SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES FOR TWO-SPIRIT YOUTH IN THE WORKPLACE

by

Mariam Ayoub

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Graduate Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
University of Toronto
Abstract

The unemployment rate of Indigenous youth is significantly higher than non-Indigenous youth. Two-spirit youth are at an even greater disadvantage due to barriers such as lack of education, poverty, discrimination, and intergenerational trauma. Additionally, Two-Spirit youth report feeling a disconnect between their ethnic and sexual identities. This feeling of incongruence contributes to a heightened risk of street involvement, drug or alcohol misuse, and homelessness. This study utilizes a community-based, narrative approach, operating within an intersectional framework. The research question is: What are the intersections of cultural identity, LGBTQ identity, and work-life experiences for Two-Spirit youth as they relate to employment outcomes? Two-Spirit youth, living in the Greater Toronto Area were interviewed to explore their employment experiences in relation to their intersecting identities. This research is significant as there is minimal research investigating the intersection of Two-Spirit youth and employment, particularly from the perspective of the youth, themselves.

Keywords: Indigenous, Two-Spirit, employment, LGBTQI2, resilience
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Chapter One

Introduction

The Original Peoples of what is now considered Canada are the Canadian Indigenous peoples. There are three groups of Indigenous peoples that the Canadian constitution recognizes: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (AANDC, 2011). The government of Canada uses this categorization (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) to legally define who is an Indigenous person (AANDC, 2011). Through European colonization in North America, Indigenous peoples have faced and continue to face assimilation by colonial supremacy, including by mandatory relocation and loss of land, foreign diseases leading to cultural destruction and loss of peoples, and significant racism and oppression. Through colonialism, Indigenous peoples were forced to abandon their cultural traditions, assimilate their cultural identity and surrender their families and children to reserves and residential schools (Forsyth, 2007; Rovito & Giles; 2016; Stewart, 2007). These experiences of loss and trauma continue to be chronic and causal factors leading to poor health and social outcomes for Indigenous communities, including outcomes related to employment.

Census data illustrates that there are 1,400,685 Indigenous peoples in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013) or 4.3% of the overall Canadian population. The Indigenous population is one of the fastest growing populations in Canada and has increased by 20.1% between 2006 and 2011, compared to 5.2% for the non-Indigenous population. Moreover, the Indigenous population has a large portion of youth; over 50% of their population is under the age of 24 (Statistics Canada, 2014). Additionally, 54% of the population of Indigenous peoples live in urban areas.
(Statistics Canada, 2009), such as the city of Toronto. It is reported by Indigenous agencies that there are approximately 70,000 Indigenous peoples living in Toronto, and a high proportion are children and youth (City of Toronto, 2010).

It is commonly sighted that the reason for the migration of Indigenous youth from rural to urban areas is the pursuit of employment or educational opportunities (Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study, 2010). However, it is difficult to find employment for many Canadian Indigenous youth. Statistics Canada reports that the unemployment rate ranges from 16.9% to 26.9% for Indigenous youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Usalcas, 2011) compared to 14.6% for non-Indigenous youth. Despite public policies and government programs designed to increase Indigenous youth employment rates, there continues to be pervasive problem for Indigenous youth trying to secure employment (Dwyer, 2003; Nguyen, 2011; White Maxim, & Gyimah, 2003).

Between 2006 and 2026, the Indigenous population is estimated to account for 12.7% of the labour force growth, and 11.3% of the employment growth (Lapointe et al, 2009). The indigenous population is significant in that it has a high number youth who live in cities and is the fastest growing demographic of its kind, yet there is an underrepresentation of Indigenous professionals in the workforce and high levels of youth unemployment. The literature indicates multiple barriers that Indigenous youth face when seeking employment, such as lack of education, poor literacy, limited cultural consideration among provincial schools, poverty, limited access to job opportunities, lack of access to employment programs, racism, discrimination, and intergenerational trauma from residential schools (Aboriginal Education Office,
However, much of the research on Indigenous youth and employment has overlooked the value of seeking the personal perspectives of Indigenous youth (Brown & Lavish, 2006; Hoffman et al, 2005; Juntunen, Barraclough, Broneck, Seibel, Winrow, & Morin, 2001). Thus, there is great need for research based on the perspective of Indigenous youth, as their first-hand experiences and ideas can inform policies and programs aiming to decrease the unemployment rate of Indigenous youth. This research study aims to fill this gap in the literature as the focus is on the narratives and experiences of Indigenous youth.

**Two-Spirit Peoples**

The term ‘Two-Spirit’ is a culturally sensitive title encompassing the connection between all aspects of identity, such as spirituality, community, culture, sexuality and gender, but has often been misconstrued as representing exclusively same sex preference (Garrett & Barrett, 2003; Lang, 2016; Wilson, 2007). It is a self-descriptor that is increasingly being used by Indigenous peoples who subscribe to an Indigenous worldview (Wilson, 2000; 2007) signifying that sexuality is considered to be part of identity and cannot be seen as separate (Wilson, 2007). This term was invoked in order to move beyond constricting Eurocentric binary classes of gender, and to honour the fluid identity process praised by Indigenous communities (Garrett & Barrett, 2003; Lang, 2016; Wilson, 1996; Young, 2005). Additionally, the term ‘Two-Spirit’ is replacing the derogatory term ‘berdache’ which has been used by psychologists and anthropologists starting in the early 20th century (Williams,
Historically, Two-Spirit peoples were celebrated and revered within Indigenous cultures, with ancient teachings from Elders that describe Two-Spirit peoples as being gifted with two spirits, both male and female (Blackwood, 1984; Garrett & Barret, 2003; Ginicola, 2017; Wilson, 2007). Colonialism within Indigenous communities in the 20th century marked the initiation of active suppression and oppression of sex and gender diversity (Gilley, 2010). Colonization in the Americas forced Two-Spirit peoples to face systemic alienation and the revered perspective of Two-Spirit peoples that was held by Indigenous communities was relentlessly challenged by Euro-American settlers (Gilley, 2010; Ginicola, 2017).

The colonization of the Indigenous peoples, including their experiences within non-Indigenous spaces and on reserves, generated cultural and cognitive dissonance for Two-Spirit and non-Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples (Ginicola, 2017; Warry, 1990). Some Indigenous communities have yet to accept Two-Spirit peoples, resulting in further isolation within Two-Spirit communities (Garrett, & Barret, 2003; Garrett & Pichette, 2000). Discouragingly, the impact of colonialism has lead Two-Spirit youth to struggle to establish a stable sense of identity and a strong sense of acceptance within a defined community (Balsam et al., 2004; Ginicola, 2017; Wilson 2007). Two-Spirit youth find themselves leaving their homes due to the rejection and disapproval from their Indigenous communities, and travel to cities where they face blatant and systemic racism (Wilson, 2007). These disadvantaged youth often succumb to a
lifestyle that pulls them away from their traditional cultural communities, and causes them to experience abuse within the urban city (Balsam et al., 2004).

Often without social support, Two-Spirit youth are unable to secure access to adequate housing or lodging and resort to living on the street or in shelters (CMHC, 2001). The impact of homelessness on identity development is numerous (Balsam et al., 2004; Ginicola, 2017; Wilson, 2007). With their difficulty fitting into a defined community and establishing a converged cultural and sexual identity, Two-Spirit youth are at an even greater disadvantage in securing access to educational and employment opportunities (Balsam et al., 2004; Gilley, 2010; Wilson, 2007). This disadvantage is further exacerbated by the homophobia and systemic racism rampant within their traditional culture and Western society.

Indigenous youth in urban cities, including Two-Spirit youth, are pessimistic with respect to their future and the declining economic and living opportunities within their communities (Marshall et al, 2008; Ommer & Team, 2007; Stewart 2008, 2009). Additionally, as a marginalized population within an already marginalized group, Two-Spirit youth are particularly at high risk for falling into maladaptive social and living circumstances. Nevertheless, Two-Spirit youth have used strategies to cope with the overwhelming pressure associated with their difficult living conditions. Operating from a community based, narrative perspective, this study addresses the matter of Two-Spirit identity development and employment outcomes by exploring how the intersections of interdependent identities (e.g., Indigenous, LGBTQ) experienced by Two-Spirit youth influence employment outcomes in the face of sustained racism and homophobia. More specifically, the study aims to inquire about
and explore the unique experiences of trauma, identity, discrimination, and overall mental health issues of Two Spirit youth, as they relate to obtaining and maintain employment. Additionally, utilizing a strengths-based perspective, the research explores and identifies adaptive coping strategies that Two-Spirit youth use for the purposes of disseminating the research to policy makers and employers.

**Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this study seeks to illuminate the stories of Two-Spirit youth regarding their identity, employment, and healing in order to generate culturally grounded models of Two-Spirit career development and employment supports. The overarching goal of the research is contribute to the literature on Two-Spirit employment and counselling and provide empirically based models and policy to contribute to increasing Indigenous participation in the national workforce. The aim is to address these issues by investigation this research question: What are the intersections of cultural identity, LGBTQ identity, and work-life experiences for Two-Spirit youth as they relate to employment outcomes?

**Rationale**

There are two central reasons for this study: 1) to explore how the intersections of interdependent identities experienced by Two-Spirit youth influence employment outcomes and work-life experiences, and 2) to access and gather Two-Spirit youth’ perspective on employment barriers and challenges in order to influence policy, programming, and employment services.

Differences between Indigenous youth who have successfully obtained employment and Indigenous youth who have struggled has not been satisfactorily
explored or determined in the current literature. Investigating variables that aid in obtaining employment for Indigenous youth is a necessary endeavor as presently there are policies and services for the improvement of Indigenous youth employment that are not successful in increasing Indigenous youth employment rates (Dwyer, 2003; Nguyen, 2011; White, Maxim, & Gyimah, 2003).

Furthermore, the employment barriers that Indigenous youth face, including colonization, discrimination, poverty, the negative impact of residential schools, poor literacy, and limited access to job opportunities, have been studied and well documented (Hoffman, Jackson & Smith, 2005; McCormick & Amundson, 1997; Nguyen, 2011; White et al, 2003). Yet current services and policies are based on Western perspectives and are not meeting the needs of Indigenous peoples, therefore the interpretation and comprehension of these barriers have not been effective in decreasing the unemployment rate (Herring, 1990; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Neumann, McCormick, Amundson & McLean, 2000; Nguyen, 2011).

Moreover, recent results from a study conducted through the perspective of Indigenous youth indicate that identity, culture, and systematic oppression, are the most prominent barriers to their employment success (Stewart, Reeves, Mohanty, Syrette, & Elliott, 2011), more important than factors such as job training or education (Stewart & Marshall 2011a, 2011b). Additionally, Indigenous youth reported that they would be more successful in the workplace if there was the capacity to build upon their cultural identity (Stewart et al, 2011; Stewart & Marshall, 2011b). These results further suggest that more research should be conducted from the perspective of Indigenous youth in order to properly attend to
their specific needs and explore their unique experiences. Consequently, the lack of direct exploration of Indigenous youth’ work-related needs may be connected to the ineffective programming regarding improving employment statistics.

This study aims to bring meaningful and influential knowledge to the academic community, policy makers, employers, and Indigenous communities by examining experiences and ideas from Two-Spirit youth themselves about the success strategies and barriers to obtaining employment. This is imperative, as there has been minimal research investigating the unique needs and experiences of Two-Spirit youth regarding employment. More specifically, research exploring and utilizing Two-Spirit youth perspectives is scarce yet necessary to improve their work-life experiences and to elucidate factors and barriers to their success that can be incorporated into programs and policies.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Many hours and much effort is spent in the workplace and as such individual’s identity is related to their current and past employment (Blustein, 2006; Juntunen, 2006). An individual’s employment also provides meaning as it communicates what they do, and how they contribute to society (Reissner, 2010). Additionally, workplace satisfaction contributes an individual’s overall mental health as well as their financial well-being (Blunstein, 2001).

Identity and mental health is also impacted by one’s culture as it influences all aspects of an individual’s life, including experiences with employment (Bruner, 1990). In this section, the importance of cultural acceptance and at work at the effect it may have on Indigenous peoples is discussed.

Deterioration of the mental and physical health of Indigenous peoples, as well as homelessness, street involvement, and drug misuse have been recognized as consequences of generations of traumas caused by colonial oppression and cultural extermination. Hence the research on the influences of traditional knowledge and healing, which have been recognized to aid in the understanding of resiliency against these aforementioned traumas. Moreover, a major component in community healing is the connection with culture and traditional knowledge.

Colonialism also had a detrimental impact on Two-Spirit communities due to the active suppression and oppression of sex and gender diversity (Gilley, 2010). Two-Spirit peoples to face systemic alienation and the revered perspective of Two-Spirit peoples that was held by Indigenous communities was relentlessly challenged.
by Euro-American settlers during Colonization in the Americas (Gilley, 2010; Ginicola, 2017). This continues to be traumatic as colonization of the Indigenous peoples generated cultural and cognitive dissonance for Two-Spirit and non-Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples (Ginicola, 2017; Warry, 1990). Many Two-Spirit peoples become further isolated as some Indigenous communities have yet to accept their identities (Garrett, & Barret, 2003; Garrett & Pichette, 2000). Consequently, the intergenerational impact of colonialism has lead Two-Spirit youth to struggle to establish a stable sense of identity and a strong sense of acceptance within a defined community (Balsam et al., 2004; Ginicola, 2017; Wilson 2007).

This chapter will present the literature on intergenerational trauma, the history of Two-Spirit people, employment, and identity. This chapter will specifically focus on the high rates of unemployment observed in Indigenous communities as a result of colonization and the intergenerational traumas that have thus ensued. This chapter will also present the research on employment relating to identity, culture, and mental health. It will also include identity formation in relation to culture, sexuality, and group acceptance. It is important to note that the issues presented here are from a Canadian systemic lens, this is done in order to understand how to improve a system that continues to suppress Indigenous peoples.

**Historical/Intergenerational Trauma**

The fundamental principle of historical trauma is that the initial experience of trauma is transferred to successive generations through social, psychological, biological, and environmental channels which results in an ongoing cross-generational cycle of trauma (Marsh, Choholic, Cote-Meek, & Najavits, 2015). The
transmission of historical trauma is theorized to occur through three phases. The first phase involves the prevailing culture causing substantial damage to a targeted population leading to economic, societal, cultural, and familial devastation. The second phase concerns the societal, psychological, and biological symptoms experienced by the original generation of the targeted population. The last phase contains initial responses to trauma conveyed to subsequent generations through psychological and environmental factors, as well as discrimination and prejudice from the dominant culture (Marsh et al., 2015). These factors combine and perpetuate the trauma resulting in heightened vulnerability to experiences of direct trauma for subsequent generations.

Abusive acts such as torture, terrorism, captivity, genocide, gendercide, and colonialism are meant to purposefully disempowering, this is established by shattering and questioning the victims’ identity, personal safety, community and sense of life meaning. Consequently, this type of complex trauma can destroy families, cultures, communities, individual identity, and can deteriorate the physical body and mental health. This trauma persists into daily life, making hope, safety, and a sense of agency very challenging for the victim to maintain (Courtois & Ford, 2013). Additionally, trauma such as this that is inflicted on a community or population penetrates into the sense of their identity and can have long lasting effects. These effects of trauma are usually transferred to future generations who belong to the targeted group, which is classified as historical or intergenerational trauma.

Trauma can come in many forms and has detrimental effects on the
experiencing individual. However, what makes trauma complex is the length of time experienced, the frequency in which the trauma occurs, the overwhelming threat or harm that it poses to identity, relationships, physical and psychological being, and overall personal safety. Such consequences of complex trauma that occur during childhood and across the lifespan can negatively impact or even reverse the individual’s development by breaking down the key developmental or prior developmental achievements during the individual’s lifespan (Kira et al., 2010).

Historically and currently, personal characteristics have been and continue to be the target of abuse or trauma. Additionally, group affiliations and cultures that are either taught or inborn and are central to the individual’s community and identity are also vulnerability targets. Examples of such are belief systems, religion, cultural practices, and political affiliations. These factors have been used by adversaries as targets for forms cruelty and violence such as, forced evacuation, relocation, imprisonment, torture, and genocide (Courtois & Ford, 2013).

The historical trauma of colonization experienced by Canadian Indigenous and Native American communities has been recognized as a substantial component to detrimental lifetime impacts, resulting in loss of family, land, and culture (Brown-Rice, 2013; Marsh et al., 2015). The cultural genocide and forced assimilation that Indigenous peoples faced have had a myriad of complex and lasting psychological, economical, and biological effects (Rovito & Giles; 2016; Wilson, 2007). Duran and Durán’s model (1995) illustrates six phases in the development of intergenerational trauma for Indigenous peoples. The phases correspond with the stages of Euro-American imperialism and include periods of first contact, economic competition,
the invasion war period, the subjugation and reservation period, boarding school period, and forced relocation and termination period. The model stipulates that one phase of trauma does not necessarily lead to trauma in the next phase, instead it is the continued and/or isolated experiences of colonization and the lasting consequences that perpetuate and cascade impacts of trauma onto Indigenous peoples.

Research with Indigenous communities has discovered a phenomenon termed “generational grief” that is observed as a repeated descent of unresolved and deep-seated emotions (i.e. chronic sadness, and grief) that occurs due to previous traumatic experiences (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2004). More specifically, if this emotional trauma is ignored and left unexamined, the trauma will be passed on to the subsequent generation. Emotional trauma is passed on through domestic violence, vicarious models of inadequate parenting, drug/alcohol dependencies, and physical/ sexual abuse (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2004). This trauma must be addressed mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually in order to resolve and conclude the cyclical impact it has on Indigenous individuals, families, and communities (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2004).

Colonization has led Indigenous peoples to be the most spatially, socially, and materially deprived ethnocultural groups in Canada and are also disproportionately homeless and inadequately housed (Patrick, 2014). These unfortunate positions have arisen from the consequences of colonialism, including colonial- and neo-colonial practices of cultural oppression, the historical dispossession of Indigenous lands, the historical relocation of Indigenous people to
desolate and remote locations in Canada, systemic/political racism, intergenerational/historical traumas, and governmental policies (Patrick, 2014).

Indigenous peoples in Canada have been burdened with social marginalization and cultural oppression through the societal and systemic actions that have subsequently followed the initial contact with European settlers, and have been directly impacted by colonization. European settlers brought many forms of depredation for the Indigenous people on their own land, such as the political, economic, and religious institutions that were meant to oppress Indigenous peoples and Indigenous cultures (Kirmayer, Tait, & Simpson, 2009). Additionally, settlers brought infectious disease, committed warfare, and cultural exile by suppressing Indigenous culture, which have had devastating impacts and have contributed greatly to the calamitous history of Canada’s Indigenous peoples (Thornton, 1987). There are continuing and residual effects of these transgressions, along with new traumas committed by Canadian and American society and politics, which currently persist across the entirety of North America and have not been ameliorated.

A predominant historical element that has greatly contributed to the poor social determinants of Indigenous peoples is the deep-rooted impact of the Residential School System. These school systems were developed and executed by the Catholic church in conjunction with the Canadian Government with the objective of educating them based on the culture and knowledges suited to the Eurocentric/Christian denomination. Approximately 100,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and put into these institutions. These schools were designed to rid Indigenous children of their culture, and as such were
denied the right to speak in their native languages or engage in any traditional practices, and thus were subsequently punished if caught speaking their own language, discussing cultural beliefs, or practising their traditions. It is well known and established that many of the authority figures in these schools committed atrocious acts; emotional, physical, and sexual abuse were perpetrated against the Indigenous children in many of the residential schools (Kirmayer, et al., 2009).

Another detrimental historical event was The Sixties Scoop; a child apprehension epidemic which began in the 1960’s. Many Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes by child protection services and placed into foster care ostensibly due to heightened concerns about child welfare. In 1959, approximately 1% of children that were legal wards of the state happened to be Indigenous. This rate was significantly elevated to between 30% and 40% at the end of the sixties, thus elucidating the substantial degree to which Indigenous communities were affected during this decade (Fournier & Crey, 1997). By the 1970s, the likelihood of Indigenous children being separated from their parents was about one in four, leaving many to be eventually adopted into non-Indigenous families and to experience abuse and racism within these settings (Gough, Trocome, Brown, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2005).

The destructive and devastating consequences of the Residential School System and The Sixties Scoop have extensively and continually affected the Indigenous peoples, including individual families and the larger communities (Kirmayer, et al., 2009). Common examples of the effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples are internalized racism, neglect and incapable parenting,
substance use, violence, criminal behaviour, suicide, loss of language and physical,
emotional and sexual familial abuse due to intergenerational trauma (Fournier &
Crey, 1997; York, 1990). These are some of the current and continued factors that
have been recognized as the consequences of historical and contemporary
colonization in Canada. These factors lead to an unforgiving cycle of
intergenerational trauma that pervade the lives of each individual and family unit and
continues to be perpetuated by external racism and systemic oppression.

Currently, and throughout the past century, Canadian government policies
have maintained a system of oppression and destabilization of Indigenous cultures
and traditional ways of life and knowing through the implementation of the Indian
Act and Residential School System, through the creation of reserves, and through
forced relocation to remote regions. Inadequate resourcing of essential services like
healthcare and education systems, as well as extreme underfunding on reserves are
prime examples of the continued racism oppression. Additionally, the overt
bureaucratic control that continues to permeate through Indigenous communities is
another element that suppresses and inhibits any societal growth or healing
(Kirmayer, et al., 2009). These historic and current elements, among many others,
have persistently and devastatingly influenced the socioeconomic crises that exist in
many Indigenous communities today. This, therefore, contributes to the poor social
determinants of physical and psychological health, including limited education, low
socioeconomic status, and considerable unemployment.

The myriad factors listed above have been recognized as the antecedent and
basis for the current high rates of poor mental health, homelessness, poverty, and
street and drug involvement experienced by Indigenous peoples living in Canada. Many Indigenous and Two-Spirit people are moving off reserve communities and are migrating to larger cities in order to find better education and employment opportunities. This can be observed in the increasing Indigenous and Two-Spirit communities that are currently residing in Toronto, Canada.

**History of Two-Spirit Peoples**

Within traditional Indigenous cultures, sexuality was regarded as existing within a continuum rather than belonging to distinctive binary categories (Garret & Barret, 2003; Lang, 2016). Sexual experiences were considered to fluctuate without necessarily succumbing to a dichotomous state (Garret & Barret, 2003; Lang, 2016). Additionally, Two-Spirit peoples were highly regarded within Indigenous communities, as it was perceived that Two-Spirit peoples were actively receiving directions from the spirit world through a special connection (Gilley, 2010; Ginicola, 2017). Accordingly, Two-Spirit peoples would often be offered culturally revered roles such as leaders, Medicine persons, and intermediaries (Garret & Barret, 2003). Two-Spirit peoples were represented by distinct terms within differing communities (bote [Crow], nadleeh [Navajo], winkte [Lakota]) and were commonly socialized within the context of their gender identity (Garret & Barret, 2003). For example, the Lakota community used the term “winkte” to label male-bodied individuals who were interested in working in roles traditionally assigned to females (Gilley, 2010). Accordingly, a winkte would be socialized to participate in rites of passage that were appropriate for their role and commonly incorporated both male and female garb in their aesthetic attire (Gilley, 2010).
Early anthropological writings document Two-Spirit peoples from the perspectives of settlers. Direct observation of Indigenous communities inform these ethnographic perspectives on homosexuality and Indigenous peoples (Wilson, 2007). For example, Parsons (1916) wrote of “these men-women” (p. 521) during her fieldwork with Zuni Pueblo people, and Lewis (1941) described “a unique type of female personality known as the manly-hearted woman” (p. 173) during his fieldwork with Blackfeet Indians in Canada (Wilson, 2007).

The languages and cultures of the settlers, such as English, Spanish, and French, are strongly entrenched in binary gender concepts, which is discordant with the fluidity of Indigenous gender constructions (Wilson, 2007). Thus, settlers had a hard time identifying and understanding the ways of the Two-Spirit peoples. The term ‘berdache’ was established by French missionaries and settlers to identify the Indigenous men who they did not categorize as fitting into the Anglo-European standards of male gender roles (Wilson, 2007). This term became part of the anthropological vocabulary, and was utilized to label Indigenous research subjects that did not meet the binary categories of sexuality (Blackwood, 1984; Weston, 1993; Williams, 1986; Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2007). The etymology of the term berdache stems back to a Persian word ‘barah’ which means kept boy or male prostitute (Angelino & Shedd, 1955; Wilson, 2007).

Currently, these ethnographic descriptions can be interpreted as evidence of the gender fluidity practiced within Indigenous cultures, however, at the time these discoveries were threatening to the more rigid lifestyles of the early social scientists (Wilson, 2007). For example, Lewis (1941) wrote “... all women [are] considered as
a group in contrast to men” (p. 176) thus identifying the steadfast notions of gender roles that these anthropologists idealized (Wilson, 2007). More negative and aggressive writings were also documented, such as “The majority are addicted to sodomy. These corrupt men...wear their hair long and a short skirt like the women” written by a French traveler named Bossu (Angelino & Shedd, 1955, p. 122; Wilson, 2007). Additionally, Lawson, a 1709 traveler, stated that Indigenous peoples “did not even have a word for [the] beastly and loathsome sin of sodomy” (Jacobs, 1968, p.48; Wilson, 2007). The settlers and missionaries spread these ideals and narratives to the Indigenous peoples until their notions gender fluidity became part of history.

In the late 1800’s, descriptions of the Two-Spirit peoples began to fade in Canada (Hamish, 2009). Indigenous communities were influenced by the homophobic and heteronormative views of gender and sexuality perpetuated by settlers, missionaries, and boarding and residential schools (Adams & Phillips, 2006; Ginicola, 2017). Indigenous peoples were forced to assimilate to European ideas that at that time viewed gender diversity and same-sex relations as ‘sinful’ (Adams & Phillips, 2006; Ginicola, 2017), and in some reserves gender expression such as cross dressing was outlawed (Gilley, 2010). As Indigenous peoples began to subscribe to the settlers’ traditional ideology about the “sinful” view of Two-Spirit peoples, the cultural tenets began to change from veneration of Two-Spirit peoples to strong condemnation of their lifestyle (Gilley, 2010; Ginicola, 2017).

Many Indigenous communities are still affected by these homophobic views of Two-Spirit peoples as this surreptitious change in perspective towards Two-Spirit communities has had devastating ramifications (Burks, Robbins, & Durtschi, 2011;
Garrett, & Barret, 2003; Garrett & Pichette, 2000; Ginicola, 2017). Two-Spirit peoples have a higher rate of unsafe sex, substance abuse, and are more likely to be victimized sexually and physically by caregivers, compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Balsam et al., 2004; Burks, Robbins, & Durtschi, 2011; Wilson, 2007). Posited theories for this alarmingly disproportionate rate are pointing to the homophobia and heterosexism within both Western and Indigenous societies. For example, Two-Spirit males reported that they are less likely to seek HIV/AIDS services in their own towns due to embarrassment and the stigma attached to the diagnosis and association with homosexuality (Burks, Robbins, & Durtschi, 2011).

**Two-Spirit Identity**

Stable identity development is linked to gaining acceptance within one’s cultural community (Balsam et al., 2004; Ginicola, 2017). Furthermore, acceptance into one’s cultural community serves as a protective factor against mental health issues and dysfunctional behaviours (truancy, poor academic performance, self-harm behaviours, etc.) (Golden et al., 1998; Hulchanski, 1999). The impact of colonialism has lead Two-Spirit youth to struggle to establish a stable sense of identity and a strong sense of acceptance within a defined community (Balsam et al., 2004; Ginicola, 2017). The pervasiveness of homophobia within Indigenous communities leaves little room for acceptance of Two-Spirit youth (Gilley, 2010; Balsam et al., 2004). Many Two-Spirit youth are pressured to leave their communities and end up feeling isolated (Wilson, 2007). A Two-Spirit Mohawk writer describes their experience of homophobia within their own community, stating "fears of abandonment by the people we love, the people whose opinion matters, the very people who, in our dreams,
whisper, 'come home, come home’" (Brant, 1994, p. 21). Brant (1994) illustrates the deeply-rooted complexities of the Two-Spirit struggle: "Much of the self-hatred we carry within us is centuries old. This self-hatred is so coiled within itself, we often cannot distinguish the racism from the homophobia from the sexism" (p. 17).

Moreover, with constant exposure to systemic racism, it has become increasingly difficult for Two-Spirit youth to find acceptance within the LGBTQ community (Garrett & Barrett, 2003; Ginicola, 2017). Many Two-Spirit youth willingly leave their communities to find acceptance within gay cultures, but “in a white world that despises both” (Brant, 1994, p. 72) they often face difficulties in this endeavour (Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 2007).

Two-Spirit youth are consequently placed at a disadvantage due to the disconnect they feel between their ethnic and sexual identities, often feeling pressured to restrict their own identity to one (i.e., Indigenous) or the other (i.e., LGBTQ) (Balsam et al., 2004; Hulchanski, 1999; Ginicola, 2017). This feeling of incongruence contributes to a heightened risk of street involvement, drug or alcohol abuse, work in the sex trade industry, and homelessness, thus pulling them even further away from their traditional cultural values and identities (Balsam et al., 2004; Wilson, 2007).

**Culture and Group Formation**

The foundation for this research lies in the activation of cultural and individual identity within social, cultural, work, and group formations. The need to feel accepted by a group is embedded in human nature; whether it be family, a group of friends, or a culture, humans have a basic need to be part of a group. Culture, in particular, is a significant factor related to mental health and identity that influences many facets of
an individual’s life, including employment (Tsai, 2013; Bruner, 1990). Additionally, people’s employment decisions are informed by cultural identity, ethnic identity, gender, and family (Andres, Adamuti-Trache, Yoon, Pidgeon, & Thomsen, 2007; Young, Ball, Valach, Turkel, & Wong 2003; Shepard & Marshall, 2000).

Research in evolutionary psychology indicates that group membership and the formation of social groups were imperative for human survival (Van Vugt & Schaler, 2008; Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Undoubtedly, the importance of group membership extends to today’s society. Indigenous communities are often a major support system for Indigenous peoples who are connected to their cultural group. For example, communities will come together and rally to support a struggling group member (Juntunen, et al., 2001).

Group membership that is based in one’s culture is regarded by individuals as being important, highly influential, and stable (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Jaret & Reitzes, 1999; Tsai, 2013). In Indigenous communities, the self exists with the membership of the group which includes family, ancestors, animals, spirits, and the surrounding land (Wilson, 2007). In descriptions of self-fragmentation, separation from the Indigenous community is often identified as a major contributing factor; “To be stripped of community is to be stripped of some (the sum) of our selves” (Wilson, 2007, p. 23). Consequently, individuals members of a disadvantaged cultural groups (e.g., Indigenous peoples) may experience low self-esteem and other negative mental health outcomes (James, Cross, & DeFour, 2007; Tsai, 2013). Low self-esteem is commonly observed in Indigenous peoples as they are at a greater disadvantage in
TWO-SPRIT YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT

society than Caucasians (Linnehan, Chrobot-Mason, & Konrad, 2006). Feelings of low self-esteem in non-Caucasian groups are often reinforced by Caucasians due to their low expectations for job performance of non-Caucasians workers (Ridgeway, 2001). This results in limited access to tools and machines for indigenous employees and thus leads to poorer performance in job duties (Linnehan, et al., 2006).

Moreover, Indigenous employees are treated differently by employers than their Caucasian counterparts and are offered less opportunities for growth and promotion (Linnehan, et al., 2006).

Social identity theory plays a role in group formation, as it proposes that if an individual is a member of a group, they are more likely to subsequently feel a sense of belonging which will then contribute to a positive self-concept and thus buttress the development of positive self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Specifically, for Indigenous peoples, acquiring support from other Indigenous people can create a healthy expression of self that is anchored in culture and traditional knowledge, such as the Indigenous pedagogy (McCormick & Amundson, 1997). For example, traditions such as circle work based on Indigenous values, traditional knowledge and the medicine wheel teachings have been used in Indigenous communities to encourage such belonging and group cohesion (Hart, 2002). Additionally, the attachment needs of an individual can be met through the connection to these Indigenous healing methods and the individual can also feel a sense of group identity (McCormick & Gerlitz, 2008). Therefore, especially for Indigenous peoples, group cohesion, cultural acceptence, and relationships are highly valuable (McCormick & France, 1995).
Indigenous peoples have had the damaging experience of being forcefully disconnected from their culture and have been working on recovering some of that damage. Many people from Indigenous communities therefore feel a sense of disjointed belonging as it has been recognized that being a member of a community offers a sense of purpose and belonging. Additionally, a connection with traditional knowledge, the feeling of belonging and having a sense of community are important factors that can bolster the healing process from trauma for Indigenous peoples. The connection to traditional knowledge is also important in terms of identity, this connection to traditional knowledge can be accessed if an individual belongs to the group and if the group and culture is intact. Unfortunately, colonization has taken Indigenous peoples further away from learning the traditional ways and instead, has cause the development of maladaptive behaviours such as substance misuse, inconsistent parenting, which has led to homelessness for some Indigenous people. These concepts align with trauma literature, which suggests that individuals who have experienced complex trauma often have diffused identities and do not feel a sense of belonging to any particular group.

**Cultural Identity and Employment**

An individual spends a substantial amount their life in the workplace. Subsequently, employment is an important factor in identity (Blustein, 2006; Juntunen, 2006; Neumann, 2000) as employment provides meaning by communicating roles, responsibilities, and contributions to society (Reissner, 2010). Employment is imperative for individuals as it contributes to financial well-being, and to overall mental health depending on their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the
workplace (Blunstein, 2001). Moreover, unemployment has been recognized as a core component to homelessness, thus bolstering its importance to mental and physical well-being.

Members of ethnic minority groups (i.e., non-Caucasian) establish cultural identity in many ways, including exploring their history, examining the discrimination and racism they face, and questioning the privileged status of Caucasian people (Barker, 2007; Linnehan, et al., 2006). Moreover, members of ethnic minority groups who participate in cultural traditions and activities with other members of their cultural group begin to feel a sense of joy regarding their ethnic group due to feelings of attachment and pride (French, Coleman, & DiLorenzo, 2013). For example, Indigenous peoples may participate in cultural activities such as smudging, drumming, and attending a sweat lodge, or a language class together, which engenders a sense of connection to their culture and a sense of pride and joy.

Research has shown that a strong cultural identity can be a protective factor against dissatisfaction in the workplace among minority employees (Linnehan, et al., 2006). For example, individuals have more positive attitudes towards working in a culturally diverse environment when they strongly align with their cultural identity (Linnehan, et al., 2006). Specific to Indigenous peoples, there is a heightened sense of peace or satisfaction when their workplace is culturally sensitive, or culturally inclusive. The posited theory, is that these positive attitudes may result from a belief that understanding others and reducing biased behaviour will in turn, reduce exclusionary behaviour and enhance their own status in their work environment (Linnehan, et al., 2006). Thus, if a workplace is culturally sensitive to Indigenous
ways of knowing, or culturally inclusive in terms of allowing cultural traditions in the office, then an Indigenous person may feel a sense of safety and a sense of being understood, in that they may consider it less likely that they will be oppressed or discriminated against at that particular place of employment.

Moreover, minority employees with strong ethnic identities are more likely to view the workplace as supportive of diversity when their employers are also members of a minority group (Linnehan, et al., 2006). Similarly, Indigenous people may feel that a workplace is more safe or accepting if there are other Indigenous people employed there or if the employer is also Indigenous. Conversely, if there are no employees or employers who identify as Indigenous, an Indigenous person may feel threatened or worried that there is a strong likelihood of being misunderstood or discriminated against. Minority employees also reported reduced emotional conflict between co-workers, more workplace satisfaction, and experience lower turnover rates when their employers are a member of a minority group (Linnehan, et al., 2006). The literature presented is helpful in that much can be extrapolated and can be somewhat generalized to the Indigenous population. For example, it can be predicted that since Indigenous people are part of a minority group, that they may also experience more workplace satisfaction, less conflict between co-workers, and lower turnover rates if their employer was also Indigenous or part of a minority group.

These results and contemplations are also supported in Indigenous literature from the United States, which indicates that when Native Americans are employed within Native American organizations, they experience a greater sense of
community and satisfaction in the workplace (Campbell Clark, 2002). More specifically, when these employees have invested themselves in their work and a workplace identity is formed, they report feeling that they have earned a valued position in the working community (Campbell Clark, 2002). Moreover, when Native American employees establish a sense of control and flexibility, they are more likely to intrinsically value their work (Campbell Clark, 2002). An idea of what a sense of control and flexibility at work are for these participants are the statements from this study; participants strongly endorsed such statements as “I have a say in what goes on at work” “I am free to work the hours that are best for my schedule” and “I get a lot of satisfaction from carrying out my responsibilities at work” (Campbell Clark, 2002).

More research is needed to continue to explore the needs and values of Indigenous people regarding workplace experiences. Indigenous peoples have been minimally and nominally involved in research regarding the needs and experiences of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, it is imperative that the voices of Indigenous people be heard within the literature as there is no one with a better understanding of their needs than themselves. These reasons are the rationale and motive for the current study. This study aimed to advance knowledge in the field of Indigenous and psychological research by taking the perspective and experiences of Indigenous people in relation to their needs, values, and narratives regarding employment.

**Suppression of Cultural Identity and Employment**

Members of cultural minority groups often feel marginalized due to the cultural majority’s position of power and privilege in society and the workplace.
(Jameson, 2007). For example, consider an Indigenous person working for a
Caucasian person, the cultural identity of the employer, and their social status and
privilege may have a negative cognitive effect on the employee by way of
resentment or fear of being discriminated against, particularly if they or their
families have had negative experiences in the past.

Consequently, attitudes about cultural identity among employees who are
members of a minority group can be influenced by the perspectives on that identity
from members of the majority group (Jameson, 2007). As a result, minority
members respond emotionally by either devaluing their cultural identity (e.g.,
deemphasizing achievements), limiting association with their culture (e.g., ceasing
all cultural activities) or focusing on a different aspect of their identity (e.g., gender)
(Sussman, 2000; Tajfel, 1978). This result is an unfortunate one as it forces the
minority individual to minimize their sense of identity and potentially lose sources of
social support from their culture.

Indigenous peoples have more frequently been employed in non-traditional
organizations over the last twenty-five years (Dwyer, 2003). Although, the Canadian
federal public service (CFPS) sector is a conglomerate of government organizations
that employs Indigenous peoples (Dwyer, 2003). However, many Indigenous
peoples within the CFPS are rarely employed in executive positions and often
overlooked for promotional advancements (Dwyer, 2003). This may be related to
many of the barriers and challenges to promotion that Indigenous employees face
when working for non-Indigenous organizations, regardless of their higher education
or experience, such as discrimination, racism, stereotyping, and environments that
exclude and discourage Indigenous culture (Dwyer, 2003).

Additionally, Western workplaces often do not engender spaces for Indigenous employees to excel due to differences in cultural practice as the dominant culture sets standards that are aligned with their own values (Jameson, 2007). For example, it is a common Western practice to be explicit about one’s strengths which is helpful and required in interviews, conversely, it is not practiced in Indigenous cultures to boast about personal accomplishments, which leaves these employees at a disadvantage (Dwyer, 2003). Moreover, Indigenous employees may experience stress and conflict while working for non-Indigenous companies due to the encouragement of Western values such as interpersonal competition, individualism, and conformity, that are incompatible with Indigenous values, (i.e. creativity, cooperation, and group cohesiveness (Dwyer, 2003).

**Indigenous Youth and Employment**

Indigenous students who have effective coping mechanisms to deal with vocational challenges, such as racial discrimination, or systemic classism, report higher levels of employment success (Thompson, 2012). Research by Stewart and Marshall (2011a; 2011b) demonstrates that Indigenous youth may have more success in approaching employment challenges if they have opportunities to further foster their cultural identity in the workplace. Systemic racism and job training were some of the reported challenges that Indigenous youth faced while attempting to obtain meaningful employment (Stewart & Marshall, 2011a, 2011b).

There are policies and programs that aim to improve the rates of unemployment for Indigenous youth, but they have not been significantly successful.
Stewart (2014) conducted research to explore why these policies and programs have not been particularly successful by taking the perspective of Indigenous youth themselves. The participant in Stewart’s (2014) study reported that Indigenous youth feel a sense of pride in the workplace when their culture is included. Conversely, they shared that many Indigenous youth work for mainstream employers who do not include Indigenous culture in the workplace and so Indigenous youth end up feeling a sense of longing for their cultural traditions and tend to struggle to adapt to Western cultural norms in the workplace. Suggestions were made by the participant, for example, they shared that culture should be much more visible in the workplace and employers should support Indigenous traditions. They also reported that they would feel more safe and supported if employees and employers were educated in Indigenous culture and history. Additionally, they offered ideas such as changing policy to increase the number of Indigenous employees and ensuring fair salaries.

The literature addressing workplace culture identifies workplace environments involving cultural communities as having more favourable outcomes for Indigenous participants who experience conflict (Campbell Clark, 2002). However, the research in this area has not been conducted with Two-Spirit youth populations, who may have more unique and complex workplace circumstances. As well, self-efficacy has been observed as a coping strategy and protective measure against career challenges (Thompson, 2012). Accordingly, self-efficacy may be connected to how successfully Two-Spirit youth utilize their cultural support networks against workplace tribulations.

This study builds upon the results from previous research conducted by
Stewart and Marshall (2011a; 2011b), which explored the experiences of supports, challenges, and barriers that Indigenous youth have faced in their quest to find meaningful and sustainable work. This study further extends these results to investigate the unique employment challenges that Two-Spirit youth face within the context of intersecting identities. More specifically, the practical goal of this project is to influence policy, programming, and employment services that are designed to implement the suggestions and experiences of Two-Spirit youth.

There is more work to be done in order to continue to explore the needs and values of Two-Spirit youth regarding workplace experiences, thus adding to Indigenous and psychological literature. Two-Spirit youth have seldom had the chance to participate and be involved in research regarding their own needs and experiences. Therefore it is imperative that Two-Spirit youth share their experiences, ideas, and suggestions thus contributing to the literature as, again, there are no better sources of understanding their needs than themselves. The motive for the current study speaks to exactly this. The current study has aimed to advance knowledge in the field of Indigenous and psychological research by adding the perspective taking of Two-Spirit youth, and inviting them to share their experiences of employment and discussing their needs, values, suggestions, and valuable and rich narratives around employment and work.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This study is part of a larger SSHRC-funded research study entitled “Breaking Ba: Challenging Aboriginal Employment Policy using Aboriginal Knowledges,” led by my supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Stewart. This study explores one specific population, Two-Spirit Youth, as a data set among the larger study and be conducted separately to other data sets.

The research question is: What are the intersections of cultural identity, LGBTQ identity, and work-life experiences for Two-Spirit youth as they relate to employment outcomes?

Research Design

The research explores the rich and unique experiences of Two-Spirit youth, and how each narrative of discrimination, trauma, resilience, and traditional knowledge will contribute to the themes and results. Therefore, the profundity and detail of the research question necessitates a qualitative methodology that employs narrative inquiry to generate meaning of each participant’s rich narrative. Additionally, this study is exploring systemic and personal experiences of trauma, therefore, ethical principles and community partnerships are integral to the research design as to adhere to anti-oppressive based research.

As researchers in Indigenous communities, our experiences have highlighted the need for respect and reciprocal relationships within the context of research. Historically, researchers in Indigenous communities have had little or no knowledge of Indigenous knowledge, traditions, or history. Additionally, Indigenous
participants and the larger communities were rarely consulted or involved in the research design. Understandably, Indigenous communities are subsequently suspicious of researchers (Cochran, Marshall, Garcia-Downing, Kendall, Cook, McCubbin, & Gover 2008; Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001; Marshall & Stewart, 2004; Menzies, 2001). In light of this, Stewart’s (2008) research recommends implementing an Indigenous research paradigm that respects Indigenous communities while supporting their healing process from colonization. As such, consultation with local Indigenous community partnerships, such as Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Sherbourne Health Centre, and Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, are ongoing.

**Qualitative Paradigm**

Qualitative research methodologies are equipped to comprehend and appreciate the lived experiences of participants from the perspective of the participant (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Qualitative methods are informed by interpretive and critical research paradigms which “place emphasis on seeking understanding of the meanings of human actions and experiences, and on generating accounts of their meaning from the viewpoints of those involved” (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002, p. 718).

It has been suggested that qualitative methods permit more exploration and flexibility as they are led by the narratives of participants rather than the assumptions of the researcher (Patton, 2002). The posited argument is that quantitative methods rely on instruments and surveys that may confine findings and limit interpretations,
thus lacking in detail and depth (Hoffman, Jackson & Smith, 2005; Jackson & Smith, 2001). Additionally, formulating and establishing a hypothesis is arguably a “constraint on [the] qualitative work”, and may result in an “unnecessarily narrow” perspective that can bias the researcher, thus omitting rich and useful information (Lareau, 2012). Consequently, qualitative research methodologies utilize open-ended questions rather than hypothesis, and thus allow for ongoing and unrestricted insight throughout the research process (Lareau, 2012). Moreover, qualitative researchers attend to the situational constraints that inform research inquiry and the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Accordingly, qualitative research is suitable for exploring and understanding the life contexts of Two-Spirit youth as it relates to employment experiences. Furthermore, qualitative research is less intrusive than quantitative research as participants have control over what they decide to share with the researcher. This is imperative as many Indigenous communities have been victimized by researchers who limit agency over the participants’ involvement in the research.

**Indigenous Narrative Methodology**

**Narrative inquiry.**

Narrative research holds similarities with qualitative research, such as the study of stories, and the assumption that these stories are fundamental to the essence of human experience (Clandinin, 2007). Narrative inquiry can be placed under the umbrella of qualitative research methodology as both utilize stories as a method of research, analysis, and also as a phenomena of study (Clandinin, 2007). In addition, narrative inquiry involves the analysis and understanding of the individual’s
experience relating to personal relationships as well as to the greater social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research utilizing narrative inquiry is not static, restricted, or stationary, instead it is continually evolving and focuses on the unique experience of each individual. According to Chase (2005), narrative inquiry is “characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). Thus, the approach that is applied and the data that is collected is potentially as diverse as each individual participant.

Additionally, narrative inquiry is markedly different from other methods of qualitative research as it operates on five analytic lenses (Chase, 2005). The first lens incorporates the individual’s thought, interpretations, and emotions over a long timeframe by recognizing that the narrator’s perspective is retrospective (Chase, 2005). The second lens identifies that individuals create narratives to communicate their reality by concentrating on their personal history, rather than detailed elements of the story (Chase, 2005). The next lens qualifies that narrative inquiry addresses particular audiences and with specific purposes (Chase, 2005). The fourth lens points out that narrative inquiry accounts for the individual’s social context by exploring their unique experiences (Chase, 2005). Lastly, the researchers utilizing narrative inquiry are themselves narrators through the interpretation process and through presenting and disseminating their research (Chase, 2005). Therefore, narrative
inquiry incorporates the researchers and the participants in the process of storytelling and developing meaning.

**Indigenous narrative.**

As Indigenous peoples, across many Indigenous groups, characteristically designate oral storytelling as a traditional mode of communicating ways of knowing (Clandinin, 2007; Stewart, 2008; Medicine-Eagle 1989), the method of narrative inquiry is culturally sensitive and consistent with this Indigenous tradition (Stewart, 2008). Clandinin (2007) states “For native/indigenous peoples, narratives are evocative accounts of sovereignty and loss, as well as identity and home. They are detailed and contextual, recognizing the importance of community and place” (p. 512).

Narrative inquiry is conducive to the exploration of the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples considering the significant similarities to Indigenous epistemology (Barton, 2004). Moreover, narrative “inquiry recognizes the value of Indigenous knowledge and its connection with other forms of knowledge (e.g., scientific), it has a place in research and policy arenas” (Clandinin, 2007, p. 512). Therefore, narrative research would not homogenize Indigenous knowledges to fit a Western scholarly view, instead the aim is to explore the individual experiences and the power tensions within cultural context, thus revealing questions that can potentially prompt and unearth beneficial resources and policies to aid Indigenous communities (Clandinin, 2007).

As theorized through an Indigenous foundation, narrative inquiry must recognize the potential cultural and ethical implications that may emerge from
storytelling. As Clandinin (2007) states, “Indigenization of the narrative is an important responsibility of native/indigenous scholars because there is a sacredness that connects the telling and retelling to the traditional wisdom and lifeways of a native community” (p. 520). Additionally, theory and metaphor is embedded in Indigenous story, thus the researcher is accountable to Indigenous communities as well as their peer scholars when requesting and sharing stories to an academic audience (Benham, 2005; Clandinin, 2007).

**Social Constructivism**

A post-positivist framework of qualitative research, social constructionism stresses the importance of how actions and social processes construct knowledge and how that impacts an individual’s understanding of the world (Young & Collin, 2004). This framework allows researchers to explore complex and varied views that are derived from multiple meanings rather than gaining knowledge through narrow views.

Furthermore, meanings are historically situated in relation to others, and individuals form meaning through their culturally bound perception of reality (Creswell, 2003; Young & Collin, 2004). Thus, researchers attempt to place their own subjective self as a minor component, and become more concerned with how participants perceive their subjective experiences of the researched phenomenon (Creswell, 1994). From this perspective, individuals are continually engaging in a process of self-construction and interpretation of the world that surrounds them (Young & Collin, 2004). This view is congruent with Indigenous traditional knowledge that proposes multiple truths rather than a single reality (Steinhauer,
Thus, social constructivism is an appropriate theoretical framework to utilize when researching and exploring the lived experiences of Two-Spirit Indigenous youth and how their experiences relate to the larger social context of Canadian society.

Participants

For the scope of this study, 5 self-identified Two-Spirit Indigenous youth between the ages of 18-35, residing in the Greater Toronto Area, were invited to be individually interviewed in Toronto. Research participants were not excluded by gender, class, or position; there are no exclusionary criteria that preclude participants from partaking in the interviews. The participants were recruited through our Indigenous community contacts. Focusing on an urban population allowed the research to assess Indigenous youth who do not live on reserves, thus accessing the Indigenous population with the highest unemployment rate (Usalcas, 2011).

Participant labels.

Each participant was assigned a number rather than a name. This was purposefully and intentionally done as it is not in the realm of cultural authority nor is it culturally appropriate for the researcher to give any of the participants Indigenous pseudonyms. Similarly, it would be culturally insensitive to give the participants pseudonyms that are Eurocentric or non-Indigenous.

Recruitment

The recruitment of participants was conducted as part of a large SSHRC-funded study called “Breaking Bad: Challenging Aboriginal Employment Policy using Aboriginal Knowledges,” led by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, a faculty member of the
University of Toronto and in collaboration with Dr. Anne Marshall, a faculty member at the University of Victoria. Participants were recruited through the community partnerships with local Indigenous agencies. Employees of the agencies were cognizant of the research and have passed on information via word of mouth to participants, and flyers were posted in their offices. Feedback and active involvement during the research process from the community partners was highly encouraged. Thus, the Ownership Control Access Possession (OCAP) principles will be adhered to; respecting Indigenous communities and conducting research with these communities rather than on or on behalf of Indigenous communities (Schnarch, 2004).

The Research Site

Toronto was the city for this study. As previously indicated, Toronto has a substantial urban Indigenous population of approximately 70,000 people. Thus, Toronto is ideal for conducting research on urban Indigenous peoples. More specifically, the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT) is located in downtown Toronto and was the research site for this project as it is a community partner on the Breaking Bad project. The NCCT is a community based organization for urban Indigenous peoples that encourages and accommodates the celebration of their cultures and traditional ways of knowing (Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, 2010).

Individual Interviews

Interested participants were contacted to arrange for an approximately one-hour long interview at a convenient location and time for each participant. The
researcher began each interview reviewing the informed consent form verbally with the participant. The participants were all informed of the open-ended and semi-structured format of the interview and all questions or concerns were addressed before the interview questions were asked. When the participants consented to the interview process, both verbally and in writing, they were presented with a gift card honourarium.

Individual interviews were conducted by the researcher with 5 self-identified Two Spirit people. These interviews provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on and share their experiences of employment. Individual interviews are also conducive to utilizing a narrative research design, which is ideal for acquiring a detailed account of each participant’s unique experience, and also involves a culturally appropriate oral based tradition (Medicine-Eagle, 1989). This also aids in utilizing a narrative approach for communicating knowledge and information (Stewart, 2008).

Participants were asked to answer the following interview questions: considerations. Participants will be asked: (1) Can you tell me about some of your experiences of employment? What are your key needs? (2) We already know that racism and oppression are issues Two-Spirit youth youth face in the workplace. (3) What are some ways that you have creatively dealt with these issues? (4) What are some of your hopes for Two-Spirit youth youth in regard to employment outcomes? (5) What are some of your fears for Two-Spirit youth youth with regard to employment outcomes? (6) How does the intersection of your identities (i.e. Indigenous, LGBTQ) hinder your success in the workplace? (7) How does the
intersection of your identities (i.e. Indigenous, LGBTQ) aid your success in the workplace? (8) How does a sense of who you are, or your workplace identity, develop in the workplace for Two-Spirit youth? (9) How do employers help or challenge the success of Two-Spirit youth in the workplace? (10) What do you consider to be the most important thing about work for Two-Spirit youth? (11) How has Indigenous culture been present or absent in your work experience? (12) How has LGBTQ culture been present or absent in your work experience?” (13) What changes would you like to see for Two-Spirit youth with respect to employment services and supports? Prompts (e.g., tell us a bit more about that) and open-ended questions were used to facilitate the interview process as needed. Each participant was randomly assigned a four digit code to protect their anonymity.

**Data Analysis**

The individual interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were coded and analysed by the researcher using a refined form of the procedures developed by Dr. Stewart (Stewart 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Stewart & Reeves, 2011; Reeves & Stewart, 2014). An Aboriginal Inquiry framework was utilized during the analysis and meaning making of the individual interviews. Analysis refers to the process of subjectively reducing a whole to the sum of its parts to explore and describe a phenomenon. Interpretative meaning-making involves subjectively dissecting social phenomena to shed light on certain thoughts, ideas, and events. In qualitative research, analysis primarily involves organizing data into theoretical groups for the purpose of displaying patterns that build a theory (Kovach, 2009), which will be referred to as themes and meta-themes.
Furthermore, story maps were constructed based on these themes and metathemes. The story maps will then be shared with the participants for revision and further comment. Table 1 demonstrates the presentation of each participant story map.

Table 1

*Example outline of story map*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story map (P.000)</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Experiences of Racial Oppression</th>
<th>Experiences Sexuality/gender based Oppression</th>
<th>Components of Success in the Workplace</th>
<th>Ideas for Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past Experiences</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Experiences</td>
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<td>Future Intentions</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These themes are what contribute to the overall goals of this research as the across participant stories relate to the research questions and give a greater picture of the reality and needs of these participants. A constant comparison analysis was used to derive the overall meta-themes from the individual interviews. The constant comparison analysis framework was developed as a framework for qualitative data analysis by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Three main stages compose the entire analysis process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The first stage is open coding, which involved data chunking into smaller...
units. The researcher gave a code to each individual chunk of the narrative of each individual interview. The second stage involved axial coding where the individual codes were categorized into a theme. Overarching categories between each individual participant’s narratives were derived from the individual themes from each participant. The last stage (selective coding) involved identifying meta-themes which were then categorized into smaller themes within each of the overarching categories. Table 2 demonstrates the coding process of one of the interviews.

Table 2

Example of initial analysis using constant comparison model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer: Wow, ok and from those experiences, what would you say your key needs were at the time.</td>
<td>Key needs were money to sustain living</td>
<td>Key needs</td>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant: My key needs in the beginning were just money, obviously, more recently, especially with the work that my father does it’s more for finding what I want and what I need. Because my dad works with spiritual healing and finding yourself again, a lot of people that come in, I see a lot of similarities with their issues and my issues, so I’m able to break that down as to why I have those issues compared to why they have those issues and work on myself as well. Help others by helping myself, I guess.</td>
<td>Key needs grew into being able to find Identity</td>
<td>Developing Identity at work</td>
<td>Basic needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeing other people’s issues at work help relate to others and understand</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustained living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Below is the overall summary of the constant comparison model including the within participants data analysis.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Analysis Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Verbatim interview transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Chunking transcript into thematic statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Assigning descriptive code to each statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Create story map for each individual narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Identify core themes within each participant’s story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Identify meta-themes within each participant’s story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dissemination

Dissemination and transfer of knowledge are principle goals, which have been highlighted and factored into the larger research project developed by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, “Breaking Bad: Challenging Aboriginal Employment Policy using Aboriginal Knowledges.” This targets three main audience groups for disseminating results. The dissemination to the academic community (i.e. colleagues and graduate students) will be accomplished via peer-reviewed publications in various academic journals, and scholarly presentations at conferences locally and internationally. Another imperative audience group is counselling professionals, policy makers, and
educators, who require in-service workshops, professional publications, hands-on resources, implementation manuals, executive summaries, policy briefs, and curriculum packages.

The third critical audience is the Indigenous community including, youth, parents, teachers, Elders, administrators, employers, service workers, community agencies, and support staff. The work will be disseminated to this group through newsletters, posters, brochures, and community workshops, as well as social media initiatives, such as media-based software applications (apps). With support and input from community partners and RA’s, results from this project will guide the development and implementation of practical tools and strategies adapted for local contexts.
Chapter Four

Within-participant Results

This section provides the within participant results including a summary of each interview and the key themes and meta-themes that emerged during the interviews. Displayed are individual story maps with a corresponding discussion of how they are related to the overarching research question: what are the intersections of cultural identity, LGBTQ identity, and work-life experiences for Two-Spirit youth as they relate to employment outcomes?

The summaries consist of a character sketch for each participant, these include aspects of their stories and their overall experience shared in the interview. The core message is presented as the predominant theme in meaning-making of the narrative for each participant. Also included are other dominant ideas found within the data of the participant’s narrative. The summaries are presented in the order in which the participants were interviewed.

Participant 1881

Character sketch. Participant 1881 was a full-time university employee at the time of our interview. He was a male in his mid-thirties. Participant 1881 had varied employment experience in different sectors. He appeared to be relaxed and expressed appreciation about sharing his experiences. During our interview Participant 1881 shared how traditions and cultures have always been important and prominent in his life, and that his Indigenous identity preceded his Two-Spirit identity. He also shared how Indigenous culture has been either absent or trivial in his past work experience. Participant 1881 answered all of the question while using
humour throughout the interview. The story map below illustrates the core concepts and themes that emerged.

Table 4

*The World of Participant 1881 from Individual Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The World of: P.1881</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Experiences of Racial Oppression</th>
<th>Experiences of Sexuality/gender based Oppression</th>
<th>Components of Success in the Workplace</th>
<th>Ideas for Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Experience</strong>s</td>
<td>Was not able to build his identity or find his place in the workplace</td>
<td>Marginalization of Indigenous Youth</td>
<td>Learned the importance of a safe space from working with people who have experience with social exclusion and racism</td>
<td>There was an advocate in the workplace that was helpful in building his confidence</td>
<td>Safe spaces are important due to social exclusion and racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocates in the workplace help build identity</td>
<td>Racism and stereotyping of Indigenous Youth</td>
<td>Had an uncomfortable conversation about his Two-Spirit identity and sexuality with his coworkers due to an ignorant comment</td>
<td>He was doing work that really mattered to him and that is what motivated all the work</td>
<td>Knowing that one can just feel without using words aiding in two-spirit identity development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous Identity developed before his Two-Spirit Identity</td>
<td>Ostracizing and isolating Indigenous Youth</td>
<td></td>
<td>He was doing work within the community and that is what motivated all the work</td>
<td>Community and modeling aiding in two-spirit identity development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He had female role models who helped him understand gender more which aided in developing his</td>
<td>non-Indigenous parents not wanting their children to play with Indigenous children for fear of being more at risk</td>
<td></td>
<td>He was doing work within the community and that is what motivated all the work</td>
<td>Openly Speaking to coworkers about identity and sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings of anger related to unfair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
two-spirit identity

queer peers friends were aided in developing his two-spirit identity

Strong female role models who had traditional roles but also asserted space where they were not welcome aided in developing his two-spirit identity

His mother was a strong role model who aided in developing his two-spirit identity

Mother aided in developing his two-spirit identity by modelling that she could be wrong and to be open-minded to people’s perspectives

stereotypes and false representations of Indigenous Youth

Feelings of stress and inadequacy about not having the skills or tools to deal with racism in the workplace

Feelings of some hopelessness related to dealing with racism in the workplace but also feeling a need to step up

Did not have Indigenous culture in the workplace

At work he was only seen as gay and his Two-Spirit Identity was invisible
| **Present Experience**s | 
| --- | --- |
| Two-Spirit people hide their experiences and identity for fear of being shamed. | Two-Spirit people hide their experiences and identity for fear of being shamed. |
| Employers cannot relate to Two-Spirit youth, thus making the environment not nourishing. | Employers cannot relate to Two-Spirit youth, thus making the environment not nourishing. |
| The work environment is structured for non Two-Spirit people. | The work environment is structured for non Two-Spirit people. |
| **Community** and learning by example of people being open minded aided in developing his two-spirit identity. | **Community** and learning by example of people being open minded aided in developing his two-spirit identity. |
| Two-Spirit identity being invisible in the workplace. | Two-Spirit identity being invisible in the workplace. |
| The LGBTQ community is white dominated and there is racism towards Two-Spirit people. | There is homophobia from the Indigenous community. |
| White queer people have the power to narrate what it means to be queer and there is potential for a two-spirit person’s voice to be co-opted so it’s important to clarify who you are in the community. | Two-Spirit people experience threats against their bodies because they look different than white people. |
| While working with Indigenous leaders, he hides his sexuality. | While working with Indigenous leaders, he hides his sexuality. |
| Sexuality is a sensitive issue with Indigenous men partly due to sexual violence. | Sexuality is a sensitive issue with Indigenous men partly due to sexual violence. |
| Caring about the job makes it better and more motivating. | Caring about the job makes it better and more motivating. |
| His intersecting identities aided because they recognized that his voice needed to be heard. | His intersecting identities aided because they recognized that his voice needed to be heard. |
| It’s good to display Indigenous art on the walls, but there needs to be more of an understanding of the significance and history of the culture. | It’s good to display Indigenous art on the walls, but there needs to be more of an understanding of the significance and history of the culture. |
| Caring about the employment is motivating. | Caring about the employment is motivating. |
| Non-Indigenous people can also be helpful advocates. | Non-Indigenous people can also be helpful advocates. |
| Working within the community is motivating. | Working within the community is motivating. |
| Female role models aiding in two-spirit identity development. | Female role models aiding in two-spirit identity development. |
| Queer peers aiding in two-spirit identity development. | Queer peers aiding in two-spirit identity development. |
| Creating a social network outside of work to deal with oppression at work. | Creating a social network outside of work to deal with oppression at work. |
because they look different than white people

Microaggressions hurt but the more blatant racism is more unsettling

Non-Indigenous people treat him differently at work when they find out that he is not straight

Burnout and detachment from the job is the result of too many demands on one Two-Spirit worker

Burnout due to placing the responsibilities on only one Indigenous person in the company: Indigenous Hire

So much gets put on their shoulders that they want to say no but they feel a pressure to do it so that

Oppressing them in the past

toxic masculinity within the Indigenous culture has made it difficult to discuss sexuality

HIV has impacted the community adding to the fear

Non-Indigenous people treat him differently at work when they find out that he is not straight

There is particular homophobia towards femqueer people, butch lesbians and two-spirit people

His intersecting identities hindered success in the workplace because they

Being joyful and restful outside of work to deal with oppression at work

Learning about LGBTQ culture to deal with oppression at work

Learning about Indigenous and Two-Spirit culture for empowerment to deal with oppression at work

Get their material needs met so that they can live meaningful lives

Make the work environment a safe and inclusive space culturally informed and nourishing free mental health coverage

Ombudsmen in workplaces to protect and advocate for the needs of Two-Spirit youth
| Future Intentions | Advocates and guides for Two-Spirit youth are necessary in Reformulate some of the Indigenous programming needing to hide identities in order to advance in the workplace Two-Spirit and Indigenous employees is a good sign of | they get represented pigeonholed him and he was only allowed to talk of things related to his identities needing to hide identities in order to advance in the workplace | safe spaces that support and are knowledgeable about Indigenous and queer culture Need to keep a cautious eye on backwards movements, such as anti-abortion, HIV issues, adoption rights Employees need to educate themselves on Two-Spirit culture Employers and employees should use the privilege of their position to create space and justice for Two-Spirit youth and to share and redistribute power, creating material space, sharing resources, decentralizing their particular power Invest in Two-Spirit youth by giving them all free education |
order to navigate workplaces that are not Two-Spirit friendly

Workplaces can adopt policies around equity and representation, work hard on supporting and developing their staff, educate about pronouns and nations, cultural training when faced with lateral violence, have deep relationships with communities and allow youth to lead

Hire more Indigenous employees
Add good queer and Indigenous Education to the curriculum
Deal with oppression by adopting the philosophy that it is ok to fail, and not to put too much pressure on himself

Core message and themes. The core message in Participant 1881’s narrative is to be accepting and understanding of who you are and where you come from. He recognized that a strong sense of identity promotes self-worth, thus leading to a sense of agency and action. He also spoke of the importance of having role models in your family and community, as they are an integral part of identity development. Participant 1881 further postulated that reflecting on and owning one’s identity can be a way to observe and dissect the aspects of social exclusion, systemic racism, and acculturative stress. He also shared that identity was highly embedded in many
aspects of his life, including employment. The other themes that were noted are racism and oppression, self-care, and inclusive employment.

**Identity.** The foundation that encompassed Participant 1881’s narrative was about discovering and honouring one’s identity. He shared that his family and community were integral to his identity development, stating:

I think that my identity as an Indigenous person preceded my identity as a queer or Two Spirit person and I would say that my identity as an Indigenous person is deeply intermingled with strong women in my life who weren’t always in the role of mentor or teacher but just people who I learned from who I think intellectually expanded my understanding of what gender and sexuality meant. So specifically, I think early, before I even had an inclination that I was a queer person, my life was actually surrounded by queer people and I didn’t even know that, like many of my friends, and none of us saw that in each other but I like to think that we were providing something for each other without knowing, which is community, which means nothing and everything at the same time, we were safe and creative for one another, allowing us to test out different versions of ourselves when we grew up. I think that there were some really strong women in my life who, the worlds in which their careers were foraged were really traditional and would have carried very traditional gender roles, in a western, Christian, Cis version of life. And these women were strong leaders who dance this interesting liminal between walking that out and also asserting space, taking
up space in places where they haven’t always been welcomed and working in roles that were much more leading.

He spoke of the importance of learning about the history of Indigenous and Two-Spirit and LGBTQ communities, sharing:

I had this season where three friends of mine, all Two-Spirit queer people, one was a Korean lesbian, we started watching queer films, because none of us had watched queer films, and we wanted to learn about queer histories but from different perspectives and we started out with the canon of queer films that we found really weird and its own world, then we got more understanding in learning about Two-Spirit and people of colour queer folks film, and started learning a really interesting history about the HIV and Aids epidemic from the perspective of Indigenous and black women, learning about how post, like queer identity in places like Korea or China or Thailand and it was a really, it started off as a fun social thing, but I think it radically transformed how we thought about ourselves and the access point for us was something creative and something where we could see ourselves in these stories and take some pride in the unique ways that Indigenous, black, Korean, queer expressions were unique and contributing something to the queer movements in general but had something unique to say, that was nourishing to me.
Participant 1881 also spoke of how he advocates for himself when there is injustice or misunderstanding about his identity, even when he felt uneasy. For example, he shared:

I think, well I think this is more specific to being Two-Spirit. Once I was referenced by my college as their “gay work husband” and I heard it and I thought “no I’m not” but it was a very white, upper-middle class person talking about my sexuality in a way that made sense to her, but actually I felt really exposed in a way but not because I was uncomfortable with being identified as queer, but was uncomfortable because I was identified as gay and what being Two-Spirit to me was being made so invisible in the way I was constructed in that space. So it’s a minor form of types of oppression that you can experience in the workplace, which required me to have an uncomfortable conversation around my sexuality in the context of working, so that I could make clear that that’s not who I was but that’s also not a problem to be that but what you’re not seeing is the particular meaning of what it means to be queer in the spaces that have formed me, and the roles that that carries in our communities and so on and so on.

**Racism and oppression.** As a Queer Indigenous person, Participant 1881 went on to speak of how an Indigenous or Two-Spirit identity has been met with much hostility and oppression. Two-Spirit youth are working on honouring their identities yet they are being made to feel less than by an oppressive system and a racist society. He shared that being in a multiply-marginalized community makes it difficult to find a safe space by saying “So I would say that in my experience, racism
and this Two-Spirit phobia thing, like homophobia, queerphobic worlds of people I’ve seen in both communities.” This can be painful to witness and process, he expressed moments in his life where he felt impacted by this:

I have definitely experienced institutional forms of racism, those kinds of things happen all the time, and you kind of learn to like, some of them impact you deeply, microaggressions hurt, but it’s the big stuff that is really unsettling, and I find for myself, actually, much more impacted by moments when I observe aggression directed at people who I perceive to be more socially vulnerable than myself in these spaces, so I think that some things I’ve become more sensitized to are explicit forms of colour based racism, like when I see people treat someone a different way because of colour of skin, I really react to it. I think when people lump everything into being Indigenous or being gay, those are two grand categories to collapse everything else into.

Participant 1881 shared that oppression also exists within communities that he is a part of, and that there is a lot of work to do regarding the minimization of racism. He spoke of the difficulties of having intersecting identities while in an oppressive society, stating:

I think that one of the challenges that I faced when I started dating men, that is the point when I felt very clearly that sexual identity and the community that I then had to become a part of was a white queer community. That was the community that got the power to narrate what it meant to be queer, and I
think I felt immediately aware and concerned about, I think because of how I present, that’s a community that I think will always try to co-opt my perspective or my voice. And those are environments where it’s very important for me to clarify who, actually I think, it hurts me to say but, like where do I know from, that was a place where I had to speak from where my knowledge comes from, which isn’t from that community alone and then I think, within the queer community, there is just a lot of garbage around racism, like the ways that two-Spirit people experience real threats against their body which is entirely about how their bodies are marked differently than the bodies of white people.

**Self-care.** Participant 1881 also noted the importance of taking care of oneself in the face of oppression as the racist post-colonial culture can lead to burnout, homelessness, and suicide in Indigenous communities. He shared:

Well, I think you have to create a much bigger world outside of your work world, and that world has to be compassionate, it has to be nourishing your joy, and that can hold your pain. I have a very privileged life now, and in some ways my life feels so different than the suffering of some of the people I’ve worked with, but I am only where I am today because of the communities that have loved me with a fierceness that I can never describe. So I would say that for me, how have I been sustained, it’s people. I also think something that I’ve really cherished in my life is having people who can inspire joy and rest, so I’ve had to really learn how to stop working, and I
think It’s something that I’ve seen in many youth that I’ve worked with, it’s this endless sense of burden that they hold everything. And I think everything will crush us.

He further elucidated the importance of self-care by stating:

And I also think, having a philosophy of “fucking up” is an integral part of surviving and growing is making a mess sometimes, getting into uncomfortably tricky situations, and feeling out of control sometimes, not having it all together, making decisions that you regret, working through that regret, coming to terms with your life as it is. To me that is as important to our life as all the good, warm, fuzzy feelings, expressions of survival, sometimes survival is about fucking up and realizing you were still kicking the next day.

**Inclusive employment.** Participant 1881 spoke extensively on ways to improve the working environment for Two-Spirit youth. He shared his thoughts on how most work environments are not structured for Two-Spirit youth and that non-Indigenous workers have made it difficult for Two-Spirit youth by stating:

I think they have challenged by simply operating with the privilege of being straight and white. To me, I think it’s about the environment not being structured for us, it’s for someone else. And even if they understood it, the environment would still be that way. So that’s not exactly someone’s personal fault but these people are participating and benefitting from that.
He went on to share his informed ideas on how to make the workplace more inclusive for Two-Spirit youth. He shared that the burden of education is often on the shoulders of Two-Spirit people, stating:

And then there is the more interpersonally, people need to educate themselves, it’s not just about creating space for me to talk about my sex life… people need to go educate themselves about what Two-Spirit means, and the difference between queer and gay, and the presence of bi or asexual people in the world and in the communities, people need to do that work for themselves and that shouldn’t always have to fall on Indigenous or queer people to do, at the same point, it can’t also be co-opted work either. Connect with people, ask in ways, be unafraid of being wrong.

He also expressed his ideas on how oppression can be reduced at a more systemic level, he shared:

I think the ways that institutions and employers can support the well-being of two spirit people is by committing themselves to use the privilege of their position to create space and justice for communities that have suffered under their privilege and power. So that means creating material space and resources, it means sharing power, redistributing power in organizations, decentralizing their particular power. I also think it means that employers have to actually participate socially, so you can’t just have industries that are interested in themselves, they have to be committed to that social good, and
that includes the good of Indigenous queer youth and people, that means that we have to expect much more of the private and public sector.

Table 5

*Participant 1881 Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Message</th>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Racism and oppression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant 1894**

**Character Sketch.** Participant 1894 was a male in his late teens, who was employed full time with his father at the time of our interview. He shared that he is “half Japanese and half Native”, stating that although he is also Japanese, the Indigenous culture had been a major part of his life. He has had multiple jobs and thus had much to share about his employment experience. He expressed throughout the interview that it was hard to integrate his identity into the workplace and so he eventually conceded. Participant 1894 appeared to be relaxed and expressed eagerness regarding sharing his experiences. During our interview participant 1894 answered all of the questions. The story map below illustrates the core concepts and themes that emerged.

Table 6

*The World of Participant 1894 from Individual Interview*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Experiences of Racial Oppression</th>
<th>Experiences of Sexuality/gender based Oppression</th>
<th>Components of Success in the Workplace</th>
<th>Ideas for Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Experiences</strong></td>
<td>Difficulties finding permanent employment</td>
<td>He had to hide his Indigenous culture/identity due to outright racism in the workplace</td>
<td>Key needs were money to sustain living Seeing other people’s issues at work help him relate to others and understand himself better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Experiences</strong></td>
<td>Key needs grew into being able to find Identity Keeps cultural identity and workplace identity separate Able to integrate cultural and workplace identity when working with family and friends his intersectional identities don’t define him, he is</td>
<td>Some employment rules are incongruent with Indigenous values Compromising cultural identity (cut hair) due to employment rules There were exceptions for certain cultures, they didn’t have to cut their hair - Sikh - but nothing for Indigenous Peoples</td>
<td>Some people who were non-binary had to compromise their comfort and identity and “fit” into the male or female stereotype by cutting their hair and wearing gendered uniforms He worked from a place of understanding in order to deal with the racism</td>
<td>Engendering open dialogue with other Indigenous peoples at work Even though it is easy to get mad, do not act aggressively Inform people that what they are saying can be hurtful Allies and Two-Spirit youth should be more unified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future Intentions

| multiple things at once | Hopes that society will shift to be more inclusive and understanding and accepting and not prejudice against Two-Spirit youth | Hopes for society to be less prejudice against Two-Spirit youth | The future is bright for Two-Spirit youth
| | Hope that education will help eradicate racism | | A need for cultural inclusion and exceptions to certain regulations (hair)
| | | | A need for identity inclusion and exceptions to certain regulations (non-binary)

Core message and themes. Acceptance and understanding was the core message in the narrative for Participant 1894. The overall message includes acceptance of a racist society in order to move forward, and understanding others as being powerful and healing. The additional themes that were noted in this interview were racism in the workplace, and connection with culture.

Acceptance and understanding. The main message that encompassed participant 1894’s narrative was having a level of acceptance and understanding in order to heal pain and face a racist and homophobic society. For instance, he stated:

One of the biggest thing that I’ve found is, you still, I go out of my way, I don’t go out of my way, I just accept people for who they are, it doesn’t
mean I think what they are doing is right, it just means I accept what they do and I take them for who they are.

He also noted that there is much oppression toward Indigenous communities, particularly towards Two-Spirit people, and one way he deals with that is to accept people for who they are and speak calmly to them. On this note he shared:

With me, especially currently in our culture, it’s very easy to get mad and react aggressively at someone for something that they say. And I’ve found, because I’ve done that, it doesn’t really help the situation, it only creates further problems, because it gives an excuse to a real life example that they can now base their ignorance on, because ignorance only comes from fear. So, I have changed my approach and this is with everything… So there is a lot of people in my life who are non-binary, and so when people make comments about “there’s only two genders” and basic biology, whatever it is, it’s not my place to get mad at them, because it’s not my thing, however I will do my best to tell them that those opinions can hurt people as most opinions can hurt people, and no matter how you look at it, getting upset because something that happened is offensive, to me, is never the answer, just because it never deals with the problem, it curbs away from actually facing the problem.

Racism in the workplace. Participant 1894 identified many experience of racism and oppression in his experiences of being an employee in various companies and establishments. For example, he shared that he had to hide his identity due to racist comments that his boss made, stating:
Working at the martial arts place, very old-timey fashion master there, I think he’s in his 70’s now, a lot of racism there, a lot. I kept the fact that I was Native under the wraps for quite a few years because i had seen him say some questionable things about African Americans, Chinese people, so like, you know, with that in mind I just thought it might be best to keep it aside.

Participant 1894 also shared other experiences of having to change his appearance in order to abide by certain regulations. He noted that these changes in appearance were connected to his cultural and sexual identity, stating:

But with the first job I life-guarded at _____, I was actually forced to cut my hair as part of their protocol, so one of the things they do there of you are an employee, if you are male, “male” you have to cut your hair a certain length, cannot be a certain colour, cannot be this and that, pretty much I had hair down to my shoulder and I was forced to buzz it all off. At the time it wasn’t big for me, but hair is important to me now so I haven’t cut in over a year and a half. But at the time I was like “Oh I have to cut my hair, it’s in the contract” and my dad said “but you’re Native” and I said “well it doesn’t list that, it only lists people who wear Turbans” but there was nothing specifically for Native people within their work.

**Connection with culture.** Involvement in the Indigenous community and working with his family was identified as being a strong source of strength in participant 1894’s identity. Furthermore, he identified that this engagement with the Indigenous culture was as an important factor in his overall wellness. For example, he shared:
More recently, especially with the work that my father does it’s more for finding what I want and what I need. Because my dad works with spiritual healing and finding yourself again, a lot of people that come in, I see a lot of similarities with their issues and my issues, so I’m able to break that down as to why I have those issues compared to why they have those issues and work on myself as well. Help others by helping myself, I guess.

Table 7

*Participant 1894 Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Message</th>
<th>Acceptance and understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Racism in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connection with Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participant 1908*

**Character Sketch.** Participant 1908 was a man in his early 30’s who was a full-time student at the time of our interview. He has been employed with Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations and was open to sharing his experiences.

He expressed throughout the interview that it is hard for Two-Spirit people to stay employed as the jobs are not accommodating and positions are limited and are mainly tokenizing Two-Spirit youth. During our interview Participant 1908 appeared to be relaxed and utilized humour while sharing his experiences. Participant 1908 answered all of the questions. The story map below illustrates the core concepts and themes that emerged.

Table 8
### The World of Participant 1908 from Individual Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The World of: P.1908</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oppression</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexuality/gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>based</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Oppression</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Components</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>of Success in</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>the Workplace</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas for</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progress</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Past Experience
- Two-Spirit people’s privacy is being invaded when they are asked to explain their identities
- Too much pressure on one person to do a multiple person job leading to burnout

#### Present Experience
- Need a sense of identity and autonomy
- Spirituality is missing from the workplace
- Feeling tokenized
- Two-Spirit people are being fetishized
- Two-Spirit youth are being hired to Indigenize spaces, which is a hard job for one person to do, it’s also being done ad-hoc rather than from the ground up, and this is taxing and frustrating
- Traditional knowledge and ceremony excluding genderqueer people
- Elders are still insisting the Two-Spirit women wear skirts in ceremony, highly gendered story-telling that does not include trans, Two-Spirit, gender queer people
- Two-Spirit youth experience blatant youth are speaking out when something is not right and are no easily swayed

#### Ideas for Progress
- Employers should be open to listen deeply
- There is a reciprocity between Elders and Two-Spirit youth, Elders teaching Two-Spirit youth and vise versa
- Empower youth to have more power and leadership roles in the workplace
- Cultural and gender competency training so that there is systemic support
- Cultural flexibility, ex. allowing people
Homophobia and transphobia Two-Spirit people are not feeling centered in the Indigenous community

Create a warm environment where there is humanity, saying how are you

**Future Intentions**

| the workplace should engender an environment that encourages growth of pride, identity, and a sense of belonging | no oppression, no difficult conversations, no constant microaggressions | Traditional knowledge has to be focussed on the experience of Two-Spirit youth
Have Two-Spirit Elders or Elders that are competent in Two-Spirit issues available

Traditional knowledge and ceremony should adapt to current changes and be more inclusive of Two-Spirit people | Hopes that Two-Spirit youth will get hired more often and not just because they are tokenized
Moving beyond positions that are only for Indigenizing spaces

Walking into the job and relaxing, without needing to answer cultural or identity culture | Grants to create inclusive programs and to educate the public
Basic competency of employees in the workplaces |

**Core message and themes.** The core message in Participant 1908’s narrative is that there needs to be major changes to employment and services for Two-Spirit youth. He expressed that we can start with educating employees and employers about Indigenous and Two-Spirit cultures so that there is a satisfactory level of
cultural competence in the workplace. He also spoke of the importance of engendering an environment in the workplace that encourages growth and pride, as work can be a part of identity development. The other themes that were noted are racism and oppression, inclusive traditional knowledge, and tokenization.

**Cultural competence.** Participant 1908 recognized that in order for Two-Spirit youth to feel safe and empowered is by being able to walk into work without facing microaggressions. He expressed that a way to do this is by offering mandatory competency training, he stated:

Some training around indigenous identities and two-spirit identities in particular, in organizations so that people are not constantly receiving microaggressions… Human resources should be soliciting cultural competency and gender competency training to come into organizations so that whoever the lone person that they hired has some support systemically and is not being asked to shoulder all of this.

Participant 1908 expressed that there needs to be supports put in place so that Two-Spirit youth can work in establishments without the real risk of burnout. He also shared that the solution can be simple even if the problem is a bit convoluted or complicated by stating:

When there are not supports that are appropriate in any way, when people are not competent to speak about something in an empathic way, and you have to have a couple of competencies to really be empathic with two-spirit people, many native organizations, most are not competent, there’s a very small amount of competency where people feel like different issues are known, so
vulnerability, whether it’s in services or employment, what I see as needing to be implemented, well there needs to be training around indigenous and gender identity and the intersections of those, so that the stigma comes out, it comes out in many ways, not just overt, that’s the least of it, it can be jokes, or fetishization, it can be just that there is no modelling of your identity anywhere in the organization, being the odd person out in any organization is tiring. So this is what I see, two-spirit youth can get just completely exhausted by the amount of struggle, so having any place where they don’t have to struggle, where they have supports, so supports are just people who treat them as not an anomaly, not unusual or interesting, or special.

**Racism and oppression.** As with all of the participants in this study, Participant 1908 shared his ideas and experiences with oppression. He offered ideas on how to start ameliorating the issues. He also expressed that Two-Spirit people are facing oppression and racism in multiple areas of life by sharing:

They’re exhausted by the amount of stigma, by the lack of being able to be in any normative structure at all, and by normative structure I mean, you know, you go into an organization and you can let your guard down and you’re not going to be questioned, they’re not going to have to face, in employment I suppose that would be policies and supports, but in mental health they’re not going to face colonial practices that are inappropriate, they’re not going to face discrimination from elders in terms of gender, they’re not going to face this sense of othering that is immortalizing, so it really comes down to hiring more two-spirit people and bringing in supports so that there’s human
resources training so that people have some sense of what their rights are and who to go to and some support if they are experiencing discrimination.

Participant 1908 also communicated that some identities are more discriminated against than others due to being a part of multiple marginalized groups. He spoke on marginalized identities regarding employment by stating:

It’s always genderqueer female identified people, are struggling with massive stigma. That’s the most targeted identity. Then if you add a multiple oppressed identity then, racialized transwomen are in dispositions around employment.

Participant 1908 shared that within LGBTQ culture there is a form of oppression that is subtly harmful to Two-Spirit people. He spoke of how fetishization can be dismissive of one’s true narrative and it can close communication between people when one is being fetishized. On fetishization he said:

It’s a fetishization, so non-Indigenous folks want to call themselves Two-Spirit, that’s what I’m seeing, and I’ve seen people become very angry about that, so I think there’s actually a desire to, particularly in the trans and queer community, for identity, that there is a tendency to take other peoples’. Not always, I mean 2 people out of a room of 30 might do it, but that trend does happen on repeat. So there’s a fetishization, so it’s like “oh I think everything is so cool and pristine and lovely in the Indigenous community”, so there is also this idealization of two-spirit people.
Inclusive traditional knowledge. Participant 1908 shared that due to colonization, Two-Spirit youth have been left out of current Indigenous teachings and practices and thus “Two-Spirit youth and adults are not feeling centered in Indigenous community even though there is a language about it”. He went on to speak of the importance of being involved in Traditional Knowledge and how this is currently changing for the better by stating:

Some of the things that are really important are that Traditional Knowledge has to be focussed on the experience of Two-Spirit people, so that means that, and this came up recently in some of my work, for many Two-Spirit people it really is important to have Elders that are also Two-Spirit, and if not Two-Spirit then really competent with Two-Spirit issues, and that is something that they are teaching Elders these days, they are teaching them how to work with gender better, how to work with pronouns better, and so there seems to be a reciprocity between Two-Spirit elders and Two-Spirit youth around learning different ways of addressing youth as identities change. So there’s two things, there are Two-Spirit teachings that are coming from the Elders and those are place based and historical, and then there also seems to be, with all the Two-Spirit Elders that I have spoken to, there’s a reciprocity, where the youth are also teaching the Elders and there seems to be a welcoming of the teachings of the modern version of gender that is happening between them.
Tokenization. Participant 1908 stated that the tokenization of Two-Spirit youth is happening in multiple veins, including employment and society as a whole. On tokenization of Two-Spirit people by society, he shared:

So there was a strawberry ceremony in Toronto that centred trans and two-spirit people that I was at yesterday and while there was a lot of gratitude and I think, you know, some of the comments some of the people were making, was it was the first time Two-Spirit people were in the news around missing and murdered Indigenous women, it does still seem to see that Two-Spirit is still feeling like a bit of a tokenized identity still.

When Participant 1908 was asked about his hopes for Two-Spirit youth and employment, he shared that he hopes that Two-Spirit people are employed for more than just their identities, as being an Indigenous hire can be exhausting and has led to burnout. On this note he stated:

I hope that it moves beyond tokenization because there’s a lot of employment that’s going on, people forward me things a lot that’s for Indigenous or specifically Two-Spirit people, and so this happens with every identity that is quite other, but it’s happening now where there are a lot of jobs for Two-Spirit youth right now that I know of that are being asked to Indigenize things that are not Indigenous to begin with, and you know, people are frustrated with trying to make a system Indigenous ad-hoc instead of it growing out of actual consultation and community, and so there are all sorts of jobs that are popping up for Two-Spirit people that are tokenizing, and so
hopefully, I don’t know, some people that I speak to are finding it very frustrating, at least there are some jobs, but there’s a discrepancy there between non-Indigenous organizations offering these jobs and then expecting one Indigenous or Two-Spirit person to reshape an organization or to take an already built structure and just shift it in a minor way to make it more Indigenous.

Table 9

*Participant 1908 Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Message</th>
<th>Cultural competence</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Racism and oppression</td>
<td>Inclusive traditional knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tokenization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant 1913**

**Character Sketch.** Participant 1913 was a man in his early 20’s who was employed full-time with an Indigenous organization at the time of our interview. He has been employed with Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations and was excited to share his experiences. He shared that his Two-Spirit identity is very important to him and that he honours who he is. He also said that he acquired many of his jobs from “connections” such as friends, and family members. He expressed throughout the interview that he needed those connections as it is hard for Two-Spirit youth to acquire employment as many establishments are discriminatory. During our interview Participant 1913 appeared to be excited while sharing his experiences and
expressed his excitement and appreciation for being able to share his thoughts.

Participant 1913 answered all of the interview questions. The story map below illustrates the core concepts and themes that emerged.

Table 10

*The World of Participant 1913 from Individual Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The World of: P.1913</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Experiences of Racial Oppression</th>
<th>Experiences of Sexuality/gender based Oppression</th>
<th>Components of Success in the Workplace</th>
<th>Ideas for Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Experiences</strong></td>
<td>He was treated with a lot of respect growing up, he was called “Princess” because of his Two-Spirit identity</td>
<td>he realized that he couldn’t really change anyone’s mind, so he took it as it came without letting it hurt him</td>
<td>Not receiving interviews when applying without personal connections</td>
<td>Was able to get employment through personal connections</td>
<td>Two-Spirit youth should work with Elders on a regular basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He tries to respectfully talk to people who are racist to get them to understand his position</td>
<td>Had to learn how to be “normal” like cisgender, straight, white people, had to hide his identity and himself in order to secure a job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Experiences</strong></td>
<td>Not receiving interviews when applying without</td>
<td>Two-Spirit people are stereotyped as being prostitutes,</td>
<td>Two-Spirit youth feel good when they are taken seriously and</td>
<td>a workplace that allows them to be themselves without changing their</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal connections</td>
<td>Drug addicts, homeless, stupid, which makes it hard to secure a job</td>
<td>Get hired in good positions</td>
<td>Appearance or identity - Inclusive uniforms</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Spirit people are stereotyped as being prostitutes, drug addicts, homeless, stupid, which makes it hard to secure a job</td>
<td>Two-Spirit people are treated differently in different communities, they are more or less respected depending on the community</td>
<td>He Feels more comfortable working with Indigenous people</td>
<td>Two-Spirit youth need to be trained for work, and trained in leadership skills</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping Two-Spirit people leads to lack of employment which is leading to suicide and homelessness</td>
<td>They are afraid to be themselves and explore their identity due to ridicule and criticism</td>
<td>Helping people is important for Two-Spirit youth, and that the work makes them feel valuable</td>
<td>More leadership training by Two-Spirit people or competent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Spirit people are treated worse in Toronto compared to other cities/towns</td>
<td>Some elders think being Two-Spirit was due to the sexual assault during colonization</td>
<td>Doesn’t fit in to the LGBTQ community due to his Indigeneity</td>
<td>Safe spaces available 24/7 for people who have to hide who they are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Spirit people are treated poorly in Toronto which has led to street work and drugs</td>
<td>Doesn’t fit in to the LGBTQ community due to his Indigeneity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listen to Two-Spirit youth, give them an opportunity to share their wisdom and ideas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>They feel as though they are the last resort when it comes to employment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
They feel like they have to work a lot harder to get a job than other people.

They are afraid to be themselves and explore their identity due to ridicule and criticism.

Being gay and Indigenous leads to double the discrimination.

Co-workers are mean and discriminate against him.

If it’s a non-Indigenous company, the culture is completely absent, in small towns it’s because of racism.

**Future Intentions**

He fears that there will be more discrimination in the future.

Hopes that Two-Spirit people will be one day treated like they were before colonialism.
Employers should learn about the Indigenous culture and Two-Spirit teachings, it’s not just about being gay - they have gifts according to the culture.

Teach children about Two-Spirit for less discrimination in the future.

Two-Spirit youth should have their own retail stores with unisex clothes and flags.

Interviews with Two-Spirit youth and research like this can help the future.

Core message and themes. The core message in Participant 1913’s narrative is around racism and oppression towards Two-Spirit youth. He expressed that he has faced discrimination from almost every avenue in his life and this has made it difficult to find and sustain employment. He also spoke of the impact that racism and discrimination has on Two-Spirit youth, such as addiction, homelessness, and street
involvement. The other themes that were noted are Traditional Knowledge and progress.

**Racism and oppression.** Participant 1913 expressed that there is oppression from multiple communities, including LGBTQ communities, saying “I don’t fit in with the LGBTQ community” and also from his own, he shared “growing up in my community, everyone was scared to be their own sexuality”. He went on to state:

> We had to learn how to abide around people’s gender roles and stuff, so we had to learn how to be around people because we couldn’t be ourselves, we had to be a fake person around other people.”

He also shared his experiences of being told that Two-Spirit people are an outcome of colonialism. He expressed sad feelings about this, stating:

> We are stereotyped, we are known to be street people, thieves, crazy, I had this one person say “you were molested as a kid, you’re not gay”. The reason we had this two-spirit presentation was for the Elders because they believe that prior to colonization they believe that gay people did not exist, because they said when the religion colonizers came they brought all the illnesses and sicknesses with them and it’s because we were raped in residential schools, I had that thought too, so I thought it’s true, some people did get sexually assaulted at that time, people tell me about this stuff they say “no you’re not gay, this happened to you because someone told you that you got molested, you’re not gay” but when did you have a choice to pick that you’re straight, it’s like, what you wait for a guy to molest a girl then you realize you’re straight? I don’t think so!
Participant 1913 explained that he faces oppression and racism constantly, and that it is very difficult to be successful with continuous discouragement. On this piece, he shared:

Oh my God, dealing with people every day, it’s dangerous for us, people have this idea that we are so safe out here, I get insulted all the time, even from my own community “you’re just gay, a drug user” so I have it in my head that that’s how everyone sees me, but no one want to help me build, they want to bring me down more, and no one recognizes that, they think we’re ok because we have a flag now, we can’t even go on a bus without a bus driver looking at us disgusting, or a group of people looking at us and laughing, look around the world, gay clubs are getting shot at, people are going missing. How are we going to stop it before it happens?

Throughout our interview, Participant 1913 expressed the difficulties he has faced finding employment, sharing, “I had a lot of jobs growing up, but the way I got jobs was through knowing people, not by applying, because I have applied for jobs, I don’t get no call backs.” He stated that he currently works for an Indigenous organization and would not want to go back to working for a non-Indigenous employer due to racism. He said “I would not work for a non-Indigenous organization because look at all the racism people have to go through and like how we’re stereotyped to be savages.”

This constant oppression is detrimental to the mental health and well-being of Two-Spirit youth, as Participant 1913 stated throughout our interview. On this note, he shared:
We have to rebuild that structure with the LGBT community because they are the most stereotyped people, they’re known as whatever, you see them all in the prostitution business, doing all these things that isn’t enabling them to do a job like you’re sitting and doing right now, or what I’m doing right now or what I have been doing, a lot of them are committing suicide, lot of them are homeless because of how the lack of understanding people have of the community because no one wants to hire them because they think that they are still the same stereotyped people that are below average, people see them as below average people.

Traditional knowledge. Participant 1913 was excited to share his Traditional Knowledge about Two-Spirit youth. He also expressed a desire to return to past ideals, stating “let’s have our own connection back with the Creator and the Earth, respecting the Earth, following the laws that were implemented by our ancestors that left it for us.” He shared how Two-Spirit people were once revered, and the reasons they should continue to be by stating:

The word Two-Spirit came from, well it was converted into English from what it actually meant, which was the LGBTQ community which was lesbian guy cuz there was no transition available but back in the day people were actually in leadership roles because they were well recognized by the community because a masculine female would do more work than an actual person, a really feminine guy would actually perform a lot of things that normal girls couldn’t do and wouldn’t feel comfortable around... Two-spirit people are very gifted and smart, they’re known as visioners, seers, but they
Participant 1913 seemed passionate about reverting back to the ways that Two-Spirit people were viewed before colonization. He shared a way in which that may be possible, “Have them working more with Elders, so that they can learn to take care of other people and the community.”

**Progress.** Participant 1913 also seemed excited for the future, as he shared that he has high hopes for the mental health and general position of Two-Spirit youth. He shared many ideas that he had for future change and progress, such as:

I want them to have more leadership skills training, I want a person with a PhD to recognize what they are, where they come from, and train them this way, it has to be someone experienced and identifies as LGBTQ because no one knows us better than our own identities … It would be good for the LGBTQ community to be working more in the school systems, but then again, they’re scared so they don’t want to show their identity, but let’s make
that change… I’d like to see them being able to work with kids who they would want to work with and show the kids that are going to be seeing the next generation, show them that we exist. I’d like to see training opportunities.

He expressed that research such as this project is another way in which to inform progress and retrieve the needs of Two-Spirit youth by saying “I’d like to see people given opportunities like what I have right now, people able to express their thoughts” Additionally, he stated that if they are not able to speak openly about their situation, those people should be able to be safe as well. On this piece he stated:

People are scared for their kids to grow up gay so they make them hide it, you have all these people committing suicide, they need safe spaces, if they want to hide it, let them hide it, they should have a safe space for them to not know like, you know, maybe that’s one thing. I would like to see a safe space drop in for anyone that identifies as Two-Spirit, a 24/7 drop in because our type of people need 24/7 support other than 9-5 when people regularly have their own straight idea of how our lives are run.

Table 11

Participant 1913 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Message</th>
<th>Racism and oppression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Traditional Knowledge</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Participant 1925
**Character Sketch.** Participant 1925 was a female in her early 20’s who was unemployed at the time of our interview. Throughout the interview she was soft spoken and seemed somewhat hesitant to share her experiences. She shared that being Two-Spirit has been hard for her as she does not fit in with the LGBTQ community and also does not feel completely welcome in Indigenous communities. She also shared that it has always been difficult for her to find and sustain employment due to racism and oppression. Participant 1925 did not answer all of the interview questions. The story map below illustrates the core concepts and themes that emerged.

**Table 12**

*The World of Participant 1925 from Individual Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The World of: P.1925</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Experiences of Racial Oppression</th>
<th>Experiences of Sexuality/gender based Oppression</th>
<th>Components of Success in the Workplace</th>
<th>Ideas for Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Experiences</strong></td>
<td>Had to hide her Two-Spirit Identity</td>
<td>Had to hide being bisexual from her community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did not have any role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Experiences</strong></td>
<td>Looks to her friends and peers to build identity</td>
<td>Is constantly being called racial slurs</td>
<td>Feels like she does not fit in with the Indigenous communities</td>
<td>When people are kind to her she feels better about working in that environment</td>
<td>Have an open dialogue with co-workers and employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finds it very difficult to acquire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not to be confrontational,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
employment due to her status
Feels like she does not fit in with the LGBTQ community

Future Intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future Intentions</th>
<th>Would like to be able to find employment</th>
<th>Would like Elders and her community to recognize that she is as good as they are</th>
<th>Two-Spirit youth should be working with elders to feel more at peace with who they are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would like to be able to walk down the street without being called a racial slur or without being looked at in a rude manner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Core message and themes.** The core message in Participant 1925’s narrative is around racism and oppression towards Two-Spirit youth. Similar to participant 191, she expressed that she has faced discrimination from every avenue in her life and this has made it difficult to find and sustain employment. The other themes that were noted are Traditional Knowledge and Identity.

**Racism and oppression.** Participant 1925 expressed that he does not feel that she is comfortable in any community, sharing “I don’t fit in with LGB and I don’t fit in with Indigenous peoples because I’m not like them.” She also shared that she feels mistreated in her daily life by society, stating “when I go outside, strangers look at me and call me names because I’m different than them”.

She also spoke of the difficulty she faces trying to find employment. She shared her feelings about discrimination in the workplace and also shared some positive moments, stating:

I can’t get jobs, no one hires me. They look at me and say no, like I want to try but my feelings are hurt when they look at me and say no. My brother is in jail and I want to help him but no one hires me. I had some jobs when I was younger but I left them because people were not nice, and people fired me too. I had some nice times too. I had a girl who was nice to me at a job, I wanted to stay there because she was nice to me but I think I was fired from that one too.

**Traditional Knowledge.** Participant 1925 expressed the importance of having Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous culture in her life. She stated “it feels good when I talk to an Elder” and “I need to smudge to feel better”, indicating the importance this has on her mental health and well-being.

**Identity.** Participant 1925 spoke about coming to terms with who she is but also shared that it has been difficult to develop her identity. She shared that she did not have positive Two-Spirit role models growing up and thus “I have to develop with my friends because I was never taught what Two-Spirit is.”

Table 13

**Participant 1925 Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Message</th>
<th>Racism and oppression</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Traditional Knowledge</th>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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Chapter Five

Across Participant Results

The analysed results from this study were able to identify factors that influence successful employment and barriers to employment. The overarching themes and meta-themes that came from this study were recognized as some of the primary factors present as they relate to the research question. This chapter will discuss each of the across participant factors (i.e. common themes) regarding employment from the perspective of Two-Spirit youth. Careful consideration and commitment was put into relaying the information given by the participants as these narratives belong to the voices of Indigenous youth.

Racism and Oppression. The Two-Spirit identity has been met with much hostility, as such, racism and oppression were significant themes throughout the narratives of all the participants in this study. Participants consistently shared that they have experienced racism in many areas of life, such as work, social situations, and from society in general.

They also consistently shared that the discrimination of their intersecting identities has contributed feeling left out of every group, and that their multiply-marginalized community makes it difficult to have a safe space. For example, Two-Spirit youth have been left out of current Indigenous teachings and practices, they feel that many Indigenous communities are homophobic, they are discriminated against within the LGBTQ community, and they often have to completely hide their identities at work to avoid discrimination. This is consistent with the research cited
in this study; Indigenous employees are offered less opportunities for growth and promotion by employers than their Caucasian counterparts (Linnehan, et al., 2006).

This constant discrimination is detrimental to the mental health and well-being of Two-Spirit youth. Participants spoke of the negative impact oppression had on their lives and also shared how it had affected the people in their lives. Multiple participants explained that discrimination in the workplace has made it difficult to find and sustain employment. Consider, Two-Spirit people shared that they are not hired if they are open with their identity, and conversely, if they are initially open with their identity, they have had to make changes to their physical appearance in order to suit their employers. In addition to unstable employment, participants shared that racism and discrimination has had detrimental impacts on Two-Spirit youth that have led to addiction, homelessness, and street involvement. Two-Spirit youth are working on honouring their identities yet they are being made to feel less than by an oppressive system and a racist society.

**Cultural Involvement.** Involvement in Indigenous culture was identified as being a source of strength according to every participant. Many of the participants shared that they are at their best when they are involved in Traditional practice or with other Indigenous people. They explained that cultural participation helped provide a sense of purpose and was a positive factor related to building good relationships, and increasing self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. The participants also discussed that being taught traditional values from an early age stabilized their sense of self. They noted that these cultural values gave them a sense of pride and strength, which then factored into confidence, agency, and motivation later in life.
Further, they stated that they prefer working with Indigenous organizations and suggested more Indigenous youth led initiatives as they would like to see more involvement with their communities. One participant went as far as to say that he would never go back to working for a non-Indigenous organization. Additionally, they shared that it was favourable when Indigenous culture was accepted in the workplace, but even further, they shared that it was valuable to have Indigenous culture incorporated into non-Indigenous corporations and organizations as it gave them a sense of safety and comfort.

Furthermore, they identified that this engagement with Indigenous culture was an important factor in their overall wellness. This is congruent with much of the research cited in this study. Cultural membership is regarded as being important and highly influential (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Jaret & Reitzes, 1999; Tsai, 2013). However, as mentioned earlier, participants in this study explained that it has been hard for them to completely belong to a specific group, including Indigenous communities, due to discrimination. Research shows that self-fragmentation can be a result of separation from the Indigenous community (Wilson, 2007).

Consequently, the Two-Spirit youth from this sample have shared that they feel as though they are members of a disadvantaged group. Thus, they stated that they have experienced negative mental health outcomes, such as a fractured identities, low self-esteem, discouragement, low motivation, and sometimes hopelessness. This is consistent with research by Tsai (2003) who found that individuals of disadvantaged groups experience low self-esteem and other negative mental health outcomes. Conversely, acceptance into one’s cultural community
serves as a protective factor against mental health issues and dysfunctional behaviours (truancy, poor academic performance, self-harm behaviours, etc.) (Golden et al., 1998; Hulchanski, 1999).

Furthermore, gaining acceptance within one’s cultural community is linked to stable identity (Balsam et al., 2004; Ginicola, 2017). There is great value and significance attached to being a member of a social group, this is an essential aspect of social engagement and is what derives an individual’s self-concept, this is labeled “cultural identity” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Taylor (1997, 2002) proposes a theory arguing the importance of cultural identity clarity. Individuals without a clear collective identity, such as oppressed Two-Spirit people, might find it difficult to develop a clear personal identity, which can lead to poor psychological well-being (Ursborne & Taylor, 2010).

Identity. Many elements can be included in developing and discovering identity, such as race, culture, age, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, occupation, or any other group-based identity. Every participant in this study spoke of the importance of establishing who they are (i.e. their identity) and discussed how they developed their identities. They recognized that a strong sense of identity promotes self-worth, thus leading to a sense of agency and action. Additionally, they spoke of the importance of having role models in their family and community, as those are an integral part of identity development. Further, many of the participants shared that it was through family and friends that they were able to explore multiple aspects about themselves. Interestingly, the participants that were able to be open about their sexual identities with their families shared that
discovering their identities and themselves was an enjoyable process. Similarly, participants who were able to openly discuss and share their cultural identities with their family and friends also said that the exploration process was enjoyable. There were participants, however, that shared experiences of having to hide their identities from family, friends, and certainly co-workers, and explained how painful the process became as they had nowhere and no-one to turn to during this process. Thus, this highlights the importance of the feeling of free expression regarding identity; exploring oneself can be a marvelous experience when supported but it can be distressing if stifled.

Additionally, many of the participants recognized the influence that colonialism had on their identity as well as how they appear to others. On this note, participants shared that they would like to go back to the ideals of the Two-Spirit identity before the influence of colonialism, as they were revered and honoured, and now they are stigmatized.

Stigma, discrimination and racism were also recognized as significant factors that affected the identity of the participants who had participated in this study. For instance, participants shared that there had been times when they started to believe the negative things that people had said. Having a negative view of the self was significantly connected with emotional distress, low self-esteem, and drug and alcohol misuse.

As previously noted, a clear and confident sense of identity was recognized as promoting a sense of self-worth. Research suggests that identity clarity is an important contributor to an individual’s self-esteem and psychological well-being.
(Baumgardner, 1990; Stinson, Wood, & Doxey, 2008). These aspects of identity were also noted as motivators for seeking employment.
Chapter Six

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how the intersection of identities of Two-Spirit youth as well as systemic, cultural, and societal oppression factor into employment experiences for self-identified Two-Spirit youth. This project can be valuable for furthering the understanding of the economic difficulties experienced by many Two-Spirit youth. Various Indigenous communities, including Two-Spirit youth, experience adversities regarding food insecurities, quality of health, limited access to social services, and financial instability due to employment instability (Richmond & Ross, 2009). Predictably, the work of Brown and Fraehlic (2012) identified successful employment as a factor in overcoming poverty on an individual and community level. Nonetheless, the results that emerged from the participants’ narratives demonstrate that Two-Spirit youth continue to face myriad barriers to successful employment.

Consideration of Results

The qualitative nature of this study allowed for the in depth exploration of each of the interview questions and therefore the entire research question. This resulted in a rich and unique narrative from every participant. The participants shared many personal experiences, thoughts, and ideas.

Although each participant narrative was unique, they shared many common ideas and experiences. To that end, the analysed narratives from this study were able to identify common factors or themes shared by the participants that influence successful employment and barriers to successful employment. The overarching
themes and meta-themes that came from this study were recognized as some of the primary factors present as they relate to the research question. This section will discuss results regarding employment from the perspective of Two-Spirit youth.

Careful consideration and commitment has been put into relaying this information given by the participants as these narratives belong to the voices of Indigenous youth.

In addition to unstable employment, and consistent with past research, participants shared that racism and discrimination has had detrimental impacts on Two-Spirit youth that have led to addiction, homelessness, and street involvement. The Two-Spirit identity has historically and currently been met with much hostility, as such, racism and oppression were significant themes throughout the narratives of all the participants in this study. The historical and contemporary effects of racism and oppression have resulted in Indigenous people in Canada to speak up and share their experiences of relocation, systemic abuse, cultural genocide, economic and social neglect, which will be further elucidated in this section. These are some of the factors that have been significant in decomposing their mental health and result in high rates of criminal involvement, poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse, which are factors that are commonly experienced within Two Spirit communities.

As previously mentioned, this constant discrimination is detrimental to the mental health and well-being of Two-Spirit youth. Many participants spoke of the negative impact that oppression had on their lives and they also shared how it had affected the significant people in their lives. Multiple participants explained that discrimination in the workplace has made it difficult to find and sustain employment.
For example, Two-Spirit participants shared that they have had difficulty finding employment if they are open with their identity as they have experienced racist comments made by past employers and are aware that they will not be employed due to their identity, and conversely, if they are initially open with their identity, they have had to make changes to their physical appearance in order to suit their employers and to abide by certain regulations. They noted that these changes in appearance were connected to their cultural and sexual identity. Subsequently, many participants stated that they prefer to work for Indigenous organizations and would not want to work for a non-Indigenous employer due to racism. These shared experiences are consistent with the research cited in a study by Linnehan et al., (2006) who demonstrated that Indigenous employees are offered less opportunities for growth and promotion by employers than their Caucasian counterparts. Two-Spirit youth shared that they are working on honouring their identities yet they are being made to feel less than by an oppressive system and a racist society.

This theme of racism highlighted the experiences of stigma and discrimination that was felt by Two Spirit people and the extended elements of marginalization that they continue to feel. Additionally, ignorance was noted as a major barrier as well as an aspect of oppression that exists within the current Canadian context, especially within employment environments. All the participants discussed experiences of racism in their life as a Two Spirit person. Many members of this multiply marginalized group in the study shared that racism is a core theme which lead to feelings of ostracism. Many aspects of racism were identified through a systemic and professional environments, however, they shared many experiences
that were at a personal and societal level.

Currently, participants shared that they consistently experience racism in many areas of life, such as work, social situations, and from society in general. They also consistently articulated that the discrimination of their intersecting identities has contributed to feeling left out of every group, and that their multiply-marginalized community makes it difficult to have a safe space anywhere. For example, Two-Spirit youth have been left out of current Indigenous teachings and practices, they feel that many Indigenous communities are homophobic and transphobic, they are also discriminated against within the LGBTQ community, and they often have to completely hide their identities at work to avoid discrimination. As Queer Indigenous people, some participants went on to speak of how an Indigenous or Two-Spirit identity has been met with much hostility and oppression. They shared that being in a multiply-marginalized community makes it difficult to find a safe space. The participants expressed that this can be painful to witness and difficult to process, and went on to share many moments in their lives where they felt impacted by this. Participants shared that oppression also exists within communities that they are ostensibly part of, and that yet there is a lot of work to do regarding the minimization of racism within these accepting groups. For example, participants shared that within LGBTQ culture there is a form of oppression that is subtly harmful to Two-Spirit people. They spoke of how fetishization can be dismissive of one’s true narrative and it can close communication between people when one is being fetishized.

Colonization has been linked to numerous detrimental factors negatively
affecting Two Spirit people, including intergenerational abuse, internalized homophobia and racism, and family violence. Colonization continues to be traumatizing to Indigenous peoples through systemic discrimination and neglect, societal racism, racism through government policies, treaties, as well as abuses that are endured in these systems, such as overcrowding and substandard services for Indigenous peoples and Two Spirit people (Statistics Canada, 2008). This was expressed by many of the participants, for example, one participant shared his experience of being told that Two-Spirit people are an outcome of colonialism, that one becomes Two Spirit after being sexually abused, and that the sexual abuse in residential schools is what caused Two Spirit people to be sexually attracted to the same sex. He explained that he faces this intergenerational trauma due to colonialism, and oppression and racism constantly, and that it is very difficult to be successful with continuous discouragement. This constant oppression and discouragement is detrimental to the mental health and well-being of Two-Spirit youth.

Many of the participants offered and spoke extensively on some ways to improve the working environment for Two-Spirit youth. They shared their thoughts on how most work environments are not structured for Two-Spirit youth and that non-Indigenous workers have made it difficult for Two-Spirit youth. They shared that the oppression can be subtle and overt; the subtle oppression is expressed in questions about their sexuality or their culture which makes the environment very uncomfortable. The participants went on to share their informed ideas on how to make the workplace more inclusive for Two-Spirit youth. For example, on an
interpersonal level, co-workers can educate themselves on the histories of Indigenous peoples. Along the same lines, they shared that it could be helpful for employers to offer mandatory educational seminars on the historical significance of colonialism as well as sensitivity training for the employers and employees throughout the corporations. They expressed that the burden of education is often on the shoulders of Two-Spirit people, and this is a solution that may assuage that burden slightly.

Another very poignant theme that was recognized in the participant narratives is identity. Identity was expressed as significant factor in the lives and experiences of Two Spirit youth and it was also recognized to have a strong influence on the process of mental health recovery for the participants. Within the greater theme of identity, there were meta-themes that emerged, such as cultural identity, sexual identity, and wholistic identity. Many elements are often included in developing and discovering identity, such as race, culture, age, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, occupation, or any other group-based identity. Interestingly, these meta-themes were recognized as being quite fluid, and had an affluent connection to psychological external factors associated with trauma, safety, and traditional knowledge. Cultural identity was indicated as the central meta-theme among the others. The three themes that underpin the cultural identity meta-theme are cultural oppression, cultural connection, and traditional values.
More specifically, the participants’ experiences of cultural oppression encompassed much of what was discussed earlier in this section, which stem from colonization, such as incidents connected to systemic oppression, intergenerational trauma, social injustices, and cultural violence. Additionally, many of the participants recognized the influence that colonialism has on their identity as well as how they may appear to others. On this note, they shared that they would like to revert to the ideals of the Two-Spirit identity before the influence of colonialism, as they were revered and honoured, rather than how it is now being stigmatized. Furthermore, stigma, discrimination and racism were also recognized as significant factors affecting the identity of the participants in this study. For example, they shared that at times they have believed some of the negative things that people had said, leading to a negative view of the self which was significantly connected with emotional distress, low self-esteem, and drug and alcohol misuse.

The participants’ experiences of cultural connection referred to involvement in the Indigenous community and working with family, this was identified as being a strong source of strength in the participants’ identity. Furthermore, they identified that this engagement with Indigenous cultures is as an important factor in their overall health and wellbeing. The participants also spoke of the importance of having role models in your family and community, as they are an integral part of identity development. Further, many of the participants shared that it was through family and friends that they were able to explore multiple aspects about themselves. Cultural involvement will be further discussed later in this section.
Ultimately, every participant in this study spoke of the importance of establishing their identity and discussed how they developed their identities, as mentioned above. They recognized that a strong sense of identity promotes self-worth, thus leading to a sense of agency and action. Interestingly, the participants that had the freedom to be open and honest about their sexual identities with their families shared that exploring their identities and themselves was an enjoyable process. Similarly, participants who had the freedom to openly discuss and share their cultural identities with their family and friends also said that the process of discovering their identities was enjoyable. Conversely, some participants shared experiences of having to hide their identities from family, friends, and certainly co-workers, and explained how painful the process became as they felt very isolated during this identity exploration process. Research shows that individuals without a clear collective identity, such as oppressed Two-Spirit people, might find it difficult to develop a clear personal identity, which can lead to poor psychological well-being (Ursborne & Taylor, 2010).

Thus, this highlights the importance of the feeling of free expression regarding identity; exploring oneself can be a marvelous experience when supported but it can be distressing if stifled. There is a body of literature that supports the idea that a clear and confident sense of identity can promote a sense of self-worth and is an important contributor to an individual’s self-esteem and psychological well-being (Baumgardner, 1990; Stinson, Wood, & Doxey, 2008). Interestingly, these aspects of identity were also noted as motivators for seeking employment.
The general foundation that encompassed many of the participants’ narratives was about discovering and honouring one’s identity. They spoke of the importance of learning about the history of Indigenous and Two-Spirit and LGBTQ communities in order to promote self exploration. Some participants shared that they advocate for themselves when there is injustice or misunderstanding about his identity, even when they felt uneasy in the situation. The core message regarding identity seemed to be coming to be accepting and understanding of who you are and where you come from as reflecting on and owning one’s identity can be a way to observe and dissect the aspects of social exclusion, systemic racism, and acculturative stress.

Other main themes that emerged in the participant narratives, and has been discussed throughout this paper, is cultural involvement and traditional knowledge. The results of these interviews provide some rich data regarding the lived experiences of marginalized people - particularly Two-Spirit youth - that have been silenced, their stories help to highlight the importance of cultural connection and the utilization of Indigenous approaches in the field of mental health. Every participant identified involvement in Indigenous culture as being a source of strength according to every participant. Many of the participants expressed a sense of peace, wholeness, and happiness when they are involved in traditional practice or with other Indigenous people. They explained that, in addition to building identity, cultural participation helped provide a sense of purpose and was a positive factor related to building good relationships, and increasing self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. Many of the participants also identified that being taught traditional values from an
early age stabilized their sense of self. Furthermore, they noted that these cultural values gave them a sense of pride and strength, which then factored into confidence, agency, and motivation later in life.

The participants stated that being involved with their culture, being influenced by traditional knowledge, and connecting to Elders has a positive effect on the various aspects of mental health, healing, and support networks. In particular, many of the participants shared that the support of the Elders was a strong source of connection to their Indigenous cultures and was further identified as a significant factor in the healing and recovery process. They expressed that in the past, being able to access to these cultural supports, such as Elders and sweat lodges was as a strong source of support and was a valuable component of the healing process, thus they suggested that it should be more readily available to Indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, they clarified that this involvement and engagement with Indigenous culture is an important factor in their overall health and wellbeing. These sentiments are congruent with much of the research cited in this study; cultural membership is regarded as being important and an important factor in mental health (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Jaret & Reitzes, 1999; Tsai, 2013). However, as the results of this study show, participants explained that it has been difficult to completely belong to a specific group, including Indigenous communities, due to discrimination they face from multiple avenues and communities. Research shows that this can be detrimental to mental health as self-fragmentation can be a result of separation from the Indigenous community (Wilson, 2007). Conversely, acceptance into one’s cultural community serves as a protective factor against mental health issues and
dysfunctional behaviours (truancy, poor academic performance, self-harm
behaviours, etc.) (Golden et al., 1998; Hulchanski, 1999). Furthermore, as previously
discussed, gaining acceptance within one’s cultural community is linked to stable
identity (Balsam et al., 2004; Ginicola, 2017). Potentially, the knowledge
highlighted from this study can help to promote strength-based practices that
incorporate the mental health influences of cultural connection and can inform
implementation of these practices into the theory and practice of psychology as well
as public policy programs.

As mentioned, another main theme that emerged was traditional knowledge,
and a meta-theme that emerged was inclusive traditional knowledge. Many
participants shared that due colonization, Two-Spirit youth have been left out of
current Indigenous teachings and practices and thus Two-Spirit people are not
feeling completely welcomed into the Indigenous community. The participants
suggested that Two-Spirit people should be included in the teachings and practices,
such as acknowledging them in storytelling and opening traditional wear to be more
inclusive. They also shared that there is much communication within some
communities and with Elders about inclusive traditional knowledge, and they stated
that they are hopeful that there will be change in this area.

Furthermore, participants had many suggestions regarding the inclusivity of
employment practices in the form of cultural competence. Many participants stated
that they prefer working with Indigenous organizations and suggested more
Indigenous youth led initiatives as they would like to see more youth based
involvement with their communities as youth are not regularly allowed to have a
strong voice in many communities. One participant went as far as to say that he would never go back to working for a non-Indigenous organization due to the discomfort and discrimination he faced at multiple organizations. Additionally, they shared that it was favourable when Indigenous culture was accepted in the workplace, but even further, they shared that it was valuable to have Indigenous culture incorporated into non-Indigenous corporations and organizations as it gave them a sense of safety and comfort. A core message in the participants’ narrative is that there needs to be major changes to employment and services for Two-Spirit youth. They offered that we can start with educating employees and employers about Indigenous and Two-Spirit cultures so that there is a satisfactory level of cultural competence in the workplace. They also spoke of the importance of engendering an environment in the workplace that encourages growth and pride, as work can be a part of identity development.

Additionally, participants recognized that in order for Two-Spirit youth to feel safe and empowered at work, they need to be able to walk into the workplace without facing microaggressions. It was suggested that a way to accomplish this is by offering mandatory competency training. Participants also expressed that there needs to be supports put in place so that Two-Spirit youth can work in establishments without the real risk of burnout.

Acceptance and understanding was also a core message in the narrative of many of the participants. The overall message identified was an acceptance of a racist society in order to move forward, and an understanding of others as being powerful and healing. They stated that having a level of acceptance and
understanding can be very healing and can help one face a racist and homophobic society. Considering much of the negative experiences shared by the participants, many of them seemed excited for the future. Some stated that they have high hopes for the mental health and general position of Two-Spirit youth. They expressed that research such as this project is a way to inform progress and retrieve the needs of Two-Spirit by giving them opportunities to express their thoughts.

**Implications for practice**

The findings and ideas provided by this study can help contribute to the field of Indigenous career counselling by offering suggestions around cultural competence and modifications to include Indigenous worldviews and pedagogy. As such, educating career counsellors on the history of Indigenous and Two-Spirit youth unemployment rates would be beneficial. For example, career counsellors should be educated on the struggle that Two-Spirit face regarding maintaining employment to merely support basic necessities, in order to guide them to potentially work in a career that interests them as well as adequately support their basic life needs.

**Cultural identity in the workplace.** The safe expression of cultural identity in the workplace is a key implication of this research. The youth shared many ways that this could be addressed, such as educating employees and employers about Indigenous and Two-Spirit cultures, histories, and the unique struggles Two-Spirit youth face in work environments. This can contribute to engendering an environment in the workplace that encourages growth and pride. Participants shared that they had to hide their identity when they were working in an environment that did not support safe expression, which left them feeling uncomfortable and
incomplete. The literature supports this finding as cultural minorities in workplaces often devalue their own cultural identity as a protective factor (Jameson, 2007; Sussman, 2000).

Additionally, participants expressed a desire for more support of cultural activities in the workplace, for example making time for smudging or being allowed to dismissed to observe cultural ceremonies. Some participants shared that they felt that employers were not adequately providing them with sufficient opportunities for skills development and promotion, which is also supported in the literature (Linnehan, et al., 2006). These results show that Two-Spirit youth do not feel supported and continue to suppress their sense of self which is a factor in the reportedly high unemployment rates.

To further the concept of cultural identity in the workplace, an additional implication of this study is that many Indigenous youth prefer to work within an Indigenous environment or organization. Every participant in this study expressed that working within Indigenous organizations had been a positive experience as the employers had an understanding of Indigenous issues and culture, which is noted in the literature as fostering group membership (Campbell Clark, 2002; French, et al., 2013; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Jaret & Reitzes, 1999). Furthermore, the participants shared that participating in their cultural identities and cultural activities was encouraged, which has been found in the literature to improve workplace satisfaction (Campbell Clark, 2002; Linnehan, et al., 2006; Thompson, 2012). However, there are limited opportunities for employment in Indigenous owned establishments as there is an increasing shortage of local Indigenous business owners (Brown, 2002).
The results from this study suggest that social support was imperative to the employment success of Two-Spirit youth as they shared that they acquired employment positions through friends, family members, and postings found in Indigenous organizations. Participants also spoke about the importance of mentors, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, whom aided their path to successful employment. The literature supports the notion that mentoring can aid in positive Indigenous employment outcomes; however, it is most effective when the mentor is also Indigenous (Burke & McKeen, 1992; Thomas, 1990).

**Education.** Another implication of the study is how strongly education is related to career success. It was noted by participants that education is a key barrier to successful employment and that free education for Indigenous peoples is necessary to encourage and support Two-Spirit youth to attend and complete higher education. This finding is strongly supported by the literature as previous studies found that Indigenous peoples are at a substantial educational disadvantage in comparison to non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, which contributes to negative employment outcomes (Linnehan, et al., 2006; Mendelson, 2006). Participants also reported feeling disadvantaged when applying to jobs due to racism, and the literature also supports these concerns and indicates that Indigenous employees are often overlooked for promotions and are rarely employed in executive positions (Dwyer, 2003). In order to address this issue, the youth in this study suggested that Indigenous youth should have supports in place to guarantee educational attainment as it would ensure more Indigenous peoples have the qualifications required for executive positions (Preston, 2008). Indeed, increasing educational attainment for
Indigenous youth has been cited as a key factor for obtaining successful employment (Brade, Duncan & Sokal, 2003; Hampton & Roy, 2002; James, 2001).

Unfortunately, there is a barrier within a barrier as the current education system damages Indigenous cultural identity through the devaluation of Indigenous culture, and places Indigenous students in an environment where they are subjected to racism (Preston, et al., 2011; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). Many of the participants expressed the importance of adjusting the education system to ensure the formal educated in Indigenous history to help combat systemic barriers and racism.

**Cultural involvement.** The Two-Spirit youth in this study mostly spoke fondly of their culture and noted that it was imperative in moving them forward in many aspects of their lives, such as their career. Furthermore, the stronger the presence of Indigenous culture was throughout their lives, the more success they had in their careers. This result is supported in the work of Gold, Meisler, DuRoss & Bailey (2004) who indicated that community connection is a key factor for experiencing successful employment. Similarly, participants in this study, and other studies, who had stronger ties to their culture, were more likely to work in an environment that supported the safe expression of culture in the workplace, and ensured that they could continue this way in future employment (French, et al., 2013; Stewart, et al., 2014).

Two-Spirit youth have a distinct and unique relationship with Indigenous culture. The participants in this study shared that although they felt very connected to their culture, there is still an undercurrent of homophobia, transphobia, and Two-Spirit discrimination within many Indigenous communities. These youth expressed a
slight sense of dissociation from their cultural group and felt the need to create a unique identity as they had personally faced discrimination from their communities. This finding is supported in the work of both Sussman (2000) and Tajfel (1978) who also found that many individuals who have been marginalized will disassociate from their cultural identity. Participants suggested ways to ameliorate this issue, such as more open communication with Elders and other Indigenous peoples, as well as incorporating Two-Spirit histories and narratives into traditional knowledge. Participants were happy to share that these implementations are currently being seen with great results.

**Social location of the researcher**

It is imperative to clarify the positioning of the researcher as a non-Aboriginal person. The researcher was born into a Middle Eastern immigrant family of lower socioeconomic status. She was very limited in knowledge regarding current Indigenous social issues and how historical context continues to impact the communities. She first became aware of Indigenous histories as a highschool student which burgeoned an interest to become more involved in Indigenous studies. The researcher does not claim to fully understand the situation of Indigenous Peoples, nor does she state that she completely relates to or compares with their experiences or narratives. However, as she has had family members forcefully removed from their homes by government bodies, her interest was subsequently inspired by her empathy towards the struggles of Indigenous Peoples. She has since been active in nurturing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities.

Over the past seven years, the researcher has concentrated her area of
research to Indigenous studies. More specifically, she has been studying issues pertaining to Indigenous employment, education, social concerns and cultural identity through her involvement as a member of Dr. Suzanne Stewart’s research team. It is imperative that the researcher remain aware of the harmful research practices conducted with Indigenous communities. In order to help address these concerns surrounding disrespectful research and to ensure ethical and successful research that benefits both knowledge and community and participant needs, this study utilizes a community-based approach. To this end, the researcher will also continue to foster professional and personal relationships within Indigenous communities, and will continue to reflect on her own position within these cross-cultural relationships.

**Implications for Canadian policy**

Policy factors were also recognized as significant barriers that contributed to the participants’ experiences of employment. For instance, the long standing and currently impactful history of Canadian policy, such as colonization, the Indian Act, the Residential School system and child welfare (the sixties scoop), has significantly impacted the lives of the Indigenous peoples. The devastating effects of these policies have continued to leave the Indigenous peoples in a chronic state of political, social, psychological, and economic disadvantage. The ongoing disempowerment and segregation of the Indigenous peoples from the Canadian government has led to the deprivation of adequate resources and skills required for fostering and developing healthy Indigenous communities (Menzies, 2005).
As mentioned earlier, in order to address these entrenched systemic barriers, employers, supervisors, and co-workers should undergo mandatory training to learn about the diversity of Indigenous communities including histories, traditions, and unique issues Two-Spirit people face. This cultural training can act as a means of decolonization and protection against racism thus increasing respect for Indigenous peoples and aiding in success in the workplace (Brown & Fraehlic, 2012; Bruner, 1990; Stewart, et al., 2014).

Furthermore, changes can be made to government and workplace policies in order to adequately establish acceptable standards of practice in treating Two-Spirit youth in the workplace. Some examples of changes to policies were brought up by participants, such as recognizing traditional ceremonies by allowing time off work, and making sure that policies regarding uniforms are inclusive for Two-Spirit youth (i.e. permitting long hair, no gender based uniforms). Additionally, many participants expressed the importance of having access to cultural practices and resources at work, such as smudging, and access to Elders. This is echoed in the literature as it was found that the ability to access cultural resources in the workplace is helpful to Indigenous peoples (Stewart, et al., 2014).

This study also indicates that non-Indigenous employment settings foster negative experiences for Two-Spirit youth through perpetuating racism by being discriminatory in hiring and engendering a hostile workplace environment. Some participants reported that unhealthy work environments were so hostile and discouraging that they felt the need to resign. Indigenous employees resigning due to negative treatment has previously been studied and supported in the literature.
Participants shared that they often do not feel welcome in non-Indigenous workplaces as they utilize a Western approach and are mainly designed for Caucasian people. The suggested policy modifications stated earlier can help dissolve these employment barriers for Two-Spirit youth.

Despite the barriers shared by the participants, they expressed optimism for the future of Two-Spirit youth in terms of employment and general well-being. However, the previously stated suggestions and policy changes reported by participants need to be implemented in order for these optimistic hopes to be actualized, such as education in the workplace regarding Indigenous history and culture, improving the education system to encourage Indigenous youth succeed in school, changing policies to allow for more access to cultural resources in the workplace, and addressing individual and systemic racism. The results of this study suggest that there are multiple barriers to success in the workplace for Two-Spirit youth, and that Two-Spirit youth have excellent strategies and solutions for these barriers that need to be executed. If these issues are not properly addressed Two-Spirit youth may continue to be discouraged from seeking employment opportunities.

**Limitations**

For research to be as objective as possible, a critical lens must be placed on each study. As such, multiple limitations to this study will be highlighted in this section. It should be noted that some of the limitations that are highlighted in the section below are arguably unavoidable due to the nature of this type of study.
Qualitative research design. A qualitative research design was utilized to facilitate an exploratory approach to extract the perspective of Two-Spirit youth regarding employment. The target population for this study was a minority within a minority, and great time and care was taken with each individual participant. Thus it was both time consuming and highly challenging to find participants, resulting in a sample size for this study. This is a limitation as a larger sample size helps to generalize the results to a greater general population.

Additionally, this methodology permits the participants to generate a unique and personal narrative that can provide a greater depth of understanding regarding youth employment outcomes. However, this can also be limiting as the unique stories and perspectives of the participants may not apply to all Two-Spirit people, particularly those who live in urban environments. Therefore, the suggestions provided should be used with caution as it is difficult to generalize to other employment experiences. For instance, some participants shared that they wanted to incorporate their identities into their workplace environments, whereas one participant share that they would rather keep their identity out of the workplace.

Researcher bias. The potential for researcher bias is always a concern with qualitative research designs as the researcher is meant to be active in all aspects of the research. The researcher in this study acknowledges the active involvement in the extensive interviews, the transcribing, the data collection, coding, and the creation of main themes and meta-themes. However, precautions were established to reduce this particular bias by utilizing other publications and interview data as well as including cultural informants to help shape the study. Additionally, as this project
is part of larger project lead by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, research assistants have conducted additional individual interviews, and the preliminary results indicate that the results from this study align with themes meta-themes from the larger project, such as the importance of integrating and accessing cultural practice in the workplace, the need for cultural understanding and respect from employers, and the need to prevent racism and oppression in the workplace.

**Directions for future research**

The findings in this study indicate that although there are many disparities and barriers that Two-Spirit youth face in the workplace, there are also many strengths and suggestions for change that Two-Spirit youth possess and would like to see implemented. As such, future research should include strength-based models of employment experience by examining the narratives of the Two-Spirit people who are successful despite these barriers. Accordingly, a recommendation for future researchers is to manipulate workplace environments in order to address the concerns that the participants in this study reported. For example, the results of implementing their suggestions, such as educating employers and co-workers, should be examined and discussed for policy implementation on a greater scale.

Another recommendation is to conduct research that examines the strengths, weakness, and benefits of workplaces that have integrated access to cultural resources in the workplace. There are many Aboriginal organizations that permit for the safe expression of cultural identity in the workplace, and it would be beneficial to examine how these workplaces allow for workplace identity to develop for Aboriginal youth and how this contributes to their employment success. Furthermore
it would be valuable to assess the manner in which Aboriginal youth employees form relationships with their co-workers and supervisors, and what makes for a supportive versus challenging relationship.

Certainly, an essential way further the research in this field is to reproduce and replicate studies such as these. Moreover, replicating this study in different urban and rural areas across North America would be imperative for determining the generalizability of these results within different contexts. Lastly, it may be beneficial to examine the narratives of employers, supervisors, and co-workers who have worked with Two-Spirit youth regarding their workplace policies and practices.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the intersection of identities of Two-Spirit youth as well as societal, systemic, and cultural oppression affect employment experiences for self-identified Two-Spirit youth. The aim of this project is to further the understanding of the economic difficulties experienced by many Two-Spirit youth. Various Indigenous communities, including Two-Spirit youth, experience adversities regarding food insecurities, quality of health, limited access to social services, and financial instability due to employment instability (Richmond & Ross, 2009). Predictably, the work of Brown and Fraehlic (2012) identified successful employment as a factor in overcoming poverty on an individual and community level. However, although the results that emerged from the participants’ narratives demonstrate that Two-Spirit youth can overcome poverty through employment, the results also indicate that Two-Spirit youth continue to face myriad barriers to successful employment.
Two-Spirit youth are part of a multiply-marginalized community which makes it difficult to find a safe space as they face homophobia within Indigenous communities, racism from LGBTQ communities, and permeating societal and systemic racism. The results presented in this study provide rich data from the lived experiences of marginalized people which can be a powerful model for future research. Additionally, these results support existing research in the literature.

This study helps elucidate the importance of engendering a culturally inclusive workplace for Two-Spirit youth as well as the impact that employers and coworkers have on their employment experience. The participants outlined the barriers and successes by sharing their personal employment experiences. Two-Spirit youth in this study also generated many solutions to improve and ameliorate these concerns in order to bolster their success in the workplace.

The results of this study help identify the need for changes in employment policies to make workplaces more inviting and inclusive of Two-Spirit people and Indigenous culture. Furthermore, Changes to the educational system need to be executed across Canada immediately, such as including Indigenous perspectives and knowledges so other Canadians can be aware of their social positioning and biases to help combat the systemic barriers faced by Two-Spirit youth. The researcher and participants in this study hope that the findings from this project will influence policy changes that will potentially eliminate systemic barriers and substantially reduce societal racism. In turn, this will result in aiding Two-Spirit youth to attain and sustain successful and fulfilling employment.
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