering, 2SP1N argued that attendance would increase self-esteem and thus lessen the likelihood of attendees participating in behavior that would put them at higher risk of contracting HIV (67). Ross argues that 2SP1N's focus on individual health encourages participants in the organization's programs to think of health in terms of individual risk factors rather than systemic oppression (67).

A major concern of Ross' project is that Two-Spirit non-profits like 2SP1N, acting in these noted ways, come to represent a wider community of Two-Spirit people:

state-funded non-profit organizations (including this particular one) and their initiatives are heavily implicated in shaping the identities of the communities that they purport to be serving, or at most 'representing.' By extension, if we recognize that this particular

organization (simultaneous to the community at-large) took shape as a response to the AIDS pandemic, then it is not great leap to assume that the massive public health machinery responding to it would have played a potentially-major role in the (then-fledgling-) community's identity-formation process. (85)

Based on his examination of funding-related documents from the 2SPIN website Ross argues that they show that "the bodies of two-spirit people become a veritable convergence of historical, cultural, and contemporary societal factors that together produce the community at-risk." (65) As a result of the association of Two-Spirit identity with organizations like 2SPIN, Ross argues that narratives of risk derived from health discourses becomes part of how people perceive themselves within Two-Spirit identity. Yet he reaches further to imply that Two-Spirit identity itself emerged from the HIV/AIDS crisis within Indigenous communities, and that as a result the term contains these health narratives at its root (Ross 62).

My analysis concurs with Ross' main points: that the non-profitisation of Two-Spirit community in the time of HIV/AIDS defines Two-Spirit people according to health discourses, and that such definitions problematically highlight individual risk rather than systemic injustice. Yet in making his case Ross makes a few critical errors. First, Ross incorrectly assumes that the Two-Spirit concept emerged solely out of a need on the part of health organizations to target gay Indigenous men and their high risk of HIV infection and that there were no pre-existing communities of LGBTQ Indigenous people (73-74). While, as Vernon explains, addressing the HIV risk of Indigenous gay men certainly played a role in the institutionalization of the term Two-Spirit in the early 1990s, this was not the case for the term's emergence from within the genealogy laid out in Chapter One, which traces to decades of prior discussions among late 20th c.

Indigenous LGBTQ activists as well as to the historical memory from which those discussions drew. Second, Ross overreaches in his analysis by portraying Two-Spirit organizations -- more specifically, 2SP1N -- as representative of the modes of organizing, identity and social life of all Two-Spirit people in Canada, or even more broadly. Given that such broad claims are based in large part on critically interpreting funding documents from 2SP1N, Ross' argument about Two-Spirit people's lives ultimately is founded on assumptions. Organizations cannot represent the diversity of the social and political networks on whose behalf they think to speak. Thus, while Ross does offer an important critique of official narrative practices in 2SP1N, this is not enough to support claims about Two-Spirit identity or organizing as such, because his methodological decision to examine funding documents rather than talk to the people who wrote them or who were affected by them does not reflect the fluidity and complexity of Two-Spirit people, networks and movements. For instance, the analysis we receive does not consider the possibility that leaders of 2SP1N might have been participating in a strategic practice to satisfy funders and simultaneously keep their organization afloat. In sum, Ross' analysis does not explore the ways in which Indigenous people possess and exert agency within a colonial system and an ability to navigate it accordingly. It is vital that Two-Spirit people and organizations be analyzed in ways that allow for their potential for critical agency, because the situations in which they find themselves often are more complex than they appear on the surface.

A Two-Spirit non-profit organization that emphasizes the critical agency of LGBTQ Indigenous and Two-Spirit youth is the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. Like many Two-Spirit non-profits, NYSHN creates spaces for Two-Spirit people to gather and also supports their participation in broader Two-Spirit organizing, such as the annual International Two-Spirit Gathering. Yet NYSHN also focuses on integrating Two-Spirit people into Indigenous

communities -- from their own nations, to broader Indigenous networks -- by supporting the practice of ceremonies in relationship with non-homophobic elders and other Indigenous community members. For instance, the "Two-Spirit & Indigenous LGBTQIA Mentors, Elders & Grandparents Support Circle" supported by NYSHN "aims to share information about community and cultural activities, including ceremonies, gatherings, events and workshops, to provide peer support and help facilitate access to culture in ways that are safe and affirming of our identities." (Native Youth Sexual Health Network) Through this project, Two-Spirit people can participate in traditional ceremonies within Indigenous communities that they rarely find other than in spaces like the International Gathering or in Two-Spirit non-profits. Such work shifts the responsibility for supporting Two-Spirit people onto their wider Indigenous communities, which often have been sites of homophobic exclusion. This shift also emphasizes the importance of Indigenous communities, in their diversity, within Two-Spirit people's lives. Perhaps most importantly, this NYSHN project models a form of organizing that supports Two-Spirit people by supporting their desire to participate in the resurgence of their peoples, even as it demonstrates that Indigenous elders and their communities are coming forward to assist Two-Spirit people in this work.

NYSHN appears to be negotiating the pressures of funding by asserting its commitments to Indigenous sovereignty over both lands and body. While funding sources for NYSHN are not clearly named on their website, they have listed "Current Collaborative Projects" that receive funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in Canada, the National Native American AIDS Prevention Center, the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, the National Council of Midwives, and the Lesbian Gay Bi Trans YOUTHLINE (Native Youth Sexual Health Network). While it is safe to assume that a portion of their funding comes from HIV/AIDS

organizations, NYSHN goes to great lengths to ensure that Two-Spirit people's lives are not framed solely in terms of risk factors. In fact, in the section of their website "What We Believe In," NYSHN writes:

Being More Than "At Risk" and "Vulnerable": means that being Indigenous or a young person is not a "risk" or "vulnerability" factor all by itself. In fact, being ourselves can be empowering. What actually puts our lives "at risk" are things such as colonialism, racism, and not having access to culturally safe resources and supports. (Native Youth Sexual Health Network)

In these ways, NYSHN frames Two-Spirit people as human beings who can be negatively affected by systemic oppressions that put their lives at risk, rather than as people whose lives are inherently at risk and who are individually responsible for the conditions of their own health. NYSHN also works with people regardless of their sobriety or relationship status, thereby not being complicit in the monitoring of people's health status in order to participate in their community organizing.

For example, in 2014 NYSHN released an Indigenist adaptation of the "four pillars" model of harm reduction, entitled "Indigenizing Harm Reduction" (Native Youth Sexual Health Network). They propose a Four Fire Model that asserts distinct values: "By centering community wellbeing and the restoration of different Indigenous knowledge systems, life ways, ceremonies, culture and governance structures Indigenous peoples of many Nations and cultures can reduce the harm we experience in our lives." (Native Youth Sexual Health Network) In their downloadable info graphic, NYSHN explains their approach to harm reduction by portraying four

fires -- "Cultural Safety," "Sovereignty," "Self-Determination," and "Reclamation" -- that surround a central fire representing the home fire, or community. This model shows NYSHN's commitment to emphasizing Indigenous knowledges and self-determining Indigenous communities when addressing the needs of Indigenous youth, which includes Two-Spirit youth (Native Youth Sexual Health Network). In this and other activities, then, NYSHN presents as an organization that, despite its funding sources, develops from and returns its work to self-determining, decolonial and resurgent Indigenous communities, even as it represents Two-Spirit people having agency in their lives and over their futures. The idea that Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people have a future is a radical idea in the face of colonial narratives that dictate their inevitable deaths. In the mode presented by NYSHN, Two-Spirit has incredible potential when utilized to potentially expand radical work to decolonize and organize Indigenous peoples.

Nevertheless, if Indigenous youth searching for their identities stumble across the category Two-Spirit and experience it as strictly policed according to moral standards that others want to uphold, then the term can become one that alienates the very people whom it was originally intended to reach. Restricting the self-identification of Two-Spirit by requiring sobriety, monogamy, or even particular Indigenous traditional knowledge (which we have already troubled), means eliminating a lot of people from using a term that was intended to be a pan-Indigenous LGBTQ identifier that reflected mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual affinities. Part of the reason why some LGBTQ Indigenous youth feel uncomfortable with the term Two-Spirit may be the colonial enforcement of specific criteria to be accepted as a Two-Spirit person. Presenting Two-Spirit identity in a solidified and non-fluid way reinforces it as a colonial product rather than one that seeks to break down those boundaries. In my own personal journey, I struggled with my sexual identity from a very young age. I struggled with the idea that I was

attracted to women because of my homophobic and Christian upbringing within my Indigenous community. When I came to university, my mind had shut down the idea that I was not straight because I would rather not explore my sexuality than admit that I felt otherwise. Around this time I began to grow as a person and challenge my own engrained ideas that sexuality was sinful. Breaking away from this thinking was very difficult and I still harbored the guilt of sexual expression even though I worked hard to feel healthy about my own sexuality. It was not until I became friends with Jessica Danforth, founder and former Director of NYSHN, that I really was able to begin my own journey towards self-acceptance. It was a scary time and I was already in my twenties! I made my way to my first International Two-Spirit Gathering before I even had admitted to myself that I was queer. I remember a new friend asking me how I identified multiple times even though I didn't really have an answer. I eventually just said "straight" because I did not want to co-opt an identity that I was not sure belonged to me. One of the reasons that I stayed away from identifying as queer or Two-Spirit was because I felt as though I did not fit into what I perceived those categories to be. It is possible that if those identities had not been policed in such strict ways, with sexuality being the defining feature, then I might have identified as such earlier in my life. These kinds of artificial boundaries based on non-Indigenous principles are steeped in our colonial legacy as Indigenous people. They are not based on the idea that we are all related. As Absolon reminds us, we are all related in terms of our spiritual connections to one another as human beings as well as our connections to the entirety of creation. These connections are how we relate to one another on a spiritual level and they cross over into our mental, physical and emotional aspects (Absolon 31). At its core, this connection is what we would call kinship. This connection also requires that we care for one another, in particular ways according to our Indigenous nation's protocol: that is, we have an obligation to behave in certain ways based on

this understanding of the world (Absolon 31). Decolonization is important to restore Indigenous people's relationships with themselves and their communities. I think it is vital to center decolonizing strategies in all aspects of our lives as Indigenous people, including within Two-Spirit community organizing. Destabilizing Two-Spirit as a concept and opening up its meaning is essential for its potential to do work that renews Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people's relationships within their Indigenous communities. Two-Spirit is decolonial when sexuality and gender do not form the only lenses through which we see people within our Indigenous communities. Two-Spirit is at its most powerful when it recognizes the wholeness of Indigenous LGBTQ people, including their relationships to their communities and the entire natural world.

3.2 Imagining Ourselves into Two-Spirit Futures

So how do we move forward as Two-Spirit people in this context? Two-Spirit organizations have undertaken a lot of good work: increasing the visibility of Two-Spirit people, bringing together Two-Spirit people from all different generations and nations, reclaiming ceremonies for Two-Spirit people and challenging homophobia within Indigenous communities. But with or without these organizations, urban Two-Spirit/queer Indigenous nation building is where the future of Two-Spirit people can be built. Two-Spirit futures will mean the resurgence of traditions and the creation of new traditions to suit the needs of LGBTQ Indigenous people and their communities.

Social media has become an important way for Indigenous people to communicate with one another because it allows us to communicate across vast geographical distances. Indigenous people have taken advantage of the ways in which technology can keep us connected and informed on political actions and celebrations, as is easily seen with movements such as Idle No More (The Kino-Nda-Niimi Collective). In my personal experiences during the beginning of the

Idle No More movement, I noticed that it became a bit of a trend to include Two-Spirit when talking about women and children in relation to nationhood and sovereignty. At first glance it appeared to be a step in the right direction, in that there was recognition of Two-Spirit people (as well as of women and children) among Indigenous people who were challenging heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism⁶ in conversation with each other about nation-building. Unfortunately, the conversation often stopped short of any kind of real engagement with Two-Spirit people. In my experience I did not witness any Two-Spirit people take part in Idle No More as representatives of Two-Spirit leadership. In Indigenous social and activist spaces, I have witnessed a pattern wherein Two-Spirit people are invoked by gestures to inclusion in the absence of any meaningful Two-Spirit involvement. Essentially, Two-Spirit has become a buzzword to include in speeches and presentations, but there is no follow-through on how to support Two-Spirit people within their own Indigenous communities. There is still no mention of Two-Spirit roles or of how essential they are to Indigenous communities. If Indigenous people want to have real conversations about nationhood, then there have to be serious efforts made to foster relationships between Two-Spirit people and wider Indigenous communities. If our leaders, academics, teachers, clan mothers, elders and medicine people are serious about the idea that we are all related, and that nation-building is how we are going to decolonize our minds and communities, then there has to be more than just lip-service recognition of Two-Spirit existence. Creating real connections with Two-Spirit people means asking them what matters to them in relation to nation building.

In order to look into what Two-Spirit futures might look like, I will offer two examples from Canada of how Two-Spirit identity has been used in different ways by Two-Spirit people.

⁶ For an explanation of “heteropaternalism”: “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy” (Arvin, Tuck and Morrill).

Alex Wilson, whose work I introduced in Chapter One, characterizes the importance of Two-Spirit as an identity category by saying that it “affirms the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity, including sexuality, gender, culture, community, and spirituality,” and that “the sexuality of two-spirit people cannot be considered as separate from the rest of an individual’s identity” (305). Wilson goes on to emphasize why Two-Spirit is specifically relevant to her own experience of community by stating, “In my community, the act of declaring some people special threatens to separate them from their community and creates an imbalance. Traditionally, two-spirit people were simply a part of the entire community; as we reclaim our identity with this name, we are returning to our communities” (305). Here, Wilson is saying that because Two-Spirit identity intends to encompass a person’s whole being, rather than single them out via their sexuality, it has the potential to place them back into their traditional roles as a small part of a bigger Indigenous community. After Wilson talks about the inadequacy of European identity theories to describe the interconnectedness of gay and lesbian Indigenous people’s identities, she further reiterates her point that “we (two-spirits) become self-actualized when we become what we’ve always been, empowered by our location in our communities (versus the micro-management of an individuated identity).” (310)

Wilson grounds her claims in her own experiences as a Swampy Cree woman from northern Ontario. She begins her story with her birth and situates herself and her family in a small isolated community only accessible by boat and plane. She speaks about being completely accepted by her family even though she was more attracted to “boys toys” and going hunting with her grandfather and brothers (Wilson 311). Only after she attended a round dance in her community and heard one of her friends tell her to “quit dancing like a boy” did she become self-conscious and feel a need to hide who she really was (Wilson 311). Wilson goes on to explain

how she came to internalize both homophobia from her peers and racism from the neighboring town to the point that she stopped identifying as Cree and moved to the nearest city. It is here that Wilson talks about her experience in the city as being even more isolating:

As an Indigenous woman, I could not find a positive place for myself in the predominantly White, gay scene. I looked there for support in my lesbian identity, and instead found an articulation of racism. Although a large number of gays and lesbian Indigenous people live in the city, the Indigenous community remains segregated from the mainstream, non-Indigenous gay and lesbian community. (312)

The difficulty with Wilson's identification as Two-Spirit lay, not with her immediate family, but in her encounters in urban spaces. She eventually comes to reframe her childhood shaming experience at the round dance by recalling that it was not the elders at the dance or her family who discouraged her from "dancing like a boy" but only one peer. This reframing helps her to be "empowered by who [she] was, rather than disempowered by who [she] wasn't" (Wilson 313): that is, fully accepting herself as a Two-Spirit woman, and strengthened by her connections to her family and her Indigeneity. She concludes by stating:

When confronted with racism and homophobia, I internalized many of the devaluing judgments of the dominant culture. Leaving my home community was an attempt to leave behind my devalued status, to become 'raceless'. However, it removed me from the strength and support I found in my community. I was even more of an

'other' in the city than I was at home, even farther from a place where my self could be found. (Wilson 314)

While Wilson's move to the city was filled with experiences of homophobia and racism, the very things that she moved there to avoid, she might not have realized the importance of her home community otherwise. Her journey points to the importance of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people feeling connected to their Indigenous relations. Wilson's story also may point to the importance of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people creating new spaces where they feel accepted for the entirety of their identity, if those spaces do not already exist.

Wilson's story doesn't actually touch on how she initially began to identify as Two-Spirit, but she does frame Two-Spirit identity within a history of government repression of Indigenous people, thereby reminding the reader that the reclamation of Two-Spirit roles and identities is part of a larger and ongoing process of decolonization. To return to how Wilson conceptualizes Two-Spirit as encompassing an Indigenous person's identity wholistically, not as limited to or as singling out sexuality, I personally think this is where Two-Spirit as an identity category actually has the most power. It may seem counter-intuitive within Western sexuality or gender identity politics, or to a colonized mind, to think that the traditional roles that Two-Spirit people held were based not on their sexuality or gender but on the individual strengths that they bring to their community. However, as Wilson says of her own experience, within Indigenous communities, to point out someone as *special* sometimes carries the potential to create an imbalance that can lead to trouble. Based on this understanding, Two-Spirit people could hold all sorts of traditional roles within their communities, depending on where their strengths lay. By identifying as Two-Spirit, Wilson infers, a person can be accepted more easily within their

Indigenous community, because the term invokes a person's whole being rather than just one special part. Alongside her experiences of racism, this is probably another reason why Wilson talks about never feeling totally comfortable within the mainstream white gay and lesbian scene where people rally around sexuality and gender difference.

Sto:lo scholar Saylesh Wesley approaches the category Two-Spirit differently in her essay, "Twin-Spirited Woman: Sts'iyóye smestiyexw slhá:li." Published in 2014, Wesley's article offers a perspective on the term Two-Spirit from the vantage of it having been in use for 24 years, while Wilson wrote only a few years after its first use. Wesley's essay concerns her personal journey as an "mtf transgendered Sto:lo woman" resolving her relationship with her Sto:lo grandmother. Her article begins by arguing the importance of story-work methodology, created by Sto:lo academic Joanne Archibald, "whereby personal experience is considered in relation to stories of elders, to craft an analysis that takes indigenous knowledge seriously." (Wesley 339) After narrating parts of her personal story -- including her birth story in which her grandmother foreshadows her life struggles as being related to her difficult delivery into this world -- Wesley describes how after coming out as gay and then trans to her family, she only really encountered difficulty three years later when her grandmother refused to sanction a "coming out" feast for her and her aunt (who identified as genderqueer) by calling them both "deviant" (342). Wesley was devastated and she began to pray for her grandmother to overcome her transphobia (342). Given that the Sto:lo people are matrilineal and matriarchal, Wesley's grandmother's opinion held a lot of weight in terms of Wesley's acceptance within her family and community. Her grandmother also is a world-renowned Sto:lo weaver. Years later, in 2012, we find that Wesley becomes both her grandmother's primary caregiver and her weaving apprentice, learning how to make Sto:lo baskets and shawls, even as Wesley during this time shares her experiences about being a Two-

Spirit woman with her grandmother (343). Through this sharing of knowledge Wesley discovers her natural talent for weaving and her grandmother begins to accept her grandchild for who she is and to respect her weaving and academic accomplishments (343). Acknowledging that this is a process and that her grandmother still struggles with the idea of Wesley being a woman, and with the courage she drew from the newfound closeness afforded by their rekindled relationship, Wesley asks her grandmother to translate the term Two-Spirit into the Sto:lo language in an effort to regenerate lost Sto:lo teachings and stories of Two-Spirit people (343). Wesley's grandmother comes back with the word *Sts'iyoye smestiyexw slha:li* which translates as "Twin-Spirited Woman" (343). By answering Wesley's request, her grandmother has taken the term Two-Spirit and made it nation-specific, grounding it within the Sto:lo language and within matriarchal traditions in which grandmothers carry and bestow cultural knowledge. Despite the Sto:lo people having lost much of their historic knowledge and language to colonization, Wesley's collaboration with her grandmother recontextualizes her identity within contemporary Sto:lo cultural knowledge, which is situated more deeply within the modes of kinship and governance that connect Sto:lo peoplehood.

Having read a generation of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous academic scholarship -- work that did not exist when Wilson wrote in 1996 -- Wesley frames the implications of her story by stating that the category Two-Spirit "inevitably fails to represent the complexities of Indigenous constructions of sexual and gender diversity, both historically and as they are used in the present", but that it can be a good starting point for the decolonization of queer Indigenous identity (344). Wesley urges other Sto:lo trans-identified women to use *Sts'iyoye smestiyexw slha:li* (Twin-Spirited Woman) if they feel an affinity for it. She also calls on the reader to find what fits them best in terms of identity, and if nothing that exists feels right, to seek it out for

themselves as she did (344). The Sto:lo genealogy of Twin-Spirited Woman bears a relationship to Two-Spirit, which formed a basis from which Wesley's grandmother offered her translation. Yet this translation also served an important purpose: recontextualizing even an honoured pan-tribal or transnational Indigenous conversation into nation-specific knowledges, and the relations among kin and across generations in which they are situated. These are the ties that also resolve Wilson's story, once Two-Spirit identity leads her back to her ties with her Cree relations that preexisted her journey and that were always sustained by them. Thus, LGBTQ Indigenous people can find in Two-Spirit identity a starting point or an ending point, but their paths link in reconnecting to Indigenous peoplehood: reaffirming connections that never ceased, or that were only interrupted by colonial thinking that Two-Spirit journeys seek to resolve. Wesley's story also emphasizes that creating nation-specific concepts to acknowledge contemporary LGBTQ experiences, while grounded in Indigenous methodologies and traditional knowledge, would address the apprehensions of many Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous youth about not being able to look to their own nations for their histories and self-understanding.

Regardless of how Two-Spirit identity is taken up, Two-Spirit youth's futures must be guided by the resurgence of Indigenous traditions and principles. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Leanne Simpson provides strategies for using Indigenous stories and traditional knowledge to guide our future decolonizing work. In a chapter entitled "Gdi-Nweninaa: Our Sound, Our Voice", Simpson explains that Indigenous people can use the Nishnaabe concepts of Biskaabiiyang (a process of decolonizing), Aanjigone (an ethic of non-interference), Naakgonige (careful deliberation) and Debwewin (truth, or the sound of the heart) to guide their contemporary lives. She illustrates these concepts through the contentious example of deciding whether or not to wear a skirt to a sunrise ceremony. Simpson writes,

I have always felt conflicted about this issue ... there have been many times when the idea that I was required to wear a skirt frustrated and angered me. So a few months ago, when I decided to go to the sunrise ceremony, I decided to listen to the part of me that was profoundly irritated with the required attire. (61)

In making her decision, however, Simpson was guided by the four Nishnaabe concepts of Biskaabiiyang, Aanjigone, Naakgonige and Debwewin: before making her decision she laid down tobacco for guidance, spoke to elders about the situation, considered how colonialism has shaped Indigenous communities, and thought about the future of her community knowing that her children would be influenced by her decision. Simpson does not discuss the outcome of her decision to not wear a skirt to the ceremony because it is the meaningful process of decision-making rooted in her Indigenous methodology that is the point of her story. We are not guaranteed a *good* outcome even if we follow these processes, but we can be sure that our reasoning is strong if we need to account for our decisions to our communities.

In line with this thinking, Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQ youth are already creating theories of how they move through the world. Recalling the idea of “living in the gray” that Jeff provided in the sharing circles, we know that it is possible to exist in ways that strategically utilize and reject categorization, even labels such as Two-Spirit. I suggest that we strategically use Two-Spirit identity in the nation-building process. Doing so can acknowledge those Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous people who came before us and, as Simpson modeled, can follow similar processes of decision-making that accord with the traditional knowledges of our respective nations. Qwo-Li Driskill also reminds us that as Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Indigenous

people, we can weave together critiques that arise out of Indigenous studies and queer theory in order to reimagine our futures as decolonial (“Double Weaving” 70). Creating communities and spaces that deliberately privilege Indigenous knowledge and stories as the foundations on which they are built, we can create a future in which Two-Spirit people’s places are restored within our own Indigenous communities. Using gray space as a way to guide us leaves future possibilities expansive and dynamic. I end with Jeff’s prophetic words: “I don’t know what our roles were traditionally, but I know that in the future, our roles are going to be very important.”

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Appendix A

GREB Letter of Approval

June 29, 2011

Ms. Dana L. Wesley
Master's Student
Department of Gender Studies
Queen's University
c/o 2-104 Bagot Street
Kingston, ON K7L 3E5

Dear Ms. Welsey:

GREB Ref #: GGEN-004-11

Title: "Conversations with Urban Two Spirit Indigenous Youth: Building Radical Indigenist Communities"

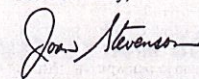
The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "Conversations with Urban Two Spirit Indigenous Youth: Building Radical Indigenist Communities" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (2nd edition) (TCPS 2) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, if applicable, of any adverse event(s) that occurred during this one year period (details available on webpage <http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html> – GREB Adverse Event Report Form). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB (TCPS 2, Article 6.16). For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementations of new procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at <http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html> - Research Ethics Change Form. These changes must be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingu@queensu.ca prior to implementation. Your request will be forwarded to the appropriate GREB reviewers and/or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,



Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Scott Morgensen, Faculty Supervisor
Dr. Susan Wilcox, Chair, Unit REB

JS/gi



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Appendix B
Recruitment Poster

**Do you self-identify as a Two-Spirited
(LGBTQ spectrum) Indigenous (Status,
non-Status, Métis, Inuit) youth be-
tween the ages of 18 and 29?**



**In collaboration with the Native Youth Sexual Health
Network, a Sharing Circle will be held on Tuesday Oct. 4th
from 5:30pm-6:30pm to explore the ways that Two-
Spirited Indigenous youth in Toronto are creating their
own communities of support.**

**In exchange for your participation you will receive TTC
tokens, \$15 and a meal.**

**If you are interested in sharing your stories, please con-
tact twospiritstories@gmail.com for more info.**

Appendix C

Project Summary

"CONVERSATIONS WITH URBAN TWO SPIRIT INDIGENOUS YOUTH"

This project will work with self-identified Two-Spirit Indigenous Youth in Toronto by audio recording stories of their experiences of marginalization and resistance. Two Spirit is an Indigenous concept that describes Indigenous LGBTQ peoples. There is limited research that has been designed by and for urban Indigenous youth who identify as Two-Spirit, but the research that does exist points to several common experiences reported by participants. These common experiences include homophobia and racism as well as the desire to migrate into larger urban spaces in order to escape perceived or enacted physical and emotional violence. In addition to this, urban Indigenous Two-Spirit youth have become somewhat lost between service providing organizations that are aimed at LGBTQ communities and service providers intended for Indigenous communities in urban spaces. Despite these challenges, urban Indigenous Two-Spirit youth have created their own communities of survival and resistance in order to support each other.

This project is in response to the lack of literature available that directly addresses how urban Indigenous Two-Spirit youth have built their own communities and how those communities might be further strengthened. This project will be based on the guidelines of Community Based Participatory Action Research, by collaborating with the community in determining the research process and product. This project will also utilize an Indigenous methodology in order to be culturally appropriate. A partnership with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) will be created to better document Two Spirit youths' experiences. The project will contribute important new information to the scholarly literature while simultaneously providing a document that reflects Two Spirit urban youths' own experiences that they may use in their own work.

In the case of this project, "Indigenous" will include any person who self-identifies as being Indigenous to Canada (Inuit, First Nations, Métis, Status, Non-Status) and "youth" will include any person ages 18-29. Regardless of wherever the youth originate, their current urban-dwelling status will be of utmost importance.

This project is based on recording audio statements made by participants in Sharing Circles. Sharing Circles are similar to focus groups in terms of having a group of participants speak about their experiences. However, Sharing Circles are qualitatively different from focus groups in terms of the significance that they hold within Indigenous communities, as well as the cultural protocol that is expected when conducting a Sharing Circle. I hope to host between two and three Sharing Circles over the course of the research in order to gather up to fifteen participants in total. The Sharing Circles will take place in conjunction with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network in the months of July and August.

Appendix D

Letter of Information and Consent Form

Letter of Information

“CONVERSATIONS WITH URBAN TWO SPIRIT INDIGENOUS YOUTH”

This research is being conducted by Dana Wesley towards completion of a Master’s Thesis in the Department of Gender Studies at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. The research is being supervised by Dr. Scott Morgensen.

What is this study about? The purpose of this research is to investigate how Two-Spirit Indigenous youth in Toronto are creating their own communities of support and how these communities can be further supported and strengthened in the future. The study will require that between the months of July and August 2011 you will participate in one audio-recorded Sharing Circle of approximately one hour in length. The location of the Sharing Circle will be determined at a later date.

What are the risks associated with this study? There are possible psychological, emotional and social risks associated with this study. Answering questions about your experiences as a Two Spirit person in a Sharing Circle may be perceived as a psychological or emotional risk. Also, participants will be asked questions about the communities in which they belong, potentially with other members of those communities present, which they may perceive as a social risk. In order to manage these risks, you should not feel obligated to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you find objectionable. In addition to this, if you are not comfortable participating in a Sharing Circle with particular participants, you will have the option to request to join in a different Sharing Circle than the one in which you were first placed, or to completely withdraw from the study. Finally, the confidentiality of Sharing Circles is limited due to the risk that participants are familiar with one another. Participants will sign a Consent Form that agrees to uphold the confidentiality of other participants.

Will I be recorded? Yes. You will be recorded with a digital audio recorder and your words will be transcribed by the researcher only after your permission has been given.

Is my participation voluntary? Yes. You may also withdraw at any time and your compensation will not be affected. If you wish to withdraw from the Sharing Circle, you can simply tell the researcher that you wish to leave and no questions will be asked. You will then be given all transcripts and audio recordings of your individual participation up to that point and the original files will be destroyed and not used for any other purposes.

What will happen to my responses? We will keep your responses confidential. Only the above named researchers will have access to this information. In any writing that cites your responses, you may choose to be given a pseudonym so that you cannot be easily identified or you may request that your real name be used. All audio files and transcripts will be stored on two encrypted USB keys (primary and back-up) and locked in a cabinet in the researcher’s office, where the key will only be available to the researcher. If identifying details about you are stated by another participant during a Sharing Circle, you will be asked whether those details may remain in the transcript. If you do not agree, they will be removed. Additionally, if during a Sharing Circle you state identifying details about another participant, that person also will be asked whether those details may remain in the transcript, and as a result they may be removed.

Upon completion of the project the researcher will ensure that each participant gets a final copy of the thesis as well as a transcript of their individual participation. After the copies have been gifted to each participant, the original audio files and transcripts will be destroyed and not used for any other purposes. The contents of the thesis may be referenced or published in professional journals or presented at academic conferences.

Will I be compensated for my participation? Yes, you will receive \$15 your participation, in addition to access to Toronto Transit Commission tokens for your commute. Refreshments will also be available during the Sharing Circles.

What if I have concerns? Any questions about study participation may be directed to Dana Wesley via email dana.wesley@queensu.ca or phone (613) 539 – 6543. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081. If you feel that you need further support, Youth Line can be reached at 1-800-268-9688. YouthLine is a toll-free Ontario-wide peer-support phone line for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, 2-spirited, queer and questioning young people. The Youth Line also provides its peer-support service online through messenger and e-mail response at <http://youthline.ca/>

Again, thank you. Your interest in participating in this research study is greatly appreciated. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.

Consent Form

“CONVERSATIONS WITH URBAN TWO SPIRIT INDIGENOUS YOUTH”

Name (please print clearly): _____

1. I have read the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called Conversations with Urban Two Spirit Indigenous Youth. I understand that this means that I will be asked to participate in one Sharing Circle and that I will be audio recorded.
3. I understand that if I am not comfortable participating in a Sharing Circle with particular participants, I will have the option to request to participate in a Sharing Circle at a later date.
4. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time. If I wish to withdraw, I may simply tell the researcher that I wish to leave and no questions will be asked. I will then receive all transcripts and audio recordings of my participation and the original files will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research project and not used for any other purposes.
5. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future. Only the named researchers will have access to the data. All audio files and transcripts will be stored on two encrypted USB keys (primary and back-up) and locked in a cabinet in the researcher's office, where the key will only be available to the researcher. The audio files will be transcribed by the researcher only to uphold confidentiality. Upon completion of the project the researcher will ensure that each participant gets a final copy of the project findings as well as an audio file and transcript of their individual participation. After the copies have been gifted to each participant, the original audio files and transcripts will be destroyed and not used for any other purposes. The contents of the final research document (Master's thesis) may be referenced or published in professional journals or presented at academic conferences.
6. I understand that every participant will be given a transcript of their contributions to Sharing Circles, and a copy of the final research document. I will be asked to read and revise both my personal transcript and the final document before the conclusion of research. I have provided my contact information below for this purpose.
7. I understand that if identifying details about me are stated by another participant during a Sharing Circle, I will be asked whether those details may remain in the transcript. If I do not agree, they will be removed. Additionally, if during a Sharing Circle I state identifying details about another participant, that person also will be asked whether they may remain in the transcript, and as a result they may be removed.
8. I also understand that it is my responsibility to uphold the confidentiality of other participants that contribute to the Sharing Circle.
9. I understand that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints, I may contact Dana Wesley dana.wesley@queensu.ca; or project supervisor, Dr. Scott Morgensen scott.morgensen@queensu.ca; or Head of the Department of Gender Studies (613-533-6318) or the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board (613-533-6081) at Queen's University. If I feel that I need further support I also know that I can contact Youth Line at 1-800-268-9688. YouthLine is a toll-free Ontario-wide peer-support phone line for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, 2-spirited, queer and questioning young people. I'm also aware that Youth Line can be reached online through messenger and e-mail response at <http://youthline.ca/>

I have read and answered the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research.