

Reclaiming Spaces Between:
Coast Salish Two Spirit Identities and Experiences

by

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Bachelor of Social Work, University of Victoria, 2006

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in the School of Social Work

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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The seed for this research germinated deep in the lands of our Coast Salish ancestors thousands of years ago. As a Coast Salish Two Spirit researcher, I noticed there is a striking absence of west coast Indigenous and Coast Salish specific knowledge about Two Spirit identities, experiences and vision work in academic and community circles. Therefore, this research was conducted exclusively on Coast Salish territories, with Coast Salish identified Two Spirit participants and allies. I apply my Four House Posts Coast Salish methodology in an Indigenous research framework, and through storytelling and art-based methods, this study asks - How does recognition of Coast Salish Two Spirit identity and experience contribute to community wellness and cultural resurgence? The intention of this study is to offer pathways for intergenerational healing and reconnections, cultural revitalization and transformation by weaving traditional Indigenous knowledges with contemporary narratives, in order to increase voice and visibility of Coast Salish Two Spirit People.

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To my Gramma. hay čxʷ qə for teaching me that dignity is to be claimed, and that big spirit power lies between the stillness. This is the story I said I wanted to share with you that night.

To my Mom. All that I have become and all that I will be is wrapped up in you. Thank you for teaching me how to play, work hard and to wear big but well made shoes.

To my Papa. Thank you for always seeing me for who I am completely, without expectation or exception. Thank you for showing me the healing power of the land. It has saved my life countless times.

To My Love. For all the unconditional support, kindness, trials and triumphs along this journey, I am so grateful to have had you by my side - like Fish and Rice. I am a better person because of you.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all our west coast Two Spirit relatives. May the honour and dignity of your whole being always be celebrated within your own heart, families and cultures, and through all your own magnificent transformations. You are never alone in the unfolding. Never.

Chapter 1 - Preparation

Honor Dance for the Four Winds

Because we are sacred to each other
you create a feast for us to share
placed carefully on newspaper
Each grain of rice
A memory of freedom
Each bean a song of respect
I am giving you all the stars I've seen
I am bringing you the moon in my voice
I am dancing you old mountains
Wind riding wild ponies
through canyons of our pain
I am covering each of you in a shawl
with long silky fringe and deeply colored roses
I am folding blankets for you
in blazing patterns
I carry you carefully in my eyes
on all my journeys
I dream nightly of the keys I will forge
of your loneliness, cradled smooth
Trapped in walls of hatred that I so rarely breach
listening for the birds who fly over razor wire coils
your spirits rise before me
I am burning sweet grass
sage and cedar
as each dawn I call your names (Chrystos, 1995, p. 124).

I begin this thesis with introduction. I start this way as an offering of respect to the reader, in order to clarify who I am as a researcher and my positionality in this work. I do this to acknowledge that this research comes from the land of my ancestors. It is a culmination of my own experience and understanding of ancient Indigenous protocols, ethics and values that I have accumulated along my own life journey. Moving forward, it is important to acknowledge that my interpretation and meaning making in this research represents one of many in Coast Salish circles. I do not speak on behalf of Coast Salish

societies, nor for Two Spirit People in general. This thesis is a reflection of what I have come to know in my own learning in this moment, and with the guidance of many helpers, human and not human along the way. I also need to clarify, that for the remainder of this document, I will apply the terms “us”, “we”, or “our” to refer to either Coast Salish, Indigenous or Two Spirit People in a general sense, and also capitalize the word “People” to depict Indigenous or Two Spirit groups, depending on context.

I am xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) and Pentlatch (Qualicum), and I have Dutch ancestry as well. The territories I come from are most commonly known as Qualicum Beach and Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), and also a little village just outside of Rotterdam, Netherlands. I identify as an Indigenous person. My People here, in what is now known as Canada, have occupied these unceded lands and waters forever; we have never relinquished our rights as stewards of these territories. Mainstream European anthropologists categorize me into an Indigenous grouping they labeled as the *Coast Salish*, which was externally developed and imposed on us about 200 years ago, based on linguistic, cultural and geographic relationality shared between Nations in this group. But our People have known we are related to these other Nations for thousands of years before Europeans identified these linkages. Our Coast Salish territories stretch far across the central southwest coast of Vancouver Island, all up the BC west coast, and well beyond imposed Washington state colonial borders. My heart beats to the rhythm of the land and waters here. I am part of this place.

Incidentally, my late maternal grandmother did not appreciate the label, Coast Salish. She opted for a more Nation-specific stance on Indigenous identity. She would say, “We’re not Salish, we’re xʷməθkʷəy̓əm.” If I were to order my own positionalities

and views of self: I identify as xʷməθkʷəy̕əm and Pentlatch first, then Coast Salish, then Two Spirit, and then a person with mixed ancestry - but all of these identities inform one another. Embedded within these experiences are all the roles that go along with these positions, including family and community responsibilities. I identify as an Indigenous person, but I am also aware that I know next to nothing about the culture and heritage of my father and our Dutch relatives. This particular ancestral knowledge was withheld from me for a very long time. Since I was a kid, I always believed it was more important to explore my Indigenous ancestry before my European ones. Even back then, I intuitively knew that these were the pieces of me under attack, and their subsistence threatened by colonialism. The dialect of my late maternal grandfather was designated by anthropologists as extinct when I was in high school; my late great grandmother was the last known speaker of our Pentlatch dialect. I was shocked and appalled to learn this. But I now know, thanks to the brilliant work of my wildly intelligent brother, Mathew, that our language is not extinct; our Pentlatch language is sleeping. Moving forward, my European cultural roots are not at risk of disappearing, and I will have plenty of time to explore these pieces of self in due process. And now that I know where to look, that journey is on my list to do. As this journey unfolds before and within me, identities and positionalities will shift again.

I was born and raised off reserve, here on the west coast of BC, and spent my childhood growing up on Nuu-chah-nulth territories. This territory is remarkably serene and profoundly beautiful. I loved being out on the land every chance I got as a child. As I got older, I started to notice I did not fit in very well with my peers, and as a result, I craved being out on the land even more (where I did not have to concern myself with this

awkwardness). This is a place of solace and spiritual grounding that my papa introduced me to, and I am so grateful to him for that gift. The forest became and is still a powerful healing place for me. I tried very hard to blend in with my surroundings as an adolescent, but given that I am Indigenous, grew up relatively poor, and I am gender non-conforming and queer, this was not an easy task to achieve. Therefore, as soon as I was old enough to move out on my own, I packed a small bag and headed for the urban centre of Victoria, on traditional Coast Salish territory.

Migration to urban areas is an act shared by many Indigenous People who seek identity, belonging, anonymity, safety, opportunity, or a home away from home. Moving to the city for family issues, or for increased employment and education opportunities, and access to services are among the top reported reasons why Indigenous people leave reserve lands for the cities. See Ristock, Zoccole and Passante (2010), and also Wilson & Peters (2005), for additional examples of Indigenous urban migration research, and Walters, Evans-Campbell, Simoni, Ronquillo & Bhuyan (2006) for migration experiences of Two Spirit self-identified women. In my view, urban areas are not unlike traditional shared territories among Indigenous societies, and resource-rich spaces on the land that act as a hub for social networking, celebration, resource gathering and cultural knowledge exchange. Cities are the same as these shared spaces for Indigenous People. Within urban circles, I personally began to solidify my own identity as a queer person through volunteer work in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer+ (LGBTQ+) community, and as an Indigenous person through my enrollment in Indigenous studies as a mature student. That journey back to self began almost 20 years ago; I have been a helper with Indigenous communities and families ever since.

I want to clarify some relevant points of reference in my own story moving forward. I describe myself as a Two Spirit person, and have done so for the past twenty years after first hearing the expression in college. Before then, other people labeled me as lesbian, which never really felt right to me. Before then, I was secretly a boy in my heart, spirit and occasionally in public. For me, the term Two Spirit is an indicator for how my experience, ways that I make meaning, and how I contribute in community emanates from a blend of male, female and other energies. My identity as an Indigenous person, as well as my gender, sexuality, roles and responsibilities are woven together to inform, alter and transform one another. Ways that I interact, receive and process knowledge, as well as my external expression can shift, depending on context, how I am feeling, and relationships I have with others. This is not unlike other people who may change behaviour and thinking, depending on who or what they interact with. But for me, changing context can shift my behaviour, can alter or multiply my gender in that moment, and subsequently widens my assessment and internalization of what I am experiencing. This is the only way I know how to describe my gender, sexuality and Indigeneity in words right now.

I was raised predominantly female at home, so I am most familiar with being experienced by others in this way; although I am still perceived to be male in certain situations. I knew at an early age that the ways I walk in this world are not confined to binaries. At this point, being experienced as male or female does not offend me one way or the other in everyday life. I am both and I am neither. I am; however, acutely aware that gendered confines and rules based on biological sex are imposed in ceremonial spaces in some of our Coast Salish communities. I know this is something that Coast

Salish societies, and those of us who are Two Spirit will need to navigate and transform together in the very near future – but all in due time.

With respect to the term and traditions of Two Spirit People, it is important to recognize that each Indigenous society has its own distinct language and ways to acknowledge those who exist beyond European binaries of gender, sexuality and Christian religious moralities – male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, natural/unnatural, good/sinful. I am still in the process of reconnecting to ancestral Coast Salish knowledge about gender and sexuality, and exploring concepts that capture these roles and identities within my own culture. Some Indigenous Nations around the globe have managed to maintain specific cultural knowledge about gendered-varied/sexually fluid community members, despite targeted colonial attempts to eradicate these traditions from history and contemporary mainstream periphery (see, for example, Anderson, 2000; Davis, 2014; Wesley, 2015; Williams, 1986/1992). At this moment, I am unable to identify this specific knowledge within my own Coast Salish culture. And until I am able to describe my own identity using Coast Salish ancestral language, I am compelled to use the modern term, Two Spirit, to illustrate these parts of my experience, gender, sexuality, as well as my cultural and spiritual positionality. I utilize this term for the remainder of this thesis.

Finally, I recognize that not all Indigenous People who are non-conforming to Eurocentric binaries of gender or sexuality will apply the term, Two Spirit, as their identity. For this reason, I proceed with caution, respect, and rooted understanding that every individual has the right to define their own identity and experiences. For this particular thesis and in the absence of original language to describe these realities from a Coast Salish perspective, I apply the term Two Spirit interchangeably, to be intentionally

inclusive of all variations of Indigenous genders and sexuality. I do this in order to make visible the multitude of Indigenous identities and experiences that fall somewhere on the non-binary and mainstream LGBTQ+ spectrums, and to make my communication a little easier. I do this to stand our Indigenous relatives up, those who may have experienced being silenced, dismissed, or made invisible by mainstream settler society, their own families or communities because of their genders, sexualities or Indigeneity.

The seed for this thesis was germinated many years ago, and reaches back into my own childhood. I was always a very inquisitive child. I had a lot of questions about everything, including gender and sexuality when I was growing up. I remember feeling misunderstood and later isolated by those around me, like I was a puzzle they could not put together, or an image they could not recognize. There was no one around me who had answers I so desperately needed as a child. I distinctly remember praying for guidance and acceptance in solitude at a young age. I did feel pressure from family to conform to outside expectations of me as female, and I recall being teased, shamed or ignored when I did not. I never understood the reasons for conformity; I did not understand why I should be made to want to limit myself, especially when it felt so unnatural to me. During times that I protested gender conformity, I was disciplined, corrected, or dismissed by my parents, and this was also very confusing for me. On the other hand, I knew intuitively that I was different from other children and I liked that. It made me feel like I had secret powers that no one else knew about. Nevertheless, my own gender was not recognizably supported by my family or peers, and I internalized feelings of shame and invisibility, which were carried into my adolescence as a result.

By the time I entered teen years, social pressures around appearance, aspirations and behaviour were, of course, exacerbated. Most of the families in my home town were very heteronormative in mindset and predominantly non-Indigenous, so there was not much room for diversity where I grew up. In response, I focused all my efforts into transforming and blending in with others. I knew it was not safe for me to stand out on my own, without the support of my family; spiritually, this was devastating for me. I have since learned that this predicament is one that many Two Spirit People find themselves in at some point in their lives: hiding true self from others, or from those we love the most for our own protection - or for theirs. I lived under a shroud of concealment for many years. Whether it was gender, sexuality or Indigeneity, I became quite skilled at changing shape and hiding bits of me in order to blend in with my surroundings. I became accustomed to the fact that I had never known a space where I could fully be my authentic self. When I was home or in Indigenous spaces, I could not fully be gender diverse or queer; when I was in mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces, I could not be Indigenous - or rather, there were no other visible Indigenous or Two Spirit People around me, and nothing I could relate to culturally in these spaces. By the time I enrolled in college, I became very uncomfortable with ways I was made to split off pieces of my identities from one another. It was only when I started to learn about Indigenous history in school, that I was able to understand how all these different positionalities inform ways I experience the world, and that these are all simultaneous and interdependent of each other.

Before I proceed, I need to clarify that I know my family and loved ones are very supportive and accepting of who I am as a Two Spirit person today, though they may

struggle slightly to fully understand my experiences every day, or even how to ask me about this. To be fair, I have never taken initiative and approached them to explain my experiences fully either - but I could. In the end, our discomfort around these issues affects capacity for my family to understand how identity as a Two Spirit person impacts my everyday experience and sense of self. Regardless, I know my family loves me very much, and I am very grateful for their devotion and support. My family and I have had to deal with many struggles together over the years. At home growing up, we were basically surviving every day. For me to have created more burden on my family back then, because of my own needs as a Two Spirit child, was neither wise nor welcome. I knew that. We were all going through enough already. I do not believe there was room for Two Spirit issues in my childhood home.

To add to struggles I experienced as a child, there was also historical trauma that consumed our family home. Both my late maternal grandparents attended residential school, and although they never really spoke about their experiences to me in great detail, I know from other stories that this affected our whole extended family in very profound ways. The hurt that residential schools caused my family is intergenerational and deep. We are all still working to untangle this legacy today. In my younger years, our own healing and survival took precedence above all other challenges, including Two Spirit ones. A return to open communication, healthy boundaries, healing past wounds, visibility, and demonstrating love and support to each other is part of our individual and family recovery; this process looks different for every person in my family circle.

Before moving on, I also want to explain some formatting points for this thesis. In order to centralize Coast Salish knowledge within the content of this research, I use

chapter and section titles which are aligned with steps in Coast Salish cultural and ceremonial work. One of the first tasks we do in ceremony is to prepare ourselves and the spaces we work in. I make reference to this and other steps in our cultural work through section headings in this thesis: preparing the self, lighting the fire, setting the table, gathering our helpers, preparing the floor, witnessing, giveaways are all pieces of work embedded in Coast Salish ceremonies. These are the protocols of our People; the way I have been taught to organize important work we do in community is to follow these steps. I apply these same teachings here.

1.2 Lighting the Fire

Keeping in circle with the most foundational principles of Indigenous inquiry, we do not explore areas we are not directly aligned with ourselves as Indigenous researchers (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999/2012). In other words, we explore topics which are meaningful to our communities and cultures, those which are relevant to, and for the direct benefit of future generations of Indigenous People. As a Two Spirit person, my experience and who I am in this world is strongly connected to Indigenous knowledge, histories, and contemporary existence within families and society. I am interested in seeking Coast Salish, Nation-based strategies to improve outcomes for our Two Spirit People today, and to understand how this can strengthen and revitalize Coast Salish ways of being and knowing overall. I walk into this work with the hope of identifying meaningful discourse surrounding Two Spirit identity and positions in Coast Salish communities, which can then offer pathways for other Indigenous groups to lift up and reclaim Two Spirit knowledges in their circles as well. As a Coast Salish person, I am also deeply concerned about the impact European imperialism, colonial institutions

and imposed social constructs have had on Indigenous gender and sexuality, and how these may affect the health, safety and wellbeing of Two Spirit people who live in and outside community today. My hope in this research is to bring Two Spirit topics from a Coast Salish perspective to light, and to identify holistic ways to bring our relatives home to cultural knowledges. I want to see Coast Salish Two Spirit People openly reflected and celebrated in our communities and culture again.

In order to clarify how we walk into our future as Coast Salish People, we must first navigate the ways that our past informs our present. To provide an example from my own history, at the time of first European contact our *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* population was 30,000 strong. After contact and due to plague and war brought to our villages by European settlers, our population dwindled to approximately 100 people (Musqueam Indian Band, 2006, p. 11). This history has had devastating impacts on the transference of cultural knowledge and family lineages today. It is not uncommon for me to hear Coast Salish Elders express that they did not grow up hearing any stories or language about Two Spirit People from their own parents or grandparents. I have witnessed Coast Salish knowledge keepers become very uncomfortable, and respond negatively when they were asked to discuss and explore Two Spirit topics. I have heard Coast Salish community members proclaim that it was Europeans who brought homosexuality to First Nations. Although it is extremely disheartening to receive these messages from my own community and relatives as a Two Spirit person, I try to remember to view them as a snapshot of individual family experiences, rather than a mural of our collective history. They are a small piece of a much larger narrative weaving of Two Spirit People in Coast

Salish circles, and these interactions remind me how much our societies have maintained and suffered as a result of colonial violence.

Following my own informal inquiries, I proceed with understanding that there is an historic gap in Coast Salish knowledge and teachings about gender and sexuality across generations of our People. At the same time, I observe protocols in Coast Salish culture around relationality, respect, interdependence, balance, transformation and ambiguity that inform behaviour and expectations for all community members. I carry these teachings forward into this search for knowledge that informs and demonstrates Coast Salish understanding of gender and sexuality systems. Reclaiming and bringing ancestral teachings forward is imperative to this Indigenous community research (see, for example, Johnson & Sparrow, 2015 to illustrate the importance of centering Indigenous knowledge in community-based research). The teachings of our ancestors, our Coast Salish ways of being and knowing have followed the same protocols long before contact with the first Europeans. These medicines will support this Coast Salish research in contemporary context.

xʷməθkʷəy̓əm are hən̄qəmīn̄əm speaking people. Our community has a guiding principle in our language, n̄éčaʔmat tə šxʷqʷeləwən ct – which roughly translates into English as “We are of one heart, one mind” (Musqueam Indian Band, 2016). This phrase describes our interconnectedness to all things and each other, and our individual responsibilities to contribute to and maintain balance in this web of relationships. This principle teaches that we are expected to be respectful, compassionate, and to contribute to the strength and wellness of the whole family, community and culture using our unique talents. It means that if a relative in community is hurting, we all have a responsibility to

help. Similarly, if there are People in community who are distanced or isolated, we must do what is in our power to lift them up and help bring them back into balance. As Coast Salish People, we are stronger when we are united, when we draw from the gifts that each and every individual offers to collective wellbeing. *néča?mat tə šxʷqʷeləwən* ct is engrained in our consciousness and in the land of our People, just as it has been for thousands of years. To this day, I have not come across another Coast Salish person who is not familiar with this teaching, or who does not understand what it implies to some extent. Yet it is difficult for me to comprehend why there are so few resources that act to illuminate the presence and contributions of Two Spirit People in Coast Salish culture, when this fundamental teaching is at the core of everything we know. How can our People know this teaching so well, but not recognize the lack of implementation for our Two Spirit relatives as well? These teachings are meant to be acted upon; it is our responsibility as community members to breathe life into them every day.

I also offer this example of traditional knowledge from my own culture, to emphasize that while all Indigenous societies navigate relationality differently, there are commonalities among Indigenous worldviews across the globe. Granted, the list of shared values and beliefs is short when examining diverse global Indigenous heritage and cultures. Yet there are some common threads in the guiding principles of Indigenous ancestors, in the language and in our traditional cultural knowledge which are useful for research and community development work. If we agree that values such as balance, adaptation, inclusiveness and non-interference are and have always been present within Indigenous cultures, it is not unreasonable to deduce that fluidity around gender and sexuality was also widely accepted and even celebrated in our communities at one time.

When we start to examine traditional Indigenous teachings and worldview more closely as researchers, within the context of Two Spirit experience, we notice different ways these values have been dismissed, avoided, and diluted over time. I propose that much of the distinction within Two Spirit narrative is derived from ways that our own identities and experiences have been suppressed by others, and in the manners in which we, as multiple entities, receive and shift as a result of these relationships. There has been a lot of change in our Indigenous societies throughout history which was violently imposed through Eurocentric imperialism and colonization processes; however, there have also been powerful examples of resistance, transformation and resilience within these narratives, our cultures, among our relatives. These examples must be explored further by our People and research as well. For the purpose of this introduction, I will highlight specific colonial policies developed and enforced by European settlers, as a means to eradicate targeted aspects of Indigenous culture, families, and ties to the land and water. This was done in order to provide an historical context to this research.

As a piece of federal law developed in Canada, the *Indian Act of 1876* was a consolidation of other colonial legislation, including the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*, the *Gradual Civilization Act of 1857*, and the *British North America Act of 1867* (Indigenous Foundation, 2009). Although it has undergone multiple amendments throughout history, the main purpose of the *Indian Act* is to allow federal government to assume total guardianship over Indigenous peoples and govern every aspect of Indigenous social, economic, political and cultural life. This legislation takes away the right of Indigenous People to decide for ourselves. The development and imposition of this colonial law is a deliberate paternalistic strategy employed to control Indigenous populations, enforce laws

on our behalf, and maintain a genesis of white privilege in this country (Episkenew, 2009, p. 6). There are quite a number of policies imposed on Indigenous Peoples in Canada under the authority of the *Indian Act*, some of which include patriarchy, misogyny, heterosexism, assimilation, and gender discrimination. These policies have had significant influence on the role and experiences of our Indigenous women, as well as Two Spirit community members specifically. To be sure, the *Indian Act* is not a policy of historical past; this piece of legislation continues to oppress Indigenous peoples across this country in detrimental ways on a daily basis.

Government attempts to relinquish Indigenous People's right to self-identify through the *Indian Act* further perpetuates a strategy of "divide and conquer" (Episkenew, 2009, p. 32). This division of Indigenous families and societies weakens our Indigenous social infrastructure, and keeps us dependent on imposed dominant, paternalistic powers and systems of colonial control. Upon close review, it is evident that gendered discrimination policies entrenched in the *Indian Act* ensure that procreation and heterosexuality are the only unions recognized by Canadian legislation for Indigenous People (for further examples, see Cannon, 2006). This completely omits the experience and presence of Two Spirit community members. It is clear that colonial construction of heterosexual, dualistic gender roles, and normalizing hierarchy through patriarchal institutions was at the core of the Canadian nation building process (Creese, 2007, p. 194). To facilitate their rule over Indigenous societies and the land, European colonizers coercively imposed Christianization on Indigenous communities to dismantle traditional governance, gender and sexuality systems (Wesley, 2015, p. 4). Intent to splinter and suppress Indigenous beliefs about open sexuality and multiple genders was an intentional

political action by the Canadian government. Imperial colonial governments targeted those elements of our Indigenous culture that unified us on the land, and made us stronger as societies; and Indigenous constructs of gender and sexuality were among those elements specifically targeted for destruction.

The colonial agenda has impacted Two Spirit People throughout history in compounding ways. To be sure, we cannot examine gender discrimination in the *Indian Act* without also scrutinizing the influence imposed Christianity has had on Indigenous cultures. There are linkages between ideologies of White racial superiority and patriarchal Christian beliefs that view men and heterosexuality as superior. These common European values are palpable. They serve to stir a perfect storm of Eurocentrism, which in the past would later compel colonial government to formulate the residential school system for Indigenous children in Canada. Here, the federal government viewed development of industrial schools as essential to promote assimilation and adoption of agricultural lifestyles in Indigenous communities, but it was Christian missionaries who recognized the advantage of isolating children from their parents and culture, and administering religious regiment in these schools (Haig-Brown, 2002, p. 29).

Furthermore, as Wesley (2015) indicates in her powerful work on urban Two Spirit identity, the vilification of Indigenous practices in residential schools simultaneously contributed to the erasure (or amnesia) of any Two Spirit traditions that may have existed in Indigenous societies prior to colonization (p. 8). It is therefore clear how historically based narratives and knowledge about Coast Salish Two Spirit traditions

may be sleeping in many of our communities. Indigenous families and cultures are still recovering from impacts of residential schools today.

I have read stories about Indigenous children arriving at residential schools, and being automatically separated into male and female gender groupings (Episkenew, 2009). Two Spirit children were especially targeted by school administrators and grouped according to biological sex, regardless of their non binary identities or roles in family and community. Their appearance, hair and clothing were altered to reflect European dualistic gender norms, and they were schooled according to colonial expectations and gendered divisions of labour (Indigenous Foundations, 2009). I try to imagine what this experience must have been like for my late maternal grandparents, being so young, far away from parents and family, and forced to live under such a violent regime.

My mother told me that my late grandfather was thrown down a flight of stairs as a boy by a minister at residential school, and that he broke his collar bone as a result. This act of horrific violence was inflicted on my grandfather for simply stealing apples to feed his younger brother at residential school. Not to imply that I did not believe what my mother said, but it was pretty cathartic when I found documentation of this event in Provincial archives as well. I always knew in my soul that it happened, and this has been infuriating and devastating. Terrifying experiences such as these are imprinted on our Indigenous families and communities to this day. Sometimes, I try to imagine what the residential school experience may have been like for me as a Two Spirit child; it is almost unbearable for my heart and spirit to travel to these places. The affect of such violent acts of conformity, assimilation and cultural genocide against our little Two Spirit children in residential schools is visceral and intergenerational.

We do not hear stories about Two Spirit experiences in the residential school narratives; nor do we hear about ways that conformity and assimilation tactics enforced by residential school administrators and government officials transformed Indigenous community views of Two Spirit People over time. For example, Christian beliefs infiltrated Indigenous understanding of sexuality. In Christianity, sex (especially out of wedlock) is closely associated with sin (Haig-Brown, 2002, p. 120), and as a result, traditional Indigenous notions of open sexuality were avoided and deemed immoral by residential school administrators. Furthermore, any children who deviated from Christian beliefs were targeted for public humiliation and embarrassment tactics, which also served to reinforce colonial and religious views, and demonized traditional Indigenous values and belief – including Two Spirit traditions. Indigenous children in the schools brought these scars back to their own communities; the trauma from these negative experiences was passed on when residential school survivors grew up and had their own children. To further compound the trauma of colonial cultural genocide, many Indigenous children were sexually abused by adult administrators of the same sex in residential schools, and by other students who also suffered sexualized assault by administrators. Therefore, many residential school survivors understandably came to equate homosexuality and non-binary gender with the abuse they endured while attending the schools (Wesley, 2015, p. 9). Children who strayed from colonial heterosexual gender norms at residential school were targeted and punished severely, thereby resulting in several generations of Indigenous People in Canada who were taught to hate, fear or dismiss same-sex sexuality and gender non-conformity (p. 9).

Colonial condemnation of gender and sexual diversity in policy, including government and Christian residential school administration, often required Indigenous families to keep Two Spirit traditions secret, in order to protect our relatives (Williams, 1986/1992, p. 141). While this secrecy may have been well intentioned, it was nonetheless left unattended and became dormant for the most part in many Indigenous cultures. Secrecy combined with the legacy of violent sexual trauma endured in residential schools, would eventually lead to high rates of isolation, dishonouring, suicide and violence against Two Spirit community members (p. 181). Those devastating symptoms continue to ripple across the lives and experience of Two Spirit People from all cultures. Because traditional institutions of gender and sexuality were forced underground, much of this particular history and knowledge has been distorted, discouraged or avoided in our communities. This lack of visibility displaces Two Spirit People from our ancestral positions in family and culture. I offer this brief history of imperial and colonial violence against Indigenous societies, in order to contextualize the very real struggles for daily inclusivity that Two Spirit People face today. This is only a glimpse of the history of our Two Spirit relatives, as these narrative have yet to be excavated from the land and our collective cultural recall. In this research, I intend to illuminate contemporary Coast Salish Two Spirit realities, and bring forward traditions that help empower and weave Two Spirit relatives back into our cultures and community periphery.

Finally, I propose that the violence of Eurocentric binary is not derived from within Indigenous cultures. Rather, we inherited this violence from settler culture. Pathologies of silence, shame and contempt towards Two Spirit People have been

aggressively imposed on Indigenous societies since first contact. They are institutionalized through federal legislation such as the *Indian Act*, enforced in policies of cultural genocide that created the residential school system, and executed in partnership with Christian religious leadership. The aim of this assimilation strategy is to splinter us from our own cultural knowledge, the land, water and each other, in order to eliminate us as competition against Eurocentric annihilation of traditional Indigenous lands and resources. This strategy further aims to erase diverse Indigenous experience and cultures. Colonial violence still infiltrates our communities today, convoluting our relationships and ways we view, silence and dismiss Two Spirit relatives. I view these behaviours (or lack of recognition) towards Two Spirit People as a symptom of colonial confinement in our Indigenous societies. We must unify, unlearn, awaken, and bring ancestral ways of being forward in our daily activities and interaction, if we are to truly recover from historical legacies of colonization, and reclaim our positions as sovereign Indigenous Nations. The pathway to this recovery lies within Indigenous, Nation-based knowledge systems, cultures and histories.

1.3 Setting the Table

I walk into this thesis carrying an Indigenous theoretical framework. Over the past two decades, Indigenous scholars have laid the foundation that affirms Indigenous theory as a viable means of obtaining knowledge in formal research (see, for example, Kovach, 2009; Hart, 2002; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Minogiizhigokwe, 2011; Q’um Q’um Xiiem, 2008; Smith, 1999/2012; and Wilson, 2008, for clarification around the rigor of Indigenous theory). This affirmation is mainly geared towards western academic institutions and Eurocentric thinkers; as Indigenous People, we have always known our

theories are valid. To me, this demonstrates the need for Indigenous thinkers to walk between multiple worlds: settler society and Indigenous realms, academic and Indigenous knowledges. In their research on Indigenous traditional and environmental knowledges, Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall (2012) offer examples of what they describe as, “Two-Eyed Seeing,” to reinforce a together consciousness between western and Indigenous learners. This example is predominantly geared towards collaboration between western and Indigenous scientists and educators, but the underlying principles highlight the value of multiple perspectives, differences between western and Indigenous thought, and the need to weave back and forth between knowledges in response to shifting circumstances. These same underpinnings apply in this study. The outcome is similar for us Two Spirit folk; we travel and experience between multiple intersectionalities and realms of being.

Indigenous People have solidified our own relational worldviews by engaging ancient processes for gathering and transferring knowledge across generations for thousands of years. The very act of reclaiming and emphasizing these Indigenous processes is decolonizing and creative in nature. I argue that the path to cultural resurgence and community wellness in our Coast Salish societies is found by weaving traditional knowledge and contemporary experiences of Two Spirit relatives. Two Spirit traditions in Coast Salish cultures are in line with the ways of being and knowing of our ancestors. This is the way we have always passed on knowledge amongst each other. The purpose of this research is to explore Coast Salish knowledge about Two Spirit identity construction and experience. The research question I put forward is as follows:

- **How does recognition of Coast Salish Two Spirit identity and experience contribute to community wellness and cultural resurgence?**

Through application of an Indigenous research framework, this study specifically engaged Coast Salish community members, using Coast Salish methodology and critical inquiry to advance understanding, inform social policy development, and influence future research. The objectives of the study aimed to:

- Examine traditional, historical Coast Salish knowledge related to non-binary gender/sexuality construction and positions in society;
- Explore ways contemporary Coast Salish People navigate Two Spirit identity development and inclusivity in home communities; and
- Identify opportunities for Coast Salish societies to revitalize traditional gender/sexuality systems and be inclusive of non-binary, Two Spirit community members in meaningful ways.

Chapter 2 will explain ways that I prepared for this research, according to traditional Coast Salish ethics and protocol. I conducted a review of existing knowledge to explore the dialogue around Two Spirit identity and experience, so that I can relate this information to Coast Salish societies and experiences specifically. In Chapter 3, I describe Coast Salish methodology using my own Four House Post methodology, as it is applied to this research, as well as details around participation, academic and Indigenous ethical considerations and limitations for this particular study. Chapter 4 presents traditional Coast Salish witnessing protocols embedded in this Indigenous research, as well as participant stories which I examined through narrative thematic analysis based on my Four House Posts methodology. A further discussion of the findings is offered in Chapter 5, as well as an overview of implications for future research, policy and practice. To conclude, Chapter 6 describes some of the transformations and gifts that have

emerged from this research, and offers some final reflections on my journey as a researcher.

With respect to implications of this research, these findings and any subsequent research efforts will benefit Coast Salish and other Indigenous Nations alike. Indigenous cultures have always been action-oriented. They are cultures of doing. This is reflected in the languages, protocols and different worldviews of our Indigenous societies. This research is a call for Coast Salish and Indigenous thinkers to conduct research according to our traditional protocols; and to apply ways of knowing and doing derived from the lands where our ancestors come from. We need to share protocol knowledge with each other as researchers, but more importantly with our relatives in Indigenous communities. This study is a response to colonial violence, to make Two Spirit identity and experience visible in our communities again, and to re-story Two Spirit relatives back into the cultural fabric of our histories, families, ceremony and daily activities.

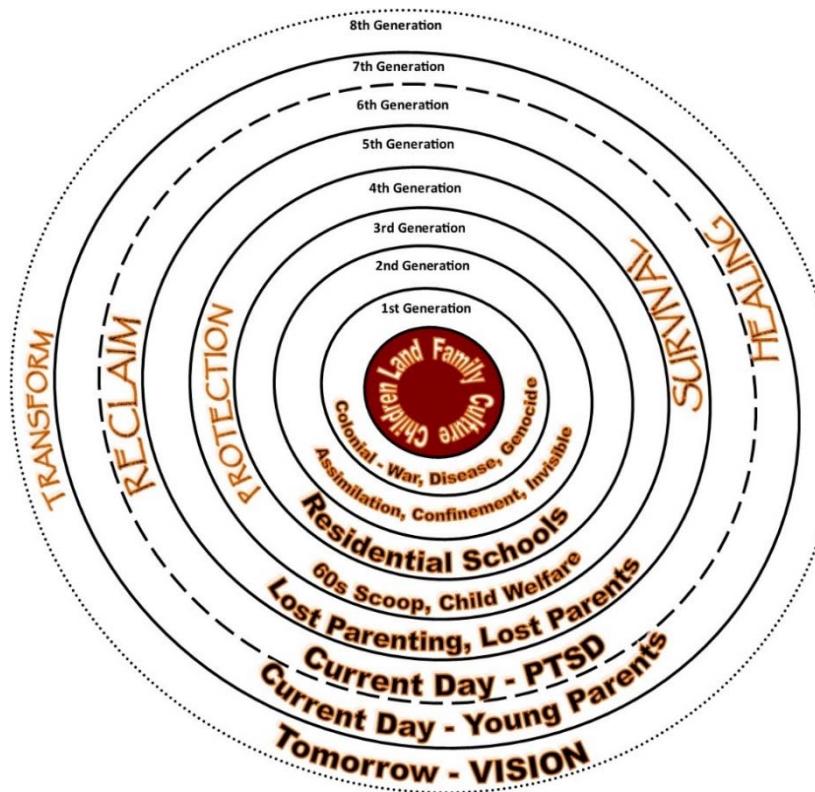
With regard to implications for social work practice with Indigenous families, I put forward the notion that all trauma needs witness in order to heal. As a helper and social worker on the front line, I work between the tremors of intergenerational trauma caused by colonial violence every day. I explore some of these impacts related to Two Spirit experience in subsequent chapters. Helpers in Indigenous communities must put symptoms of cultural genocide back into historic and contemporary context, and work to restore balance with Indigenous families in trauma-informed ways. Protocols from our Nations and from the land will act as guides. Social work practice must navigate and make these protocols visible, to help Indigenous families receive witness to their own healing, recovery, and their own Nation-specific cultural reclamation and resurgence.

This research provides one example of how Indigenous Nations may conduct and marry formal research process with unique, community-based strategic planning initiatives and Indigenous theory. Formal research findings can leverage individual Indigenous community efforts to build and enhance programming, policy and resources specific to territory, history, culture and context. Findings from modern knowledge seeking efforts must be actionable within Indigenous Nations and communities. If research does not apply in this way, or if the findings sit idle upon conclusion, then I suggest in these ways, it is incomplete. To clarify, my understanding is that I hold responsibility as a researcher to ensure that I do everything I can to breathe life into the knowledge shared here, and that the work is disseminated and directly applied for the benefit of our Indigenous communities and relatives. Research must be conducted according to Indigenous protocol and ways of knowing, and it must delineate clear actions for future Indigenous development work, if it is to have a meaningful, long standing impact for Indigenous families and communities. For this study, I focus on Coast Salish communities, culture and development; however, other Indigenous Nations and researchers can apply this same process, based on their own protocols.

Finally, conducting this particular research using a Coast Salish approach is decolonizing and reclaiming in and of itself. In this thesis, I demonstrate one way that researchers can move towards doing the work in ways that are more in line with their own epistemology and positionalities, while also celebrating unique and specific ways of being and knowing contained within Indigenous cultures and positionalities we research within. Centering Indigenous knowledge and communities in the research allows us to build and strengthen Indigenous identity and connections to the land. It serves as a

restoration mechanism, which returns power and control of research processes back into the hands of Indigenous scholarship, communities and the ancestors of Indigenous territories. In this regard, Nation-based research is a return home for researchers and communities, a return to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and as a source of resurgence for our People.

Chapter 2 – Gathering Our Helpers



*Image 1 - Imagining
Resistance Rings:
Where are Coast Salish
Two Spirit identity, story
and experiences in the
history and literature?*

In order to begin this review, I engaged a reflexive activity to identify any bias or predetermined understandings I have held about Indigenous history, the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous cultures and societies, and what this means for Two Spirit People in our families and communities. I wanted to see what I already knew about this history, and the effects it may have had on my Two Spirit relatives. The results of this exercise are shown in *Image 1* in this chapter. Following this process, I turned my gaze onto the resources. I needed to clarify what knowledge about Two Spirit identity, experience and history was already available, before moving forward in my own study. There was certainly evidence of ambiguous Indigenous gender and diverse sexualities in the literature (Anderson, 2000; Creese, 2007; Haig-Brown, 2002; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Little Thunder, 1997; Morgensen, 2011; Simpson, 2011; Thomas, 1997; Williams,

1986/1992). For the purpose of this review, I did not intend to corroborate diverse Indigenous gender systems; I proceeded with the assumption that the presence of Two Spirit traditions is already widely accepted in academia. I was instead interested in exploring whether the existing scholarship offered any insight into the impact Eurocentric ideology and colonialism has had on Indigenous gender and sexuality traditions, and the implications for Coast Salish culture specifically. In reviewing the sources, it is clear that the intent of imperial Canadian government was to disrupt, destroy and erase Indigenous cultures and connections to land through mechanisms of assimilation (Smith, 1999/2012). This includes decimation of Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality, as they are fundamentally contrary to the European worldview and assimilation (Anderson, 2000). I wanted to know what scholars are writing about the experiences of contemporary Two Spirit People, how they have resisted colonial attacks and reclaimed their identity and positions in family and culture.

To put issues of Indigenous gender and sexuality construction, identity and experience into a broader context, I looked for impacts of heteronormative, patriarchal systems on non-binary members of our societies in general, and on Two Spirit and Coast Salish community members specifically. In retrospect, I always wondered how my experience as a Two Spirit person is unique or similar to others. Therefore, I wanted to know more about identity development and stories from other Two Spirit people today, and what this meant for them in their own families and communities. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to examine existing resources about our Two Spirit relatives through this research, and I was excited to learn what awakenings and new understandings this process would reveal.

For this review, I examined resources from North America about non-binary gender/sexuality in Indigenous contexts generally, with emphasis on Two Spirit experience specifically; sources ranged in random date from 1992 to 2016. I conducted my search for resources online at multiple international university library websites, Google Scholar, Google, Indigenous health, gender and culture publication sites, and online Indigenous, social work, gender and sexuality journals using combinations of the following key words: Coast Salish, Salish, Two Spirit, trans, queer, gender, sexuality, resistance, reclaiming, decolonizing, west coast, Canada, British Columbia, Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native, Indian, traditional, health, teachings, culture, storytelling, oral traditions, narrative, and methodology. In addition, I reviewed and drew from bibliographies and from references listed in articles identified as relevant sources in my literature search. I found it challenging to find a good number of sources published within the last ten years, addressing research in the area of Two Spirit identity and experience. Therefore, I chose to prioritize sources written by self-identified non-binary, genderqueer, LGBTQ+ thinkers and Two Spirit authors, and further priority was given to Indigenous authorship. I identified four central themes reflected in the literature, which represent some of the main discourse surrounding Indigenous gender and sexuality histories, contemporary realities and future calls to action for Two Spirit research and community members. These four themes include: 1) Worldview; 2) Racism; 3) Violence; and 4) Decolonization.

2.2 Worldview

From the community's perspective, the fulfillment of social or ceremonial roles and responsibilities was a more important defining feature of gender than sexual behaviour or identity. (Fieland, Walters & Simoni, 2007, p. 11).

Differences between Indigenous and western European (mainstream) cultures and worldviews are significant. Mainstream academic scholarship and various Eurocentric socio-cultural fields of study throughout history have applied a cultural bias to how gender and sexuality issues are approached among its own citizens, and those of Indigenous societies. In the western mainstream, gender and sexuality are compounded into one defining factor of sexual behaviour. This is measured against the extent to which they conform or do not conform to western notions of heteronormative patriarchy and predetermined gender assignments to males and females (Davis, 2014; Driskill, 2010; Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Hunt, 2016; Lang, 1997; Namaste, 2000; Walters, Evans-Campbell, Simoni, Ronquillo & Bhuyan, 2007; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). Any gender or sexual ambiguity is thereby resolved within a masculine, European framework centering on ideals of procreation and heteronormativity (Lang, 1997; Namaste, 2000; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). Mainstream approaches privilege discourse about sexuality over any gender or cultural variations that deviate from western ideals, thereby erasing recognition that Indigenous societies have had their own distinct knowledge about multiple genders and sexuality long before Europeans arrived on our shores.

Within pre-contact Indigenous societies, the presence of multiple genders had more to do with fulfillment of social roles, responsibilities and functioning than it had to do with sexual behaviour (Davis, 2014; Driskill, 2010; Fieland et al., 2007; Hunt, 2016; Lang, 1997; Walters et al., 2006; Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2008). The distinction is in what we do, not who we do in terms of relevance. Although roles and responsibilities for predominant males/men and females/women were still maintained in Indigenous societies

before European contact, (Davis, 2014), the egalitarian, inclusive and adaptive nature of our cultures allowed for a wide variety of gender and sexuality expressions among community members. Strict binary confines are not historically supported by Indigenous worldviews, and this fluidity is recognized among Indigenous cultures around the globe (Anderson, 2000; Simpson, 2011; Williams, 1986/1992). Traditional Indigenous gender systems are intimately connected to the land, family and community responsibilities (Davis, 2014; Driskill, 2010; Hunt, 2016; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2008). The ways in which gender and sexuality systems are expressed by Indigenous societies are as unique and diverse as the land and cultures themselves.

Differences between worldviews are to be expected among cultures; however, these variations become destructive when western European culture views its own as superior to that of Indigenous societies, and members forcefully impose their beliefs onto perceived inferiors as a result. Unfortunately, Indigenous Two Spirit, gender and sexuality traditions have been aggressively targeted by mechanisms of western colonialism and assimilation strategies throughout history (Alaers, 2010). I explore some of this colonial violence in the next sections. Many policies of cultural genocide and Eurocentric ideals have caused an intergenerational rift in Indigenous communities, replacing traditional values of acceptance and inclusivity with division, shame and condemnation (Fieland et al., 2007; Lang, 1997; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). This has resulted in a perpetual colonial erasure of Two Spirit roles and identities from the gaze of both mainstream and Indigenous societies, with exception to European anthropology disciplines, which focused greatly on fossilizing and ultimately misinterpreting Two Spirit traditions. Two Spirit identity erasure tactics have thereby

fractured Indigenous People from the very core values and practices that make our cultures unique. Indigenous societies are still recovering from this historic dishonouring of Two Spirit experience and existence today.

Indeed, how we view ourselves and others within our own cultures impacts our relationships and behaviours. Based on this review, it appears that discourse suggests European cultures tend to prioritize the sexuality, domination and heteronormativity of their males, more than Indigenous cultures prioritize contributions of multiple genders and sexes to the collective wellbeing (Davis, 2014; Driskill, 2010; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). The universal collapse of gender and sexual behaviour into one indicator of queerness or “Othering” in European cultures, and the resulting homogeneity of non-binary identities for people from all ancestral backgrounds is an indicator of limited homonormative views of very fluid genders and sexuality. It is clear that Indigenous cultural views about gender and sexuality are in vast opposition to those of European settler cultures.

2.3 Racism

When they do not question or consider the impact of their actions on racialized or colonized peoples, White Queers are complicit in sustaining settler colonialism. (Greensmith & Giwa, 2013, p. 142).

Intergenerational colonial wounds inflicted on Two Spirit People have caused many to split their identities in some capacity. Some either choose to remain in their home communities, where their Indigeneity is maintained but non-binary identity is rendered invisible, and some move away from home where non-binary identities are more accepted in mainstream LGBTQ+ community, but Indigenous identity and struggles against colonialism are not validated (Davis, 2014; Driskill, 2010; Fieland et al.,

2007; Lang, 1997; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2014; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2008). This serves to quarantine the experiences of Two Spirit People, excluding their lived realities and needs from mainstream LGBTQ+ communities, and distancing them from traditional knowledge and supports within Indigenous family circles and cultures. Migrations patterns of Two Spirit relatives between their home communities and urban cities are known to researchers (see, Ristock, Zoccolone & Passante, 2010, for example), or at least, the movement is known. Teengs and Travers (2006) also did some beautiful work on a Youth Migration Project research, which highlights reasons Two Spirit Youth leave their home Indigenous communities to move to the cities (violence, homo/transphobia in home communities, gender and sexuality shifts), and the racial discrimination (within employment, housing, and health service access), and violence they experience while in urban circles. Research about Two Spirit migration can harvest knowledge related to Two Spirit experiences of violence and racism within these respective spaces, relationality between acts of migration, and implications for the delivery of culturally appropriate health and wellness services to Two Spirit People both within and outside Indigenous communities.

Two Spirit People have a compounded struggle to emphasize their own Indigenous identity, knowledge and histories, while simultaneously having to align with compartmentalized mainstream understandings of their Indigeneity, gender and sexuality (Davis, 2014; Driskill, 2010; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Hunt, 2016; Wilson, 1996). Two Spirit People travel between multiple realms of being and knowing, as Two Spirit identity and experiences stretch across an assortment of positions of gender, sexuality, race and culture. And because of this wonderful diversity, they are inadvertently vulnerable to a

multitude of concurrent oppressions and discrimination in both mainstream and Indigenous societies. Many Two Spirit People are known to leave their home communities in search of a sense of belonging in urban centres, only to be met with further exclusion and racism at the hands of non-Indigenous settlers there (Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Ristock et al., 2010; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2014; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Peters, 2005). In other words, the effects of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples, and the need for safe spaces to unpack these impacts in the cities is not overly welcome or accepted by non-Indigenous LGBTQ+ community members. This is mainly reflective of settler allies to understand how the perpetuation of mainstream, LGBTQ+ homonormative ideals on Two Spirit folk in these circles, is experienced as racism and inadvertently dismissing the Indigenous experience. This is highlighted by Pamela Palmater (2011), in her work on Indigenous identity and gender politics. She asserts that Indigenous People are most certainly subject to racism, but the racism we are most concerned with, in this case, is the racist denial that we are distinct People with our own cultures and communities (2011, p. 63). To be sure, discourse around racialized violence against Indigenous People is not readily recognized or often taken up in mainstream LGBTQ+ circles, discourse or research. To me, this is racist denial of colonial history. This serves to dismiss violence experienced by Two Spirit People, based on racial and cultural factors while they engage mainstream LGBTQ+ communities.

The literature shows that mainstream LGBTQ+ communities (informed by heteropatriarchy, heteronormative and colonial ideals), serve to perpetuate Eurocentric norms of gender and sexuality, resulting in continued racialized violence against Two

Spirit People and experiences (Davis, 2014; Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2008). Most of these communities do not incorporate colonial history or racialized violence into campaigns or research for equality and justice. This has a devastating impact on the wellbeing of our Two Spirit relatives, as their ancestry and heritage is further removed from their identity as gender or sexuality diverse people, when they are in urban circles. This means that although Two Spirit People may be accepted in mainstream LGBTQ+ communities, their cultural heritage and racial histories are not. Violence against Two Spirit People, whether in mainstream or within Indigenous family and communities, is a direct result of historic and colonial attacks on Indigenous cultures. By excluding colonial violence from political agendas, mainstream LGBTQ+ communities reinforce the same Eurocentric values, hetero/homonormativity that inhibit them as well.

2.4 Violence

When one aspect of a person is unhealthy, the entire person is affected. This too is true for the entire community; when one aspect of the community is missing, the entire community will suffer in some way. (Wilson, 1996, p. 308).

Colonial violence and Christianization of Indigenous populations, paired with Eurocentric campaigns of misogyny and homo/transphobia opened a flood gate of assimilation policies, intent on displacing Indigenous People from our homelands, erasing and vilifying Indigenous gender, sexuality, as well as our Two Spirit traditions (Davis, 2014; Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Lang, 1997; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). Colonial policies such as the *Indian Act*, residential and boarding schools, and provincial child welfare laws were developed and imposed on Indigenous People in order to enforce and maintain heteronormativity, patriarchal domination, European

binaries, thought, and control over Indigenous identity, families and existence. See Sinclair (2007; 2009) for salient examples of racism and identity politics engrained within colonial government child welfare laws.

Although Two Spirit people continue to resist attempts to eradicate their identity and histories, the devastating impact colonial violence has had on Indigenous families and the wellbeing of Two Spirit People is substantial (Anderson, 2000; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Justice, 2014; Little Thunder, 1997; Smith, 2005; Thomas, 1997; Thomas & Jacobs, 1999; Walters et al., 2006; Williams, 1986/1992; Wilson, 1996). Gender is a known factor in violence against non-binary and LGBTQ+ community members inclusively (Namaste, 2000; Wilson & Peters, 2005). The intersectional effect of gender and racialization has amplified the impact of colonization on Indigenous women, and Two Spirit People specifically. A further discussion of examples of colonial histories of violence against Indigenous women and transwomen experiencing homelessness or marginal housing may be found in Allan & Sakamoto (2014). This is significant.

Violence against Indigenous women has been historically encouraged and normalized by the colonizers, and Indigenous societies (also impacted by historic and contemporary colonialism) in turn, began to perpetuate this violence as a result. Indeed, collective violence is associated with gendered violence (Dauod, Smylie, Urquia, Allan & O'Campo, 2013), and although there is a need for increased research in these areas, violence against Two Spirit folk in particular, parallels histories of colonial violence against Indigenous women. Two Spirit self-identified women also report that they do not feel welcome accessing services in their home communities or in the cities, due to racism and sexism experienced in these organizations (see, Teengs, 2008 report, for examples of

violence, racism and discrimination imposed on Two Spirit women). For any Two Spirit People who do not fit in with European homonormativity or heteropatriarchy, the risk of being victims of violence is exacerbated (Elm et al., 2016; Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Wesley, 2015), and opportunities to heal and recover from the impacts of violence are limited at home or in the cities.

Violence against Two Spirit People in their own families and communities can manifest in complex and multifaceted ways. Knowledge around Indigenous gender, sexuality and Two Spirit traditions has been repressed, hidden or assimilated in Indigenous cultures, in order to mimic mainstream heteropatriarchy and Eurocentric social structures (Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Lang, 1997; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 2008). What this means for Indigenous families, is that they have limited recollection or knowledge about how to be in relationship with their Two Spirit relatives. Internalized homo/transphobia within Indigenous communities is an intergenerational legacy caused by gendered colonialism that Two Spirit People can face at home (Wesley, 2015; Walters et al., 2006). Silence around Two Spirit identity and experience in family also has implications, as it can be difficult for Two Spirit People to negotiate whether silence is dismissive or quiet acceptance of their role and place in community and culture (Wesley, 2014). Our Two Spirit relatives in their home communities report that they continue to be excluded from ceremony and cultural activities because they do not conform to colonial binaries of gender (Driskill, 2010; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2014; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). In order to heal historic wounds effectively and in a good way, and to resist further colonial attacks on traditional knowledges, Indigenous communities must look to reclaim Two Spirit practices in daily

life. Our Indigenous families (blood, adopted, chosen, foster, or any other kind) have a responsibility to respect Two Spirit folk for who they are, regardless of our gender identity or sexualities, and even if this changes multiple times throughout our lives (Kiwetinohk Kisik, 2017). This resurgence includes honouring and incorporating Two Spirit identities and experience back into our Indigenous societies and cultures.

2.5 Decolonization

Part of the colonial experience for Native people [in the United States] is that we are constantly disappeared through the stories that non-Native people tell, or don't tell, about us. (Driskill, 2010, p. 79).

The literature indicates that dialogue surrounding gender, race, class and colonial ideology impacts mainstream genderqueer and LGBTQ+ community members (Driskill, 2010; Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Hunt, 2016; Namaste, 2000; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). Discourse about colonial subjugation must also engage long term decolonization activism; it should focus analysis and resist notions of heteropatriarchy and homonormativity, if it is to achieve emancipation from imposed assimilation tactics these systems enforce. Currently, mainstream LGBTQ+ and queer people of colour critiques continue to omit colonial histories of violence against Indigenous People, and erase Two Spirit experiences from mainstream understandings of Indigeneity (Driskill, 2010; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Hunt, 2016; Lang, 1997; Wilson, 2008). Analysis that omits history of colonial oppression and erasure of Two Spirit identity serves to perpetuate colonial worldviews and genocide committed against Indigenous societies across the globe (Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Lang, 1997; Namaste, 2000; Walters et al., 2006; Wilson, 2008). Western researchers who bring forward multidisciplinary approaches, and who work in partnership with

Indigenous researchers and methodology, can challenge these colonial mechanisms, recognize and honour diverse cultural experiences of colonialism, and offer opportunities for resistance and reclamation to mainstream non-binary and Two Spirit People inclusively.

Resistance to colonial subjugation and violence against Indigenous communities in general, and for Two Spirit People specifically, has always been rooted within Indigenous ways of knowing and being. There are deliberate and destructive motivations for how and why imperial European governments target Indigenous families and cultures, in attempt to dismantle, assimilate and seize control over land and resources for its own gain. The literature confirms that the very aspects of Indigenous cultures targeted by colonial persecution throughout history (which includes Indigenous identity, spirituality, family, education, ceremony, cultural activities and values), will subsequently serve as viable sources of resistance and resiliency for Two Spirit People (Fieland et al., 2007; Hunt, 2016; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 2008). Unique, Nation-based Indigenous knowledges contain pathways for every community to heal from the effects of intergenerational colonial trauma, and to revitalize interconnection to the land, history, each other and our collective futures.

Indigenous traditions and cultures are diverse, ever-changing and adaptive to surrounding environments; Two Spirit community members and identities are the same. The literature offers multiple examples for how Indigenous communities are rebuilding these relationships through a return to Nation-specific knowledges, values and practice (Davis, 2014; Hunt, 2016; Wesley, 2014; Wilson, 1996). It is important to note when applying a decolonizing approach to research, there must be a resulting transition in

thought and behaviour within relationships. To me, that is an indicator of decolonization, unlearning settler and colonial violence, and reclaiming values and knowledge within our Indigenous cultures. In order to critically resist colonization, we must resist the removal of Indigenous identities, culture and histories from the grand narrative (Allan, 2006).

Two Spirit identities and experiences must also be included in these endeavours; our Two Spirit knowledge must be incorporated into Indigenous cultural revitalization projects, as a mechanism for wholeness and transcendence of unique Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

2.6 Discussion

For this review, it is significant to note that the majority of existing literature explores traditional Indigenous gender and sexuality construction from predominantly South Pacific, Eastern Canada First Nations, Native American cultures, or urban cities (Anderson, 2000; Driskill, 2010; Epple, 1998; Fieland et al., 2007; Gilley, 2006; Haig-Brown, 1988; Justice, 2014; Lang, 1997; Little Thunder, 1997; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Thomas, 1997; Thomas & Jacobs, 1999; Walters et al., 2006; Williams, 1986/1992; Wilson, 1996). Respectfully, I recognize the relevance of highlighting gender and sexuality systems from various Indigenous cultures and contexts, not only to demonstrate commonalities among these knowledges, but also to expound complex diversities within Indigenous cultures across the globe. I am grateful for the contributions that multidisciplinary and Indigenous scholarship have made over the past thirty years to develop foundational understandings of Two Spirit traditions. But there is still an undeniable absence of the territories currently known as west coast Canada, and an

absence of Coast Salish knowledge and stories about gender, sexuality, or Two Spirit experience in the literature. This void was striking to me.

Could it be that other Nations have maintained cultural knowledge about Two Spirit People, and Coast Salish Nations (which includes a large grouping of different Nations across a vast expansion of traditional territories) have not? At first, I thought perhaps west coast Two Spirit omissions in the literature are related to migratory patterns of colonialism in Canada, as well as geographic and population differences between eastern and western Indigenous societies. From what I understand, the first European settlers landed on the east coast of Canada. It is plausible that densely populated resource rich west coast Indigenous communities received greater colonial and settler presence than that of our eastern neighbours. This would have resulted in higher levels of population devastation, and a definitive fracturing of cultural knowledges about Two Spirit people.

Geographic voids in Two Spirit knowledge may also be related to cultural variations among Indigenous societies here on the west coast. I have spoken informally with a number of Elders and knowledge keepers from different west coast Nations in my own extended family, who indicate that they were not raised knowing any ancestral stories about Two Spirit People. I mention some of these claims in the previous chapter. To add to this, it is suggested there are no Two Spirit stories on the west coast, because gender and sexual fluidity were always openly accepted in our communities here. Considering what knowledge about west coast Nations is available (or rather, that is not available), I wondered if searching for roles and stories about Two Spirit People comparable to other Nations is a flawed approach. Perhaps there were no specific stories

or teachings about Two Spirit identity in Coast Salish societies, because our ancestors did not see the need to stand these relatives apart from others. Maybe I could not find any information about specific Two Spirit roles and responsibilities in Coast Salish culture, because there are none. Regardless, this is definitely an area that warrants further research; Two Spirit knowledge and experiences must be represented and re-storied back into Coast Salish histories and culture.

Finally, it is noteworthy to scrutinize historic colonial misrepresentations of Indigenous gender and sexuality. Further discourse addressing the contemporary resistance and re-vision work for Two Spirit community members will support strategies for Indigenous cultural revitalization, health and wellness, nationhood and decolonization efforts overall. The literature clearly affirms the need for additional research on contemporary identities, needs and experiences of Two Spirit People, especially female-identified community members (Davis, 2014; Elm, Lewis, Walters & Self, 2016; Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Hunt, 2016; Lang, 1997; Namaste, 2000; Ristock, Zoccole & Passante, 2010; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). Knowledge and opportunities for understanding Two Spirit traditions both within and outside Indigenous communities must not be frozen in the past; our Indigenous knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. Two Spirit communities and identities are progressive, alive and adaptive. Further exploration of these realities will serve to cultivate Indigenous cultural revitalization, forge new alliances with other LGBTQ+ platforms, and reclaim traditional Indigenous gender systems and positionality. Following the path of Indigenous ethics and values, the protection, inclusion and honouring of Two Spirit relatives is a community responsibility, which will contribute to the healing and strength of our entire Nations.

Chapter 3 – Preparing the Floor

Native people have always told story. Among those storytellers were Two Spirits. This I know, despite the attempts of Jesuits, missionaries and other infiltrators to “whitewash” us and make us invisible, even to ourselves. I am continuing an old tradition, only this time around using a computer. Story is meant to be spoken – that has not changed. The written becomes the spoken whether by hands or mouth, the spoken enters the heart, the heart turns over.

- Beth Brant (1994, p. 82).

3.1 Indigenous Research

I stand in this thesis with understanding that Indigenous ways of being and knowing are different than western European modes of thought, and that this significantly impacts different ways in which researchers seek, interpret and transfer knowledge. Indigenous scholars have graciously done much of the foundational work which clearly demonstrates how different values among Indigenous and western European cultures (in other words, that which we hold as most relevant), impacts different ways we approach the research process and relationships within it. Whether it be universal versus multiple truths, individual versus collective focus, cooperation versus competition, there are significant philosophical underpinnings that make Indigenous methodologies unique and distinct (see, for example, Baskin 2011; Kovach, 2010; and Smith, 1999/2012). Our beliefs and values about the world determines what each of us sees as most relevant and meaningful, which in turn determines ways that we gather knowledge, and subsequently how we pass knowledge on to others. For Indigenous methodology in particular, this includes information and messages derived from intuition, dreams, ceremony, and experiences on the land where we come from. Although there are a number of core elements, Dr. Margaret Kovach (2015) identified four of the most common aspects of

Indigenous methodology: 1) holistic Indigenous knowledge is legitimate; 2) relationships are central in research; 3) collective view informs reciprocity in research; and 4) Indigenous methods are valid ways of gathering our knowledge (p. 53). I carry these helpers offered by Dr. Kovach (2015) forward into this research.

Indigenous research methodology is informed by Indigenous ways of viewing the world as relational. These processes are based on the collective survival of our People and Indigenous cultural ways of being; they are informed by the territories we come from, and the interactions that exist as a result of these relationships (Battiste, 2008). Existing research shows that relationships are at the core of Indigenous methodologies (Baskin, 2011; Hart, 2002; Kovach, 2009; Minogiizhigokwe, 2011; Q’um Q’um Xiiem, 2008; Qwul’sih’yah’mah, 2015; Simpson, 2011; Smith, 1999/2012; Wilson, 2008). Observing relational elements woven throughout my own research framework, I would also add transparent, inclusive, holistic and adaptive to the list of key implements among diverse Indigenous methodologies. In seeking Nation-specific knowledge about Two Spirit identity and experience through an Indigenous lens, Indigenous theory is the most appropriate approach to gather and interpret Coast Salish histories, stories and experiences, to support implementation of community strategic planning and cultural revision work for this particular research.

3.2 Decolonizing Research

It is necessary to centre Indigenous thought and knowledge systems when researching with Indigenous communities. Whether as a theory, research framework, or an approach to analysis, decolonization is an element embedded within all Indigenous research (Kovach, 2009; Kovach 2015; Simpson, 2011; Smith 1999/2012). This is

relevant for me to mention for a number of reasons. First, the destructive and oppressive history of western European research done on and to Indigenous communities, resulting in non-consensual extraction and exploitation of Indigenous resources and knowledge is well documented. Kirkness & Barnhardt (1991) introduced concepts of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility to mainstream research circles, as a required means to repair and restore accountability in research conducted with Indigenous societies. However, western research can still serve to harm rather than benefit our communities, despite the establishment of these and similar Indigenous research ethics and standards. Second, incorporation of a decolonizing aim in research serves to challenge Eurocentric notions that western methodologies hold more value than Indigenous ones. Battiste (2008) suggests that Eurocentric colonizers predominantly tend to view themselves and their ways of knowing as ideal and superior, thereby justifying their own self-imposed authority to assess the competencies of others. This notion applies to research, in terms of institutional approval processes, ethical review and criteria, limited access to research funding, support for policy development, and so forth.

Similarly, in her ground breaking work on Indigenous theory, Dr. Tuhiwai Smith (1999/2012) asserts that as Indigenous researchers, it is important to centre our own methodological frameworks, in order to talk back to western colonial mentalities that minimize, or that are opposed to Indigenous ways of being and knowing in modern research. Following our own Indigenous and nation-specific philosophies of thought and knowledge employs resistance to epistemological restraints of western methodologies, and also transforms the relationship between formal research processes and Indigenous societies.

Western European research strategies are situated in opposition to Indigenous methodologies because they are guided by western colonial thought and worldview. Dr. Smith (1999/2012) offers that contrary to western research methodologies (which predominantly aim to dismantle topics they explore), Indigenous approaches seek to build them up, identify interconnections and strengthen relationships. There are fundamental differences in intention when researchers seek to build, rather than to break down. Even if western European research methodologies abandon or relax their searches for universal truth and application, as with more contemporary critical and postmodern qualitative approaches, they are still sequestered in an endless cycle of data analysis, as their deconstruction process has no end (Tomaselli, Dyll & Francis, 2008). I recognize these profound differences between western and Indigenous approaches and worldviews. I gently carry these offerings by Dr. Tuhiwai Smith (1999/2012), and Tomaselli, Dyll & Francis (2008) into this research. The ways that Indigenous methodologies gather knowledge and interpret meaning are directly linked to Nation-based systems and protocols, and the specific ways that each Nation and community views itself, the world and knowledge in general. This research is guided by the Four House Posts of my Coast Salish methodology; it incorporates a decolonizing aim in its intent and analysis, and is compelled into action through my own Indigenous epistemology.

3.3 Coast Salish Methodology

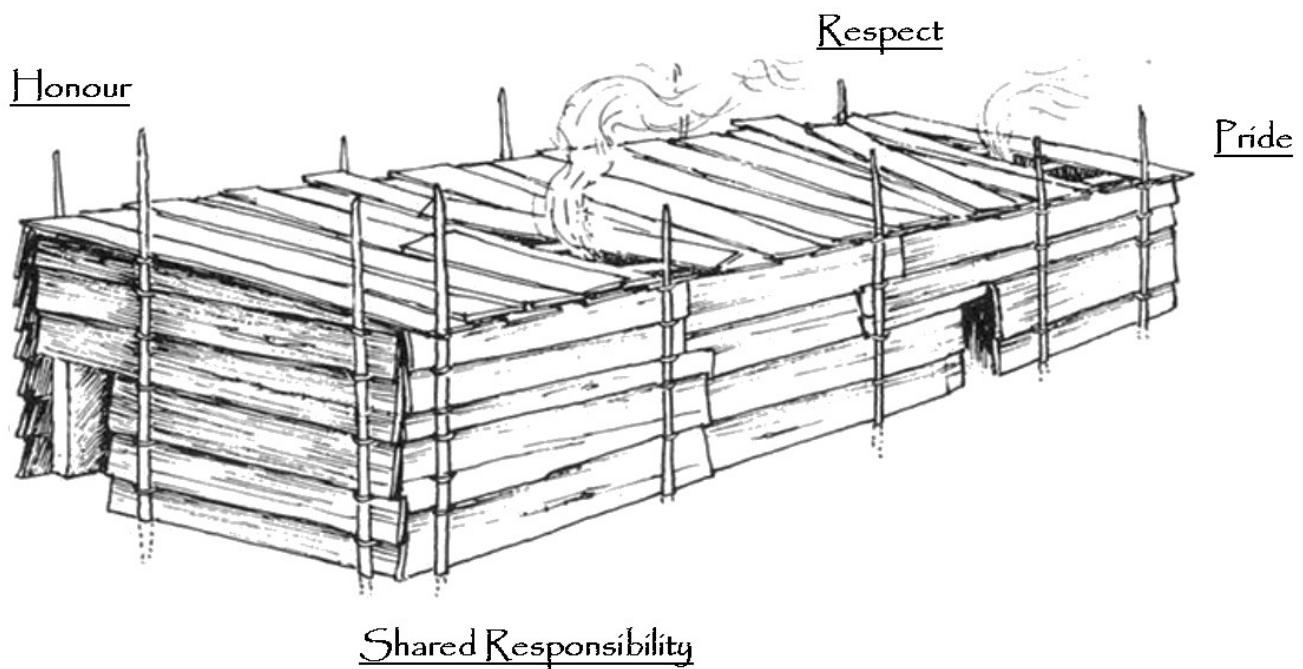
Indigenous research methodologies are relevant to the geography of our home territories. These elements are bound together. Values, ethics and protocols embedded within Indigenous knowledges are derived from our relationships to the land, the locality of Nations and are particular to place (Basso, 1996; Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

Although these principles and mechanisms vary based on the environment, there are a number of key elements in Nation-based Indigenous research frameworks that Kovach (2009) illustrates in her own work: a) holistic epistemology, b) story, c) purpose, d) the experiential, e) tribal ethics, f) tribal ways of gaining knowledge, and g) an overall consideration of the colonial relationship (p. 44). These components are recognized and incorporated into my own research with Coast Salish Two Spirit People and community members.

The ontological foundation for my research methodology is drawn from ancestral teachings surrounding the Coast Salish longhouse, and all the protocols for how our People enter, move within and exit this space. There is evidence around the four corners of the longhouse that indicate Coast Salish culture holds balance, transformation, protection and inclusivity in the highest regard. The spirit world is very much a part of Coast Salish protocol; dialogue with other realms of existence is encouraged and celebrated in our ceremonies and culture. I applied this understanding in development of my Coast Salish methodology, and also drew from guiding principles of *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* governance (Musqueam First Nation, 2011), which I viewed as accountability measures established for our community. I understand these specific principles and teachings around them were identified by a committee of Elders and knowledge keepers to inform elected leadership. These principles included: Respect, Pride, Inclusiveness, Honour, and Shared Responsibility. I collapsed values of Inclusiveness and Shared Responsibility into one category, as I recognized these concepts as interdependent and similar. This also allowed me to create an even number of cornerstones to hold up my Coast Salish framework. I could have also viewed the value of Inclusiveness as the smoke hole of this

longhouse, as this is the doorway to welcome other ancestors and relatives into this ceremonial space – but I chose to collapse it for this study. The final research framework principles for this project, along with Indigenous ethics I hold in the highest regard as a researcher include: 1) Shared Responsibility - accountability; 2) Pride - transparency; 3) Honour - empowerment; and 4) Respect – relationships.

Image 2 – Coast Salish Methodology



To clarify, I framed my research methodology using the Four House Posts of a longhouse, because as Coast Salish People, we lived in these houses together everyday at one time - whole families under one roof living together, separated only by partitions. We did everything in longhouses as community; in this space, we receive nourishment, replenish our spirits, protect each other, engage in ceremony, and work in creation and transformation. If reality is in the relationship one has with truth, as Shawn Wilson (2008) suggests, then our motivation as Indigenous researchers is to strengthen our own

identities and relationality to self, the land, our ancestors, the spirit world and each other. For me, this implies that I put what I know about Coast Salish ways of being and knowing into action during this research process. When we follow protocols from the culture of our Nations, we breathe life into knowledge seeking and transference activities, and identify new understandings that are meaningful and useful for our People.

Indigenous research is a search for ourselves as Indigenous People (Kovach, 2009); it is an exploration of our own histories, identities and visions for the future of our societies. Within all Indigenous methodology, knowledge of oneself is essential to any inquiry. Minogiizhigokwe (2011) shares that perception of self is the filter through which all knowledge flows. For me, this statement rings true. She explains that one of the main goals of Indigenous research is to learn more about self, our history, worldview, and culture. She then describes that locating ourselves in the research addresses issues of accountability, validity and reliability in the research process (p. 73). This also affords the reader with opportunity to discern credibility of researchers who seek knowledge about certain topics in Indigenous communities. Similarly, Q'um Q'um Xiiem (2008) offers that understanding and insight into self, the environment and relationships are derived from lived experiences and our critical reflection about those experiences (p. 42). These beautiful depictions of reflexivity capture the significance of mindfulness in conducting research in a good way, while also illuminating personal motivations and connection we have to specific areas as Indigenous researchers.

As a researcher, my experience in this study is a relative component of the narrative of Coast Salish Two Spirit identity overall. All the history, what I know and what I have learned up to this moment, I carry with me into this research, all contributing

to the unique positions from which I search. It is important for me to demonstrate ways that I make meaning throughout the process as much as possible. The only way I know how to show this is through narrative; therefore, I will share a brief story of my first coming home to xʷməθkʷəy̓əm community and territory, as an example of how I experience and interpret a specific unfolding:

In the first couple weeks of my return home to xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, I initiated a summer project to allow youth to process food fish for distribution to Elders, and people in community with mobility challenges. I hired a crew and we set up shop in the longhouse for six weeks to clean, process and jar five hundred sockeye salmon.

One evening just before sunset, I drove up to the longhouse alone to drop off some sharpened knives for the following work day. As I exited the longhouse, I was halted by the weight of a presence I could not see physically, but that I could sense in other ways. I heard the sound of it inhaling and exhaling deeply. I could hear and feel that something was directly in front of me. After every few cycles of breath, I heard its mouth smacking, like it was tasting the space between us. From where my jeep was parked, I noticed it blocked anyone else from being able to see where I was standing outside the longhouse. I knew I was vulnerable in that moment, and in that realization, all my senses became heightened. *Inhale, exhale, smack, smack.* I could see nothing around me that would make such a noise; it sounded close and far away at the same time.

Whatever it was, I knew it was watching me. I cannot be sure how long we stood there face to face not moving, but it seemed like quite a while before I heard it back away, circle in front of me about 20 feet, and roll quickly around the opposite side of the longhouse. I followed the sound and walked around that same corner. There was nothing I could see above or around where I was standing. The sound and weight of its presence was gone.

I have spoken with a few Elders and knowledge keepers in community to gain some insight about this interaction. Some suggest it was a past longhouse dancer who smelled the sockeye being processed, and got curious about my presence; others suggest it was a snake. I feel it was the spirit of our ancestor, sʔi:lqəy̓ (giant Two-Headed Serpent). I mention this because it did not intuitively feel like a human presence, and it was not the first time I have been visited by this ancestor. sʔi:lqəy̓ is a spiritual helper of

mine. There are other factors I learned about *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* history along the way, which also helped me to understand that I was visited by *sʔi:lqəy̓* again on this day.

One story I read about *sʔi:lqəy̓* was shared by late Elder, James Point, and was retold to *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* in publication with his permission (Suttles, 2004). I will not reproduce this story here, as I do not have consent from the Point family to do so. I will mention; however, that this story is not told as a myth or a legend; it captures an actual encounter with *sʔi:lqəy̓* that happened thousands of years ago, when *sʔi:lqəy̓* lived in a bog adjacent to one of our villages. There are many different lessons I draw from this particular story, one of which tells about a new plant that sprouted from the path in the land that *sʔi:lqəy̓* left in their travel to the Fraser River. The plant was named *məθkʷəy̓*, and it spread far across our territories along the riverbed. Another story tells that our ancestors had never seen this plant before, and that they considered it to be sacred because it came from *sʔi:lqəy̓* (Musqueam Indian Band, 2011). Our people were not permitted to walk over or harvest it. This is how we came to be known as *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* – The People of the Place where the *məθkʷəy̓* Grows.

For me, these stories reveal our innate connection to the land and water here in *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm*, and to Coast Salish ways of being and knowing. I also learned that during this visit, I was standing on the same path that *sʔi:lqəy̓* travelled on, heading out to the Fraser River thousands of years before that day. I imagine this path is also where our *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* longhouse stands today. The *məθkʷəy̓* used to grow all around that area, and has always been a symbol of *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* identity. It is noted at times this plant would disappear and flourish very much in sync with our population throughout history (Musqueam First Nation, 2011). We know we are one with this place. It was assumed

these fluctuations would happen during times of war, plague and resurgence. I believe our cultural resurgence is connected to the məθkʷəy̕. Currently this plant is endangered, and does not grow in our territory any longer. The fact that it is gone right now, indicates to me the need for us to reawaken our stories, to stand each other up, and continue the innovation of our Coast Salish knowledge systems. When our stories and teachings are part of daily life again, and this activity ripples out across the whole community, I believe the məθkʷəy̕ will return. In retrospect, I feel this particular visit with sʔi:lqəy̕ was an acknowledgement that I have ties to this place, to our history, our ceremonial house, and to our Coast Salish knowledges. I received it as a welcome home, and as a call to take my place in the responsibility here in community and culture.

3.4 Methods

The path of our ancestors and the ways back to traditional knowledge systems are contained within the stories of our relationships with internal and external worlds. I carry these treasures carefully into this research process. In following trails blazed by Indigenous scholars, like Dr. Margaret Kovach (2009; 2010; 2015), I move forward knowing that Coast Salish knowledge offers guidance in my research choices that reflect the values, standards, ethics and ways of our Indigenous People generally, and of Coast Salish People and culture specifically (p. 43). As an Indigenous researcher, I found it challenging to articulate our Indigenous ways of being and knowing, or why I chose certain methods as part of this project. I was taught that certain methods are just the way it is done in the context, and that we would know this intuitively and through the guidance of community. These methodological choices are the only means by which the research would be authentically reflective of my position as an Indigenous researcher,

and honour the traditional knowledge of my Coast Salish ancestors. As Coast Salish, we gather knowledge by sharing stories, through observation, experiential learning, in ceremony, when we create, and in dialogue with spirit realms. I deliberately put these methods into action in order to impress Coast Salish footprints for future research in Two Spirit discourses, and other spaces where our presence was absent previous.

Indigenous societies have always had our own methods for seeking and transferring knowledge between community members, across plains of consciousness and throughout generations. Absolon & Willett (2004) offer some lovely examples of Indigenous research methodologies, including different titles for Indigenous methods, in verb/action form, that were forwarded by Dr. Tuahawai Smith (1999/2012) to describe Indigenous protocols, activity and vision work (Absolon & Willett, 2004). The methods we choose depend upon the epistemological touchstones of our Indigenous research framework and Nation-specific methodologies we adopt as a result of this foundation. It is still important to clarify that each Nation has its own distinct means of seeking and passing on knowledge. Though every Nation is different, we do see some commonalities among the methods which are directly tied to Indigenous relational worldviews. Protocols around experiential learning, non-interference, storytelling, growth, balance and safety inform and describe the act of seeking, interpreting and transferring knowledge in our societies simultaneously. For the purpose of this study, and in the spirit of these offerings presented by Absolon & Willett (2004), and Tuahawai Smith (1999/2012), I chose to utilize methods of Testimony, Storytelling, Connecting and Sharing for data collection, and also Reclaiming, Gendering, Revitalizing, Honouring, Protecting and Dream in the data analysis.

Research methodologies that have a narrative component study stories in context.

My focus on Coast Salish knowledge and contemporary stories in this research will re-contextualize Two Spirit experience and history, in order to recalibrate mainstream research agendas that serve to perpetuate colonial thought, and justify the oppression of Indigenous People (Absolon & Willett, 2004). Indigenous scholarship has shown that most Indigenous cultures across the globe are predominantly experiential and orally based (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Qwul'sih'yah'maht, 2015). Emphasis on storytelling in this Two Spirit research honours these traditions and resists master colonial narratives of Eurocentric cultural superiority.

Critical reflection and reflexivity are woven into the experience for both the storyteller and the listener in narrative. Indigenous stories change based on who is listening, what is being emphasized, and ways the listener makes meaning out of the experiences being described (Simpson, 2011, p. 104). In this respect, storytelling is a reciprocal act of sharing, reflexivity, transformation and transference of knowledge between the teller and the listener. In her work, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* (2011), Leanne Simpson affirms that narrative is an important process for visioning, imagining, and critiquing social spaces around us (p. 32). Upon reading this, I was immediately reminded of Coast Salish witnessing protocols, and the powerful influence that having or being a witness has on us as humans. I explore these protocols in greater detail in the next section. For these reasons, I am compelled to centre story in this research, as the methods surrounding this interaction are tied directly to my Indigenous theoretical framework. By focusing on conversations, stories and testimony of participants, as well as artistic representations of Coast Salish Two Spirit identity, I was further able to increase

visibility of these experiences, and to search for ways to share them with the broader community. Following Coast Salish protocols and ethics in the research allowed for accountability and protection of participants and the knowledge throughout this process. Focusing on Two Spirit issues within Coast Salish context provided opportunity for our People to re-examine and subsequently decolonize our cultural understanding of gender and sexuality. All of these processes are contained within the stories in Chapter 4.

Indigenous ways of knowing and being are largely, if not completely contained in relational narrative. All that we know, our Indigeneity and the ways we acquire and transfer knowledge is done through sharing stories about our ancestors, the land, ourselves and each other. Indigenous societies are built upon these oral traditions. Emphasis on personal narrative, individual expression and testimony in this particular research honours these Indigenous traditions, while at the same time resists European research approaches that have historically served to muffle or misrepresent authentic Indigenous voice and experience. Applying narrative as a method allows me to privilege and centralize Indigenous knowledge, which is the most fundamental element in Indigenous research theory. Qwul'sih'yah'maht (2015) reminds knowledge seekers that narrative places the storyteller in control of what is being shared, readjusting the power of control to the research participant, and requiring the researcher to act as witness rather than facilitator in the process (p. 186). This ensures accountability and clearly identifies participants as owners of the knowledge gathered, examined and developed in these research projects. Stories have always been used as a teaching tool in my Coast Salish culture, which is why they are a foundational element of the methodology for this research.

3.5 Preparing the Work

As far back as we can recall, Coast Salish People have followed protocols of witnessing in ceremony and community work. This is one of our traditional forms of documenting history, family lineage and conducting ourselves according to ancestral teachings (Qwul'sih'yah'maht, 2015). The timeless tradition of witnessing, for me, demonstrates our Coast Salish identity as a public People. Everything we do as individuals and families is shared within the broader community. We are all connected to each other; we watch each other's work through witnessing in order to support and to ensure the accuracy of what transpires at an event or ceremony. Our witnessing protocols have helped perpetuate Coast Salish ways of being, and the transference of cultural treasures, histories and knowledge within each family for millennia. It has always been this way for us. This is how we conduct ourselves when there is important work that needs to be recognized and passed on. So naturally, I applied these same protocols in this research.

I had a talk with xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Elder and Coast Salish knowledge keeper, Shane Pointe, about the process of witnessing in our culture. He told me that historically, when other villages would come to our longhouse to participate in ceremony, they would always bring their own historian, or trained witness with them. He said this was done in case the host family called upon that particular village to be a witness. If that happened, they would be prepared and have their most skilled history keepers ready and available to comply with the request. Witnesses were always provided a handshake (money) or material payment for their service. After contact with European settlers, witnesses were gifted a Hudson's Bay Company blanket as payment, once these became more abundant

in Coast Salish communities. Shane said the value of these blankets was equivalent to \$0.50 at that time. Over the years, leadership in our communities recognized that families of witnesses would get more use out of monetary handshakes, rather than blankets as payment. Therefore, witnessing payments in Coast Salish ceremonies transformed from blankets to \$0.50 (two quarter coins) for each service. This amount has remained the same in our ceremonies since this shift first took place.

I am so grateful to Shane for sharing what he knows about witnessing protocols and history in Coast Salish culture. It is clear that the responsibilities of the witness in our ceremonial work are critical on a multitude of levels. Witnesses are our historians. Traditionally they are very seasoned in ceremony; they know all or most of the ancestral names of the People in the longhouse, and the lineage of the families doing the work. The highest priority of the witness is to maintain accuracy of the details, what was observed and what was experienced during the ceremony. The role of the witness is to bring this message back to their own homes and villages, and to corroborate that the family did their work according to protocol, and took no short cuts in doing so. They must observe and experience all the work of the host family, and be able to articulate the messages they carry forward in their hearts, spirits and home communities. Herein lies the Coast Salish documentation system based on oral tradition, but the process involves so much more than that. There is so much happening underneath the surface of what is seen visually. Through witnessing protocols, Coast Salish People ensure culpability, interdependence, inclusiveness, respect, honour, transparency and relationality. These protocols are for how we begin and end all ceremonial work.

I have been preparing for this research my whole life, through my own experiences, hopes and vision for Two Spirit People in our communities. In keeping with Indigenous ethics of accountability and witnessing protocols, I am required to establish a circle of community advisors, to help guide the research and to ensure I conduct myself in a good way as a knowledge seeker. For this research, this circle is known as the Coast Salish Advisory Committee (CSAC). It was important that I obtained community support to do this research even before it began, because without the support of the People we aim to do research with, the work would not be relevant or successful. Researchers also risk doing harm without this guidance, so they must be cautious and deliberate in this area. Based on my own past experience working with advisories, I put forward that the CSAC should have 4 key functions: 1) guide the research, and ensure I am working within Coast Salish protocol and ethics; 2) assist with recruitment of participants; 3) ensure all documentation and data collected is relevant and accessible to Coast Salish communities; and 4) to witness the work and carry the messages about the research forward. Potential CSAC members were asked to commit to attend collaborative meetings about the research, to help with recruitment, and to support the work for the duration of the study.

Indigenous networks are all about previously established relationships, who we know and how well we have maintained our relationships in the past. I had been working to develop Two Spirit programming in xʷməθkʷəy̓əm community for two years before this research project received approval by the university. As a result, I was already aware who was actively involved in Two Spirit initiatives in community. I needed to approach community members who were known and visible supporters of Two Spirit projects and

relatives, and who had the skills to guide this work according to Coast Salish protocols.

Established criteria for CSAC members included: 1) must have Coast Salish ancestry; 2) must be 19 years or older; 3) must either identify or have relatives who identify as Two Spirit; and 4) need to demonstrate commitment to learn and support Two Spirit People in Coast Salish communities.

The invitation went out to four relatives to sit on the CSAC, and began in gratitude and ceremony. We all shared a meal to start, because this is our way. I explained the key functions of the CSAC and asked for their feedback. I told them my intention in the research. Then I stood each one of them up individually; I shared ways that their presence and individual gifts reflected the Four House Post principles of my methodology, and ways that I saw this as a benefit to Coast Salish Two Spirit People. I gifted each potential participant a beaded Eagle feather to thank them for their work in community. The Eagle feathers I found in Snuneymuxw (Coast Salish) territory on Vancouver Island, the place of my birth; the beading was done by a *xʷməθkʷəy̕əm* mother of a Two Spirit child. I did this ceremony to acknowledge ways these individuals already support our Two Spirit relatives, and to ask them to now be a witness to my Two Spirit research as a CSAC member. It was at this point they all agreed to commit, and this research began.

3.6 Design

For this first study exploring Two Spirit experiences in my communities, I decided to focus on adults over the age of nineteen years. These community members needed to identify as Coast Salish, and have a direct connection (personal or familial) with Two Spirit identity and experience. We included Coast Salish community members

who self-identify as Two Spirit, and also their relatives/supporters, Elders and knowledge keepers as potential participants. Contributions were limited to ten individuals, in order to keep the sampling small and concise for this study. Priority was given to people who identified as Two Spirit, and also for at least one Elder/knowledge keeper to contribute. Members of the CSAC were also able to participate in conversations (interviews), and to submit creative works if they chose to. Data collection took place over the course of two months in the Fall, both in Vancouver and on Vancouver Island. It was done during this time, because I was taught that Fall is the season of harvest, gathering and preparation.

This research was conducted on Coast Salish territories exclusively, and was centred around Coast Salish culture and Two Spirit experiences specifically. When I was developing this project, I decided to focus on neighbouring Coast Salish communities most closely aligned with my own Pentlatch and *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* cultures, based on linguistic and historic relationality. To achieve this, I informally consulted linguistic and cultural leaders in *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* and at the University of British Columbia (which sits on our territory) to identify a list of Coast Salish societies known to be most closely related to me by dialect. I targeted relative communities this way, because I know that Coast Salish worldview, our culture, our protocols, the history of our connection to the land is contained within our ancestral languages. I see these communities who share language and dialect as our closest relatives; they are family to me. Once this list was developed, I chose Nations that are in closest proximity to Vancouver and Vancouver Island, as they would be easiest for me to access. Relative Nations I reached out to included: Squamish, Snuneymuxw, Stz'uminus, *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm*, Tseil-waututh, and Qualicum. Then I approached elected leadership for each of these Nations to inform them in advance of my

plan to potentially recruit participation, and to possibly hold data collection in their territories for this research. It was important for me to obtain prior and informed consent of leadership in these Nations, not only to garner their support for this research, but also to maintain accountability and transparency at all points in the process. If any of these Nations or leadership collectives indicated that they did not wish me to do this research on their lands, I would not have proceeded to study in these territories. However, I was fortunate enough that all of these Nations gave consent for this research to occur on their lands.

In terms of recruitment, my CSAC members and I focused predominantly on existing networks within our own circle of friends, colleagues and loved ones. Potential participants were targeted and asked by committee members to consent to meet and talk with me to discuss the project further. This allowed opportunity for me to clarify any points of concern they may have had about the research, so they could then decide whether or not to engage this study in an informed way. In addition to this targeted recruitment, I also sent general electronic recruitment material through various Nations who gave their consent to this research, and also distributed through various local university list serves, Vancouver Island and Vancouver Pride societies, and local Indigenous health, community and cultural organizations through my own networks.

I visited Squamish First Nation in Vancouver during their first Two Spirit Honouring Ceremony in Fall 2017, where I volunteered at the event, and then set up an information table to recruit participants for this research. The response we got from Coast Salish community members for this research was overwhelmingly positive. It was at this particular honouring event, that I received a public challenge from leadership in

Squamish Nation to identify ancestral Coast Salish language that captures Coast Salish Two Spirit identity specifically. I brought this challenge back to my CSAC group for further discussion and follow up. I talk about my CSAC response to this challenge put forward in Chapter 6 of this thesis. In all my interactions in Coast Salish community about this research, it was clear there is a shared, rooted desire to highlight and demonstrate Coast Salish knowledge about Two Spirit identity, and to reclaim these spaces in our families and communities.

As I have mentioned previously, incorporating narrative into my methodology was imperative. Therefore, in order to collect data for this research, I offered one-to-one, semi-structured conversation sessions, as well as a group circle talk as main methods. Storytelling and Testimony are part of this narrative. Data collection sessions were audio recorded, with individual participant's consent. Although all participants indicated they were open to engage in a circle, most expressed preference to meet with me individually, as this was the first time for many to more deeply explore Two Spirit experiences with another person. This is where elements of Sharing and Connecting, Honouring and Protecting are factored in as method for this research. To reiterate, the act of sharing stories gives witness, power and visibility to the storyteller. It allows a deeper relational Connection to occur during these exchanges; these relationships serve to Honour and Protect those involved in the exchange, by helping to keep us connected to one another before, during and after the research is done.

For this research, most participants said they would feel most comfortable to start in a private conversation, rather than group setting, and that they would be open to meet as a group at a later date. I also offered the chance for participants to submit art work,

poetry or other forms of expressive mediums as part of their individual contributions to the data. I recognized it was important to offer more than one method for participants to contribute within, as not all stories and narratives are adequately captured in words. This further opened prospect for discussion around Dream, spirit talk and teachings, all of which are part of Coast Salish epistemology.

During conversation with participants, it was important to centre dialogue around each individual's perspective and experience as it relates to Two Spirit identity, whether they were a supporter or if they identified as Two Spirit themselves. In this way, pre-determined conversation questions became a guide for discussion, and the participants were able to focus on parameters they felt more directly aligned with personally. In this discussion process, I was tasked with responsibility to witness the Testimony. The questions for these conversations and the creative contributions ensured that they were Gendered based on the identities of the participants, and focused on Reclamation of Coast Salish cultural knowledges. Coast Salish protocols were incorporated throughout the entire process. Sharing food is one example of our protocol; I was taught that the act of feasting and swallowing while doing work helps ensure lessons and knowledge being shared is internalized by all those present. Food was part of data collection. Small gifts were also offered to the participants at the beginning of each session, to acknowledge their invaluable contributions to this process, and to maintain good relations beyond the study. This is also part of Coast Salish protocol. This is how we take care of our relationships and each other. To be clear, accountability informed by Coast Salish ethics and ways of being is woven into this study.

I analyzed data for this research using, what western research describes as a thematic narrative approach, and then positioned themes identified within the Coast Salish research principles for this project. Thematic analysis is the search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the stories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This is done by reading and re-reading (absorbing) the data in research. Thematic analysis according to Fraser & Jarldorn (2015) is the study of what was said (not how it is said), and looking for commonalities and differences. While I highlight some of the differences in Chapter 6, for the purpose of this study, I emphasized commonalities in the themes. A thematic approach is useful for theorizing across a number of difference cases and conversations, finding common thematic elements across research participants and events they report (Riessman, 1993). This allows me to connect what the participants see as meaningful in the stories, and what I infer as common threads in the stories as well. Furthermore, analysis in narrative studies opens up forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers (Riessman, 2000). This compels researchers to look at the context in the stories, and not just the words spoken. To be sure, narrative analysis and methods are intrinsically part of Indigenous research methodologies, because they are gathering knowledge based on oral storytelling traditions congruent with Indigenous paradigms (Kovach, 2010). This is directly applicable to this Indigenous research study, which is why I bring gifts of narrative and thematic analysis into this work. Participants were also asked to provide verbal or written descriptions of any artistic or creative contributions, otherwise they would stand on their own to be interpreted freely by the readers. A total of three participants submitted creative works to this research, and these are offered in Chapter 4. Again, the intention of my analysis approach is to

highlight commonalities among participant narratives, and in the subjective meaning making of experiences and situations being described.

In keeping with Coast Salish research ethics and methodology, it was also relevant for me to include analysis of the impacts of colonial history in the data (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Smith, 1999/2012), in order to illuminate opportunities for decolonization and resistance to colonialism among participants, as well as the Indigenous communities they come from. When I looked at the data from a decolonizing lens, I sought to identify historic and contemporary power differentials between Indigenous and settler groups, and among Indigenous and Two Spirit folk themselves. To me, rifts of power and influence within these dynamics often contain illustrations of Indigenous cultural resurgence, resistance and resiliency, while also allowing opportunity to centre Indigenous knowledge and experience in the narrative. I recognize that some unique elements of Two Spirit resurgence are found in pieces that are unique in the stories and experiences. For the purpose of this research, I focus on commonalities in the data, as a means to emphasize identity, community building, belonging and unity among Two Spirit relatives; however, analysis of some of the differences in the narratives can be applied in this same manner for future research. I explore some examples of differences in the stories in Chapter 5 of this study.

Data analysis for this project took place in winter. I have always understood this as a gathering, sharing and reflective time for our People. After each session with participants, I made notes in my personal research journal about what I experienced in that interaction. I waited until all the transcriptions were complete, before reading and listening to the talks back for the first time - ten talks that I only recalled with my heart,

in dream, and on the lands of our Coast Salish People. I read these talks over and over again in one night, highlighted what stood out for me, and then put them away for four days. I continued to make notes in my research journal over these four days. I also contacted each of the ten participants during this time, and gave them a copy of their transcript. I asked each of them to review and edit the content, and to let me know if anything in particular stood out for them in the discussion, or what they recalled afterwards. I completed their requested edits, and reminded each of them they had a choice whether to consent to have their story submitted as research data or not. All participants consented verbally and in written form numerous times during this process.

On the fifth and sixth days of data analysis, I reviewed my research field notes, which I had been writing, sketching and doodling randomly since this project received university approval. Many of these entries were written immediately after talking with participants and reflecting on ways that I made meaning of what I was experiencing as a researcher along the way. I grouped these entries into categories based on the Four House Posts of my Coast Salish methodology, and what I learned in the talks I had with my relatives in this thesis. I planned to wait until the eighth day to start reading and listening to the conversations in this research again, but I was undisciplined and became impatient. So I started this work on the eve of the seventh day. I categorized areas highlighted in the transcriptions earlier, according to the Four House Posts that guided this research, and I looked for themes.

My Four House Posts methodology helped me discern themes in my own meaning making, and in the research data. By placing the data from participant contributions into these categories, I was better able to see commonalities in what was

shared, and stories, words and statements which are connected and related to one another by concept. Through application of Indigenous methods of Reclaiming, Gendering, Protecting, Revitalizing, Honouring and Dreaming in the analysis (Smith, 1999/2012), I specifically looked for ways to enact these processes in my own discernment of the data. In more accessible terms, I was experiencing the stories shared by participants through these specific acts and intentions. Through that process, a list of very specific themes began to emerge, and I drew from what I felt were the most direct and relevant quotes of the participants and conversations to emphasize these themes in the stories. Further, by doing this process according to protocol, I allowed the natural rhythm of our Coast Salish territories to inform and guide the discernment. I have always applied the act of finding common threads and linkages in narrative in my work as a helper, and in my own family. In order to put this process into context, I offer teachings that were gifted to Indigenous scholarship by Carolyn Kenny (2000) about her reflections on Indigenous meaning making. She describes:

When I teach research methods to my students at the university, I use Raven to help me describe the research process and the research experience. Raven flies. He surveys the land. He watches all of the berries. If he is using all of his ravenly skills, he is discerning. He knows which berries to pick and he knows how to organize them and categorize them into the right baskets. When I study transcripts of interviews, I feel a bit like Raven might feel. I wait for the words of the participants to jump out to me from the page. I survey the land over and over again. I read the transcripts many times until I have a referential totality, a sense of the whole set of transcripts, all of the stories and words of the participants. (p. 159).

This reflection of Indigenous meaning-making process is insightful and absolutely applies in this particular Indigenous research. I am so grateful for Carolyn Kenny's generosity in allowing her own meaning making process to be accessible and visible for other Indigenous researchers to see. Through her insightful articulation, I feel better able

to step forward in this process, knowing that my own intuition, life experience, skills and cultural teachings are affirmed by our ancestors, and very much a part of knowledge seeking journeys I engage with Indigenous communities. Involving such propensity in the work is therefore viable, valid and critical for Indigenous theoretical data analysis in modern research. Once I identified the themes for this research, I brought them back to my CSAC for review and approval; these themes, highlighted in Chapter 4, include: Protection (Shared Responsibility); Mentorship (Honour); Transformation (Respect); and Identity (Pride).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This research complies with university research ethics and standards, and drew upon Coast Salish principles rooted in the research framework. During and after data collection sessions, participants were made aware that these discussions have the potential to re-stimulate past trauma experiences, trigger latent memories or emotional responses that may cause discomfort or spiritual harm. This being the first study of Coast Salish Two Spirit topics specifically, this research may have also stirred confidentiality and personal safety issues for participants. In considering this, the option for participants to change their names and genders in the transcriptions was made available. Sessions with local Elders, counsellors and healers were offered to participants before, during and after each data collection session. I also offered to provide participants with a list of additional supports locally available during the research process.

It is also relevant to mention Indigenous ethics around informed consent. I was taught that when we request permission to enter someone's home, territory or to witness their journey, that we must acquire their consent first. Consent is one of the most ancient

of Indigenous protocols. Within the act of seeking and providing consent lies opportunity for clear intentions, commitments, respectful relations and reciprocity. Participants of this study were provided opportunity for informed consent at every interaction, and had the option to edit or withdraw their contributions from the research any time before the final written thesis was submitted. Evaluation of the study will eventually be conducted consensually and collaboratively with study participants during a final talking circle, and I will make presentations and recommendations to community leadership based on the results of these findings, and at their request.

3.8 Limitations

Following the teachings of my ancestors, it is not protocol for me to talk back as witness until the work is complete. The research project as it was designed, was concluded according to university standard. However, I know that this work with Coast Salish Two Spirit People is not done, yet I imposed a university timeline on the process regardless. I view academic timelines as a hindrance for Indigenous research; therefore, whenever possible, I applied a seasonal Indigenous timeline for research activities to address some of these limitations in the process, because this is informed by my Indigenous research paradigm. This piece of the Two Spirit narrative has been completed, but the ancestral currents that pull us together as family remain. I am part of the responsibility to ensure that this research is put into action, for the benefit of our Coast Salish communities and Two Spirit relatives. This is the work I need to complete, before my CSAC can talk back to what I have done as an Indigenous researcher; this next stage of the work will take place after the final report is submitted to the university, and after completion of my oral examination for this research.

Regarding the focus of this particular research, I centered Coast Salish methodology and limited communities and participants to Coast Salish identity, heritage and cultural knowledges. In the review section of Chapter 2, I examined sources that discussed Two Spirit identity and experiences in general, across different Indigenous Nations, communities, and other mainstream LGBTQ+ circles. This was required, because I knew coming into this review that there would be very limited sources that represent Coast Salish knowledge about Two Spirit topics in the literature. While I acknowledge that my approach in this study was Coast Salish Nation-specific, I also recognize that the implications and application of this research benefit all our Two Spirit relatives and their home cultures and communities. It contributes to the west coast knowledge base for Two Spirit narratives and discourse, something that was absent in the literature before this research was completed.

With respect to geographic limitations of this research, I recognize that not all Coast Salish communities were included in the data. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Coast Salish traditional territories are vast and widespread. I knew I would not have been able to reach out to every individual Nation in this grouping for this study. Instead, I chose to focus on Nations most closely aligned with my own ways of being and knowing, and that are most closely related to me culturally and linguistically. To me, this is a strength in this research, not a limitation, as I followed my own protocols and relationality as an Indigenous researcher to inform the process.

Finally, participation in this research was limited to adults over the age of nineteen years. This is not fully representative of multiple generations of Coast Salish and Two Spirit community members, and does not completely capture the vision and

experiences of young People, or Elders specifically in our communities and cultures. Furthermore, I recognize that not all Two Spirit community members are ready to speak about their experiences and identities in a research project. In this regard, I rely on Coast Salish protocols around public community work, and my CSAC to pass on the message to others that this research process was conducted in a good way, in hope that this will encourage others to engage these types of studies in future.

3.9 Friends and Relatives

My intention to increase visibility of Coast Salish Two Spirit identity and experience is woven into the purpose of this research. The stories, testimony and artistic creations shared in this study are precious and life giving for Two Spirit community members. So too are the friends and relatives who offered them up. Their words, talents, pain and triumphs are the warps and wefts of this narrative. And although their words may not be explicitly visible in every chapter of this research, they are here, between the pages, pleated within the story and vision being carried forward on behalf of our People. Our Coast Salish Two Spirit identities and experiences are here. We have always been here.

In order to prepare for this work in Coast Salish communities, protocol required me to first select my witnesses. In this regard, the CSAC acts as witness to my behaviour and conduct as a researcher. These same protocols also proclaim that the participants, our relatives who contributed to this research also require witness to the work each of them have achieved. Informed consent provided by each individual participant in this research is a call for me to be a witness to their stories. Consent sets this responsibility in motion. Part of my duty as witness is to share back what I saw, heard and felt during the work. I

want to express gratitude to all my new friends and relatives who participated in this research, and for entrusting me with this great honour. I am humbled to have been able to conduct this study in our Coast Salish communities with them by my side. Therefore, I offer the closing subheadings of this chapter as a means to witness back my own experience and learning which resulted from these interactions. These offerings are written directly to the participants, as they are meant for and belong to each and every one of them. My witnessing responsibilities are shown below.

3.9.2 Sempulyan

My dear relative. I want to thank you for choosing me and this project to share your stories in, and for sharing some of what you learned about Two Spirit identity and experience. When I first met you in community, I was immediately drawn to your positive energy and sense of humour. I could see that you are a story teller. Your brilliant spirit gives off its own illumination; I felt drawn to this light. I have a deep respect for you, Sempulyan. So when you agreed to participate in this Coast Salish Two Spirit research, to say that I was excited would be an understatement. I looked forward to sharing a meal together and listening to your stories.

When the call went out for this research, you responded right away, you stood up to indicate your commitment to Two Spirit wellbeing in our culture and families. I know this study asked a lot of the participants, to share very personal stories with hope that this can be applied to help others. I want you to know I felt overcome with emotion by your generosity, and your willingness to do what you can to make a difference in the lives of our Two Spirit relatives. I was humbled by the depth of your knowledge of community history, and your ability to reflect and pass this understanding on during our talk together.

When this discussion began, you helped me realize very quickly that we needed to follow the path of the stories, and not be so confined to questions in front of us. I want to thank you for that important lesson in this process.

My relative, I want you to know that I heard what you said. You were trained by our male and female traditional knowledge keepers on the how to do the ceremonial work in our longhouses, and how to follow and take responsibility for the teachings of our ancestors. Thank you for the reminder that, as Coast Salish People we groom our relatives from a young age, to fulfill certain roles and responsibilities in protocol and ceremony. We need to do that more deliberately today. I want you to know that I see the work you are doing in community, and it warms my heart. You are a natural history keeper, a skill that is so invaluable in our communities and culture. I saw you walk into this talk with generosity and openness, love and kindness, dignity and respect. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you have brought to this circle, and I am grateful to that our Two Spirit relatives have you as a support to them. I am looking forward to being in circle and working with you again in future.

3.9.3 Noah

My friend, I want to thank you for standing up for Two Spirit relatives when the call was put out. When I asked for help to do this research, not just for me but for our Coast Salish communities, you did not hesitate to step forward. I am grateful for the strength and courage you carry with you, and the ways I have seen you share these gifts with those around you. You bring youthful energy and grounded insight to every space you walk in to. Your playfulness reminds us to laugh and find light and vision in every situation. Your quiet observation reminds us of the importance to be mindful, and to take

time to think and process before we speak. It also tells us to be respectful of spaces we hold, to not interfere with the learning and healing of others, and to engage talk about Two Spirit identity and experience with patience and humility. I am so grateful for the teachings you have brought into this circle.

Since the day I met you, Noah, I have watched your transition from a distance. I have seen the way you conduct yourself in community with honour and dignity. I have watched you demonstrate our traditional teachings in ways that community members of all ages can observe and learn from. The integrity of your presence commands respect from others; you lead by example, not by lesson. I want to you know that I see you. I am humbled to witness the good way you conduct yourself in community, and it fills my heart with love and hope for the future of our Two Spirit community members. You are the future in our Coast Salish communities, and knowing that, it gives me great comfort to see the teachings of our ancestors alive within you.

I watched you do the work. I heard the stories, how you stood grounded in the knowledge of who you truly are fully and completely. Your commitment to authenticity is uncompromised. I felt in my heart the compassion you have for family, and those loved ones who are still learning about Two Spirit identity and experience in our communities. I know the ways you have mentored young ones who need clarity and ask questions about these issues. I see your willingness to share what you know and have experienced, but also what your own hopes and dreams are for the future of Two Spirit People in our Coast Salish Nations. You are an inspiration and a role model. I raise my hands and thank you for carrying on the work of our ancestors.

3.9.4 Eagle

To my respected relative. I want to thank you for the honour to witness your story, and the revitalizing work you have done in your own family and community to support Two Spirit People and projects. It brought me great joy to learn you wanted to contribute to these important talks, because I see all the good work you have done already. It warms my heart and spirit when supporters and allies of Two Spirit People make themselves visible. I want you to know that I heard what you said, about the importance of showing up and standing beside our Two Spirit relatives when they need it most. I see the rooted knowledge you draw from, the strength of your family's teachings, and how you put these gifts into action in community. I heard you say that healing and recovery is an entire family and community effort, not just an individual one. Healing and growth involves and benefits each and every one of us. I carry that message forward in my heart; I want to thank you for that reminder.

I watched you follow the teachings of our ancestors. I see your family working together, role modeling ancient ways of knowing and being to others, and leading the rest of us down a path of healing and reclamation. Coming back into to our Coast Salish ways, I heard what you said, that it is important for our family members to be mindful, and to take time to care for their own hearts and spirits in these transitional times. I received the message: watching our Two Spirit loved ones go through their own transformations is challenging, emotional and spiritual work. I want to thank you for the reminder to take care of ourselves properly on these journeys, so that we are better able to take care of others. We must support the family members and the general community in their own learning and healing around Two Spirit topics. This is an important part of the

revitalization work that must be done, and I am grateful you have brought this forward for all of us to see.

3.9.5 Holly Bear

My dear cousin. I am so grateful that Creator brought our spirits together. During our talks, I can see and hear the love and pride you take in sharing and educating about Two Spirit identity and experience. I see how far you have come on your own journey as a proud Coast Salish Two Spirit person. I heard about all the people, young and old, you that had a hand in raising their awareness and compassion for Two Spirit relatives. I raise my hands to you for the work you do in community to represent our culture and families in a good way. I heard you speak about the teachings, about respect and the importance of language, sharing and openness with each other. I see you walk your talk, Holly Bear. I encourage you to carry on with this good work, as I know it has a positive impact on our loved ones who need it most in community.

I was humbled when you asked me to witness a little piece of your story. You are a kind and gentle spirit, unassuming and patient with others. I also heard you talk about the value of alliance building, and strengthening our relationships with other LGBTQ+ and non-Indigenous community circles. I heard that it will take all of us together, to improve circumstances for young Two Spirit People. I carry this lesson forward into my own journey, and in my own communities. I want you to know that I see you, my cousin. You are a helper, an educator and a collaborator. You carry the teachings of our ancestors in your heart, in your dreams and vision for all our relatives, wherever they may be living. You work to help others, and in turn you strengthen you own connection to our

ancestral teachings. I am grateful our paths have crossed, and that we have been reunited as family in this process.

3.9.6 Tyson

To my precious friend. I am so honoured to have been able to witness your testimony. What you shared, the depth of knowledge you have shown, and how you carry yourself in community is to be respected and modeled after. I see and hear that you hold wisdom beyond your years. You are a passionate visionary, playful and dedicated to represent Coast Salish People in a good way. I want to thank you for all you have shared here, and I will continue to watch as your journey and contributions to family and community unfold before us. You are becoming. This is something remarkable and magic to witness from the outside. You are a beautiful soul.

I want you to know I heard what you said. You carry the teachings of your grandparents, and of your ancestors inside your heart and spirits. They are part of you, and you are part of them every day. I heard you say that we should not be afraid to speak to and communicate with our ancestors regularly, that they are our relatives. They love us and are here to help. Our ancestors want to be acknowledged and seen, and so do we. We need to find ways to bring ourselves closer to our ancestors; they need to be part of our everyday life again. Our connection to our ancestors is one of our greatest strengths. I want to thank you for this message of healing. I will carry it with me always.

I know you have experienced a lifetime of stories in a short period of time, and that you have carried yourself with grace throughout. I want to acknowledge your strength and resilience. I want to thank you for lessons you shared about openness and honesty with loved ones, about having compassion and care for those in our families who

still struggle on their own healing journeys. These gifts will carry you in your own journey. They are gifts we can all learn from. You are visionary, an artist and a change maker. It was a blessing to stand by your side during this work, and I raise my hands in thanks for all you have done, and continue to do.

3.9.7 Shane

?a: si:yém. I want to thank you for honouring me, for trusting me to be a witness to your stories. I have been fortunate enough to work with you on a number of different projects. I know you are always so open and willing to answer the call, when we need help or guidance to do this type of reclamation and honouring work with our families in community. I am so grateful for your generosity and kindness in this way. I can see you are truly dedicated to the wellness of Coast Salish families, and you show this in your work and commitment to share and pass on the wisdom of our ancestors to others. I raise my hands to you for leading by example, and showing us how to live our cultural teachings every day.

I heard what was said, Shane Pointe, that you want your name to be recognized in this work, so that others in community will know that you are supportive of our Two Spirit relatives. You wanted your name to be known, as an example of ways others in community can work together to create safe space for Two Spirit People in our families and ceremonies again. I heard the message, that it will take everyone in community to unlearn colonial violence inflicted on our Two Spirit relatives, to reclaim our cultural ways of being, and come back into balance. I heard that this is possible, and it is happening already. You reminded us to be patient with each other, and gentle and kind as we navigate these transitions in our families. I heard you say that we need to be patient

with ourselves as well; we are all learning how to be whole again as Indigenous People, and we need to stand and support one another in this learning and transformation.

I am so grateful for you, my friend. I truly felt the spirit of our ancestors around us during this process. I know they are watching, and they are happy with the work you have done for community. Your wisdom and these messages of love and inclusiveness will lift up our families and Coast Salish Two Spirit relatives for many years to come. I am humbled beyond words, respected one, and I thank you for this honour.

3.9.8 Saylesh

My dear sister. I want to thank you for taking time to sit down and talk with me as part of this research. I want to thank you for choosing me to share your stories with. I am honoured and delighted by your presence in this important work, and all that you bring to this process.

When I knew it was time to start this thesis, I immediately began talking with anyone who was willing, to learn as much as I could about Coast Salish Two Spirit stories. I looked everywhere for Coast Salish Two Spirit representation in the literature. I searched for a long time but could not find any reflections of our People. And then I found your blaze mark amidst the pages. Yours was the only story that revealed a path to Coast Salish knowledge about Two Spirit identity and experience. You made a mark for our People, and I was able to follow the path as a result. Words can never express the most heart-felt gratitude and respect I hold for you, dear sister.

You planted a seed deep in the land of our ancestors, where it grew for three years before blooming as part of this research. Your story was light on a darkened trail, during a time on my own journey that I needed it most. I am forever grateful to you for that. And

when it came time to start the talks as part of this research, our spirits called out to each other. It felt almost as though they were drawn to one another, sharing language without words. We started this dialogue together in dream and vision, before meeting physically, and were guided by some of our closest ancestors and helpers. I know that this spirit talk is not yet finished, and the purpose has yet to be revealed. But I also know in my heart that it is profoundly significant and commands our attention.

Saylesh, you broke ground and opened a doorway. You have reclaimed space for our Coast Salish Two Spirit relatives again. Because of all you and your family have done to live the ancestral teachings, to be inclusive, visible and supportive of Two Spirit identity in culture, our future generations will see and know their rightful places in community and ceremony again. I raise my hands high in gratitude for you, my sister. I am honoured to have witnessed a tiny piece of your story and transformation in this moment.

3.9.9 Salmon

My good friend. I want to thank you for your dedication to this work. I know you are aware how important it is for our Coast Salish Two Spirit relatives, and I know how busy you are. For taking the time to have these talks, for all the guidance and encouragement you offered up during the process, I raise my hands to you for that. I want to thank you for supporting this work, and for the gifts you have brought into this circle.

I heard the words: our families need to start talking to each other again about gender and sexuality issues. We need to be more open and supportive to one another. We need to move beyond the silences and find ways to lift each other up, to make space for all of us in the community circle. I heard you say that making space for each unique

person is about respect. It is so important that these words and the work carries on, that it does not sit idle for our families and communities. Our Two Spirit relatives matter. I want to thank you for these powerful reminders.

Salmon my friend, you bring a level of curiosity and insightfulness that is refreshing and life giving. Your gifts of observation and compassion for others were so needed in this work. I am grateful for the patience and understanding you show towards others. Grounded in self, I see that you are a person who walks with uncompromised integrity today. You model these gifts to those around you, and I want to thank you for the good work you have done to support our Coast Salish and Indigenous communities.

3.9.10 Bitty

To my dear relative, Bitty. I want to thank you for the honour to witness to your stories and your creative work. It was a blessing and a gift to sit and talk with you, to explore ideas for healing and reclamation for Coast Salish Two Spirit People everywhere. I am so grateful that our paths crossed again after all these years. We were both just young when we first met; I still have the picture on my wall of when I last saw and spoke with you fifteen years ago. Being reunited in this way is a true reminder that our Coast Salish circles always come back around eventually. We are all family as Coast Salish. For me to witness the resilient warrior you have become, and the ancestral wisdom and insight you have cultivated within you, gives me great hope and pride. I thank you for this honour. My heart is glad.

You are an old soul, Bitty, and your pen name suits you as such. I see the many ways you walk in this world as a visionary and an advocate for our People. The messages you carry forward about healing, wellness and resurgence for Coast Salish and Two Spirit

relatives emanates from the very lands we come from. Your contributions are timeless, beyond measure and intergenerational. You journey with a gentle strength, which also commands such deep rooted respect and dignity from those around you. You lead by example; you teach without interfering. I can hear that you carry ancient teachings of our ancestors inside you. I see you share this so willingly with others, in the spirit of kindness, generosity and community building. I am so grateful for that. You apply the gifts Creator has given you to spark change and action in our families and communities. Your presence in this work is invaluable and inspiring on so many levels. I want you to know that I see you, my relative. We are all in circle together, watching, loving and supporting one another. I thank you for this honour. I will carry it in my heart for many years to come.

3.9.11 Mack

To my precious loved one. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, for asking me to be a witness to your stories and the work you have done. It is such an honour to be able to speak to all I have seen, heard and felt throughout these talks. When I first met you, I could see that you are a gentle spirit. But I also know that the gentle ones in community, the unassuming ones are usually also the most observant, insightful, and humble. You exude strength and determination as a Two Spirit person, and I hold you in the absolute highest regard.

I heard everything you said. I carry the words and feelings in my heart always. Your story is my story; your story is all of our stories as Coast Salish Two Spirit People. You are standing alongside many friends and relatives, all working in unison to reclaim space for Two Spirit People in our families, communities and culture again. I heard the

words, that we need to remember there is a whole community of Coast Salish Two Spirit People out there, that it can be difficult to speak the words that for so long have gone unspoken. I heard that this sharing process is healing and transformative, when we gather together in circle to do this work. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for bringing these lessons into this process.

I want you to know that I watch the work you do in community. I see you conduct yourself respectfully, with kindness and compassion. You are always willing to answer the call when it comes, and I do not see any short cuts; you approach the work with honour, integrity and mindfulness. I raise my hands to you, for carrying on the teachings of our ancestors, and for being a positive example to others in our community. I learned so much from you, my relative. Words will never be able to fully capture the depth of my love and gratitude for you. My heart is full.

Chapter 4 – Standing Up Our Relatives

reclamation!

two-spirit hallucinations
 gender and sexual diversity across reservations
 consent and invitation
 self-love, respect and transformations

dreams of colonial healing
 bringing back a flood of feelings
 cleansing, replenishing memories of believing
 refreshing, reviving ways of seeing

decolonial sex, love and rock & roll
 light up that sage bowl
 let's lose control
 shapeshift our souls

a dream for next generations
 a vision of liberation
 ancestors holler in exclamation
 two-spirit reclamation!

with lands, bodies, spirits, minds
 aligned
 the struggles will be easier to
 survive
 no one left behind
 rise up, thrive (Bitty, 2017).

4.2 What Was Asked

This next section will demonstrate the stories participants shared during this process. Pre-determined questions for data collection acted as guides for these discussions. Overall, the focus of these talks was around ways that increased recognition of Coast Salish Two Spirit identities and experiences can contribute to community wellness and cultural resurgence. Participants were able to apply this general concept in

their responses, and focused on any areas or questions that stood out for them particularly. The questions that were posed included:

- **What do you know about Coast Salish sexuality and gender systems? How does this inform ways family and community is structured today?**
- **What is your understanding about Coast Salish Two Spirit experience and identity?**
- **What would Coast Salish ancestors say about gender, sexuality, Two Spirit identities, roles and responsibilities?**
- **How can we support Coast Salish Two Spirit People in family, community and culture?**
- **Is there anything I haven't asked about that you'd like to share?**

I recognize that every individual family has its own unique methods and protocols. It was important to examine what some of these processes may be, how participants internalize them, and how this informs community views on family, sexuality and gender from a Coast Salish perspective. This is also a good way to determine what knowledge about Coast Salish gender and sexuality already exists, and reveals participant awareness of what knowledge their families and communities provided to them when they were growing up, why and where that knowledge comes from. Similarly, every person understands and experiences Two Spirit identity in their own way. My intention in asking about personal Coast Salish Two Spirit experience was to unveil any knowledge that participants had about generalized Indigenous and Coast Salish specific traditions, teachings or stories. This conversation also allowed participants to personalize their testimonies, and speak from their own experiences of being and/or supporting Coast Salish Two Spirit People.

I mention in previous chapters that I entered this thesis with understanding that there is a gap in ancestral Coast Salish knowledge about Two Spirit identity and history. I did not expect to reveal traditional Coast Salish stories or teachings specific to gender, sexuality or being Two Spirit in our culture – although I remained hopeful. In order to address any gaps in knowledge, I introduced a visionary question to participants, so they could imagine and capture cultural values, beliefs and practices they felt would positively benefit Two Spirit People, and our Coast Salish families and communities. It is also a question that asks participants to imagine what our ancestors would have to say about contemporary contexts for Two Spirit People. In order to identify specific community actions to improve experience and conditions for Two Spirit relatives back home, I asked participants to identify what they as individuals, and as families and community can do to better support these loved ones. My intention in asking this was to gather details which I could then apply to specific recommendations for resource and program development in Coast Salish communities.

I also offered the opportunity for participants to contribute creative submissions to the data, by way of art, photo voice, poetry, or any other mediums they preferred to express themselves in. I did this with understanding that not all stories and messages are captured and translate adequately into written or verbal language. Three participants chose to submit creative pieces to the data. Artistic and creative expression allows participants to explore Two Spirit ideas on a deeper level, and provides opportunity for the work to have an impact beyond the confines of the spoken or written word. The very act of creating art and language is, in of itself a spiritual practice; in it lies the vision work of Coast Salish Two Spirit People and their allies. I used creative expression as a method

in this research, because art (and ways that its creation and interpretation conveys very personal meaning on emotional and spiritual levels), is very much a part of our Indigenous cultures. Participants were invited to submit up to four creative contributions each, and to provide descriptions of the work if they chose to. Creative submissions needed to represent all or some of the following elements:

- **Coast Salish Two Spirit identity**
- **Coast Salish Two Spirit experience**
- **Coast Salish Two Spirit wellness**
- **Coast Salish Two Spirit cultural resurgence**

4.3 Organizing the Seating

I had a very challenging time figuring out how to present the participant stories in this thesis. These precious stories are a reflection of Coast Salish narrative of Two Spirit People; they are Two Spirit identity and experience in part and in their totality. It was difficult to not include entire transcripts from each discussion, as I view every aspect of these talks and process as relevant, inspiring and meaningful to this reclamation work. I am acutely aware that increased visibility of Coast Salish and any Two Spirit stories is so vitally important for Indigenous wellness and cultural resurgence efforts. As part of my Indigenous research framework, centring the stories and Indigenous knowledge is essential to the work; I have done this by following my own Coast Salish methodology, protocols and ways of approaching the process. I know in my heart the best way to centre this Two Spirit, Indigenous knowledge is to show transcripts in their entirety, so readers can fully absorb the conversations and make their own meaning out of the content. But in

the end, I felt that adding another 164 pages of transcription to this thesis would be overwhelming for readers, and so I knew I had to find another way to honour the stories.

In place of entire transcripts, readers will find harvested foundational concepts that stood out for me and the participants specifically. In pulling pieces from the whole, I was able to weave smaller, more manageable sections of narrative together to create something new to offer to both the participants and the readers, while doing my best to honour and mitigate any damage to the integrity of the stories as a whole. I felt more confident conducting this transformation of the data, because this process is informed and guided by Indigenous ethics and Coast Salish methodology. The participants all received a draft of this chapter, so they could review and edit their own stories as necessary; they also gave their blessing for me to proceed in this way at that time. I wove the data together in the best way I know how in this moment, with care and respect for what was shared by participants. Individual contributions of all our friends and relatives in this project are still here; they transformed to reflect back my own learning and new understandings.

I present this knowledge by categorizing the elements of the conversations that stood out into four overall themes that are connected to my Four House Posts methodology; a further discussion of my approach to working with and categorizing the data is laid out in Chapter 3. I begin each theme section with a quote that is also repeated and discussed in depth in conversation later in each respective theme. I offer these introductory quotations in order to highlight some of the most poignant words shared by participants, in relation to the themes. I did this in order to centralize knowledge shared by the participants themselves as a starting point, and to indicate that it is their stories and

wisdom in the conversations that helped guide and bring the findings in this research to life. The participants created the content; I mapped the paths they set out as the researcher. Each theme section is composed of three sub-sections: 1) introduction; 2) the stories; and 3) summary.

When I was going through and seeking commonalities in the content for each theme, a number of sub-themes began to emerge. To present overall themes and sub-themes in the data, the opening quote of each theme section is followed by an overview of the sub-themes, to help illustrate how I understand their interconnectedness and contributions as a whole. In “The Stories” section of each theme, I bring forward conversations I had with the participants and weave these into the content, through small quotes, paraphrasing and small chunks of conversation as representations of the stories. This weaving is meant to offer representations of the stories and to help make the talks and meaning making as visible as possible. I then conclude each theme section by summarizing the common thread identified in the data. For the purpose of clarity and readability, I distinguish quotations from participants in ***bold italic*** text. These are some of the treasures in our Coast Salish Two Spirit stories.

4.4 The Stories

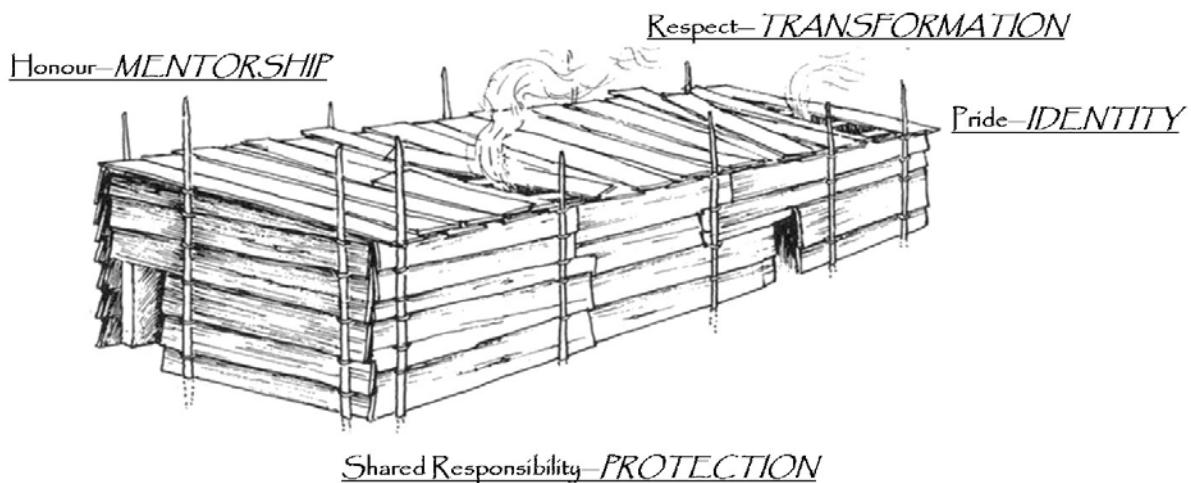


Image 3 – Coast Salish Two Spirit Themes.

4.4.2 Protection - Introduction

...I feel like a lot of people here, they will accept you and appreciate you and respect you, but they just don't want to go and like, make the effort to go and learn...they are just kind of like, 'It doesn't affect me. It's not important to me'. But they don't realize how important it is to ME, or to you...or to any LGBTQ and every other gender and/or sexuality. How much it would mean to us.
 (Noah).

Throughout the talks with participants, safety and protection of young and adult Two Spirit community members were raised on a number of different levels. There was discussion about the effects of social, emotional and spiritual isolation on the wellbeing of Two Spirit People, and direct correlations between colonization, residential schools and the imposition of fear, shame and western binaries of gender and sexuality in Indigenous communities. Participants offered a lot of insight into ways that families and leadership in community can work together to address these issues, as well as to support and protect Two Spirit relatives from further harm. They said that some of this work includes community members becoming more aware of Two Spirit matters in family and ceremony, and becoming educated on how to be a more active source of support in

community. It is here in the stories that I heard participants share teachings of reciprocity and shared responsibility to love, nurture and care for our relatives, as well as our children who are Two Spirit. In order for family and community to play a more active role in changing the experience of their relatives, participants indicated that families must understand what is happening now, how it effects Two Spirit People, and what they can do to make change for future. Understanding the ways that we address current and historic distances between our beloved Two Spirit relatives and their families, leadership and ceremonial knowledge keepers are the first steps in this healing process.

4.4.2.2 Protection: The Stories

When Two Spirit community members become isolated from their collective families, community or culture, whether they are adults or children, their level of vulnerability and risk of harm is increased on a holistic level. All participants who self-identify as Two Spirit in this project spoke about having to learn and develop their own identities through personal research (with minimal to no guidance from others), and having to navigate their own experiences outside of family and cultural support. When I mention cultural supports, I am referring to our People having access to ceremonies, protocols, traditional knowledge keepers and ancestral teachings which are reflective and inclusive of Two Spirit identities. These cultural supports are medicines that act as helpers for our relatives when they need it most. Without them, our community members are at risk of further isolation from their Coast Salish identities, and also a divided sense of self and wellbeing, in order to compensate for lack of safe space for them within current cultural practices. People are vulnerable to harm when they are isolated.

Participants talked about the need to fully surround Two Spirit People with family, community and ceremony again.

All of the Two Spirit participants said that they did not have anybody in their family, community, or in the western LGBTQ+ community circles they could turn to for specific support with identity development or participation in community and culture. This is illustrated in the words of Holly Bear, who said, ***I basically educated myself, who I am, where I'm from, where I'm at. And I guess you could say I'm proud of myself and what I did.*** While Bitty made similar comments about isolation, ***So I think growing up on the reserve, it felt like my circle got really small that way...So I don't think I felt like I had someone.*** I heard indicators of a reconciliation process for each Two Spirit participant, in terms of finding ways to cope with emotional and spiritual distances from family and community, while also identifying methods to honour the self and find a sense of belonging in that process. In this respect, Sempulyan shared that they had to do their own personal healing work, before they were able to apply the same level of compassion to others. They said,

...it took me a long time to learn to love and accept myself. To forgive myself...I had to learn to forgive myself and accept myself for who I am...and not feel shameful or to be guilty for being attracted to men or women. (Sempulyan).

To me, identity development and self-acceptance journeys demonstrate the tremendous resilience among Two Spirit People, and at the same time show an underlying sense of loneliness that silence can cause as well. When I consider these comments, I hear participants saying that our families and communities need to be more aware of the impacts of silence and invisibility of our Two Spirit People.

All participants made explicit linkages between the isolation experienced by Two Spirit People, and the colonial trauma experienced by Indigenous families, communities and cultures. There is an underlying understanding among the participants that indicates isolation, shame, fear and violence directed at Two Spirit People is not part of traditional Coast Salish culture. Rather, it was brought and imposed on our societies by European settlers. Our families continue to act out the values and beliefs about diverse gender and sexuality that have been forced upon our People since first contact. For the Two Spirit participants, applying this historic connection to their own experiences can facilitate powerful healing, forgiveness and empathy for our families and relatives in community. To provide an example of these correlations made, I offer an excerpt of conversation I had with Tyson on the topic below:

CS (me)	What is your understanding of Coast Salish, Two Spirit or non-binary experience and identity?
Tyson	<p><i>My experience is very...it had its ups and downs growing up. My dad went to residential school, so he got heavily sexually abused by men. So it put in his brain that a man should not love another man. So growing up, I wasn't allowed to be girly, and I wasn't allowed to be the way I wanted to be. Just because I didn't understand at that age, but I understood why because that's just how a perfect family is. The boys play with boy's stuff, and the girls play with the girl's stuff. So I followed that for a little while. I still did those things behind his back with my mom.</i></p> <p><i>...So it was very easy for me to express who I was until my dad got home. But my mom had said that my dad always knew, he just didn't want me to be that way. Just in his mind at that time, just because of what he went through.</i></p>

Tyson spoke about his father's healing journey in his testimony, and how this affected the relationship they had together over the years. I can also see in the testimony, how Tyson makes inferences about colonial ideals of nuclear, binary family systems

being imposed on his own family, and ways that he navigated these confines growing up. To me, this is powerful reflexivity.

Similarly, Bitty discussed their views on silence and lack of Two Spirit visibility in Coast Salish communities. They also drew connections to colonialism as the cause of silence, and to grief and loss of our Indigenous genders and sexuality as the result. This is a brief excerpt of that talk:

Bitty ***Because I think about, that there's, like Elder Two Spirit People, and I don't ever see Elder Two Spirit People, and I never get to talk to them.***

CS Yea. Where are they in our communities? Well, especially in our communities. I think that's a good point. Where are they? They have to be out there. Isn't that weird?

Bitty ***Mmm hmm.***

CS Why do you think they are not visible? Why do you think we can't see them?

Bitty ***I don't know. I guess part of me thinks about a mix of things. Some people I think don't live their Two Spirit lives. Some people...***

CS You mean, like, they're not...?

Bitty ***...like, I guess, not identifying as...or maybe not living the life they feel is in their heart. And they make other choices based on oppression, or feeling shameful, or lots of different reasons, I guess. Or if you were a survivor of residential school, then you probably go through a lot of hard feelings then, trying to figure yourself out, I guess. So...***

CS It makes it harder.

Bitty ***I think there must be Two Spirit Elders though.***

When I look at Bitty's comments, I am reminded of insidious silence that continues to fester within our families and communities. Often our Two Spirit People do not receive any answers or guidance from their relatives or leadership on identity, gender and sexuality matters. Therefore, we are left to figure these out on our own, and to draw

our own conclusions about where the silence and invisibility comes from, what contributes to this oppression, and what this means for us in community in the future.

Bitty also shared reasons they thought Two Spirit People may be more prone to sit back in silence and wait for relatives to reconcile their beliefs about diverse genders and sexualities. With respect to healing and transcending colonialism in Coast Salish families, most participants discussed the topic of burden in some form. Rather, that they did not wish to further burden family members who may already be suffering the impacts of colonial violence. To me this was relevant, because it speaks to the need for compassion and respect for where our loved ones are in their own healing journeys. On this topic, Bitty said:

Even in knowing that they've been harmed, we'll hide our own hurt...because we don't want to put more on them, because of the hurt that they've already been through in their lives.

Personally, I have experienced hiding my own needs and feelings from family, because they were dealing with enough already; I mentioned this in my introduction chapter. Shane also speaks about not overburdening others, but in a different context. His words are shared below:

Well, it gets to comfort, so we all need to be respectful of comfort. So although niece and nephew might be comfortable, that doesn't mean the open-minded initiators on either side might be comfortable – because they might not be. So we have to, so the niece and nephew needs to be respectful of that as well, because you don't want to embarrass or hurt them either.

Based on the testimonies, I see that Two Spirit People do not wish to burden or harm their relatives with their need for support around experiences of displacement, dismissal, disrespect, and dishonouring. I believe that this comes from a place of love and care for our families. It is rooted in deep understanding of intergenerational traumas that

still exists in our Indigenous families today, and how this is connected to continued oppression of Two Spirit relatives in our communities. However, I also know that everything boils down to balance in the end. We do not want to further burden our relatives as Two Spirit People, but at the same time, participants were clear in their testimonies that now is the time for our relatives and leaders to step up, and take more direct action to support and reclaim Two Spirit People in our culture.

Some of the most poignant comments made on the topic of burden and shared responsibility were offered by Noah. I offer his thoughts below, within the context of conversation we had together:

Noah *And I feel like a lot of people here, they will accept you and appreciate you and respect you...but they just don't want to go and like, make the effort to go learn. Oh it's like, 'Oh it's at the gym? Ahhh, I'll just stay home.'*

CS You mean that you think they do that with everything, or with [Two Spirit] issues in particular?

Noah *Well, I feel like with these types of issues, they are just kind of like, 'It doesn't affect me. It's not important to me.' But they don't realize how important it is to ME, or to you...or to any of the LGBTQ and every other gender and/or sexuality. How much it would mean to us. Because if we're trying to hold something here, to help you understand who we are as People, as Aboriginal People, as Coast Salish People of this spectrum...it's just kind of like...*

CS Like, why wouldn't you?

Noah *If this is such an amazing community, as everyone says it is, where are they? That is my question. Where are they when I need them? We're there when you need us, most of the time. We'll try to be there for everything. But what about when I need you? And I might not need it, like, a lot. But I just need that support.*

To me, Noah's words clearly represent his experience of traditional teachings around Shared Responsibility not being implemented or received. On the one hand, Noah states that Two Spirit People in community, whether they are out and open in public or

not, are always available and willing to help our relatives, for the betterment and wellness of the whole community. On the other hand, Noah questions why Coast Salish families and community members do not recognize Two Spirit identity, experience, safety and wellness as valuable endeavours for them to take on, or to become more engaged with. When I heard Noah say this, I was immediately able to recognize an imbalance between Coast Salish families who are accepting of Two Spirit relatives, but who do not take action to get involved in lifting up these relatives. Bitty describes this as, ***"I think there are families that accept and some that don't, and there's the In Between."*** For me, the 'in between' speaks to the lack of motivation or engagement of Coast Salish communities in Two Spirit wellness and resurgence efforts. Participants called for our families and community members to become more active in this work.

All participants spoke about the need for families to receive education on Two Spirit identity, Indigenous gender and sexuality specifically, as well as the impacts of colonialism on our families generally, so that they can better support Two Spirit People in our communities. When discussing the changes needed in Coast Salish communities, Sempulyan suggested the following:

...provide education...to help the families and parents and grandparents...we need to be able to have enough courage to tell people that [negative] behaviour is unacceptable. Because they are family.

When I heard Sempulyan say this, I also linked this to the teaching of Shared Responsibility, as family and community stand up for one another when it is needed. Our loved ones will not be able to do that effectively unless they are educated on gender and sexuality topics. There were other participants who spoke about education and awareness as the priority to make positive changes for Two Spirit People in community. For

example, Bitty spoke about education, but they also pointed to the need to entrench this learning in Coast Salish history. They said:

...getting more information around the history of Two Spirit People, that it's not a new identity in relation to gay and lesbian. It's a reclaiming. So I think the more people understand that's something we always believed in and held important, then it gives more reason to let go of things that don't belong to us, that we practice.

Re-educating our families and communities about Two Spirit matters, especially in ways that reinforce: 1) understanding that these identities and experiences are not new to Coast Salish societies and culture; 2) that we were here before contact with European settlers; and 3) that we have always been here. This kind of historicized approach to re-education is a powerful message of encouragement, decolonization and healing for our People.

The participants also clarified some groups in our Coast Salish communities who should be targeted for Two Spirit awareness and education first. Many of them suggested that perhaps leadership and knowledge keepers should be the ones to initiate this education process. On this point, Holly Bear shared:

Those are the people that really need to get on our side – is the leaders. Because it's awesome to have people like you and I out...But if the leaders are on board with you, then that makes a bonus – the leaders, the Elders, everything...

Our Indigenous communities hold Elders, traditional knowledge keepers and leadership in high regard. We value what they say and do, and look to them for guidance on how to behave. Therefore, it is important that they be included in strategies to improve the wellbeing and experiences of Two Spirit People in ceremony and community. Eagle talked about the need for leadership and role modeling in community here:

The leaders have to be educated and informed, and lead by example. But...also at the same time, and maybe more so important, is educate the families on...the traditional roles and the values that we held for trans gender, Two Spirit People...educate our community...everybody needs this information...because we all interact.

Based on recommendations made by participants, our Coast Salish families will be more compelled into action when they see role models in community doing this important work. Perhaps we need to look more closely at the role of Elders, knowledge keepers and leadership in supporting families to actively reclaim Two Spirit knowledge and identities in our culture. The topic of mentorship is explored in greater details in the following theme.

I was greatly inspired to learn that participants already had a firm grasp of understanding the impacts of colonization and residential schools on Indigenous families, communities and cultures, and how this subsequently affects the experience of Two Spirit People. In his own attempt to understand some of the fear around gender and sexual diversity within his own family, Shane got curious and sought an explanation from a relative. He said:

I want to know what drives [my cousins'] fear. So he's afraid they're gonna choose him, and if they choose him, that must mean that he's homosexual. So it's the fear...it's kind of one of those things that he needs to grow out of...Christianity shifts that and they make it fearful.

These types of interactions and learning moments within families are most important. Each family needs to follow their own path to healing and recovery of Two Spirit traditions and experiences in their households. Without these conversations happening, the historical traumas remain unresolved. Bitty also spoke about the origin and impact of silences in their Coast Salish family. They said:

...sexuality and gender isn't something talked about much even, never mind, Two Spirit or non-binary...it's pretty quiet...I also think there is as result of colonization and stuff...intergenerational trauma and sexualized violence and homophobia and misogyny.

Reflecting on Bitty's words here, I cannot imagine what it would be like to try to clarify my own identity as a Two Spirit Person, if I did not already have knowledge of the history of colonial violence and oppression against Indigenous People. In that scenario, I would have no touchstones or explanation for why society (and relatives in Indigenous community as well) treat me differently than others; I feel this would cause me to internalize feelings of shame, fear and displacement even deeper. I feel it is important to know what historical legacies we are dealing with in community, so we know which areas to target for healing.

All of the participants spoke extensively about their hope of seeing increased healing opportunities for families, so that they may work through and let go of past traumas around gender and sexuality, and be more present for relatives who need them. Participants offered messages of love and encouragement to all Coast Salish societies, reminding them that it is time to bring our families closer in circle, to reconnect and reclaim our cultural ways of being and knowing, and to include Two Spirit identity and experience in that process. Holly Bear sent a message of safety and protection for families in their own testimony. They said:

Our families – it's time to accept us and embrace who we are and to accept us. And start teaching our youth and start teaching our community who we are, and not to shame us, or put 'em down, because of who we are.

On the same note, Shane shared extensively on what he felt Coast Salish families and children need to be reminded of, with respect to Two Spirit People. In his own words, Shane offered:

Don't be fearful. Be braver than your mom and dad, and that means be open minded...be open to all people around the world...be brave. Don't be like your parents – scared people.

...it's gonna open their hearts and their minds that have been closed by others. Not ours. The fear around sexuality and gender transformation - that's not ours. That fear and hatred is not ours. It comes from somewhere else...free yourself from it.

I love this idea that our families and communities need to identify their own unique ways to unlearn and free themselves from the confines of colonial binaries and values. These Eurocentric ideals limit and continue to harm our Indigenous and Two Spirit People. I agree with the participants that our families need to be aware of how they contribute to silencing, invisibility and violence against Two Spirit People in community. I believe that for the safety and protection of our future generations, this needs to happen immediately. Families must work to heal their own traumas, and to unlearn colonial mentalities and practices that serve to harm Indigenous cultures, as well as our most vulnerable Two Spirit children and relatives.

4.4.2.3 Protection - Summary

Protection and safety are very much a part of Coast Salish culture, so it is not surprising that this teaching was visible in the data. I have been told that many of our protocols have been established for our own personal holistic safety, and I know that expectations around these protocols can vary from family to family. As I understand it, safety rules are not encouraged out of fear; rather they are acted upon out of respect for boundaries, each other and the spirit world. The teaching of protection reminds me that there is always consequence to action, to think and feel before I do, and to be mindful of my impact on the surrounding environment. It also reminds me that we need to share knowledge about protection protocols amongst each other, in order to keep the rules

alive, and also to keep one another safe at all times. This is a shared responsibility that we are all expected to follow as Coast Salish People: to protect one another as family. No one should be left out of this circle in our communities, but especially those most vulnerable to harm – our Two Spirit relatives.

In reviewing the data, there is undoubtedly a spoken need for Coast Salish families to do more to support and protect their Two Spirit relatives. Perhaps at this time, in this context, the silent acceptance our families show their Two Spirit relatives is not enough. Perhaps in this day and age, silence is in fact doing more harm than good. Based on my own experience, I propose that silence can sometimes imply disapproval, fear or judgement about Two Spirit lifestyles, and if this remains unclarified, then our Two Spirit relatives are left to navigate the meaning behind different silences in family and community on their own. The participants suggest that Coast Salish families need to get motivated to step forward and actively share the burden of reclaiming Two Spirit traditions and knowledge in our culture and communities.

Finally, in considering participant testimonies about how to create, maintain or compromise safety for Two Spirit People, I could not help but wonder: if our families and communities were to applying basic teachings of reciprocity and shared responsibility in daily life, would they continue to remain uninvolved, uneducated and unaware of the depth of experience that Two Spirit relatives face on a daily basis? Shared burden, collective responsibility and reciprocity were all subthemes in the data, and have a direct correlation to the theme of protection in my view. As Coast Salish community members, our traditional teaching is to protect one another. We do this by sharing the work, lifting

burden, speaking out for each other, and defending one other as needed, as one family.

These are all acts which are connected to protection responsibilities.

Subsequently, questions that came up for me on the topic of protection in my analysis include: if Coast Salish families are aware that it is difficult for Two Spirit People to navigate and be protected from harm in our families, communities, and in mainstream society, then why are they not doing more to create safety at home? Is it fear holding our relatives back? Shame? Ignorance? Two Spirit issues are community and cultural issues. Each and every person in family and community has a responsibility to take action, to make change, and to restore balance for Two Spirit relatives. As Coast Salish and Indigenous People, we all have this responsibility, because the teachings of our ancestors show us this.

4.4.3 Mentorship - Introduction

But I haven't really had another non-binary or Two Spirit person to look up to. And that has always kind of been hard for me...just another person that identifies as non-binary or Two Spirit. It just would have been nice to have. Someone you can relate to... (Mack).

Mentorship is one of most fundamental education methods in Indigenous cultures. It is informed by ancestral principles of non-interference, experiential learning, observation and interdependence. In mentorship, we look to our Elders and those who are more experienced and wiser for guidance on how to behave. This process is not directive; it instead leaves open space for mistakes, trial, error and adaptation. In reviewing the data, I was inspired and humbled to see teachings around mentorship enter the talks multiple times. Two Spirit participants discussed ways that having role models available would have made a difference in their lives, and also the importance of having mentors available for younger Two Spirit People in community. There were talks about the role of

Elders and knowledge keepers in mentoring our families and children on how to apply traditional values to inform their understanding and treatment of Two Spirit People as well. Overall, the notion of mentorship as an education tool for families to move towards reclaiming Two Spirit knowledge and People in our Coast Salish culture, was raised in all the conversations. Here is a small sample of our talks about mentorship as it relates to Two Spirit identity and experience.

4.4.3.2 Mentorship: The Stories

All participants discussed elements of mentorship in their testimonies: some focused on the impact it would have had on their own lives and their own experiences, and others explored the importance of Elders and knowledge keepers in mentoring families to regain traditional values, such as respect and inclusiveness of our Two Spirit People. Mentorship is a teaching tool that encompasses all of these elements. To me, mentorship is one of the most fundamental processes of cultural knowledge transfer in Indigenous societies. In its absence, we leave our community members to solidify and internalize understandings about their culture and identities elsewhere, outside the safety and support of our own Indigenous communities and worldviews.

For the Two Spirit participants in particular, mentorship and even the act of sitting in dialogue with another Two Spirit person is healing and affirming. Noah alluded to this in his talk, stating:

Now that I've realized what these questions are and what they mean to me... it does kind of give me that boost to want to talk about it more, because I didn't even know I was thinking those questions.

In the same way, Tyson mentioned that being able to talk to another Two Spirit person in this research was also positive for him. In his own words, Tyson said:

I haven't even talked about this with another LGBTQ person. It's kind of a good feeling, because I never really spoke about this.

...[Family] don't know that feeling of wanting to transition, they don't know the feeling of loving another of the same sex as them. So having someone be there for that person, being there for a person is a really good feeling.

Through these comments, I see that Noah and Tyson are aware of ways that support and encouragement can have a positive impact on a person's experience and sense of self. I can also see ways that mentorship for the Two Spirit participants is not necessarily just about having Elders or older People in their lives; it is about being able to just connect and talk with others who can understand and relate to their own experiences. Mack articulated the importance of Two Spirit relationships in our conversation together; a sample of that talk is shown below.

CS So you mentioned one of the needs is awareness. What does that mean? About what? Who needs awareness?

Mack *I think the older generations – all they know is like, gay and lesbian people. People who identify as non-binary and Two Spirit now, might be a newer thing to them. So I think those things definitely need more awareness. Like how different we all are, and, I don't know...*

CS Like Two Spirit 101?

Mack *Exactly. 'Cause I don't think they know what it means yet? Education.*

CS ...get that information out there. Community events. More ways to be visible and gather together.

Mack *Like, they still...people are still really hush hush about it. Like, I remember when I first came out, I felt like I had to be quiet about it or something.*

CS What is that about?

Mack *Feeling to be quiet? I don't know. It's just, like, a small community and everybody knows you. And I worried about being judged. I think they need to get rid of that feeling, that sense of worrying or whatever, and get the love back in here.*

CS Agreed. I know what you're talking about. Your family is pretty supportive...role models.

Mack *I think they've been like, role models for me. The amount of love they have given me, that's inspiring. But I haven't really had another non-binary or Two Spirit Person to look up to. And that has always kind of been hard for me. I don't know what questions I would have had...or just reassurance that everything is ok, identity-wise and stuff like that.*

CS That's huge. You mean like an older person or an Elder?

Mack *No, not necessarily an Elder. Just another person that identifies as non-binary or Two Spirit. It just would have been nice to have. Someone that you can relate to, because like, everybody in my family is just, you know. In a sense, and how they have only that understanding...they don't experience it like I do. They only have an idea and that's...it's hard for them to really empathize the internal pain or struggle that non-binary People go through.*

Reflecting on this dialogue, Mack highlights two priorities in the areas of education, teaching and learning that I can see: 1) family and community education about Indigenous gender and sexuality; and 2) opportunities for Two Spirit People to share and gather together in community. I see that mentorship plays an important role in both these dynamics as an education tool. Families role model their love for Two Spirit relatives to others, by expressing this support externally, and becoming more aware of Two Spirit identity and experiences internally. Two Spirit People benefit from the connection to and mentorship of others in community who have similar experiences and identity.

As Two Spirit People, being disconnected from our families and culture is one thing; to be disconnected from each other can create a muddled view of self in relation – especially for our Two Spirit children and youth. As humans, we must be able to see ourselves reflected in family, culture and community systems. Participants mention the importance of planning and making change for the children in this respect. As adults, we need to be role modeling how to practice inclusiveness and respect towards Two Spirit

People. We need to be showing our children and youth ways that Two Spirit identity and experience is part of our Coast Salish culture. Bitty offered a reminder that we need to take the experiences of our Two Spirit children into consideration at all times. In response to my question: “What’s your understanding of Salish non binary experience?” Bitty said:

Um, I guess I think a lot about resiliency. Like, being here today and just having the conversation that we’re having. And again, that working towards building more inclusive communities, for ourselves, but for next generations too. And imagining those resources supporting our youth, and making their journeys a little less lonely and more safe.

Because part of what I see in my own experience, and I think a lot of other Two Spirit are lonely and not knowing a lot of other Two Spirit People. I only started to know Two Spirit People again in the last few years, since going to ‘alt Pride’. And I sometimes feel that it’s shifting.

I agree with Bitty. Our community work always requires consideration for future generations. When our communities decide to look at ways to create safer space in culture, family and community for Two Spirit relatives, they are working to make change today, and also simultaneously for Two Spirit children in future. I heard participants talk about mentorship and role modeling with passion and clarity, and with an eye on the future wellbeing of our Two Spirit People. This unequivocally compels us to involve the needs of our children, and our children’s children in the change making. On this note, Sempulyan made changing the experience of Two Spirit children very clear in his comments:

...we need to be able to allow our future to understand that they will be loved unconditionally. They will be respected unconditionally, and they won’t be ostracized or ridiculed for being themselves.

All participants discussed their shared understanding that what currently happens in Coast Salish communities is not inclusive of Two Spirit identities or experiences – this

is a concern we must address as families, in order to secure a safe and inclusive future for our children.

The importance of mentorship in Indigenous identity building and cultural knowledge transference cannot be overstated. During discussions about role modeling, many comments were raised about the responsibilities of Elders and knowledge keepers in reshaping the experience and identity of Two Spirit People in Coast Salish societies. There were also comments made about some limitations and healing work that needs to take place among our older generations. Understanding some of the results and impacts of colonial trauma that still exist in our Indigenous families, I walk into this section of the theme with great care and humility. I am very cognizant of the deep love and respect that we hold for the role and experience of our beloved Elders and knowledge holders. I bring this love and understanding forward in the talk.

Exploring definitions of ‘Elder’ with participants, was meant to capture some of the values and behaviors embedded in these different roles in community. In order to examine these values more closely (keeping in mind that all Two Spirit participants said they never had a Two Spirit Elder or mentor relationship), participants sometimes needed to pull from their own negative examples and experiences, in order to clarify which elements will need to be mended in relationships between Two Spirit People, Elders, and cultural mentors. I felt this work begins by identifying the role, purpose and values present in these relationships. In this regard, Salmon discussed their understanding of what constitutes an Elder. Here is a small section of that talk:

CS What is an Elder?

Salmon *You know, even elders...I don't know if they are real Elders. What I've been taught...*

CS What you've been taught about Elders...?

Salmon *...that Elders are patient. Elders are non-judgemental. Elders are educators, but in a way that isn't manipulative and controlling.*

Salmon went on to discuss specific People in community that they felt emulated values of what they felt an Elder should be, according to their experience and knowledge.

The conversation carried on:

CS ...there's a difference between an Elder and an old person. Just because you are old doesn't mean you're an Elder.

Salmon *And that I should respect you. But I will. But it doesn't mean that...I respect you other than in that moment. I might go away thinking...'what the hell?'*

CS Yea that's what I was just gonna say, right? We are taught to respect and listen to our Elders, and that's actually engrained in our culture, right? I mean, they're our guides. We're supposed to. They're the knowledge holders. So yea, what do we do, if Elders haven't earned that respect, or they're not non-judgemental...all of those things, all of those qualities that you just described. Well, what does that mean for us?

It's not ok to challenge Elders or older People who are viewed as Elders, right? But some of them are stuck in that place that you said. They are kind of closed-minded, or judgemental, they're manipulative maybe. What do we do?...These are supposed to be the ones who are put on a pedestal as guides of our community. What do we do? How do we reconcile that?

Salmon *You know, and what anybody who knows me knows this is true, and doesn't find this surprising. My mother has always been my Elder. She has always been someone, you know, I always...when we were kids, my brother and I were so well behaved, because of our love, respect and fear. Not physical fear, but emotional fear, that she would be disappointed, that she would be upset. If we weren't behaving, if we weren't making life easier for her...make it, you know?*

...So yea, she was...my grandmother and my grandmothers, they were my Elders. I respected them. They were good to me. They were good to People. They were authentic, they were loving. They were supportive. They were everything. Yea, my mother has always been my Elders. I always wanted to...she always, I felt, deserved my respect.

I really appreciate the way Salmon brought discussion about the role of mentorship, and our experiences with Elders as Two Spirit People back to family. Indeed, perhaps the most important Elders in our lives are within our own family circles: our parents, aunties, uncles, grandparents and great grandparents. They are the ones we are in closest proximity to; they are the guides for which values and behaviours are acceptable within families. Most of participants also discussed the role that grandparents play in their lives, as a source of nurturing and mentorship for them. This talk with Salmon brought forward some other questions for me, in terms of ways we define the role of Elder in our communities, and how we experience Elders in a mentoring role as Two Spirit People. What makes an Elder? And how do we determine who most appropriately fits in that role? How are Elders in our communities working to be inclusive of our Two Spirit relatives? What is our family/community response when we see Elders who may not promote and maintain dignity and respect of Two Spirit relatives? As Two Spirit People, is it wrong to expect basic respect, dignity and inclusiveness from our leaders and cultural knowledge keepers in community?

These are complicated questions that need to be explored further, in order to clarify how each of our communities, their Elders and cultural teachers will move forward towards full acceptance and integration of Two Spirit relatives. These inquiries have already been on the hearts and minds of the participants. They spoke about ways they can re-enter our longhouses, our ceremonies and culture as their authentic selves, as Two Spirit People. In his own words, Noah made a direct link between cultural inclusivity and positive identity building for community members. He shared:

It's like, if I were to ever go in the smokehouse, I would like to know that question, and how they would deal with that question, or deal with me being

there...I just want to be respected, and I don't want to be objectified in a way...I feel like there needs to be more talking about this.

...There needs to be more talking about these things. Because as someone who wants to be more involved in my culture, who wants to be more...like more involved...how am I supposed to be involved if I don't identify with something? It's a lot harder.

I recognize what Noah is referring to here, and I acknowledge the importance of seeing ourselves reflected in the cultural ceremonies and practices of our ancestors. I am also aware that Coast Salish community members who identify as cis gender and/or heteronormative do not necessarily concern themselves with these same types of representation issues, because their binary experience and identities are always mirrored in contemporary Coast Salish and settler cultures. So where are Two Spirit People reflected in our cultural practices? At this point, the answer to that question is, we are not. Some participants suggested that decolonization efforts in Coast Salish culture may require that our communities readjust some of our current protocols. This discussion made me wonder about ways that colonial violence and oppression may have seeped into our ceremonial spaces. As a dancer and cultural worker, Sempulyan spoke about the impact of colonization on cultural practices as well. His words are offered here:

In our longhouses...we're not truly accepted...There is still a lot of ignorant people that are supposed to be traditional people that are...they can...take a step back and learn to be more loving, compassionate, honourable, humility, trusting, um...caring, nurturing. Instead of forcing their own personal opinions on the [teachings] of the ceremony.

Similarly, in another discussion about decolonizing Coast Salish ceremonies, Saylesh shared her insight into the experiences of older People, who our communities place in traditional roles of Elders and cultural teachers. Both Saylesh and Sempulyan

reference that healing from colonial trauma is still needed among some of our Elders and knowledge keepers. On this topic, Saylesh shared:

It's true. On a whole other level, you know. And how our elders that we have now...some of them haven't even grown up yet. When you really get to who they are, and you really see who they are, you get to where they're coming from. They are still those children pretending to be grown ups.

This is a powerful statement that deserves further analysis. I want to clarify before moving forward, that I recognize discussions about Elder and cultural teacher behaviours are extremely tricky to navigate, because these are such sensitive topics for our People. Looking through some of these conversations about mentorship, I can feel the weight of this topic on my heart and spirits; and I can sense the caution welling up inside as I engage the talk now. Our ancestors and Elders have endured a lot of trauma over time, due to colonization. They have come through so much already; I know the last thing we want to do as Indigenous communities is harm or re-injure our Elders, by burdening them with stories about how they have, or may continue to suppress Two Spirit relatives in their mentorship or teaching capacities. Yet, I still felt it was necessary to include this sub-theme in the research, because a number of the participants spoke about its relevance to their own experiences. This was important to the participants; it is important for all of us, as Two Spirit People and Indigenous communities, to look at this dynamic together in a respectful and honest way, if we are to move through and beyond this point in our journeys together.

It is on this note that I offer my own understanding of mentorship and trauma with great love and care: as Indigenous People, we cannot proceed to fully heal and decolonize our families and communities, without a thorough examination of the role that cultural knowledge keepers have in either perpetuating or transcending colonial violence against

our Two Spirit relatives. These are the delicate spaces between our ceremonies and cultures we need to explore together next. Elders and knowledge keepers have always been integral to Indigenous cultural survival, resilience, and the wellbeing and identity of community members and families. And at the same time, I also recognize that harms left unhealed or unaddressed, hinder our ability as humans to move beyond the effects of historical trauma. We remain stuck in our own unresolved hurt, stuck in the past, and this wound gets carried into relationships we have with ourselves, our families, communities and cultures. This is particularly relevant to consider, when discussing the need for mentorship and role modeling for Indigenous children and youth. Just like our Elders and older generations in Indigenous community, our Two Spirit children need the opportunity to have their experiences witnessed and openly supported by others in all cultural spaces, in order for them to move forward in a balanced way as their whole selves.

I know that in many of our Indigenous cultures, we are taught not to question our Elders. To be sure, my intention is not to question the authority and wisdom of our Elders and knowledge keepers here, but to instead encourage reflexivity, as it relates to gender, sexuality and the experiences of Two Spirit People in our communities and ceremonies. Only through this shared understanding will decolonization and cultural reclamation around our genders and sexualities occur within Indigenous families and societies. In the spirit of reflexivity, growth and healing in our communities, we all have a responsibility to examine our impact on the environment and on those around us. For our Elders and cultural teachers, I see that it is the same. No one in Indigenous society is immune to the effects of colonization, and I offer the invitation that it is okay to talk about this as families in a healthy, non-blaming and dignified way now. I heard participants in this

research express their deep love and compassion for Elders in community. There is no doubt about that. And I also heard them talk about intense spiritual pain inflicted on them and other Two Spirit relatives when they are excluded, or when they become the target of violent heteronormativity and binaries in our ceremonial spaces. These talks are relevant to healing journeys for Two Spirit People and Indigenous societies overall.

In these conversations, participants also encouraged Coast Salish families to regain our traditional values, and put these teachings into practice every day. Many participants viewed Elders and ancestral knowledge keepers as the key players needed to raise awareness and build support for Two Spirit relatives and their families. However, all community members were called upon to take up this challenge by the participants, and were viewed as part of the solution by the participants. In their statement, Eagle was very clear on what they felt needed to shift in community:

...educate our community, and get beyond this belief that there is just heterosexual couples, male, female, and there are other...genders. And everybody is equally valuable, and we all have a role to play. We talk about culture...our teachings, how we conduct ourselves, about what a respectful society we are. And we have to relearn what was lost.

I agree with Eagle's notion that Indigenous societies need to relearn our cultural values, in the sense that we need to apply them in contemporary contexts; I heard participants express this concept in many different ways. Participants of course still exhibited a tremendous amount of empathy, patience and love for their relatives. I believe the participants understand that healing takes time, and that everyone's journey to recovery from colonization is their own. This healing requires us all, as community members to regain awareness of our surroundings, and to adapt to the needs of our

families and culture today. Shane indicated that this process is already happening in Coast Salish societies, although it may be difficult to recognize at times. He said:

The more language, culture and ceremony we engage in, the more náčaʔmat we are. We're coming back to náčaʔmat. We weren't náčaʔmat since the Indian Act, since residential schools, since the reserve system. We are now...we're coming back to náčaʔmat.

Change often happens slowly in our families and communities, especially when we see each other every day. But that does not imply change is not happening. I concur with Shane, that our cultures are always changing regardless of time. Perhaps this adaptation unfolds according to the flow and rhythm of the lands we are from as Indigenous People. Maybe we need to pay more attention to the heartbeat of our protocols and territories. Nevertheless, there appears to be shared insight among the participants about: 1) the need to heal Coast Salish families and communities from colonial ideals and imposed binaries; 2) ways this transition translates into daily family and communal practices; and 3) the impact this will have on future generations of Two Spirit People in Indigenous societies. Participants asked their Coast Salish families to stand up for Two Spirit relatives. I heard them say our families need to do better in this regard. We need to make change now, and role model a better way of viewing and treating Two Spirit relatives, a way that is aligned with our cultural values and teachings as Indigenous People.

4.4.3.3 Mentorship - Summary

Our friends and relatives in this research discussed the role and responsibilities of mentorship, and how this impacts the lives of Two Spirit community members. Although most self-identified participants discussed the value of mentorship, in terms their lack of experience with Two Spirit role models growing up, they were clear and specific about

reasons why this would have made a positive difference in their lives had they had access to it. Participants also talked about the importance of Two Spirit People being able to connect to others with similar identities and experiences, and that as communities, we need to ensure mentors are made available to Two Spirit children and youth. Similarly, participants said that our families in communities also need to have access to mentors who can help them unlearn Eurocentric ideals and views about gender and sexuality, and reclaim traditional Indigenous values and practices again. Participants explored the role of Elders and knowledge keepers in mentorship, and identified some areas of healing required, to strengthen these relationships. Strong mentorship will make a positive contribution in this change-making process with our families and in our culture.

Transformation and change-making in Coast Salish societies is explored further in the next section.

4.4.4 Transformation – Introduction

...and I was thinking about that because in our lives as Indigenous People, transformation is a huge part of our belief and value system. Transform. Change. So I'm thinking about Two Spirit, and I was going...transformation, masks. You put your regalia on, you transform. You put the mask on, you transform. Everything is transformation, so...it might have to do with transformation. (Shane).

Transformation has always been an integral component of Coast Salish culture. The ability to change shape, to become something else, something new, something old is all engrained in our protocols and ceremonies. It is also deeply embedded in the experiences of our Two Spirit relatives. Participants who self-identify as Two Spirit discussed multiple ways they transform their genders, sexualities, and experiences, based on their daily interactions with family, community and in ceremony. Other participants

talked about their understanding of transformation as a method of adaptation, a tool that can be used to help our relatives move through whatever work they need to get done in that moment. As Coast Salish societies, our culture and families have always made space for and celebrated transformative change. In this respect, participants recognized a number of elements in current family and cultural systems that need to change in order to clear a path for our Two Spirit relatives to enter these spaces again. Based on what the participants shared, I see these transformations in our families as a reclamation of ancestral knowledges and teachings, which provide a doorway for our People to walk through and towards full participation, respect and inclusiveness of Two Spirit people in all areas of our culture. I highlight a few examples of how transformation came into the discussions below.

4.4.4.2 Transformation: The Stories

In discussions about Coast Salish Two Spirit People, I expected to hear stories from participants about shifting, blending, and splitting their identities and experiences. This was partially because I am Coast Salish, and that is the lens I view the world through, but also because I am Two Spirit, and I know that change is a huge part of our strength, development, and identities in between binaries. I anticipated these stories, because to me, these talks are about capturing the fluidity that exists within our spirits, hearts, genders and sexualities as Two Spirit People. We move through these elements of self and knowing; this act is what binds us together as family, as relative Two Spirits. There were a number of examples of shape shifting in the discussions, which stood out for me.

Sempulyan spoke about fluidity in his own experience. In defining what Two Spirit means, they said,

Well, my understanding of being Two Spirited – that Creator has gifted me with the spirit of a woman and a spirit of a man, and that I am able to love freely. I am able to share the teachings...of female teachings with a female dancer because I can connect with their [spirit]. And with the men, again be able to understand how and what my role is as a traditional man.

They went on to share how gender or expression of gender can shift as well,

“...there are days where I can be as feminine as they can be, and then there are days where...situations...like in the longhouse, I’m very masculine in the longhouse.”

(Sempulyan). In processing these statements, I am reminded that transformation, or in other words, ways that we shift and adapt our genders, sexualities, and meaning making is contextual, personal and varies with each individual. For Sempulyan, identity and the energy of their spiritual grounding determines ways they present themselves and contribute in different social contexts.

Mack also captured notions of fluidity in defining their own identity and experience in conversation:

CS What's your understanding of Two Spirit, non-binary experience and identity?

Mack *Now, I identify as non-binary. But before that I identified as a gay male...but I feel like I am still learning. Like I...*

CS Changes...

Mack *Yea. Changes. Which kind of sucks because...it sucks that you need to find a word to place yourself, so other people understand what you are, or who you are.*

CS ...what does it mean to you?

Mack *I don't know. I think it's just being who I am. It's also like, I just don't like the idea of a male or female kind of person. I don't identify with a male or a female.*

CS Either one doesn't fit...

Mack ***Yea. Neither fit...***

I note that Mack does not specifically indicate that they shift between genders or sexualities in this section of the talk. What I did hear them say is that identifying within the binary of either male or female is not an accurate representation of their experience. I also find it interesting that Mack draws attention to the fact that identity labels, words that we use to capture our sense of self is part of a social interaction. I am now wondering if labels are meant to benefit others, not necessarily ourselves. Mack remains who they are regardless of labels. Salmon also talks about classifications as externally driven in their talk:

But it seems people are more comfortable with how they buttonhole, when they can label people. That if somebody is outside of that and different at times, way out, sometimes that it makes them uncomfortable, because they don't know how to relate or trust them.

In this respect, as community members, I wonder if most Two Spirit People feel the need to put words to our genders and sexualities, so others know how to receive us. Saylesh suggested that this is a tricky undertaking, at least for the English language. She said that the original language of her People was spirit taught. ***"It was...you couldn't capture it in a paragraph for instance. How could you write down the word for something that you can't touch?"***

I need to mention here that Saylesh wrote the only peer reviewed journal article about Coast Salish Two Spirit identity and experience in existence (Wesley, 2014). In that work, among other ground breaking achievements, Saylesh collaborated with her own relatives to identify a new word in her ancestral language for Two Spirit. Today, she

recognizes that more work needs to be done in this area, in order to fully capture the essence of what we are attempting to convey in a word for Coast Salish Two Spirit People. Our societies still need a word that inclusively describes the rainbow of experiences within Two Spirit identity in our own Coast Salish languages.

During some of the other talks about identity, participants used transformative terms like shift, movement or fluid in their descriptions of identity. Bitty was specific in highlighting some of these areas in their own experience:

CS What's your understanding of Coast Salish, Two Spirit, non-binary experience and identity?...

Bitty *Yea, um. Well, I talk about myself, or refer to myself or identity...I do say that I'm Two Spirit. In pronouns, I usually say that I use he, she or they, because I feel like I shift through those aspects of myself. So I don't really have an attachment to somebody, like, needing to know specifically either. Or kind of like, whatever you feel like saying. I don't really feel offended by it. And some of those things sometimes seem newer in community, to be sharing those things, like more outright and stuff.*

CS Like pronouns and stuff?

Bitty *Yea. I think that in community...I wouldn't say that in Indigenous community, they know what that is yet either.*

When I examine Bitty's words more closely, I recognize that what they are describing around identity, are ways they experience multiple spirits, personas, expressions within the self. To me, this represents a particular Coast Salish and Indigenous Two Spirit point of view – seeing self in a multitude of spirits, is also connected to the ways we view self in relation to others. The bottom line is that the collective and the multiple are central to the meaning making, in talks about Two Spirit identity.

Transformation occurs in the identity development of our Two Spirit relatives, and also in their daily interactions with family and community. The ways in which our families and communities respond to, dismiss or recognize shape shifting among Two Spirit People varies. These responses are also indicative of social components of gender identity and sexuality, as well as colonial imposition of binaries and Christian morality on Indigenous Nations. Stories about ways that our loved ones are affected by Two Spirit transformation reveal these capacities, and highlight the ways in which change, by association, impacts the relationships we have with each other and ourselves. Therefore, it is important to look at how Two Spirit transformation is received by relatives and Elders in community. To illustrate, I offer a portion of two separate talks I had about impacts of Two Spirit identity on family below.

In discussing her grandmother's transition towards acceptance of her new (Two Spirit) identity, Saylesh shared,

...Like, she loves me, loves me, loves me...but had a huge hand in raising me. For the longest time could not accept that I am actually a woman. Could not, therefore, how could she accept me? So she sort of had these conditions, you know. 'You are my grandchild, but...you shall just be my grandson. And I would be like, you put it as if I killed him. And it took me forever to put it into the right words and say, 'He was never here. He was always a performance. And now I'm here. It's always been me.

When I reflect on Saylesh's offering, I hear her describing the process of becoming (for her, as a Two Spirit person), of transforming into who she was born to be. And I also hear her describing her grandmother's transformation as well, in terms of her reconciliation and subsequent acceptance of her grandchild changing gender and identity within family and culture. Although one of the main reasons for gathering these stories is to capture the experiences of our Coast Salish Two Spirit People specifically, I feel it is

significant to note that these realities, and the paths to reconciliation in our Indigenous societies are also reflected in the lives, needs and experiences of their relatives.

Transitions and movements through gender and sexuality for Two Spirit People affect the whole family.

I offer one more conversation piece I had with Eagle about transitions to highlight the notion of family experiences of Two Spirit identity below.

CS It sounds like he did involve you in the transition though, because you say he identified as a lesbian, and then [a dude]...

Eagle *Yea. So we get through high school, and maybe that was a conscious decision to wait until he got out of high school to make that revelation. I mean, I think it was July. He graduated in June. The next month he comes out – so is that a coincidence or strategic on his part? I haven't asked him about that.*

CS What was that like for you?

Eagle [Crying] *Mmm. Yea. I cry, because I still feel like I've lost [my niece], although he's still the same person. I raised a girl for 18 years, and I was always accepting, as I said. We are who we are when we're born. But for whatever reason, I felt like I've lost a part of him. I don't know. And another part that has been revealed, I guess. So there is always a little bit of mourning still.*

CS These identities impact whole families, right? Not just the one person...

Eagle *Yea it does...*

Capacity to view Two Spirit issues as whole family, whole community issues is relevant, when looking at strategies for how different Coast Salish societies will reclaim Two Spirit relatives, knowledge, roles and responsibilities moving forward. Participants clearly indicated the need to support family members to move through these transitions with their Two Spirit loved ones.

Participants mentioned that transforming the dynamics and experiences of Two Spirit People requires the effort of everyone in community in order to be effective. We all

have a role to play in that shift as community members. That said, I feel it is important to remember what Shane shared with us earlier in the chapter: these change making processes need to be implemented at a pace which is comfortable for everyone in the family and community, and conducted in a loving, patient and supportive way - not just for Two Spirit People, but for their extended families as well.

In order to change the context that our Two Spirit People experience identity in their homes, participants said that families need to first be willing to explore and unlearn limitations they have adopted, which are derived from colonial values and worldview. Two Spirit participants continue to bump up against binaries and heteronormative ideals in their families and in ceremony. In their own words, Bitty shared ideas about the need to remove colonial shrapnel embedded in our family and ceremonial systems. A section of that conversation is shown below:

Bitty *I think that's what I think about a lot of times, in making space for two spirit too. Because I think about, even though I'm not involved because as a family we're still there for different things you know - or my grandfather was, it's just that it stopped after him.*

I think about people's draw to, I guess gender norms within traditional practices too, and I really wonder about acceptance around that. Like what if someone wasn't comfortable dressing and dancing what's meant to be female dance or male dance, and I have a lot of curiosities and thoughts around that too.

CS ...and it makes curious what the responses would be to those Longhouse families, and to those teachers that also...what are the possibilities? So how would we be more inclusive and honour people where they're at, rather than possibly forcing somebody that's non-binary into a binary role?

Bitty *I found even I guess in mixed community gatherings, where things happen. I went to an Indigenous leadership gathering in Lilloet once, and it was really early when they had started it. So I think they were still figuring things out together and learning from each time they held it - but as it went on. Some of those things seem to be more and more structured, where people who identified as women were to wear certain things while they're there, and to not wear*

certain things while they're there too, and then do the sweat. People who identify as women are again told certain things to wear, and how to hold your body in a sweat too. I found that also really upsetting.

And different things I guess made me think, and that also made me upset. I can do those things and I do kind of shift, but what if that day I'm not wanting to wear a skirt, or what if I feel like I don't want to cross my legs the whole time I'm in a sweat? Are these traditions coming from now or are they coming, as well, from influence?

So I question a lot of those things a lot. Even a lot of the times, you see really big differences in what males are kind of be able to be like, and what's expected of women seems even more...

CS ...restrictive for women?

Bitty [nodding]...*and I think a lot of the times teachings get told without the whys, and that's where things can become really hard too.*

What I see Bitty describing here is the need for balance in our families and communities again. Just because some Two Spirit People indicate that they shift between genders, energy and roles, does not imply that they will be comfortable in any gendered situation at any given time. Holly Bear also draws attention to restoration work that needs to happen in our communities. Along these lines, they shared the following comments:

Like all of our First Nations communities, always had church involvement. It was always kind of pushed, and to keep quiet, and don't do this, don't do that, kind of attitude...Because I think Christianity values have been incorporated a lot of our ways of teachings, and ways that we live our lives today.

...I see it's a struggle for Two Spirit People. That's why we form our own little societies, our own little organizations, because that's our family. Because our birth family or actual families cannot come in to play with us. So we form our own families, our chosen families, our extended families – which is very important to our People.

In the absence of full acceptance and participation in culture and ceremony as their authentic selves, Two Spirit participants said they resort to seek and develop a sense

of belonging and relationship outside their family homes. Bitty spoke about belonging in this comment:

...I think about, I guess, colonization, and things that have happened, and how we a lot of the time are excluding Two Spirit, non-binary, intersexed, trans...I think like, from belonging and in general, to be themselves in community or at home.

Participants indicated the need for Coast Salish families and communities to work to almost update our culture to reflect the needs and gifts of all our community members - Two Spirit People especially, because they have been excluded. This was the call to action by all the participants, that change and healing will not happen without everyone onboard.

I also heard clearly in the dialogue that it is time our families and communities grow beyond colonial limitations, and return to the freedom of our ancestral knowledges. Participants suggested this change starts at home, by families engaging reflexivity about ways they view and conduct themselves in relation to Two Spirit community members. Shane made a very good point about judgement and shaming that is directed towards Two Spirit People in our communities and ceremonies. He said,

To me, well if I don't belong to your family, how can I say? I have no right to say no, because I'm not your family. Nor do you have the right to say, bar me from doing anything my family belongs to...None of us have the right to say you don't belong, because of the mere fact that they're born and they're our family – they do.

In the same way, Bitty also spoke about violence towards Two Spirit relatives in their comment, “*Why would you fight with someone for what they want to be?*” Participants all said that Coast Salish families need to take affirmative action to create more positive space for Two Spirit relatives in family and culture.

As Coast Salish societies, how do we reclaim our cultural traditions in order to bring our Two Spirit relatives home in the physical and proverbial sense, if we cannot identify specific stories or teachings about these identities, roles and experiences in our culture and history? Tyson encourages communities to, ***“Keep bringing it up. Keep carrying it on. Keep asking questions. Keep talking about it.”*** Mack also offers words of encouragement for families in their talk: ***“...I think [ancestors] would be happy to see that we are kind of reclaiming that - taking that back. Learning again, you know?”*** In the same way, Holly Bear shared valuable lessons for families about the importance of visibility for Two Spirit People in community: ***“Time for us to bring it back to sight, you know? It’s been under the carpet for so long.”*** And finally, Bitty shared powerful insight about making change in their comment, ***“...you can’t really get ahead if your community is still behind or not well in ways.”*** It is evident in the data, that the role of the families and communities to step into Two Spirit transformation, to fully reintegrate our relatives who are Two Spirit is integral to the solidification of Coast Salish identities, and the reclamation of our ancestral knowledges that inform our relationships overall.

4.4.4.3 Transformation - Summary

When I think about the act of reclaiming space for Two Spirit relatives in culture and family, and when I hear stories about Coast Salish Two Spirit identity development and experience, it does remind me of transformation. These are stories about becoming. It is a process of reclaiming what we were, and what we are today, and what we will be tomorrow as Coast Salish societies. Changing or shifting the current dynamic, moving through the status quo together, stretching beyond European binaries, and journeying

towards full participation and celebration of Two Spirit relatives, all represent transformation to me.

Navigating binaries of gender and sexuality also requires us to navigate and transition between binaries of time - past, present and future. Most Indigenous worldviews understand time and space as cyclical. In this regard, I offer my understanding that there is a tendency in dialogue about Indigenous culture and Two Spirit identity, to place traditional knowledge in the past, rather than looking at ways in which traditional knowledge manifests in the current environment. In order to reclaim our past as Coast Salish and Two Spirit People, we need to closely examine what is happening and missing in our culture today, and we need to transform our practices, stories, teaching tools, and languages to reflect the values, beliefs and conduct of our ancestors fully. I heard participants say that now is a time for creation and change. Performing these acts collaboratively as families, we strengthen our identities and connection with Coast Salish knowledges across entire societies of our People.

4.4.5 Identity - Introduction

I also refer to being Two Spirit as the next generations' ancient acknowledgement of the gifts that come with having the ability to strongly connect with, and move through both feminine and masculine aspects of self, whether externally, internally, or both.

Identifying as Two Spirit is a way to honour, recognize and love myself the way my community would have prior to colonization. It is resistance to the colonial disruption, and shaming of Indigenous views of gender fluidity and sexuality. (Bitty).

When I think about identity, its purpose and power, I am drawn to notions of belonging and kinship. I see identity as an indicator of who we are, and how we are in relationship to others; identity describes the different ways we are positioned in family

and society, and the People we belong to. I also think about some of the affects that occur when identity is ungrounded, perplexed or un-affirmed. In the following conversations, participants spoke about ways that Two Spirit People have been positioned outside community circles in Coast Salish culture. They also explored changes that our families and leadership need to make, and traditional teachings they should act upon in order to inform strategies to bring our Two Spirit relatives home. Participants were clear that Coast Salish societies must bring our Two Spirit People home in the holistic and proverbial sense. This reclamation work begins with families honouring our Two Spirit People in community again. Our families must break through colonial silence around gender and sexuality, and reintegrate our Two Spirit relatives into our collective Coast Salish identity. These are some of the words shared about identity by the participants.

4.4.5.2 Identity: The Stories

I heard many stories about the need to recognize and celebrate our Two Spirit relatives, not just within their own families, but openly and consistently in community, and in ceremony as well. This applies especially to the children and youth in community, who may be questioning or who already identify as Two Spirit. I discussed the idea of children as representatives of the future of our Indigenous Nations with Bitty in detail. Their thoughts on how Two Spirit youth are received in our families were:

...I think that there's still a lot of youth who are either afraid or experiencing things where they're not going to be themselves. So yea, we are not holding them sacred then.

In examining the experiences of children as it relates to his own Two Spirit identity, Tyson spoke about silence and fear around gender and sexuality that still exists in his own community. His thoughts are shown here:

CS Funny, I think what I hear in that is a process of finding that identity, and finding who you are.

Tyson *Because down here, I bet you anywhere on Coast Salish, it's not really talked about. Not specifically down here on this reserve, but anywhere.*

CS Like, being Two Spirit, or transitioning?

Tyson *Not transitioning – being like, in the LGBTQ community. Not at this moment but before – growing up as a kid, it wasn't really talked about, or it wasn't really shared about. It wasn't really written down. Nothing was really ever said. So it was hard to find my identity growing up.*

All the participants raised the issue of silence and fear around gender and sexuality among Coast Salish families, and all linked this directly to colonial and intergenerational trauma in our communities. A lack of confidence or discomfort around gender and sexuality matters in our Indigenous communities has a direct affect on the identity development of our young ones. Unhealed trauma inhibits our capacity to move through and beyond silent acceptance, to a place of open support and demonstrated love and inclusiveness. Only when these historical wounds in our families are reconciled, can we walk together as Nations towards cultural sovereignty. Tyson offered a beautiful story that demonstrates his experience with the power of healing within his own family. In discussing his father's healing journey as a residential school survivor, Tyson shared:

And then he was like, ‘Just so you know, you’re my son, you’re my baby boy, and I love you for who you are. It doesn’t matter.’ So that moment really hit me hard. I wasn’t crying, maybe until a few years later. I still keep that feeling, because my dad had come such a long way from where he was. And for him to be able to accept me as his son, for loving another man, even though he went through some stuff – that you can feel those feelings was really big for him.

I loved hearing this story. While Tyson's father was putting in the hard work and effort to recover from his own trauma, he still made an effort to circle back to Tyson, to ensure his son knew that he was loved and supported as his authentic self. The teachings I

received from this story were about compassion for our relatives, healing, rebuilding relationships, and expressing love and support through action. I know from firsthand experience that growth and healing occurs when families are open to learning how to strengthen their relationships, when they show their support and appreciation for their Two Spirit relatives, and all that they represent and contribute in family and community.

The Two Spirit participants also discussed their journeys towards personal acceptance and pride in self. Sempulyan was very clear on this point: ***I am really proud to be Two Spirited today. I've done a lot of personal growth and personal healing to come to a place of personal acceptance.***" Again, I note that participants shared that their own self acceptance was achieved outside the support of their families and culture. Most of them said that their families are accepting, but not directly supportive of their Two Spirit identity. I explored this idea in previous sections. Noah provided a fine example of this dynamic in his own words. He said:

...after coming out, everyone was very accepting of me and very proud of me, and there for me...people accepted me just for the fact that I was coming out, but I don't think a lot of people understand and/or are willing...to make the extra effort to do their research and understand.

Considering what Noah and the other participants shared about pride and self-esteem, I was compelled to examine this notion of unspoken acceptance of our family members a bit further. Unspoken acceptance is a tricky notion. On the one hand, quiet support and Two Spirit People knowing that they have this support from their families (however silent it is) is a positive thing. On the flip side, I also heard many stories about silences within Coast Salish families that are hurting our Two Spirit People and children. Therefore, I recognize silence as violence in this regard, because it does not necessarily affirm, validate or advocate for the rights of Two Spirit People to engage their culture and

communities as their whole selves. Knowing what we know about colonial trauma and the harmful imposition of European binaries in our Indigenous families, I wonder if silent acceptance is enough. Amidst and between the quiet, there is a level of uncertainty and distance that is maintained; I see these elements become internalized within Two Spirit identity development processes. I believe that as Indigenous families and communities, we need to be more aware of the ingredients we are mixing into the identities of our Two Spirit relatives.

Our friends and relatives in this research said that Two Spirit needs to be recognized as an authentic, Nation-based identity again. As Indigenous People, we need to find ways to incorporate Two Spirit identity, roles and responsibilities within our ancestral knowledge, stories, language, ceremony, activities and protocols once more. All of the participants said that we need to help remind our relatives and leadership that Two Spirit identity is part of our collective Coast Salish identity. They are not separated. Two Spirit identity, gender and sexual fluidity have always been part of our Coast Salish knowledge and cultural history.

Saylesh spoke with great passion about the positions of our Two Spirit relatives. She said that it was important for her to make a contribution to break the silence and invisibility of our Two Spirit People in Coast Salish societies. While discussing the article she wrote on Coast Salish Two Spirit identity, she said:

Saylesh *I just think, well, all I want...all I wanted was to be heard, and to deliver, announce the birth that we're back. We never were gone. We just got forgotten. So now we're going to start remembering you know, and...*

CS Remembering, reclaiming...

Saylesh *...like not just remembering, but reMEMBERING, giving back, you know? Like, our People are robbed of our Two Spirit.*

CS I agree.

Saylesh *And so we're...we're here. I had enough warrior in me to say fuck that. We had a place. I don't know what it is. I can't travel back in time, but my spirit can. And my spirit tells me that we were here.*

In this same talk, Saylesh mentioned that through all her own research efforts, she could not locate any ancestral knowledge about Two Spirit identity in her own family. As I recall her words, and the words of the other participants who said they had never heard any stories or teachings about Two Spirit People in our culture, I get an eerie feeling. At times it feels almost as if we have been erased from Indigenous and colonial history as Two Spirit People. Our identity, voice and visibility have been stolen from us. But when I think about how colonialism and assimilation processes work, it makes sense that these elements of our culture were likely targeted to be snuffed out by settlers – these efforts were not successful. Attempts to erase Two Spirit People from our cultural histories, are efforts to further split and divide us from ourselves, our ancestors and each other. To me, this is the purpose of silence. This is why it is so important for us to resist and mend these fractures in our communities, and to come back full circle as united Nations once more. We do this by breaking silence, standing and walking with our Two Spirit relatives now, in this moment and always.

During discussion about breaking silences, Shane shared an important message for his relatives in community. He said,

I long to reinforce my support of my families, my nieces, my nephews, my adopted nieces and nephews from other language groups, and especially in the support of shedding the fear of my age peers – those older and a bit younger, whose hearts aren't open yet. To support them in that hope, that moving back to

our own values and our own beliefs about, nəćaʔmat – we're all one. We're all one.

From my heart, I appreciate all the wisdom and treasures that Shane shared here, as he captures elements of demonstrated support, role modeling, decolonization, patience, understanding and cultural reclamation all in one statement. In Shane's description, I can see how every person in family and community has a role and responsibility to bring Two Spirit identity back into our homes and longhouses. Having a strong identity is being able to see ourselves reflected in our own cultures. When we strengthen the identity of our People, our Nations become more aligned with our ancestral knowledges. We are stronger united as our authentic selves, Two Spirit People and Coast Salish societies alike.

4.4.5.3 Identity – Summary

Participants spoke about family acceptance, silent acceptance and personal acceptance of Two Spirit identity and experiences. They talked about the need for our families and leadership to take more definitive actions to increase the voice and visibility of Two Spirit relatives. Whatever these processes look like in different families and communities, they must be informed by and embedded within ancestral knowledge, teachings and histories. Performed in this way, we strengthen not only the identity of our Two Spirit People, but our Coast Salish cultures and broader communities as well.

Coast Salish identity is in the ways we make meaning: our protocols, languages, land, ancestors, and our instruction as a People. That interconnectedness pleats and binds us together as Two Spirit; as Coast Salish our identity together is in dialogue and motion, and in our relationships with ancestral knowledges. Identity is in the ways we put our Coast Salish family protocols, traditional values and teachings into practice. It is in the

ways we live the protocols every day, and how we honour and celebrate our interdependence and connection to one another.

4.5 Creative Contributions

Three participants chose to take advantage of the opportunity to submit creative and artistic pieces of work as data for this research. Their contributions are offered here, along with any description or talk they offered for each piece. These visual representations of Coast Salish Two Spirit identity, experience, resurgence and wellness are put forward as vision-making tools for the participants. Beyond whatever background information the participants provided about them, these contributions are to be interpreted individually, based on the views and experiences of the observers. They are meant to provoke emotional and spiritual responses of the viewers, not necessarily ones that have words to them. These creations are shown below.

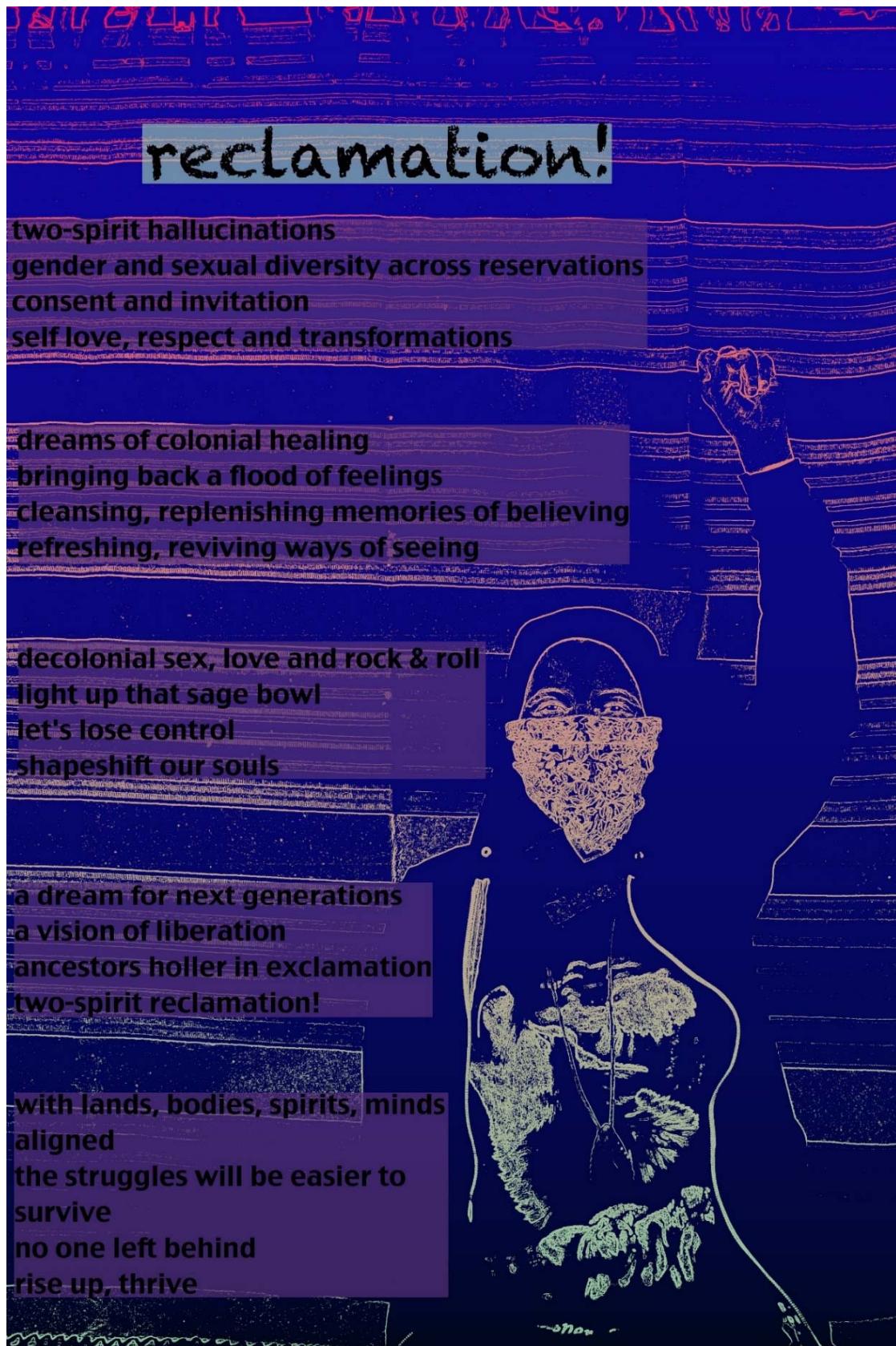
4.5.1 Bitty

Bitty contributed a poem and two different photo-art creations to this research, as representation of Coast Salish identity, experience, wellness, and vision work. Both of the photo-art pieces contain the total or a portion of the poem, reclamation! (Bitty, 2017). This full poem is referenced at the beginning of Chapter 3. They wrote this poem as part of their personal visioning work for Two Spirit People in our communities. Vision work is reimagining what our ancestors, what our relatives would say and do in these times, and using this knowledge as a guide for our own conduct in community today. Bitty said that in this reimagining, they were thinking about all the teachings that they do not have access to, and were hoping to wake all of these things and values up in people. The first

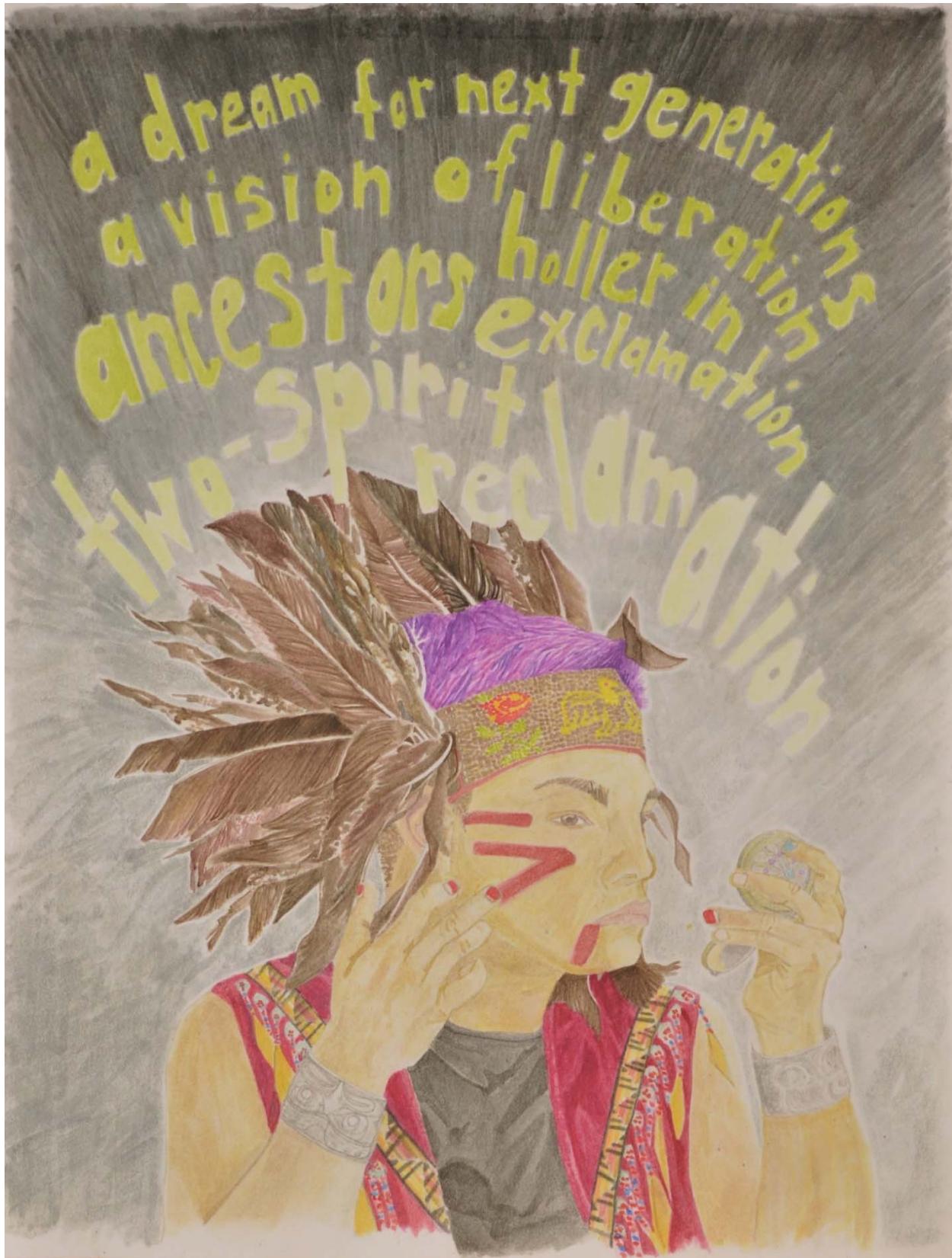
photo-art piece was created after the poem, and shows Bitty's visual representation of the words in the poem and their vision work around Two Spirit reclamation.

The second watercolour photo-art creation shown is an image of a Coast Salish fashion designer and traditional longhouse dancer. The image is reflective of a news article photo taken of this particular designer (Klassen, 2014). Bitty said they did this photo-art piece because there were no other visible Coast Salish Two Spirit representations around, and they wondered "***Where are the other Coast Salish Two Spirit People that are doing stuff...?***" This piece shows a portion of the same poem as well. Bitty said that they believe our ancestors are restless and hollering at us to do better, that they are calling for us to not just remember, but to honour and celebrate our Two Spirit relatives in community again. This message is a call to all our family members, not just Two Spirit People, to wake up and work to reclaim these aspects of our culture and relatives.

4.5.1 Bitty – Submission 1



4.5.1 Bitty – Submission 2



4.5.2 Noah

Noah wanted to share an image of him getting ready to lead the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Two Spirit Pride Parade float. Shown here getting dressed in a trans flag cape, wearing a xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Two Spirit Pride shirt, Noah stood and walked with his Two Spirit relatives, friends and family for the first time in front of hundreds of thousands of people in Vancouver, leading the way for all other parade entries behind him.

4.5.2 Noah – Submission 1



4.5.3 Mack

Mack developed the Coast Salish Two Spirit Pride symbol®©, as a visual representation of Coast Salish Two Spirit unity, support and cultural resurgence. The design was created using traditional Coast Salish art style and shapes, and emulates the rainbow Pride symbol already used by our LGBTQ+ friends and allies. To describe Mack's meaning making behind the image: Red represents Fire; Orange represents Vision or Visibility for Two Spirit People; Yellow is the Sun; Green shows the Land which is our Identity; Blue represents Water; and Purple depicts the məθkʷəy̕ plant (where Mack is from), but it also represents the Ecosystem in our different Coast Salish territories. The rainbow design is cradled in Coast Salish cloud formations.

4.5.3 Mack – Submission 1



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Chapter 5 – Explaining What Happened

I wish to posit an alternative definition of traditionalism as anything that is useful to Indian people in retaining their values and worldviews, no matter how much it deviates from what people did one or two hundred years ago. The nostalgic anthropological view, by contrast, creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Only cultures that are able to adapt and change remain living cultures; otherwise they become no longer relevant and are abandoned.

- Craig Womack (1999, p. 42)

As I take a moment to ground my heart, mind and spirits, and breathe in all the beautiful stories and knowledge cultivated throughout this research study, I give thanks to all who contributed their hearts, minds, bodies and spirits into this work, and now step into discussion of the findings. So what does all this mean for Coast Salish Two Spirit People? Or more specifically, how does all this knowledge gathered apply to my research question: How does recognition of Coast Salish Two Spirit identity and experience contribute to community wellness and resurgence? In order to address these questions appropriately, I need to go back to the beginning. For me, this starts by looking at how all of the participant stories relate to what others have been saying and writing about Two Spirit identity and experience. When I look back at themes identified in the literature, I see common threads presented in the findings of this study which require attention. Some of the most salient relationships in my view are highlighted below.

Participants in this research study clearly describe how the required efforts to restore the honour of Two Spirit People in Indigenous families and cultures must be two fold. First, our communities must look to our Elders and knowledge keepers to help guide our families out of colonial darkness and internalized violence against Two Spirit People. I discuss this in the Mentorship theme of Chapter 4. The findings recommend that we must find and honour the fluidity of our Indigenous genders and sexualities again.

Participants suggest that our leaders must also do their own healing and trauma recovery work in order to support this reclamation process, for we know that colonialism has affected everyone in our Indigenous communities. Our families need to see their leaders and Elders put our traditional teachings into action to benefit Two Spirit People specifically, and the broad community overall. This is the path that our Indigenous communities will travel together, in order for all family members to heal from historic colonial traumas around gender and sexuality, and for our cultures and families to become whole once again. Second, our families must ensure every opportunity is created for Two Spirit children and youth to recognize ancestral knowledge around openness, love, support and respect for themselves, and also towards other relatives who may have diverse genders and sexualities within our Indigenous cultures and societies. This finding (shown in the Transformation theme in Chapter 4) is echoed in the literature in the Decolonizing theme, which demonstrates that in order to restore the honour of our ancestors and the integrity of our cultural worldviews, Indigenous societies must resist heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy, and return to our own traditional ways of being and knowing (Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Walters et al., 2006; Wilson, 2008). This finding does not imply that Indigenous societies must return to a place of the past, before colonial contact; rather, our families and leadership need to bring the traditional values, protocols and teachings of our ancestors forward into contemporary contexts. This precious knowledge needs to be applied more deliberately today within Indigenous communities and circles, so as to provoke change that directly benefits Two Spirit relatives within our territories and families.

When we strengthen the identity and sense of belonging of Indigenous People in their home communities, we sequentially strengthen our Nations and cultures. This was evident all throughout the Identity section of Chapter 4. This research indicates that right now, our Coast Salish families and cultures are silent on Two Spirit matters; our Two Spirit People and their experience remain invisible in families, and their identity and contributions remain unacknowledged in our communities overall. Here I want to emphasize again, that my understanding of our Coast Salish culture is that we are a public People. Therefore, dismissing or excluding certain members of our societies goes against our cultural values and teachings of respect, inclusiveness, shared responsibility, honour and pride. My research findings demonstrate that Two Spirit People feel part of culture more authentically, when they see themselves and their experiences reflected in community and ceremony. Again, there is an emphasis on unity, commonality and visibility in the data. This was echoed in the Identity theme of Chapter 4 of the data, and also in the Worldview theme in Chapter 2. The sense of interconnectedness and the cultural identity of our general Indigenous populations will benefit from this as well, as Two Spirit traditions, teachings and honouring are reintroduced and embedded in our cultural knowledge and histories – our Indigenous families and community circles become whole again, when fragmentation within our families and communities is mended.

These findings help build on research previously conducted by Kovach (2009) and Smith (1999/2012), who focus on Indigenous and decolonizing research methodology and theory, and demonstrate that building identity for Indigenous community members is part and parcel, an act of resistance to colonial violence and

oppression. This violence unchecked, will continue to target, harm and suppress our Two Spirit relatives; it will continue to split them apart from their families and home territories, their own identities and each other, thereby minimizing or even erasing the very existence of Two Spirit People, and Indigenous gender and sexuality systems from our histories and cultures. In this respect, Two Spirit matters must be part of decolonization efforts in Indigenous research as well. Strengthening the positionality and identity of Two Spirit People offers a new narrative of who Two Spirit relatives are within our cultures, their ancestral responsibilities and places in our Indigenous families and societies.

In relation to the oppression of our Two Spirit relatives' experience within and outside Indigenous family and community, the findings in the research literature indicate that violence inflicted upon Indigenous communities in general and Two Spirit People specifically has been consistent since first contact with European settlers (Davis, 2014; Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Lang, 1997; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). This was clearly reflected in Violence and Racism themes of Chapter 2, and was also talked about by participants in this study. Violence is perpetrated by colonial governments through enforced legislation and policies such as the *Indian Act*, residential schools, and provincial child welfare laws. These Eurocentric policies aim to control, manipulate and dismantle Indigenous family and cultural systems at the root, so that they may be erased and replaced with European values, ideals and belief systems. When colonial history was examined more closely in this research, I could identify ways in which policy specifically targets elements of Indigenous family and cultures that make them distinct, and in opposition to those in colonial culture - namely targeting our

Indigenous languages and ceremonies, and subsequent ways we view and treat our women, children, Elders and our Two Spirit People. Over time and due to intergenerational trauma caused by colonial violence, Indigenous families and cultures have slowly internalized notions of heteronormativity, heteropatriarchy and homo/transphobia, which are heavily endorsed and enforced by settler society. This serves to further fragment Two Spirit People from their own families, home communities and cultures. The literature also suggests that Indigenous societies must identify ways to return to ancestral knowledges, to put them into action and restore the honour, dignity and visibility of our Two Spirit relatives (Davis, 2014; Hunt, 2016; Wesley, 2014; Wilson, 1996).

Decolonization will be part of any healing and recovery process for Indigenous People – the unraveling of colonial harm against our families and cultures. As Indigenous People, we must be able to stand grounded in our own truths and experiences on the lands of our ancestors; we must resist colonial mentalities in our home communities, and root our families in our own protocols and cultural ways of being and knowing. My review of the literature in this study illustrates that the colonization process, as a domination strategy, serves to eradicate all previous knowledge about a specific territory, in order to implant a new history based on Eurocentric ideals and master narratives that justify the genocide of Indigenous families and cultures, and the theft of Indigenous lands and resources for personal and corporate gain (Anderson, 2000; Fieland et al., 2007; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996; Simpson, 2011; Smith, 1999/2012). This was demonstrated in both the Worldview and the Racism themes of Chapter 2. These implanted colonial narratives endorse dissimilar and stratified societies that places

heterosexual, white males at the centre; anybody who does not fall into these favoured categories is labeled as “the other”, and is targeted for annihilation or assimilation through relentless violence and subjugation. In response, Indigenous communities, people of colour, and other LGBTQ+ circles must identify ways to all work together to resist the imposition of violent heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity (Driskill, 2010; Fieland et al., 2007; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Hunt, 2016; Namaste, 2000; Walters et al., 2006; Wesley, 2015; Wilson, 1996). This implies that non-Indigenous settlers must understand colonial history and decolonize their views of Indigenous People first, so they can be sure not to further perpetuate Eurocentric ideals that harm or silence Two Spirit folk in future. The findings from this research further demonstrate that the transformation of current circumstances for Two Spirit People requires community members to unlearn imposed colonial values and ways of doing. Participants said that colonial views of Two Spirit People are hurting our relatives and children deeply. Our Indigenous families and communities must collaborate to restore balance in their relationship with others, to change the experience of Two Spirit People and any other groups who become the target of colonial violence.

Finally, in all the data from this research, and in all the literature reviewed for this study, I was only able to locate one academic resource about Coast Salish Two Spirit identity and experience (Wesley, 2014). There was absolutely no information about traditional cultural knowledges and history about Two Spirit People in Coast Salish communities, or in any Indigenous Nations from the west coast of BC at all. There was very little specific research about contemporary experiences and identities of Two Spirit People, and none from a Coast Salish perspective (with exception to that one article I

found). Participants also expressed that they had received no cultural teachings about Two Spirits from within our own Coast Salish communities when they were growing up. To me, this is a substantial gap in the knowledge which warrants immediate remedy. In the undeniably small collection of existing scholarly works on Two Spirit identity, history and experience, I place this Coast Salish Two Spirit community-based research in between the others as a placeholder. It is time for our west coast Indigenous Nations to honour our Two Spirit cultural traditions again, to create new knowledge about Indigenous gender and sexualities where it is needed, and to re-story our Two Spirit relatives back into their families, longhouses, and the fabric of our cultures. This research study is a respectful but stern reclaiming of these spaces between our histories and our futures. It is reclamation of all our beloved Coast Salish Two Spirit ancestors, children, adults and relatives to come.

Returning to the original focus of this research, recognition of Coast Salish Two Spirit identity and experiences contributes to community wellness and cultural resurgence efforts in a multitude of ways. Amidst the silences in Coast Salish families and communities around Two Spirit topics, is an opportunity to create dialogue and distribute gender and sexuality information across multiple generations, which will serve to improve the health and wellbeing of Two Spirit and all other community members. Breaking down stigma around gender and sexual health will build confidence and safe spaces for Two Spirit People, and all community members who may not fit into colonial binaries and heteronormativity. This research shows that in addition to the positive benefits of increased health and safety awareness, transforming our current cultural knowledges again to reflect and honour Two Spirit experiences, gifts, roles and identities

will bring entire Indigenous societies back in line with their ancestral teachings and values. This cultural resurgence process will be unique to each Indigenous Nation and community, their own protocols and territories, and is a powerful reclaiming of Indigenous history, cultural traditions, dignity and respect. The impact of this shift in cultures will stretch across entire generations of our People. This research study shows that restoring, creating and maintaining dignity, respect, roles and responsibilities of our Two Spirit relatives again will absolutely contribute to overall community wellness and thriving of Indigenous families and cultures on a holistic level.

5.2 Implications

Based on this research study, it is clear that more research in the area of Two Spirit identity and experience is necessary, particularly around west coast knowledge systems and Indigenous cultures, and contemporary realities for Two Spirit People. It is recommended that new research look at resistance and decolonization strategies of Two Spirit People, as well as opportunities to link multiple generations of Two Spirit People together. I propose that resistance responses among Two Spirit folk are often rooted in some of the more unique elements across personal narratives. It is here that researchers unveil illustrations of power, influence, oppression, suppression, resilience, spirit, and the voices of our ancestors within Two Spirit stories. I did not always explicitly identify these unique topics in the findings, mainly because I received many of these particular knowledges as sacred, and in need of their own robust diligence, honouring and protection. These differences represent some of the experiences that occur between larger Two Spirit narratives. They are personal, spiritual, and substantial enough to warrant their own research. Some of the most impactful variations in the data, for me, were

around “coming home” stories of our Two Spirit relatives (returning to home communities and territories), and in the spirit talk and spirit helpers that came forward throughout this entire research process. But those stories are for another study. Other distinctions in this research included: 1) Indigenous communities in colonial darkness and Two Spirit relatives as guides back to light; 2) specific challenges for trans relatives and their families; 3) promiscuity and stereotypes about Indigenous and queer sexualities; 4) experiences of violence in and outside Indigenous communities; 5) varied ideas about Two Spirit events and activities for community development; and 6) feisty Two Spirit ancestor vision work, and pursuits to emulate this same confidence and approach today. Exploring all of these additional topics through further research would produce influential demonstrations of Two Spirit resistance and resurgence.

In addition, the findings in this research show that more study in areas of community vision work and art making will provide insight in some of the transformation processes that are occurring in different communities for Two Spirit People. I mentioned in previous chapters that methods which encourage creativity and creation allow for Two Spirit expression of experience, identity and envisioning beyond the confines of the spoken or written word. Participants in this study spoke about traditional and contemporary art making as a source of medicine for them personally, a way for them to connect with the land, our ancestors, and their own internal and holistic dialogues. Future Two Spirit research surrounding community art-based methods and initiatives are highly encouraged.

Finally, there is knowledge available from other Indigenous Nations that identify Two Spirit People as high or special status community members, and that Two Spirit

People were revered and sought after for a variety of reasons in these cultures (Anderson, 2000; Hunt, 2016; Lang, 1997; Wesley, 2015; Williams, 1986/1992). Some of the participants in this research study expressed curiosity for what this means, or how it applies in a Coast Salish context. Noah asks, ***"If we were so revered, then where are our stories?"*** Similarly, Saylesh mentioned Two Spirit stereotypes in her own words here:

Well, I mean, I've heard the cliché over and over again, that Two Spirit People are/were the gifted ones...and they were the ones that were upheld, and they were revered, and they could see both perspectives, and...and that's great, you know.

These comments made me think about what these roles and responsibilities of Two Spirit People, and what our positions in society looked like before European contact. Personally, I know that some of the gifts I have to offer our Indigenous families and communities as a helper, have to do with my being a Two Spirit person, but I do not consider myself to be high status by any means, or deserving of special treatment because of this. If we look at some of the ways our family systems and ceremonies are structured in Coast Salish culture more closely, then perhaps we will recognize the possibility that Two Spirit People were not held above any other community members or relatives pre-contact. Maybe this is the reason why there is no knowledge or recollection of specific Two Spirit stories or traditions within Coast Salish culture represented in this study.

I have been told that the only way our Coast Salish People can gain "high status" (if there is such a thing) in our societies, is in the measure of their ability to acquire resources, and in the extent to which they give back to community. I was taught most People in Coast Salish families and communities were viewed as having the same status in the past - aside from heads of family, who were assigned by individual family groups based on their merit. Nevertheless, it is the families, the Elders and community members

that determine who is positioned where in our culture. If I apply this knowing to our Two Spirit identity, roles and responsibilities specifically, it seems plausible that Two Spirit People were not considered to have higher standing than anyone else in our Coast Salish societies. They would not have been considered “high status”, because our cultural systems and knowledge would not set us apart from our relatives; we would have been integrated into society just like everyone else. Our teachings and values would not support that kind of distinction. In other words, the cultural, family and community recognition or appreciation of individual skills, gifts and talents in Coast Salish societies, does not necessarily translate into high status for Two Spirit People, as we see in other Indigenous cultures. This would certainly explain why it is so challenging to find specific stories about Two Spirit ancestors in our culture. More research into ancestral cultural knowledges of Coast Salish and other west coast Indigenous Nations in the areas of Two Spirit identity, roles, grooming of cultural workers and other stories is required.

5.2.2 Social Work Practice

As I mention in previous chapters (and this is well known among Indigenous thinkers), our Indigenous cultures have always been action-oriented. They are cultures of doing. This is reflected in our languages, ceremonies, protocols and our worldviews. Indigenous families and helpers in community must examine current practice, and clarify what they do specifically to support and lift up Two Spirit People, in relation to the protocols of the cultures and territories they come from. As a helper in Indigenous communities for the past twenty years, I know that all trauma requires witness in order to heal. This research study indicates that social work (or helping) practice must understand, navigate and demonstrate knowledge about Indigenous protocols and intergenerational

trauma in their work, in order to help families as well as Two Spirit People receive witness to their own resistance, resilience, and recovery from colonial violence.

5.2.3 Social Work Policy

Social work (helping) practice and doing is informed by policy. In my experience as a helper and a manager in Indigenous communities, I know that a lot of existing federal and external funding for Indigenous community programs is distributed based on predetermined program criteria and focus areas. This can be disheartening at times, as these eligibility measures are often developed by non-Indigenous community members who are not informed about specific needs among Indigenous families and communities. However, I also know that there are existing opportunities for Indigenous Nations and urban communities to creatively identify Two Spirit knowledge and education as part of their own cultural resurgence efforts, as well as other health and wellness priorities. Formal research findings such as this one, that delineate contemporary Two Spirit People and their families' needs, identities, experiences and cultural histories can leverage Indigenous community efforts and funding applications to build and enhance Two Spirit informed programming, policy and resource development. This research calls for Indigenous community circles to be mindful to incorporate Two Spirit identity, experience and knowledges into community development initiatives at every opportunity.

5.2.4 Decolonizing Research

Conducting this research using Indigenous theory and Coast Salish methodology is both decolonizing and reclaiming. It represents resistance to historic and destructive colonial approaches and theory in research on Indigenous Peoples, as well as reclamation and honouring of our unique Indigenous cultural ways of knowing and doing, our ethics,

methods, and relationships to the land and each other. Centering distinct Indigenous knowledge and Two Spirit community members in this research allowed for opportunities to strengthen community circles, identities and connections to our land and protocols. Doing research in an Indigenous way is healing and emancipatory. It serves as a restoration mechanism, which returns power and control of knowledge seeking processes back into the hands of our Indigenous scholars, leadership and the ancestors of our Indigenous territories.

This research is informed by Indigenous theory, framed by Coast Salish methodology, was conducted within Coast Salish societies, and prioritized Coast Salish Two Spirit community members. Indigenous scholar, Margaret Kovach (2009) highlights what she sees as key elements of Indigenous research in her own work. In this particular Coast Salish Two Spirit research, and based on teachings about tribal methodology offered by Kovach (2009), I have demonstrated: a) my holistic Indigenous epistemology as relational; b) included story and narrative; c) clarified my purpose and intention for Indigenous communities through this project; d) incorporated my own experiential learning process in the research, as well as the participants'; e) centred around Coast Salish ethics and protocols; f) drew from Coast Salish methods for knowledge seeking and gathering; and g) considering decolonizing strategies and intention throughout the process.

Conducting Indigenous research using Nation-based methodologies is a return to self for Indigenous researchers and community members, in my view; it is a return to our Indigenous ways of knowing and being as a source of strength, cultural resurgence, collective identity building and vision making for our People. Nation-based

methodologies offer the foundation for relevant and transformative community-specific, and community-driven Indigenous research efforts. This research is a call for Indigenous scholars to conduct knowledge seeking and gathering with our communities informed by Indigenous ways of knowing and being; it is a challenge for all Indigenous thinkers to consider and incorporate the identity and experiences of our Two Spirit relatives into their work. This research is also a call for other Coast Salish researchers to conduct their work according to the protocols of our ancestors and the lands we come from. It is a challenge to rekindle these knowledges, by putting them into direct action for the benefit of Indigenous communities and our relatives. This research is a call for Coast Salish and other west coast Nations to make Two Spirit identity, experience and contributions visible in our communities again, and to re-story Two Spirit relatives back into the cultural knowledge basket of our histories, families, ceremonies and daily activities.

For all the learning, and all the beautiful knowledge shared and developed as part of this research, my heart is filled with gratitude for our friends and relatives who participated in the study, and for those Two Spirit ancestors who came before us. It is at this point in the work that I move into the closing of this Coast Salish Two Spirit circle. I offer some closing remarks in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 – Closing the Work

“So as a writer, speaker or storyteller, I have a set of obligations to fulfill in my discourse. My role is not to draw conclusions for another or to make an argument. My role, based upon the guidelines of relationality and relational accountability, is to share information or to make connections with ideas.” Shawn Wilson (2008, p. 133).

6.2 Giveaway & Invitations

When ceremonial work we conduct in community is complete as Coast Salish, witnesses are offered gifts as payment, to give thanks, and as recognition for their roles in observing what has transpired. I was taught that only when the family work reaches this stage, is it appropriate and respectful to leave the house or space. It is protocol and good teachings to remain until the family has completed the work. When giveaways take place, other families who are present can circle the floor, inviting the guests to come back and witness work that they are planning to complete at a later date. For this Coast Salish Two Spirit research work, the give back and invitations are highlighted below.

When I attended the first Two Spirit honouring ceremony in Squamish Nation last year, some of the community leadership present put out a call for helpers to identify Coast Salish language that captures Two Spirit identity. In receiving this message, I was reminded that the worldview of our Indigenous Nations, and the teachings of our ancestors are contained within our traditional languages. The challenge to find Coast Salish Two Spirit language was directed at everyone in attendance at this event, and also specifically at this research study (probably because I was the only researcher present that evening). I brought the message about this challenge back to my own CSAC for feedback and guidance.

One of the members of my CSAC is a hən̄qəmīñəm language speaker, and works in the community language department. She immediately began seeking knowledge that could help us with this endeavour. The CSAC collaborated together, and provided our relative with a number of foundational concepts that capture our experiences and descriptions of being Two Spirit: transformation, becoming, shifting, inclusive, all together, multiple, and so forth. We all felt around the circle that a new hən̄qəmīñəm word or phrase needs to act as an indicator to others, that someone is Two Spirit. We all recognized that this could imply a number of different genders and sexualities being described simultaneously. We said that this new word needs to indicate something is special or unique about an individual, and that others need to be mindful of this in their relationship with them. There are currently a number of Coast Salish ideas being applied to inform development of this new word.

The canoe is often used as a metaphor for spirit in Coast Salish culture. It is also a symbol of unity, transportation and our connection to the land and water. The canoe has its own multiple spirits throughout its lifespan: 1) seed to cedar tree; 2) the carved canoe; 3) its connection and travel on water; and 4) all the pullers/canoe family members inside. All of these elements are interconnected as one. As Two Spirit People, we are the same as the canoe; brought together on the water, we are all one as well. Further, there is a phrase in our hən̄qəmīñəm language that describes when People need to switch sides of the canoe while travelling. This is performed in order to keep the momentum of the canoe strong and steady, while also balancing the strength and harmony of the canoe family. This phrase is called out for everyone on the canoe to hear, so they can prepare themselves and the canoe for the transition to take place. This is a work in progress in

xʷməθkʷəy̕əm community. When development of this Two Spirit word is complete, and verified by our fluent language speakers and Elder women (because they are the law makers in our societies), it will be offered to our relative Coast Salish Nations for their own purposes. This is part of the give back of our CSAC, to all Coast Salish Nations and Two Spirit People across our territories.

Similarly, the Coast Salish Two Spirit Pride logo designed by Mack for this research will be offered to our relative Nations, as a symbol of Two Spirit reclamation in our culture and communities. This design is illustrated in Chapter 4 of this study. The intention of this offering is to unify our families and leadership in the support, respect and inclusiveness of Two Spirit identities and beauty. It is my hope, and that of our CSAC that Coast Salish Two Spirit relatives will see themselves and our culture reflected in this symbol, and be reminded that they always have a loving, supportive home and position in our communities. An official unveiling ceremony for this design took place in the lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̕əm People, at which time we invited members and leadership from other Coast Salish Nations to attend. At this unveiling, our relatives received permission to use this important Two Spirit symbol for their own community initiatives and Two Spirit purposes. If there are any Coast Salish Nations who do not wish to use the new word or logo developed in this research, our hope is that they will be inspired to develop their own symbols and language for Two Spirit, according to their own languages and contexts. We present these gifts with love and gratitude to other Nations, and to all our Two Spirit relatives. May these offerings bring us closer together as Nations, and as Two Spirit People in future.

Some of the most profound lessons that I carry forward from this research are derived from our ancestral knowledges. In seeking new words and phrases for Two Spirit People, and in discussions I had with Elders and knowledge keepers, I learned that our traditional hənqəmīnəm language is, for the most part, genderless. In other words, our language is predominantly verb oriented, focused on work and actions; it requires an indicator for gender, but can also be understood outside the confines of gender as well. Coming through this study I received this lesson: the ways of being, knowing and expression of our ancestors, are not confined to, or based around genders or sexuality. They are about our relationships, protocols and our instruction as a People. Similarly, I realized after this study that many of our supernatural and spiritual helpers are genderless and not sexed. I could not believe I never noticed this before engaging this research! Spirit helpers are predominantly not described or depicted in traditional stories and narrative as either male or female. Instead, gender or the sex is determined by the listener, and whatever they need the helper to be in any given moment. There are also many roles and responsibilities still within our culture and ceremonies which are genderless; they are not restricted to just male or female family members. To me, these are powerful representations of our Coast Salish gender and sexuality traditions and knowledges, providing a small glimpse into opportunities for Two Spirit inclusivity in our families and longhouses in the future. Through this research, I solidified my understanding that our cultural tradition as Coast Salish People is change. But more than that, I see transformation as part of all Indigenous cultures, because we are bound as societies to ever-changing land, environment and relationships. Transformation for our Two Spirit

relatives, and for our families and cultures is a foundational act that informs our identities as Indigenous People.

As I pack my belongings and prepare to exit this space, I know in my heart and spirits that I will return here. I am drawn to this place, to the creation. My intention in doing this research was to find voice, to see faces of our Coast Salish Two Spirit relatives, and to bring us closer together. This was achieved, and so much beyond that. Our Two Spirit stories, our experiences and visibility in family, culture and communities were lifted for all to see in this study, including ourselves. I am humbled to have been a small part of this monumental demonstration of love, honour and respect for our Two Spirit People. Being reconnected in circle with Two Spirit kin, after being displaced for so long has been overwhelming and healing beyond words. I am split open at the end of this process; as Coast Salish Two Spirit beings, we are stretched free and whole from our cocooned isolation as a result of this study. Wobbled but alert, we stand ready. New dialogue, new research, new protocols and stories are emerging. The rhythm in our hearts and spirits, in our families and cultures is shifting. Our new and old songs and dances are being witnessed again. The transition has turned over. This research represents a reintroduction of our narrative as Coast Salish Two Spirit People; it is a beginning and an unfolding, not a conclusion. I bring all the treasures, all the lessons from this research forward into the next gathering. Our Two Spirit knowledge is alive and will continue to breathe and expand within and all around our traditional Indigenous territories. Transformation within ourselves and our cultures will continue to be spun and woven throughout spaces between and among us as Indigenous and Two Spirit People. But then again, it has always been this way. We have always been here, becoming. *hay če:p qə*.

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Appendix

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Reclaiming Spaces Between: Coast Salish Two Spirit Identity & Experiences

Principal Investigator: Corrina Sparrow, MSW (candidate)
 School of Social Work – Indigenous Specialization
 University of Victoria
 Phone: *** * * * / E: ****@****

INTRODUCTION

I am a student and a helper in our communities. I am from the Sparrow family on my grandmother's side in Musqueam, the Recalma family on my grandfather's side in Qualicum (Pentlatch), and I also have Dutch ancestry.

I am doing this project to learn how recognition of Coast Salish non-binary and Two Spirit identities and experience can contribute to community wellness and cultural resurgence. You are being invited to take part in this research project because you have been identified by the Coast Salish Advisory Committee (the "CSAC") as a person who can make an important contribution to this project.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

Your participation is absolutely voluntary, so it is up to you to decide whether or not you participate in this project. Before you decide, it is important that I ensure you understand what the research involves. This consent form explains what the project is about, why this research is being done, what will happen during your participation in the project, and the possible benefits, risks and discomforts you may experience as a result.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. If you decide to participate in this project, you are still able to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason for your decision.

If you do not wish to participate, you do not have to provide any reason for your decision, nor will you lose any benefit of any services you are entitled to or are presently receiving.

Please read through the following information carefully, and discuss it with your family, friends, or a trusted professional before you decide whether you want to consent to participate in this project.

WHO IS CONDUCTING THE PROJECT?

The research project is being funded by Corrina Sparrow personally. The Coast Salish Advisory Committee (the "CSAC") guides this study and is made up of a Musqueam (Coast Salish) community member, knowledge keeper, parent and ally who either identify as Two Spirit or

non-binary, or who have demonstrated commitment to and understanding of Two Spirit experiences. The project research study is being led by Corrina Sparrow at the University of Victoria.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of the *Reclaiming Spaces Between* research project is to learn about Coast Salish Two Spirit and non-binary experience and identities, and ways this knowledge can contribute to cultural revitalization in Coast Salish communities.

The aims of the research project are to:

1. To examine traditional, historical Coast Salish knowledge related to non-binary gender/sexuality construction and positions in society;
2. To explore ways contemporary Coast Salish people navigate Two Spirit identity development and inclusivity in home communities; and
3. To identify opportunities for Coast Salish societies to revitalize traditional gender/sexuality systems and be inclusive of non-binary, Two Spirit community members in meaningful ways.

STUDY PROCEDURES

You are invited to contribute your knowledge in one of three ways: either through one or two data gathering talking circles, a one-to-one interview, and through photo/art voice submission. These data gathering talking circles or interviews will be conducted in the Greater Vancouver area, and also on Vancouver Island. Participants will be asked to self-identify as a Two Spirit or non-binary person, or an ally and support of Two Spirit experience and relatives.

First, you may be invited to participate in one of two (2) data gathering talking circles. These data gathering talking circles may include up to eight (8) participants. Second, up to two (2) one-to-one (1-1) interviews may be conducted. It is anticipated that each data gathering talking circle or interview may require up to two (2) hours of your time, and any additional one-to-one (1-1) interviews may require up to two (2) hours of your time. The data gathering talking circles and interviews will be audio-taped. Once they are transcribed, and all identifying information is removed from the transcripts, they will be sent to you for review. You will be asked to make any suggested or required changes. Once this is complete you will be asked to approve the changes made to the document. This may take three (3) additional hours of your time.

Third, you are invited to submit 1-4 photographs or pieces of artwork that best represent for you: 1) Coast Salish Two Spirit identity; 2) Coast Salish Two Spirit experience; 3) Coast Salish Two Spirit wellness; and 4) Coast Salish Two Spirit cultural resurgence. You will be asked to either submit a written description of each image you submit, explaining how it represents these themes, or you may also provide this description verbally to the researcher, and it will be documented added to your transcription for final approval. This may take up to one (1) hour of your time.

POTENTIAL RISKS

You may experience emotional discomfort talking about the personal, family or Coast Salish community-based loss of traditional cultural or language knowledge. Before we begin the

information gathering talking circle or one-to-one interview, in order to minimize risks, you will be given a list of support and counseling resources available to you.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The anticipated benefit to you for participating in this research study include an expansion of your personal, family and Coast Salish community based knowledge related to Two Spirit and non-binary experience, identities and cultural revitalization. In addition, your research contribution may help the future reclamation or revitalization of Two Spirit and non-binary identities, roles and contributions to Coast Salish cultures and communities.

If you would like to receive a copy of the results of the study, please provide a mailing address on the final line of this document (on page 4).

CONFIDENTIALITY

Unless you request to be referred to by your name in the research documents, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity on all documents will be identified only by code number and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Principal Investigator's home office. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The audio-tapes will be kept on a secure, password protected computer hard disk in the locked home office of the Principal Investigator and on a secure, password protected data traveler in the Principal Investigators locked filing cabinet. Any email communications including your data will be encrypted before being sent over the internet. We encourage all research study participants to refrain from disclosing the contents of the discussion outside of the data gathering talking circle; however, we cannot control what other participants do with the information discussed.

REMUNERATION

In order to defray the costs of transportation, participants will be reimbursed upon the provision of a transportation receipt. If the data gathering talking circle or interview occurs during breakfast, lunch or dinner, participants will be provided with a meal and/or refreshments. All participants will receive a small, cultural gift as a token of my appreciation for sharing their knowledge. In addition, participants will receive \$50.00 honoraria for participation in each data gathering talking circle or interview.

CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Corrina Sparrow at *** ***.

CONTACT FOR CONCERN ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the General Enquiries Line in the Department of Research Services at UVIC at 250-472-4362, or send an email to: vpradmin@uvic.ca

CONSENT

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without question or repercussions. Data that you provide to the study may be withdrawn up to the point of publication of findings.

There is a separate consent form for the release and reproduction of any photographs or art images submitted as part of this research project and final thesis report.

Your signature below indicates that:

- a) you have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form for your own records,
- b) that you consent / do not consent (*circle one*) to your participation in the project.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant Signing Above

Mailing address
number

Postal Code

Phone

(If you request a copy of the final report to be mailed to you).

The signature of a Witness is not required.

CONSENT TO USE OF IMAGE

I hereby give Corrina Sparrow (Principal Investigator for research project *Reclaiming Spaces Between: Coast Salish Two Spirit Identity & Experiences*) permission to use images of me, or images I submit as part of the said research project (including any still photographs, artwork or reproductions of this artwork) ("Images") for any purpose in connection with promoting the *Reclaiming Spaces Between* research project and its activities (the "Purposes"), which may include advertising, promotion, and information sharing. Corrina Sparrow may crop, alter or modify images of me and combine such images with other images, text, audio recordings and graphics without notifying me.

I understand that my personal information, including images of me or that I have created or submitted as part of this project, is being collective pursuant to section 26 of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, R.S.B.C, 1996, c. 165 for the Purposes. I consent to any other information about the Images provided by me to Corrina Sparrow being displayed in connection with the appearance of the Images. I consent to any of my personal information, including images of me or that I have submitted as part of this project, being stored, accessed or disclosed outside of Canada.

Any questions about audio recording, photographing or art image submissions should be directed to:

Name of coordinating research office at UVIC (please print):

Image Submission Date

Image Location

Name (please print)

Signature

Email Address (please print)

This form is a legal document and is not to be altered in any way.

DO YOU IDENTIFY AS:

- COAST SALISH?
- PART OF COAST SALISH COMMUNITY?
 - * TWO SPIRIT / LGBTQ / NON-BINARY?
 - * ALLY or SUPPORTER OF TWO SPIRITS?
 - * ELDER / TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPER?

WE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU

A community-based research project is happening now. We will explore traditional and present day knowledge, experience and identities of our Coast Salish Two Spirit / LGBTQ / non-binary relatives.

This project aims to revitalize Coast Salish knowledge about Two Spirit and non-binary community members. It will make recommendations for how to build Two Spirit community again in our Nations, according to cultural ways and teachings.

A group Talking Circle and one-to-one interviews with your community members will be held at a private date and location very soon.

There will be a maximum of 6 participants at the Talking Circle.

Community members may also choose a personal interview, instead of attending a circle. A meal and honoraria will be provided in gratitude for your contributions. Circles and interviews are private and completely voluntary.

For more information, please contact CORRINA SPARROW
(Musqueam/Pentlatch/Dutch UVIC Master's student conducting this study)
hay ce:p qa



T: *** ***

Email: ****