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Smudging the System; Rejecting the Politics of Traditionalism and Settler-Homonationalism

by

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Sikahpiohkiitopi

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Abstract

This is a study of LGBTQ2 Indigenous identity and politics in colonial Canada. Scholars of Indigenous politics have recently focused on the importance of interrogating the sexualized and heteronormative landscape of settler colonialism, which has led to the proliferation of anti-queer violence within Indigenous nations. As such, the central tasks of this study are to determine how *Two-Spirit Queer* (2SQ) people engage in practices of resistance and freedom, as well as the factors that account for a queer Indigenous politics. Specifically, this study is interested in 2SQ life and politics among *Blackfoot* people. The thesis also examines how 2SQ people are problematically situated within the politics of “*Two Spirit Reconciliation*” as it propagates settler-homonationalism. Throughout the thesis, I argue that Indigenous territorialities, and the relational networks they carry, are central to the political *resurgence* of 2SQ people.

Keywords: Two-Spirit Queer; Blackfoot; reconciliation; resurgence; traditionalism; colonialism

Preface

Oki nikso'kowaiksi. Nitaniiko Sikapiohkiitopi. Hello, I am Grey Horse Rider, I am *Nitsitapii* from *Kainaiwa* (Blood Tribe), which is part of *Siksikaitstapi* (Blackfoot Confederacy). My extended relations include the Pace, Soop, Tailfeathers, Eagle Child, Black Plume, Low Horn, and Standing Alone families. This research emerges out of my own life observations and experiences as a self-identified cisgendered queer Blackfoot man. Moreover, my ethical responsibilities emerge from my social and political position as *Siksikaitstapi* (Blackfoot) and the responsibility I have to my community to ensure that my research moves forward in a respectful way. As such, locating myself as a Blackfoot person is central to my research and *Siksikaitstapiipaitapiiyssin* (Blackfoot way of life) because this is my way of acknowledging my personal journey in acquiring the knowledge I know today. Bastien explains, “*Siksikaitstapi* (Blackfoot) ways of knowing are dependent upon relationships, which create and generate knowledge.” (Bastien, 2004, p. 77). It is through the interconnectedness and creation of multiple relations that I have acquired my knowledge.

Growing up in *Kainaiwa* (Blood Tribe) and the City of Lethbridge, I was surrounded by many Blackfoot knowledge keepers and elders. However, the knowledge surrounding 2SQ Blackfoot people has been fractured and, in some cases, erased and replaced with colonial conceptions of gender and sexuality. Consequently, I grew up feeling disconnected from my Blackfoot identity as I struggled, and continue to struggle, with the prevalence of heteropatriarchy within *Siksikaitstapiipaitapiiyssin* (Blackfoot way of life). As such, I felt compelled to address the violence Two Spirit Queer (2SQ) Indigenous peoples face both within Indigenous communities and within LGBTQ spaces. Navigating the complex structures of relationality that emerged out of my queer Indigeneity led me on this path to understanding

Blackfoot conceptions of queerness. What I mean by this is not just the pre-colonial Blackfoot stories and traditions of queerness, but the contemporary practices of queer Blackfoot relationality that exist today. Thus, this research project is infused by my own personal experiences and desire to initiate conversations of what it means to be 2SQ and Blackfoot. Centering the voices of 2SQ Blackfoot people in my research emerged out of my desire to produce research that is useful to the relational networks I belong to. It is my hope that this thesis will inspire future research that interrogates the sexualized and heteronormative landscape of colonialism within Blackfoot life and politics.

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List of Abbreviations

2SQ – Two Spirit/Queer
IRS – Indian Residential School(s)
JSR – Just Society Report
LGBTQ2SI – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two Spirit, Intersex
TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Aakiinaa - Homosexual male
Aakiipisskan - Women's Buffalo Jump
Aakokatssin – Sundance/Big Camp
Aawowaakii – Transitioning to female
Aawaatsimihkaasatai – Return to balance
Ahkoomohsin – To make a vow
Akaowotaakii – Transitioning to male
Ao'tsisstapitakyo'p - To be cognizant and to discern the tribal connections
A'yai-kik-ahsi – Acts like a woman
Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi – What we were put here with as our responsibilities for our survival
Ihtsipaitapiyopa - Source of Life or Creator
Iitskinaiksi – Horn Society
Iiyikitapiiks – Fearless People Society
Kainaiwa – Many Chiefs People/Blood Tribe
Kana'kaaatsiiks – Societies
Katoyis – Blood Cut
Kimmapiiyipitsinni – Kindness, caring, and generosity
Maotokiiks – Buffalo Women's Society
Náápi/Napi – Old man
Niitsitapi – Original people/Indigenous
Ninaakii - Homosexual female
Ninnohkanistssksinip – Speaking personally
Ninowaakii - Masculine female
Sikahpiohkiitopi – Grey Horse Rider
Siikisikaawa – Blackfoot
Siksikaitsitapi – Blackfoot person
Siksikaitsitapiipaitapiiyssin – Blackfoot way of life

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Overview

This is a study of queer Indigenous identity and politics in colonial Canada. Moving through Indigenous studies on gender, sexuality, colonization, and decolonization, the central tasks of this study are to determine how Two-Spirit Queer (2SQ) Blackfoot people engage in everyday acts of resistance, and what is needed to develop a unified political voice among 2SQ Blackfoot people. The following central question and sub-questions will be fundamental to achieving these goals¹. How can 2SQ people activate broader forms of freedom and resistance?

- a) How are current reconciliation projects undermining the political resurgence of 2SQ people and politics?
- b) How are 2SQ Blackfoot people relegated to the periphery of life and politics?
- c) What are the pathways to 2SQ resurgence for Blackfoot people?

The point of this is not to definitively settle on one way of conceptualizing 2SQ Blackfoot life and politics, but rather develop a theoretical foundation of Blackfoot conceptions of queerness and relationality and how they can be activated. This is motivated by the politics of exclusion that 2SQ Blackfoot people encounter in both modern queer spaces and within community settings.

The title of my thesis references the recent political project of Two Spirit Reconciliation that has been taken up by the Canadian settler-state. The critique I offer is formulated around the same critiques made by other scholars against the broader reconciliation movement in Canada (Coulthard, 2014; Million, 2013; Simpson, 2017). What I mean by this is that similar to other reconciliation projects, state-centered reconciliation can become a distraction to engaging in

¹ For a full list of interview questions used, please see Appendix A and B

more meaningful political projects that are grounded in the specific knowledges and experiences of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, my critique also focuses on the way Two Spirit Reconciliation emerged, which was in large part spurred on by Egale Human Rights Trust² in their efforts to secure a state apology from the federal government on state discrimination to LGTBQ2SI people. As such, I argue that the foundations of Two-Spirit Reconciliation emerge from this political objective rather than on enacting resistance and freedom for 2SQ people.

The Argument

Throughout the thesis, I argue that 2SQ Blackfoot people can enact resistance and freedom by participating in broader forms of relational modes of being, which can be supported by turning to the principles and values that have maintained Blackfoot governance and political practices since time immemorial. I argue that this can be achieved through the creation of a 2SQ Blackfoot Society modelled after traditional society structures (Bastien, 2004; Conaty, 2015; Crowshoe & Mannes Schmidt, 2002; Ladner, 2003). Societies are an important part of *Siikisikaawa* (Blackfoot) governance as they are the centre of Blackfoot relationality and the conduit for activating the ontological responsibilities for maintaining these relationships (Bastien, 2004). *Kana'kaaatsiiks* (Societies) are the mechanisms used to activate Blackfoot relationality as they “were charged with operationalizing the teachings of the bundles, teaching, guiding and disciplining the nation, and seeing to the nations’ and the Confederacy’s continued existence by providing good leadership and making good decisions” (Ladner, 2003, p. 143). Blackfoot Society groups were essential to the survival of the Confederacy as they provided

² Egale describes themselves as “Canada’s only national charity promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBTIQ2S) human rights. Our vision is a Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and all other forms of oppression so that everyone can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias” (Egale, 2017, p. 8).

specific functions in the maintenance of Blackfoot law (Crowshoe & Mannes Schmidt, 2002, p. 16). These societies were used to carry out social, political, economic, and spiritual functions of the confederacy (Ladner, 2003). As Bastien (2004) explains,

“Each of the age grade societies teaches each person *Kiitomohpipotokoi* [ontological responsibilities]. These responsibilities are the manifestation of knowledge, skills, values, and roles of holistic living...The following ontological responsibilities are examples of the values imbuing and forming our social structures. The words are who we are as *Siksikaitstapi*, our existence means manifesting these values. They include *Kimmapiiyipitsinni* [compassion], *Isspomotsisinni* [sharing and support], *Ainnakowa* [respect], and *Isskanaitapsstsi* [relationship]. These responsibilities are the source of our collective and tribal identity. They form the stages and processes for human development among *Siksikaitstapi* and subsequently delineate distinctions and integrity among tribal societies” (p. 135).

This should not be seen as the only way to activate 2SQ resurgence, but I argue that a 2SQ Blackfoot Society would provide space to collectively learn from other 2SQ Blackfoot individuals that are also wanting to acquire knowledge about 2SQ Blackfoot history and practices, which will form the basis of collective action³. However, this should not be confused with queer inclusion into straight Indigenous spaces. Instead, this thesis follows the analytical framework of “Queering Resurgence” that Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) proposes. She argues, “Radical resurgence is then about the destruction of the colonial hierarchy that heteropatriarchy embeds in us, our communities, and our nations, and restoring all Indigenous bodies as political orders within our political systems and nationhood” (p. 134).

This research engages in complex forms of relationality. Specifically, I argue that the politics of tradition and selective Indigenous intellectualism has allowed for the relegation of

³ It is my hope that this work will not end with this thesis but also inspire future community action fully realized through the establishment of a 2SQ Blackfoot Society. Additional community engagements will include sharing this work at community conferences and community consciousness raising trainings to be used at local Blackfoot organizations. Additionally, effort will be made to publish queer interpretations of Blackfoot Creation Stories in order to provide greater access to this information.

2SQ Blackfoot people. For this reason, these conversations and the arguments I present are in many ways a critique to those relational practices that insulate heteropatriarchal and anti-queer violence as being traditional. At the same time, the strategies, activities, and initiatives that 2SQ Blackfoot people expressed as a way for activating a queer Indigenous politic, turn to Blackfoot political thought and governance. While this may seem like a contradiction, my analysis will show how these ideas are supported by the values and principles of *Siksikaitapitapiiyssin* (Blackfoot way of life). These ideas will no doubt be challenged by some Blackfoot traditionalists as being a fabrication of Blackfoot culture. Therefore, in presenting my arguments, I will support these ideas by showing how they are intimately connected to Blackfoot creation stories, political thought, and history.

What do I mean by Two-Spirit Queer (2SQ)?

Two-Spirit was officially adopted by academics at the Third International Gathering of American Indian and First Nations Gays and Lesbians in Winnipeg in 1990, but the term was already circulating in many Indigenous communities, both on reserve and in urban centres (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011). According to Hunt (2016), Indigenous conceptions of gender and sexuality are “not rooted in heteronormativity, but rather they accounted for diverse sexual practices and identities” (p. 7). For a lot of Indigenous peoples, the Indigenous specific language and history used to describe queer individuals has been lost or fragmented. Two Spirit became a way for those diverse practices and identities of different Indigenous cultural traditions to come together and be situated in a queer inter-Indigenous relational network. As Greensmith and Giwa (2013) explain, Two Spirit also emerged “as a response to the overwhelming homogeneity of White Queer settler communities and the lack of awareness of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and non-heteronormative gendered and sexual

subjectivities in Canada” (p. 131). Therefore, Two Spirit has become a way for those individuals who are estranged from their communities to develop a connection between their sexual/gender identity and their Indigeneity. While the term “Two Spirit Queer” does not capture the unique conceptions of gender and sexuality within Blackfoot traditions, it has been established as an important identity marker as well as a theoretical framework that is predicated on Indigenous interrogation and critique.

This thesis is about those fractured relational networks; in particular, those of 2SQ Blackfoot people, and the modes of political engagement that are being proposed to address these issues. This thesis delves into the debate of what it means to reclaim Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness that has been lost or fragmented, and the politics that are embedded within these reclamation projects. It also sheds light on the complexity embedded in engaging in resurgence activities when the structures of settler sexuality – that now dominates the way Indigenous peoples talk about themselves in reference to gender, sex, and sexuality – restrict access to Indigenous spaces and queer spaces for 2SQ people. For the sake of brevity, I will use 2SQ for the duration of my thesis. At the same time, this thesis engages with Blackfoot conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality and the politics associated with them, which is included in Chapter Two and Chapter Four.

Overview of Thesis

Purpose.

The purpose of my research study is to present an original piece of qualitative research that explores how 2SQ people can engage in resurgence activities. Moving through the thesis, I place the literature on queer Indigeneity in conversation with scholarship on Indigenous resurgence (Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Simpson, 2017) in order

to understand what a queer Blackfoot politics might look like. This includes an analysis of how 2SQ life and politics are taken up in contemporary political spaces, and what their limitations are in activating the resurgence of 2SQ people. To illustrate this, the research study is twofold. The first step will be to investigate how 2SQ people and politics are taken up in the broader political project of reconciliation. Specifically, I analyze two reconciliation reports and their engagement with 2SQ life and politics. This allows me to position these reconciliation reports within the lived experiences of 2SQ Blackfoot people, which forms the second component of this study. The second part deploys an Indigenous methodology and analyzes the political dimensions of 2SQ politics within the Blackfoot Confederacy. This includes learning from self-identified 2SQ Blackfoot people and their experiences navigating Indigenous and queer spaces. To accomplish this, I will examine the political dimensions of what it means to be Blackfoot and 2SQ living in Blackfoot territory. Not only is this thesis a study of 2SQ Blackfoot politics, but also an examination of queer indigeneity and what 2SQ resurgence means in the presence of internalized anti-queer violence in Indigenous spaces, and racialized violence in queer spaces.

Although this study provides the means to establish a theoretical foundation for 2SQ Blackfoot peoples' experiences, my approach does elicit several limitations. Most importantly, my research study does not provide a representation of all 2SQ Blackfoot peoples' lived experiences, nor does it offer a complete representation of the experiences of 2SQ Indigenous peoples collectively. Additionally, having interviewed a group of individuals that offer a working understanding of 2SQ Blackfoot identity and history, the study leaves out individuals that do not have this knowledge. Moreover, I was not able to interview participants from *Ampskapi Piikani* (Blackfeet Reservation in Montana) so it is limited in how it captures the impact of heteropatriarchy and anti-queer violence in the US settler context. Additionally, I cannot claim to

be neutral nor objective in this research study given my own lived experiences as a self-identified queer cisgendered Blackfoot man.

Key terms.

With 2SQ life and politics being a central theme within this thesis, it is important to clarify the foundational terminology used in this research study. In my thesis, I critically engage with the complex intersections between the politics of gender and sexuality and the politics of traditionalism within the Blackfoot Confederacy as it pertains to Two-Spirit/Queer Indigeneity. All of this is wrapped up in understanding how 2SQ Blackfoot people engage in broader forms of resistance and freedom, which Simpson (2017) refers to as “queering resurgence”.

I define the politics of traditionalism as those oppressive anti-queer practices that have relegated 2SQ Blackfoot people from life and politics. Specifically, I draw attention to the ways in which Blackfoot life and politics are entangled with anti-queer thought and practice, which do not emerge out of Blackfoot political thought, but are instead a result of what Leroy Little Bear (2000) refers to as the “Jagged Worldview”. Using the jagged worldview framework allows me to nuance and critically engage with the political framework of Indigenous resurgence.

Indigenous resurgence is an approach to decolonization that centres Indigenous political thought and practices, but as I will demonstrate, these ways of knowing and being are closely aligned with the politics of traditionalism. Indigenous resurgence and “traditionalism” are not the same, but they embody the same ideas regarding political engagement, which is the centering of Indigenous thought and practices. However, I provide an analysis that shows how Indigenous thought and practices are encased in “jagged worldviews” (Little Bear, 2000) which has propagated anti-queer violence and heteropatriarchy that disempowers 2SQ folkx. In particular, I interrogate the ways in which settler-imposed conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality

become infused within Indigenous lifeways, which are then asserted as “traditional”. I use the analytical framework of the “jagged worldview” to show how anti-queer violence is taking up within a politics of traditionalism to justify 2SQ relegation from Indigenous life and politics. At the same time, I engage with Simpson’s (2017) framework of “queering resurgence” to better understand how 2SQ Blackfoot folkx can disrupt the politics of traditionalism within Indigenous practices.

Using Simpson’s (2017) framework of “queering resurgence”, I argue that this includes challenging the heteronorming of Blackfoot Creation Stories and terminology, which I argue are central to operationalization of the politics of traditionalism. Queering resurgence is also about strengthening the collective voice of 2SQ Blackfoot folkx through the creation of a 2SQ Blackfoot Society, which will function as the mechanism used to “smudge the system” of Blackfoot anti-queerness.

At the same time, I critically analyze the ways in which “Two Spirit Reconciliation” engages with queer Indigeneity. Specifically, I examine how reconciliation for 2SQ people is presented in the orientations of the TRC and JSR. The analysis I make of these reconciliation reports shows how 2SQ people and voices are relegated from this political project. In making this argument, my analysis is informed by the work of critical race and gender scholars (Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Lenon, 2018; Morgensen, 2011) who critique the deployment of settler-homonationalism in mainstream queer spaces and politics. The literature on settler sexuality has made several important contributions, both theoretically and politically, in highlighting the sexualized and gendered dimensions of settler colonialism (Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Morgensen, 2011). In particular, the work of Scott Lauria Morgensen on settler-

homonationalism has been instrumental in understanding the operationalization of settler biopolitics in Canada.

The term settler-homonationalism is an extension of the theoretical concept of homonationalism, which is a critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses that propagate narratives of queer modernity and queer citizenship (Puar, 2013). As a theoretical framework, settler-homonationalism draws attention to the ways queer subjects become complicit in the settler colonial project “that renounce and enact violence upon racialized and colonized peoples” (Greensmith & Giwa, 2013, p. 133). Likewise, settler-homonationalism draws attention to the ways queer politics and subjects are ensconced in the logics of homonormativity, which “upholds and sustains [heteronormativity] while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2002, p. 179). In particular, I turn to the theoretical framework of settler-homonationalism to better understand Indigenous-queer relationality within the political project of Two Spirit Reconciliation. This allows me to show how Two Spirit Reconciliation holds up settler-homonationalism over decolonial queer allyship.

Chapter layout.

In the next chapter, I layout my analytical framework of the “jagged worldview” which informs the theoretical and methodological orientations of this thesis. Specifically, I provide my analysis of resurgence and reconciliation as political frameworks for 2SQ Blackfoot people. Additionally, I anchor these political frameworks within Blackfoot political traditions and practices, which also sets the stage for my methodology in this research study. Throughout the thesis I deploy an Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) to anchor the experiences of 2SQ Blackfoot people.

In chapter three, I examine the emergence of “Two Spirit Reconciliation” in Canada. Specifically, I argue that the emergence of “Two Spirit Reconciliation” is a form of settler-homonationalism. To attend to this, I explore the current literature on reconciliation discourse in Canada and scholarship on settler-homonationalism. The second part of the chapter turns specifically to the TRC and JSR in their representations of 2SQ life and politics. In this section I focus my analysis on the discursive practices of the reports, consisting of careful and purposeful reading, paying attention to what they privilege, what is made visible, and what is ignored. Following a methodological directive offered by Dian Million’s (2013) felt theory, I focus on the ways in which the reports emphasize discourses of trauma, victimhood, and healing as opposed to a decolonial queer politics.

In Chapter four, I examine what it means to be 2SQ and Blackfoot through the collection of personal narratives. Using a conversational method (Kovach, 2009) I privilege the stories of research participants through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. A primary goal of the project is to highlight the experiences and perceptions of 2SQ Blackfoot people by critically centering their voices in the research process. Centering the voices of research participants is critical to an Indigenous Research Methodology because it allows for the identification of what is relevant within a research project (Kovach, 2009). This is a key tenet of any Indigenous methodology because story as method “allow participants to share their experiences on their own terms” (Kovach, 2009, p. 120). This is where insights gained from engagement with 2SQ Blackfoot people will be used to understand Blackfoot conceptions of queerness and how these have shifted as a result of colonization. Moreover, this chapter will examine the effects colonialism has produced on the relational networks within the Blackfoot Confederacy and how 2SQ Blackfoot

people are engaging in various acts of resistance. As such, I examine the political dimensions of the everyday experiences of 2SQ Blackfoot people.

In Chapter five, I conclude by discussing the future of queer Indigenous politics by discussing the implications of this thesis on how Blackfoot politics can be shaped and reshaped. Specifically, I provide my arguments on how 2SQ resurgence is activated, and what is needed to sustain it for Blackfoot people. In answering these questions, I reengage with Two Spirit Reconciliation and Queering Resurgence as models of political engagement. I argue that Queering Resurgence affords new opportunities for understanding Blackfoot queer politics.

Chapter 2 – Queer Indigeneity and the Jagged Worldview: An Analytical Framework

By force, terror, and educational policy, it [colonization] attempted to destroy the Aboriginal worldview – but it failed. Instead, colonization left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples. They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview. Their consciousness became a random puzzle, a jigsaw that each person has to attempt to understand (Little Bear, 2000, p. 84).

Through various settler colonial processes Indigenous peoples were violently enveloped into a society that holds radically different ways of understanding and viewing the world (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Coulthard, 2014; Little Bear, 2000; Morgensen, 2011; Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2012). This was largely achieved through the imposed value system of settler sexuality (Daigle, 2018; Morgensen, 2011; TallBear, 2018) alongside government policies that have been instrumental in radically transforming the relational frameworks of Indigenous societies. Blackfoot scholar Leroy Little Bear refers to this as the “jagged worldview”.

The stories of 2SQ Blackfoot people have been engulfed by the jagged worldview in ways that attempt to eliminate/assimilate queer Blackfoot thought. What this means is that the methodological framework used in this thesis must be malleable enough to handle the conflict-ridden realities that emerge between “traditionalism” and queer Indigeneity. Therefore, this chapter will focus on important theoretical and methodological considerations in order to understand what is needed to activate the resurgence of queer Indigenous life and politics among Blackfoot people. The relegation of 2SQ people from Indigenous life and politics necessitates a different set of methodological considerations. In the proceeding pages, I will present my arguments on how an Indigenous research methodology, anchored in Blackfoot thought and practices, provides pathways to an analytical framework that goes beyond the traditional/modern binary of what constitutes “authentic” Indigeneity and knowledge.

What are the theoretical considerations for this thesis?

Resurgence and reconciliation have become the two major schools of thought in Indigenous politics (Asch, et al., 2018) and they propose different ideas regarding political engagement. With the ongoing critiques these schools of thought have towards one another, they both struggle in their orientations with queer Indigeneity. Particularly, this chapter examines the efficacy of the political projects of reconciliation and resurgence for 2SQ Blackfoot people. Both have come to dominate the field of Indigenous politics in recent years, which has led to polarizing debates on how best to approach Indigenous-Settler relations and Indigenous futures (Asch, Borrows, & Tully, 2018).

Resurgence and reconciliation.

With the rise in Indigenous resurgence scholarship (Alfred, 2005; Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Simpson 2017) there has been a renewed emphasis placed on grounded normativity and placed-based practices as an alternative to settler-state engagement. As Dene scholar Glen Coulthard argues here, Indigenous resurgence is more than just theory, it is embodied practice. For resurgence scholars, state-reconciliation projects “divert our energy and attention away from community resurgence” (Corntassel, 2012, p. 91). In other words, reconciliation becomes a “politics of distraction”, which “shift[s] the discourse away from restitution of indigenous homelands and resources and ground[s] it instead in a political/ legal rights-based process...[that] ultimately rewards colonial injustice” (Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p. 472). In Canada, reconciliation has been critiqued for its inability to address ongoing forms of colonial violence as it becomes a way for the state to “narrowly [situate] the abuses of settler colonization *firmly* in the past.” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 22). These critiques are focused on the kinds of reconciliation projects “that threaten to reconcile Indigenous peoples to the unjust status

quo” (Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 5), which needs to be differentiated from “transformative reconciliation” (Asch, et al., 2018).

Indigenous place-based practices of obtaining self-determination are not always available to 2SQ people because of the nature of internalized heteropatriarchy and anti-queer violence within Indigenous communities. In particular, Blackfoot 2SQ people face a host of restrictions into ceremonial spaces because Blackfoot societies are now regulated by strict gender protocols. As Cree poet and scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt explains, queer indigeneity and the nationalist desires of Indigenous political leaders are problematized when 2SQ people are factored into these nation building projects. The primary reason is that for the most part, these resurgence activities and nation-building practices “cannot be the ideational house for those of us who are queer and/or trans Indigenous and two-spirit” because 2SQ people “participate in relational practices that agitate the body or the nation as inviolable containers for political life” (Belcourt & Nixon, 2018). In other words, resurgence struggles to engage with queer Indigeneity because 2SQ Indigenous people have been relegated to the periphery of life and politics, not only through state power but by their own people.

While regenerating Indigenous practices of ethical engagement is imperative to a decolonial politics, the influence of colonial ideologies and settler logics pose significant challenges to resurgence theory. In an interview with Canadianart, Billy Ray-Belcourt and Lindsay Nixon discuss the future of queer Indigeneity as it pertains to Indigenous thought and action. For Lindsay Nixon, “resurgence is a political philosophy that often argues that Indigenous peoples must rise above colonialism by asserting flattened conceptions of sovereignty and nationhood, thereby erasing women and two-spirit folks by centring solely activism that mirrors colonial-capitalist warring and legal scholarship” (Belcourt & Nixon,

2018). Moreover, grounded normativity, a key tenet of resurgence theory, also produces harmful political practices among Indigenous peoples if they are not engaged critically. In particular, land and competing claims among Indigenous peoples to territory have motivated divisive and harmful political practices between one Indigenous group to another (Voth, 2016; 2018). The same logic can be applied to different Indigenous groups competing for funding on different political issues; such as land and gender (Simpson, 2017).

These political strategies are motivated by the current incentives in place that encourage engagement with settler logics (Coulthard, 2014; Voth, 2018). There is a real fear that without engaging in settler logics Indigenous peoples will be politically disadvantaged as other Indigenous groups compete for government recognition (Voth, 2018). For this reason, “Two Spirit Reconciliation” is all the more enticing for 2SQ people to engage in. This is why an Indigenous queer politics needs to answer those important questions of how to enact resistance and freedom in ways that reject settler logics but also finds specificity and rigor in the complex and varied realities of 2SQ Indigenous peoples. According to Belcourt, “this means, then, is that those who are Indigenous and differently gendered and/or sexualized will seek and/or perform alternative sites of political action and community-building” (Belcourt & Nixon, 2018).

Despite the criticism of Indigenous resurgence, it does centre the voices and philosophies of Indigenous peoples in its articulation of Indigenous political inquiry. Navigating the intellectual terrain of resurgence and reconciliation is helpful in identifying how they fall short in addressing question of queerness, and how we might build off of them to develop renewed conceptions of a decolonial queer politics (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). For that reason, it provides an important jumping off point for developing stronger theoretical considerations of a queer Indigenous politics.

Simpson pushes the idea of resurgence further by incorporating a gendered analysis (Simpson, 2017). In her book, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resurgence*, Simpson (2017) provides new insights on resurgence theory and the necessity to ground decolonial processes in “radical resurgence”. She argues that heteropatriarchy – a hierarchy that privileges cisgender, married, monogamous men and women – is a main tenet of the settler colonial strategy (p. 134). In that sense, she bridges resurgence with queer theory, by calling for the “Queering of Resurgence”. She places urgency on “queering resurgence” because settler colonialism “is about the destruction of the intimate relationships that make up our nations, and the fundamental systems of ethics based on values of individual sovereignty and self-determination” (p. 123). She argues that gender has been frequently overlooked by Indigenous activists and scholars as a natural hierarchy of Indigenous political issues places land inquiries first and work regarding gender and sexuality as secondary (p. 53).

The “queering” of Indigenous resurgence adds a new layer of analysis to Indigenous resurgence by emphasizing the need to denaturalize the sexualized and gendered dimensions of settler colonialism within decolonizing projects (Anderson et al., 2015; Driskill, et al., 2011; Hunt & Holmes, 2015). Therefore, my thesis will engage with the theoretical framework of “queering resurgence” in order to elicit questions of how this plays out in spaces of “traditionalized” anti-queer violence.

Settler sexuality and the politics of traditionalism.

The jagged worldview is a helpful conceptual framework to understand the tensions that now exist between “traditionalism” and its fusion with settler conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality. In TallBear’s (2018) words, “As part of efforts to eliminate/assimilate Indigenous peoples into the national body, both the church and the state evangelized marriage, nuclear

family, and monogamy” (p. 147). In this light, anti-queer violence and heteropatriarchal practices are enveloped into contemporary Indigenous relational frameworks. What is more, these harmful practices are now protected under the guise of “traditionalism” by some Indigenous leaders and knowledge holders (Wilson, 2018). As Rifkin (2017) argues, while Indigeneity has asserted itself as a strong critique to settler-colonialism, it has also “*renormal[ized]* aspects of settler governance and popular sentiments as taken-for-granted facets of Indigenous identity, as the de facto center against which other people(s) or forms of (collective) self-expression appear as aberrant or inauthentic” (p. 207). For instance, Briggs-Cloud (2015) argues that the missionization of Indigenous languages has led to the adoption of “oppressive Western theological concepts”, which requires critical engagement with Indigenous tradition when it is evoked as a justification for oppressive practices (p. 246).

The “de facto center” of Indigenous identity has been warped by years of settler-colonial violence and assimilation tactics used to eliminate us (Wolfe, 2006). Consequently, TallBear (2018) emphasizes the need to critically engage with the way decolonial futures are pigeonholed within settler understandings of family, which she argues furthers the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. The alternative frameworks TallBear provides on understanding relationality, away from settler conceptualizations, are helpful in understanding the ways in which 2SQ Blackfoot people are actively working to subvert heteropatriarchal governance practices that are predicated on these ideas.

Therefore, in presenting my arguments, I heed the advice offered by Starblanket and Stark (2018) in their analysis of resurgence, reconciliation and relationality. In their chapter, they advance a cautious directive on resurgence efforts that are orientated to a dualistic logic of tradition and modernity. They raise concerns about centering resurgence efforts on a desire to

recreate past traditions in the present. They also caution against taken prescriptive and universal approaches to resurgence activities because what might work in one community might not work in another, which is why paying attention to context-specific variables is so important.

Specifically, they argue:

In our view, a relational way of being has the potential to challenge and move beyond dichotomous treatments of past/present or tradition/modernity. By adopting a relational world view, we are better positioned to see the continuity between past, present, and future while also recognizing tradition as dynamic, contingent, and context dependent. By conceptualizing Indigenous cultural knowledge and practices as constantly evolving and adapting to new contexts, a relational approach can direct our attention to the values and precepts underlying Indigenous modes of relating rather than getting caught up with defining and replicating the specific configurations of past practices. (Starblanket & Stark, 2018, p. 196)

The desire to recreate what was lost/stolen as a result of settler-colonialism is intuitive, but it is also predicated on a romanticized Indigenous past that is orientated under the notion of authentic Indigeneity (Briggs-Cloud, 2015). Likewise, there is a need to critically engage with Indigenous traditions because they “have been shaped by historical discontinuity”, it is not enough to evoke them “superficially, without adequate attention to the epistemological insight embedded deep within Indigenous languages” (p. 244). The politics of tradition is especially profound in the “heteronorming of our languages” from the interpretations and translations made by Christian missionaries and salvage anthropologists (Briggs-Cloud, 2015, p. 253).

The jagged worldview framework is important in understanding how Indigenous political thought and practices have been influenced by settler-colonial morality structures. Kiera Ladner’s analysis of fifty-years of Indigenous politics in Canada shows that few scholars within the discipline are engaging with Indigenous political thought and governance practices (Ladner, 2017). When Indigenous peoples are engaged in scholarly research, they are largely positioned as one monolithic political bloc (Voth, 2018) which circumscribes the study of queer

Indigeneity. Therefore, in filling this gap I directly engage with Blackfoot political thought and practices to better understand how resistance and freedom is activated for 2SQ people (Belcourt & Nixon, 2018) in the presence of traditionalized anti-queer violence. In the pages that follow, I will show how the politics of traditionalism buttress anti-queerness and heteropatriarchal governance.

Blackfoot political thought and practices.

The jagged worldview is helpful in understanding how the deployment of the politics of traditionalism are in many cases not part of “traditional” practices, but a reflection of settler-imposed morality structures and institutions. Therefore, understanding what shapes Blackfoot governance and relationality is important to understanding how 2SQ people have been relegated to the periphery of life and politics, and how this contradicts the values and principles of *Siksikaitapitapiiyssin* (Blackfoot way of life).

For instance, Bastien (2004) explains, Christianization led to significant alterations in traditional knowledge and value systems, which devastated Blackfoot relational networks. When Canadian officials banned the Sundance many Blackfoot governance structures were replaced with settler-imposed institutions, sexuality, and economic systems. Many sacred ceremonial items were also lost to museums, which simultaneously led to the loss of relational practices and knowledge. The process of colonization and the banning of Indigenous spirituality disrupted these governance practices, which has resulted in the breakdown of Blackfoot relationality “and their corresponding ceremonies have been neglected, forgotten, and abandoned” (Bastien, 2004, p. 170). This breakdown of relationality created a fractious Blackfoot society “as intratribal and even intrafamilial violence grew” (Conaty, 2015, p. 86).

As Conaty (2015) explains, “In the wake of contact, however, these ceremonial relationships gradually eroded, as the population was decimated by disease, spiritual practices were outlawed, and children were taught to be ashamed of their culture” (p. 24). This was a time when Blackfoot people were at their weakest. As Bastien argues, “the small reserves, with the absence of game, the prohibition of ceremonies, the loss of language, and the children in residential schools, left the survivors with the belief that *Niitsitapi Oopaitapiysoowaiyi*, the way of life of *Niitsitapi*, was no longer a necessity for survival” (2004, p. 21). This was an act to facilitate territorial expansion by re-ordering Blackfoot peoples’ relationship to the land (Starblanket & Stark, 2018) and each other by attempting to shift their value systems. Bastien (2004) argues that this strategy was designed to present the “white man’s ways” as the best survival strategy for Blackfoot people during this time.

Contrastingly, in her analysis of Blackfoot governance, Kiera Ladner (2000) explains that pre-colonial Blackfoot life and politics was not structured around rigid gender roles like it is today, rather it was predicated on “radical individualism”. Specifically, she argues:

The Blackfoot world-view and its corresponding nationalism is predicated upon a recognition of individual autonomy and individualised powers and potentials whereby all beings and all manifestations of power are respected and included, and all beings are recognised as having the potential to contribute to the nationalist project in accordance with the gifts and powers given by the Creator (Ladner, 2000, p. 54)

This conceptualization of Blackfoot life is supported by the concept of *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi*, which translates to “what we were put here with as our responsibilities for our survival” (Bastien, 2004, p. 200). It refers to the responsibilities every Blackfoot person has on using the gifts Creator has bestowed upon them in contributing to the survival of the Confederacy. This is an integral part of *Siksikaitsitapiipaitapiyysin* (Blackfoot way of life) as each individual had something different to offer the collective. In her conversations with Blackfoot elders, Kiera Ladner writes that pre-

colonial Blackfoot life and politics “was a world where women existed at the centre of society – economically, spiritually, politically and culturally. It was a society in which women could choose their own path in life, as wives, mothers, spiritual elders, as owners of property, even as warriors and chiefs” (Ladner, 2000, p. 41). She describes a time when Blackfoot society was shaped by *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi* (radical individualism).

The argument that Ladner (2000) puts forward can be also be supported by the works of Dempsey (2003) and Blackfoot elder and historian Beverly Hungry Wolf (1980). Both Dempsey and Hungry Wolf provide accounts of historical queer figures in Blackfoot society. These authors provide a jumping off point for engaging with Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness. Both authors write about the story of Running Eagle, who was a famous warrior, leader, spiritual healer, and an individual who traversed gender protocols. Her story is important because it categorically dismantles the narratives that now dominate Blackfoot teachings of gender roles and protocols. For instance, Blackfoot elder Reg Crowshoe describes the traditional roles of Blackfoot men and women as followed: “A boys goal in life was to become a good hunter and warrior and eventually a leader of his people; a women’s goal centred on being married to a successful man, having children, and keeping a lodge” (Crowshoe & Mannes Schmidt, 2002, p. 18). According to Hungry Wolf (1980), Running Eagle was famous for her successful war trails as she played an important part in protecting Blackfoot territory from hostile forces by neighboring nations and even early settlers. This form of leadership attracted a large number of followers from other camps who eventually joined her and formed their own band, with her being the chief (p. 62). She was also a spiritual leader, having set up her own *Aakokatssin* (Sundance ceremony) (Hungry Wolf, 1980). All of these actions contradict contemporary Blackfoot gender regulation practices and strengthen the political concept of *Ihpi'po'to'tsspists*

(radical individualism), where individuality outranks gender as the determining factor for roles and responsibilities. Dempsey's (2003) description of "Blackfoot berdaches" and Hungry Wolf's (1980) description of Running Eagle provides some key insights into Blackfoot conceptions of queerness and *Ihpi'po'to'tsspists* (radical individualism).

Early anthropological accounts also discuss the spiritual powers of "Blackfoot berdaches" like "Four Bears" who was *A'yai-kik-ahsi* (acts like a woman). According to Dempsey (2003), Four Bears was considered to have spiritual powers that were given to him by the Sun, which allowed him to control the weather and "foretell the future of the Piegan tribe" (p. 62). Like Running Eagle, he was also considered a famous warrior having successfully defeated the Crees, Assiniboinés, and Sioux along the war trails, which eventually led him to becoming the chief of the Worm Band. While both authors miss some of these nuances, they do provide a foundation to make connections with the work of Ladner (2003) and Bastien (2004) on Blackfoot gender and governance. For instance, the stories that Dempsey shares about Blackfoot berdaches are all about the freedom individuals were given within the Confederacy to perform whatever gender they desired. There was no enforcement of gender protocols like there are today. In fact, the leadership that Running Eagle and Four Bears demonstrated attracted followers from other camps, which led to both of them becoming leaders of their own bands. Moreover, this encapsulates *Ihpi'po'to'tsspists* (radical individualism), as these individuals were drawing on their gifts for the survival of the Confederacy. They were not forced to perform a particular gender role. Regardless of these historical accounts of Blackfoot queerness, Dempsey (2003) also emphasizes that these individuals were the butt of many jokes by Blackfoot people, which is another instance of discrediting their place in Blackfoot life and politics. However, when you put his work in conversation with Bastien (2004) and Ladner (2003), the conceptualizations of

Blackfoot queerness are made even stronger. Returning to the central argument of this thesis, *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi* (radical individualism) was a central feature of Blackfoot governance, and to the ways in which Running Eagle and Four Bears operationalized this concept to activate their resistance and freedom as queer individuals.

What are the Methodological Orientations of this thesis?

Colonization is not the only story Indigenous peoples know, yet it is the narrative that has been insidiously ingrained within our minds and within the institutions of daily life. As Daniel Heath Justice (2018) reminds us, “there are all kinds of ways this story (colonialism) seeps into our bones and eats away at our spirits, undermining our potential, eroding our capacity to hold one another up and build affirming relationships through and across difference” (p. 3).

According to Gaudry (2015), research that focuses solely on the effects of colonization “perpetuates outsider perceptions of Indigenous communities as fundamentally dysfunctional and in need of outside intervention” (p. 245). Specifically, the discipline of political science has a long tradition of studying Indigenous peoples and politics through Western political traditions that ignore Indigenous perspectives and knowledges (Ladner, 2017). Consequently, research ‘on’ Indigenous politics has largely been focused on the settler state managing the “Indian Problem”, that decentres Indigenous “voices and/or research priorities” (Ladner, 2017, p. 175). Thus, the methodological orientations of this thesis seek to disrupt the colonial narration of 2SQ life and politics. In chapter three, I critically engage with the storying of 2SQ people within the political project of “Two Spirit Reconciliation” and the detriments this has for queer Indigeneity.

Currently, Indigenous-settler relations have been framed within the political project of reconciliation, a political framework built on the illusive and beguiling belief that a “renewed relationship” with Indigenous peoples can be acquired without acknowledging or addressing

ongoing forms of colonial violence (Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017). For instance, since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter TRC) Final Report (2015a), the Canadian government has vowed its support to restoring relations with Indigenous peoples through the TRC ninety-four calls to action (2015b). Similarly, the Canadian government endorsed the calls to action made by the Egale Human Rights Trust (hereafter Egale) in their report titled *The Just Society Report: Grossly Indecent – Confronting the Legacy of State Sponsored Discrimination against Canada’s LGBTQ2SI Communities* (hereafter JSR).

In both reconciliation projects, 2SQ Indigenous people and politics are taken up in deeply problematic ways. I focus my analysis on the discursive practices made in these two reconciliation reports as a proxy for understanding the broader theoretical questions of how settler-colonialism has impacted contemporary 2SQ Indigenous life and politics. Specifically, I am interested in looking at the effects of reconciliation discourse and the material consequences it produces for 2SQ people. In selecting data to analyze, I examine the TRC Calls to Action related to gender and 2SQ people. My text selection was influenced by the critiques that have been made by scholars regarding the TRC as a model of engagement to enhance Indigenous-settler relations. By this, I mean that I am interested in seeing how the TRC has ignored issues of gender, most notably 2SQ people, and what this means in terms of material consequences. For instance, Regan (2018) explains that the TRC has become an important site of scholarly research as government and funding agencies begin to respond to the Calls to Action. As a result, it is important to carefully examine the TRC Calls to Action as there are real material consequences from its recommendations, such as research funding. This will form the basis of the second part of my project, which will examine how discourses of reconciliation and decolonization are understood from the vantage point of 2SQ Blackfoot people.

Then, in chapter four, I centre the voices and perspectives of 2SQ Blackfoot people in order to understand how queer Indigeneity is *responding* to settler colonialism. A salient feature of this thesis is to learn from self-identified 2SQ Blackfoot people to uncover the political dimensions of 2SQ life and politics. As a member of the Blackfoot Confederacy this is a project that seeks to reaffirm the identities of 2SQ Blackfoot people and contribute to the larger conversation of the political resurgence of 2SQ people. Thus, this research project is infused by my own personal experiences and desire to initiate conversations of what it means to be 2SQ and Blackfoot. It is my hope that this thesis will inspire future research on Blackfoot conceptions of gender and the political resurgence of 2SQ people and politics within Blackfoot territory. This research also contributes to topics of decolonization and contemporary Queer politics in Canada. As pointed out by Greensmith and Giwa (2013), there is a dearth of literature of empirical investigations that examine how settler colonialism has impacted contemporary Queer politics and the lives of 2SQ Indigenous peoples in Canada. There are even fewer studies that have explored 2SQ people and politics from a Blackfoot vantage point. Therefore, my analysis hopes to add to the critique of settler colonialism and the strategies that are deployed to relegate 2SQ people and politics from Indigenous life and politics by learning from self-identified 2SQ Blackfoot people. For these reasons, my thesis study is grounded in *Siksikaitsitapiipaitapiiyssin* (Blackfoot Way of Life). What this methodology provides is the ability to understand Blackfoot politics from a Blackfoot vantage point, which allows for a deeper understanding of the nuanced relationships that exist between Blackfoot people.

Criteria for participants included people who self-identify as Blackfoot and Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ2) within Southern Alberta. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling strategy. According to Yin (2016), purposive

sampling allows researchers to select specific cases “that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data – in essence, *information rich*, given your topic of study” (p. 93). Specifically, homogenous sampling was utilized to study a specific subgroup within the Blackfoot Confederacy. According to Bornstein, Jager, and Putnick (2013) this sampling strategy is advantageous for studies that are looking at underrepresented sociodemographic groups in research. They state, “homogenous sampling design eliminates all variation associated with one or more sociodemographic factors, it adds no noise associated with those sociodemographic factors to the overall results” (Bornstein, Jager, & Putnick, 2013, p. 362). Similarly, Chilisa (2012) explains that homogenous sampling is used “to describe the experiences of subgroups of people who share similar characteristics” (p. 170). Due to the relational nature of Indigenous methodologies, research participants can include those with existing relationships with the researcher (Kovach, 2009). More explicitly, I have chosen to interview five of my peers, people who have a working understanding of Blackfoot Two Spirit Queer life and politics.

How does this thesis deploy an Indigenous Research Methodology?

According to Blackfoot scholar Betty Bastien (2004), the concept of research is not at odds with *Niitsitapi* epistemologies because Blackfoot people have been doing “research” long before the arrival of Europeans. The fundamental difference is that Blackfoot people acquired knowledge for the sake of “generating and creating knowledge premised on the goal of existing in harmony with the natural world. [Blackfoot epistemologies] allow tribal individuals to turn inward unto the self, toward an inner space” (Bastien, 2004, p. 39). Based on this understanding of research, I interpret my research study as a contemporary example of seeking out knowledge with the goal of moving towards harmony for all Blackfoot people. Harmony in this case means restoring the place of 2SQ Blackfoot people within the Confederacy. The second sentence in this

quote refers to the ability of Blackfoot people to turn inwards to their own life experiences as a way to guide the research process. Bastien (2004) goes on to say that “Research, understood as an inquiry using traditional protocols, is a journey of relating, participating, and understanding my relatives” (p. 46). Similarly, I am using IRM as a way to ensure 2SQ Blackfoot voices, philosophies, and knowledges are centred in the research process (Smith, 2012). Specifically, my research incorporates the values and beliefs of *Siksikaitstapi* (Blackfoot) in its design, methods, and analysis. I will explain why I have chosen this methodology, how this is Blackfoot, and what this allows me to do in my research in the following section.

***Ahkoomohsin* (to make a vow) as Blackfoot methodology.**

As I understand it, *Ahkoomohsin* refers to the sacred Blackfoot practice of making a vow for transfer rites to knowledge or for spiritual guidance on fulfilling a specific commitment (Bastien, 2004; Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, 2002). Most notably, Blackfoot people will make a vow when they plan on joining a sacred society. According to Blackfoot elder Reg Crowshoe, vows were traditionally made “for the betterment of the tribal community and the insurance of its survival” and they were used in particular ceremonies to “restore balance when there is a health problem, when there is a conflict between people themselves or people and the environment, and when there is a lack of buffalo” (Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, 2002, p. 21). *Ahkoomohsin* is part of the broader emergence of witnessing as Indigenous methodology (Hunt, 2018). According to Kwagiulth scholar Sarah Hunt, Kwagiulth witnessing is informed by a deep sense of obligation “to recall something that is being questioned” that involves action-oriented remembrance within relational networks like the potlatch tradition (p. 289). As I understand it, *Siksikaitstapi* witnessing can be activated in two ways; through public witnessing ceremonies like *Aakokatsin* (Sundance) and through the practice of *Ahkoomohsin* (to make a vow), which are deeply

personal moments that take place between an individual and Creator. In this thesis, I deploy these methods in the group gatherings as we collectively prepare to create a 2SQ Blackfoot Society that will be fully present and involved at *Aakokatsin* (Sundance). Likewise, I deploy this method of *Ahkoomohsin* (to make a vow) in my own personal efforts and critical self-location, which I will explain in proceeding section.

***Ninnohkanistssksinip* (speaking personally) as critical self-location.**

To help situate my research methodology, I will share my own story and lived experiences in shaping the topic of my research study. This is referred to as *Ninnohkanistssksinip* (Speaking personally) which is part of my self-location process (Bastien, 2004). In other words, by speaking personally I am explaining the way I understand this topic. *Ninnohkanistssksinip* is also an acknowledgement that there is no one universal truth, but a multitude of experiences that constitute Blackfoot relationality. I grew up in *Kainaiwa* (Blood Tribe) and the City of Lethbridge surrounded by many Blackfoot knowledge keepers and elders, but my family was not directly involved in any Blackfoot cultural practices aside from the occasional smudge or face painting ceremony. I did not grow up around ceremony like some of the families that are part of Blackfoot sacred societies. Both of my parents came from devout Catholic families, but the Catholicism I grew up around was an Indigenized form of Christianity. Regardless of my family's involvement in the Catholic church they were no less Blackfoot than someone that grew up traditional⁴. Accordingly, I witnessed the intra-Indigenous conflict along religious/traditional affiliations on the Blood Reserve as I navigated these tensions growing up. I remember feeling

⁴ There is an assumption made by Blackfoot ceremonialists that Blackfoot people that identify as Christian are somehow co-opted and silent supporters of the settler colonial agenda. This logical reasoning does nothing to address the damaged relational networks that currently exist within Indigenous communities, but actually exacerbates them.

like I was less Blackfoot because I was not raised around institutionalized Blackfoot traditionalism. On top of that, I felt very disconnected from my Blackfoot identity for being a queer cisgendered Blackfoot man. However, my relationship to organized Blackfoot ways of being changed when I attended my first *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) in August of 2012.

At the time, I was getting ready to move away to Vancouver for my undergraduate degree. I was having severe doubt about moving and it was my uncle who told me to go seek out the advice of the elders at *Aakokatssin* (Sundance). He told me to approach one of our relatives who was also a member of an *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) society. That was the first time I sought out the advice of any elder without the help of my parents. When I met with this *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) society member and explained my anxieties of moving away for school, they told me a story about a Blackfoot practice where people would leave the main camp for long periods of time to go to Chief Mountain to acquire knowledge, which they said was similar to what I was doing with my schooling. They also told me about the Blackfoot practice of vow making in ceremony and that if I wanted to make a vow to help them at *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) I would be provided with spiritual guidance while attending school. So, this was the first time I became an active participant in ceremony by agreeing to help them at *Aakokatssin* (Sundance). This was an important transition in my life in developing a stronger relationship with Blackfoot ways of knowing and being. At the same time, my parents were approached by elders who had asked them if they would consider joining the new sacred society group that would transfer in after the group my *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) mentor currently belonged to.

When my parents joined the Horn Society our family became immersed in Blackfoot lifeways and ceremony, which was the pathway we used to activate our familial resurgence. With my parents in the Horn Society for six years I learned a lot about Blackfoot protocol,

ceremony, history, and political philosophy. This was an important experience because my family was brought back into the circle indirectly by my *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) mentor I initially sought out.

This was an important lesson in my understanding of the complex forms of relationality that exist within Indigenous spaces. On one hand, the intra-Indigenous conflict still exists between Christians and ceremonialists, as well as along gender lines. On the other hand, there are small pockets where these relational networks can be mended in a more intimate than structural way. In other words, when our family became involved in *Aakokatssin* the intra-Indigenous conflict did not disappear, but we strengthened our own connection to these land-based practices, which I argue is crucial to understanding how to enact resistance and freedom for 2SQ Blackfoot people.

The summer of 2017 was also an important jumping off point for two important transitions in my life. At the time, I had just been accepted into the Master of Arts Political Science program at the University of Calgary and I was getting anxious the closer the program start date approached. I was again encountering doubt and questioned my own ability to do this kind of academic work. This all occurred during *Aakokatssin* (Sundance), which was the perfect space to engage in these feelings and questions because I was surrounded by family and mentors. After talking to family and those closest to me, the advice I received was to ask myself why I am doing this work, and what I am hoping this will allow me to do after it is over. And it dawned on me that I wanted to do something on Two Spirit Queer Blackfoot politics. The knowledge surrounding 2SQ Blackfoot people has been fractured and, in some cases, erased and replaced with colonial conceptions of gender and sexuality. I had personally encountered situations where women and 2SQ people were meant to feel unwelcome in Blackfoot spaces.

The direction of my MA research became clearer after spending time at *Aakokatssin* (Sundance). I decided that I wanted to pursue this topic because of the frustrations I had over the absence of 2SQ Blackfoot people at *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) and in the broader community, but I was not sure how to approach it. This led to a series of deep reflections about my past and why I thought the university was the best avenue to achieve this work. As such, I felt compelled to do something about it, but I could not seek out elders for two reasons. First, many Blackfoot elders would outright deny that there were 2SQ Blackfoot people prior to contact. I remember asking some of my great-great-aunts if we ever had Two Spirit people and they told me, “No, they’re a new thing. They came with the Europeans”. The second response I would get from elders was that we had Two Spirit people and they played a part in the community, but they could not give me any details of what that looked like or what their role was in the community. So, it became very clear that I needed to take a more nuanced approach to learning about Blackfoot conceptions of queerness. I myself learned the most about queer indigeneity from my undergraduate degree at UBC in Vancouver from other Indigenous students and professors, which is why I thought turning to academia was the best approach to take in seeking out these questions. While I was engaging in these feelings of doubt about going into the MA program, I was approached by my *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) mentor and his wife asking if I would join them as a partner in the new group of sacred society members. This new group of society members would transfer to the current group my parents belonged to. As I understand it, joining an *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) society is the path to becoming an elder and learning sacred Blackfoot knowledge. It is a huge responsibility and undertaking that many people have turned down because of what it requires of them.

When I was approached I was immediately taken aback because I did not consider myself “elder material”. Additionally, I was conflicted with what I saw as a problem in our Blackfoot community, which included the problematic nature of heteropatriarchy and strict gender protocols that prevents 2SQ people and women from fully engaging in ceremony and cultural practices. However, my *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) mentors really supported me when I was making the transition into my undergraduate degree in 2012. And it became very clear to me that despite my own frustrations I needed to reciprocate the support I received from my *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) mentors. This means that I would be at the centre of what I was most frustrated about with current Blackfoot heteropatriarchal practices. Prior to given my answer I sought out the advice of my parents. They told me that people join a society for different reasons; some will join because they are legacy children, meaning that their parents or grandparents were society members, so it is just an expectation that they join; or, they are trying to seek out particular knowledges; or, they make a vow for a specific reason, which could be for good health or for spiritual guidance to achieve something; one of the rare reasons is that they are approached to join. After seeking the counsel of my parents and grandmother (Ebby), I approached my *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) mentors and agreed to be their partner. I asked my parents what the proper protocol was to make a vow, and they told me that that is between you and *Ihtsipaitapiyopa* (Source of Life or Creator). After receiving this knowledge, it became clear that I was joining for two reasons. First, I am reciprocating the support I received from my *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) mentors for bringing our family back into our Blackfoot ways of being. And second, I am making a vow so that the work I am doing on Blackfoot 2SQ life and politics will be done in a good way.

Upon completing my coursework in my MA program, I was instructed by my grandmother (Ebby) to have an offering sweat before I started my research and interviewing process. I was told by my parents and other elders that an offering sweat is used to seek out spiritual guidance to start a project in a good way. The way I understand it, an offering sweat is part of Blackfoot affirmative protocol because it links the work you are trying to do, whether that be for spiritual reasons, or in my case for guidance in my thesis study, with *Ihtsipaitapiyopa* (Source of Life). It is a spiritual witnessing practice that places the individual making the offering accountable to completing their vow through spiritual guidance. This is what makes my research methodology Blackfoot. I have seen too many 2SQ Blackfoot people lose their lives to addictions and violence, which is why I see my thesis study as more than just research, it is also ceremony (Wilson, 2008).

The methodology of my research study positions me as an active participant in this resurgence project, which is deeply personal. What this means is that this research study is interwoven with my everyday life and relationships, these thoughts and ideas are constantly shaping and re-shaping my actions. This goes back to the Blackfoot concepts of *Niinnohkanistsksinipi* (speaking personally) and *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi* (those things we were put here with; implies responsibility for them), which are foundational to Blackfoot affirmative inquiry (Bastien, 2004). Therefore, I consider the method of storying as a political action designed to transform the narrative for 2SQ Blackfoot people.

The reason for positioning myself in my research is to provide a sense of transparency and push back against the harmful colonial research practices that continue to dominate Indigenous research inquiries (Strega & Brown, 2015). According to Henry, Tait, and STR8UP (2017), critical self-reflection is an important part of the research process in Indigenous research

inquiries because it pushes against reproducing harmful colonial research practices. Many colonial research endeavours lack a sense of accountability to Indigenous peoples and communities as they conducted research ‘on’ Indigenous peoples and communities rather than with them (Henry et al., 2017). In this thesis, I am very much involved as a participant as our group works to strengthen Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness and engage in resurgence activities. In many ways, this research study circumvents the ways in which Indigenous research methodologies often look to those in positions of power within Indigenous communities, such as elders or knowledge gatekeepers, to shape research projects.

Chapter 3 – Beyond “Two Spirit Reconciliation”: Rejecting the Politics of Settler-Homonationalism

In recent years, Indigenous-settler relations have been largely situated within the politics of reconciliation. In particular, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was established to rectify the historical injustice of Canada’s Indian Residential School (IRS) system that had an objective of forcibly assimilating Indigenous children into settler society (TRC, 2015a). The policy objective was to “kill the Indian in the child” through means of assimilation and *rehabilitation* into the dominant Euro-western culture (Hanson, 2009). Patrick Wolfe (2006) explains that, “assimilation can be a more effective mode of elimination than conventional forms of killing because it does not involve a disruptive affront to the rule of law that is ideologically central to the cohesion of settler society” (p. 402). This settler-colonial objective was driven by the prevailing narrative of Indigenous “deficiency” (Justice, 2018). While the TRC (2015) acknowledges the IRS system as a form of “cultural genocide” it largely overlooks the full effects residential schools have had on gender (Green, 2017) and queer Indigeneity (Simpson, 2017).

Two Spirit Reconciliation was spurred on by the partnership the TRC developed with Egale towards the end of its mandate. In the summary of the TRC Final Report (2015a) it states, “In the final year of its mandate, the Commission organized two events to gather additional information for its report...It [the Commission] also organized, with the support of Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, a forum with members of the Two Spirit community to discuss the impacts of residential schools and what needs to be done to support reconciliation and healing in that community” (p. 33). The phrasing of this directive clearly draws a distinction between Indigenous communities and 2SQ people. In the absence of including 2SQ people in the analysis

and findings of the TRC, Egale has taken on the role as queer Indigenous arbiter in its JSR. Specifically, the JSR states that “We must also rehabilitate the two spirit tradition oppressed by colonizing forces in coordination with aboriginal stakeholders” (2016, p. 107). Specifically, Egale claims that “conceptualizing sexual and gender discrimination vis-à-vis the LGBTQ2SI population through the prism of intersectionality is necessary for the restoration of queer dignity through official state recognition” (2016, p. 12).

The TRC and JSR have facilitated the political project of what I refer to as “Two Spirit Reconciliation”. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the political consequences of Two Spirit Reconciliation as it relates to queer Indigeneity. A prime component of both political projects was the delivery of a government apology for historic wrongdoings, but the positioning of queer Indigeneity within these reports necessitates critical engagement. What I mean by this is that 2SQ Indigenous peoples have been taken up in the project of reconciliation only secondary, which is why a thorough analysis of “Two-Spirit Reconciliation” is warranted.

Both reconciliation reports emphasize the need to acknowledge historic wrongdoings in order to establish pathways for new relationships. However, in this chapter I demonstrate that reconciliation is operationalized in ways that inhibit queer Indigeneity in the reports narration of 2SQ life and politics. Specifically, I argue that Two Spirit Reconciliation emerges out of a politics of settler-homonationalism, which is the production of queer settler subjects attached to the privileges provided by settler-state recognition. In this way, I will show that the deployment of Two Spirit Reconciliation fails to activate transformative reconciliation and resurgence for 2SQ Indigenous folkx.

What does Two Spirit reconciliation look like?

The establishment of the TRC of Canada has been heralded as a pathway to building a new relationship with Indigenous peoples but it overlooks queer Indigeneity in its analysis and recommendations. A prime component of the TRC are its ninety-four calls to action (TRC, 2015b), which have become important as organizations look to them as a template for rebuilding Indigenous-settler relations (Krikorian, Cameron, Martel, McDougall, & Vipond, 2017, p. 31). For the most part, reconciliation discourse in Canada has become “a blueprint for legislation, policy and practice which address the root causes of the conflict and give impetus to the transition towards democracy and good governance” (Valji, 2010, p. 15). At the same time, however, reconciliation in Canada has also become a site of increased criticism by scholars who argue the current reconciliation process in Canada has been used as a nebulous framework to belie the reality of ongoing forms of colonial violence (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Alfred, 2009; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017).

In this chapter, I present my arguments of what Two Spirit Reconciliation means in the context of two reconciliation reports, the TRC and JSR. In the following section, I focus my analysis on the discursive practices of the TRC by examining the 94 Calls to Action and its attention to 2SQ people. More specifically, I am interested in looking at the effects of reconciliation discourse and the political consequences it has for 2SQ people. For instance, Reagan (2018) explains that the TRC has become an important site of scholarly research as government and funding agencies begin to respond to the Calls to Action. As a result, it is important to carefully examine the TRC Calls to Action as there are real consequences from its recommendations. The subsequent section then analyzes how 2SQ people are taken up by Egale in the JSR. Drawing upon the work of Dian Million (2013), I demonstrate how 2SQ people are

ensconced within the logics of victimhood that centre past injustices as the primary narrative for 2SQ people.

This analysis makes clear what I mean by “Beyond Two Spirit Reconciliation”. I do not mean a rejection of reconciliation as a mode of political engagement. Instead, I make the case for an understanding of reconciliation that is informed by decolonial allyship and accountability. As I present these arguments, I am reminded that decolonial queer allyship is possible and already present in my own relationships and the lives of other 2SQ Blackfoot people⁵. These arguments are built off the arguments made by other scholars who have also investigated Indigenous-queer relationality.

For Greensmith, a politics of decolonization within queer spaces should be thought of as a process and less of an outcome because non-Indigenous LGBTQ people need to develop “a coalitional politic that addresses the survival and resilience of Indigenous peoples and nations” (p. 33). This includes actively embodying a “decolonial queer praxis”, which is a relational approach that calls for a re-orientation “away from White supremacist logics and systems and toward more respectful and accountable ways of being in relation to one another and on the lands we live on, while not appropriating Indigenous knowledge” (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p. 168). This politics of accountability includes naming and working against queer settler colonialism, which “might mean that the entirety of queer organizations is to be challenged, reworked, and possibly dismantled” (p. 34). For Lenon (2018), a decolonial queer politics might include a politics of refusal that “involves the concomitant refusal of a story of determined non-innocence to explain our [white lesbian/gay/queer] lives, changing it instead to the project of accounting for ourselves

⁵ See my analysis in Chapter 4 under section Queer Indigeneity and the Utility of Looking Outwards, as well as my analysis in Chapter 5 under section Queer Indigeneity and Transformational Reconciliation.

under conditions of white supremacy and settler colonialism” (p. 566). These decolonial allyship frameworks provide excellent contrasts to the deployment of the politics of settler-homonationalism in mainstream queer spaces and politics. Specifically, this work will help set up my argument and analysis in Chapter Four and Five when I present my case for what constitutes a Blackfoot queer politics.

The TRC Calls to Action and Queer Indigeneity

In my analysis I have labelled each of the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action that give explicit attention to queer Indigeneity and gender. Table 1 displays the results of this analysis; for the sake of brevity, I display only those issues which are most obviously directed to gender and sexuality. Immediately, it becomes clear that the TRC does not engage with queer Indigeneity, as there are no specific recommendations made for it. Within the entire document, gender-specific recommendations are mentioned three times out of a total of 94 Calls to Action. There is no analysis provided to residential schooling and its role in disturbing Indigenous conceptualizations of queerness or gender.

Residential schools were detrimental to Indigenous conceptualizations of queerness, as well as family systems and political structures. Indian residential schools separated Indigenous peoples from their families and imposed colonial morality structures of what constitutes appropriate gender, sexuality, masculinity, femininity, and family. In doing so, queer Indigeneity was relegated from Indigenous life and politics. The onslaught of Indigenous conceptualizations of queerness and gender frameworks emerged out of the narrative of Indigenous “deficiency” (Justice, 2018). The storying of Indigenous peoples being inferior and in need of saving has been central to settler colonialism. Consequently, this narrative gave way to policies and laws that

sought the *rehabilitation* or assimilation of Indigenous peoples. All of which, has created jagged worldviews. For this reason, the relegation of queer Indigeneity from the TRC is telling.

Table 3.1 TRC Calls to Action

Category	Number of Recommendations	Mentions of Gender	Mentions of 2SQ	Description of recommendation
Child Welfare	5	0	0	None
Education	7	0	0	None
Language and Culture	5	0	0	None
Health	7	1	0	TRC Call to Action 19: Close gaps in health outcomes. Address health gaps on “maternal health”
Justice	18	1	0	TRC Call to Action 41: Appoint a public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women.
Canadian Government and the UNDRIP	2	0	0	None
Royal Proclamation and Covenant of Reconciliation	3	0	0	None
Settlement Agreement Parties and the UNDRIP	2	0	0	None
Equity for Aboriginal People in the Legal System	3	0	0	None
National Council for Reconciliation	4	0	0	None
Professional Development and Training for Public Servants	1	0	0	None
Church Apologies and Reconciliation	4	1	0	TRC Call to Action 59: Learn about church’s role in colonization.
Education for Reconciliation	4	0	0	None
Youth Programs	1	0	0	None
Museums and Archives	4	0	0	None
Missing Children and Burial Information	6	0	0	None
National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation	2	0	0	None
Commemoration	5	0	0	None
Media and Reconciliation	3	0	0	None
Sports and Reconciliation	5	0	0	None
Business and Reconciliation	1	0	0	None

Newcomers to Canada	2	0	0	None
TOTAL	94	3	0	

It shows that settler-imposed structures of gender, sex, and sexuality are naturalized within the political project of Indigenous reconciliation. Accordingly, examining the TRC’s lack of engagement with settler-imposed morality structures of gender, sex, and sexuality, shows how the “jagged worldview” framework influences what is named and privileged in the TRC. This is important because scholars have pointed out that 2SQ people have a dearth of statistical data collected on them regarding violence (Hunt, 2016). Simpson (2017) points out the pattern of this relegation:

“We have no statistics on the number of queer children that died in residential schools, died escaping residential schools, committed suicide as a result of their residential school experience, or were forced to live an invisible life because of residential school homophobia and shaming. Nor have we fully investigated the intergenerational impacts of the infusion of anti-queer violence into our communities and its impact on our political systems and nationhood as a result of residential schools” (p. 125).

In her survey of scholarly literature regarding the health of Two Spirit people, Sarah Hunt concludes that “these research findings indicate the need for a deeper integration of Two-Spirit peoples’ lived experiences in local and national strategies to address violence” (p. 15). The storying of the TRC is important because it demonstrates the relegation of 2SQ people from the analysis and recommendations made in the political project of Indigenous reconciliation.

While 2SQ people are not mentioned within the TRC Calls to Action, I also examine how gender might be mentioned in other ways. Gender related calls to action are important to examine within the larger analysis of 2SQ politics because they are part of a larger narrative of settler-imposed structures and institutions of gender, sex, and sexuality. In the report, there is only one recommendation that explicitly mentions gender (Calls to Action 41; see Table 1). While there are several other recommendations that have gender implications, this is the only

recommendation that draws attention to a specific action, which calls on the federal government to “appoint a public inquiry into the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls” (TRC Calls to Action #41, 2015b, p. 4). While this is an actionable recommendation, it is focused on the creation of another public inquiry as opposed to structural reforms. In other words, the only actions that are deemed worthy in the TRC are public inquiries, rather than addressing ongoing forms of gender and sexualized colonial violence (Cook, 2016; Cornassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Million, 2013).

The remaining two recommendations do not explicitly focus on gender but draw attention to “maternal health” and church involvement in colonization; these recommendations are found in the health section and church apologies section of the TRC, respectively (TRC Calls to Action 19 and 59; see Table 1). The reason for including these other two recommendations resides in their brief mentions of gender. The health recommendation (TRC Call to Action 19) calls on the federal government “to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities” (TRC Calls to Action, 2015b). This recommendation lists a variety of indicators, one being maternal health. While it does directly mention gender, it is done so in passing to the broader health inequities between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians, which posits a weak gendered focus because it is only one component of the entire recommendation. While gender is briefly mentioned in the health section of the TRC (Call to Action 19), it does not draw enough attention to the ways in which colonization is itself a determinant of health. Furthermore, the problematic nature of this particular recommendation is that it does not view gender inequity as an important factor in the path to reconciliation, which has been recognized as a determinant of health (CCSDH, 2008). Hunt (2016) asserts, “This erasure has an impact on the types of policies that are created, funding

priorities, and the design and delivery of Aboriginal health programs” (p. 13). For this reason, it is troubling that this will have serious material consequences for what programs and research get funded, and which ones will not as a result of the TRC Calls to Action.

Lastly, the recommendations for church officials does not mention gender directly but does call on church officials and their congregations to “learn about their church’s role in colonization” (TRC Call to Action 59). This is a vague directive that has the potential to leave out important information. While the recommendation does mention the role of residential schools in damaging Indigenous family it does not explicitly mention how colonialism has altered the gender frameworks or governance systems of Indigenous peoples. For instance, it does not state how the imposed values of the church have devastated the very fabric of Indigenous social and political frameworks.

For instance, recalling a conversation he had with Blackfoot elder and leader Adam Delaney⁶, Conaty remembers Adam frequently saying, “When the White people came, they just shook us dramatically. It’s up to us, in our healing process as a people, to know who we are and where we came from. We need to understand that there is nothing wrong with being who we are” (Conaty, 2015, p. 269). Under his leadership, Adam led a group of traditionalists to restore important Blackfoot societies, ceremonies, and practices from the 1970’s to early 2000’s. However, Blackfoot elder Herman Yellow Old Woman claims that there was a lot of community resistance to the restoration and repatriation of Blackfoot lifeways because of the imposed morality structures of Christianity. He states, “I’ve got nothing against Christianity, but it was very strong in our community, and that is where the resistance was coming from” (Conaty, 2015,

⁶ Adam Delaney (Blood Tribe) was an important leader in the Blackfoot repatriation movement during the 1970’s to early 2000’s. He was instrumental in reclaiming lost and stolen ceremonial items following the lifting of the Sundance ban.

p. 189). He goes on to explain how Christianity instilled fear into the people about the Blackfoot way of life: “Many people had lost their belief in our traditional ways and following various Christian dominations. They were afraid of Iitskinaiksi” (p. 193). This is significant because the recommendation fails to address how the church was salient in damaging Indigenous governance structures and political practices.

To this end, the TRC erases 2SQ people from its political project and analysis. Emphasizing this is critical to my argument as residential schools were instrumental, along with other government strategies, in the internalization of anti-queer violence and heteropatriarchy among Indigenous peoples. It is important because the TRC Final Report has a mandate to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (TRC, 2015a, p. 319). Yet, the report fails to address the intergenerational impacts of heteropatriarchy, anti-queer violence, and the daily forms of violence that 2SQ people contend with because of it (Simpson, 2017).

Settler-homonationalism and the Just Society Report

Despite the TRC failing to address the legacies of residential schooling on 2SQ people in its Calls to Action, the political project has been taken on by Egale in the JSR. The report was part of a larger political project for LGBTQ2 that states, “all queer Canadians deserve truth and reconciliation for the historical misuses of state power that eroded their human dignity” (Egale, 2016, p. 12). Egale played an important role in the JSR and its calls to action on the federal government to “honour the truth and make it right” by apologizing for Canada’s history of “state sponsored homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia dating back to Contact and the suppression of the Two-Spirit traditions among First Nations” (Egale, 2016, p. 2). Unlike the TRC Calls to Action, the JSR highlights how “European colonizers persecuted First Nations for failing to

conform to their gender norms, including matriarchal structures and gender non-conforming behaviour” (Egale, 2016, p. 11-12). In doing so, the JSR positions 2SQ people and politics within a renewed discourse of reconciliation in Canada. My method of examination on the JSR consisted of careful and purposeful reading of the report, paying attention to what the report privileges, what is made visible, and what is ignored. Following a methodological directive offered by Dian Million’s (2013) felt theory, I focus on the ways in which the report emphasizes discourses of trauma, victimhood, and “healing” as opposed to 2SQ resurgence.

While the JSR acknowledges 2SQ peoples in the report, it does so in problematic ways. The JSR deliberately situates 2SQ as an identity marker separate from its theoretical and political position as a critique of settler colonialism (Driskill, Finley, Gilley & Morgensen, 2011; Hunt, 2016; Simpson, 2017). The JSR allowed me to delineate how 2SQ people and politics are framed within a politics of settler-homonationalism. In other words, the report fails to situate queer injustice within the broader framework of settler-colonialism.

There are three themes that emerge within my analysis that resonate with the established literature of critiques made on queer politics and its engagement with 2SQ people in Canada. First, there is an absence of 2SQ voices in the political project of “Two Spirit Reconciliation”. Second, contemporary queer politics in Canada is evoked through a politics of inclusion that enables queer subjectivities to utilize Two Spirit identity to support homonationalist political projects by decentering themselves from transformative reconciliation and decolonial allyship. Last, the discourse surrounding Two Spirit Reconciliation is ensconced in logics of trauma that placate self-determination and transformational reconciliation with the promise of a white “saviour” in its place. One of the main directives in the report states:

As part of a comprehensive process of acknowledging and repairing the harm done to LGBTQ2SI communities in Canada, Canada should apologize for the harm done to Two Spirit people, memorialize that harm for all Canadians, and make efforts to work with First Nations, Two Spirit people and Egale to restore the Two Spirit traditions (Egale, 2016, p. 20).

The report emphasizes *apologize, memorialize, and restore* in its engagement with queer Indigeneity. These three words are oriented towards past events rather than the structures of settler sexuality and the violence it continues to produce. Interestingly, the report portrays the gender frameworks of Indigenous peoples as being destroyed and in need of saving. The use of “memorialize” suggests 2SQ people have been eviscerated completely and are in need of state assistance to “restore Two Spirit traditions”. This directive overlooks the political resurgence of 2SQ life and politics and its decolonial foundations in contemporary queer politics in Canada. While I do not dismiss the damages that have been done to Indigenous conceptualizations of queerness and the need to restore these relationships, the report positions Egale as an important agent in these restoration actions. Even in the report itself, it fails to “make it right” by conflating “reconciliation” with “rehabilitation”. Rehabilitation appears consistently throughout the document which makes it a major flaw in execution and understanding of reconciliation, as opposed to a writing misprint. This is significant because “rehabilitation” resonates with the narratives used in crafting the Indian residential school system, which also saw its purpose as integrating Indigenous peoples into modern society. The narrative of Indigenous “deficiency” is still present in this report, albeit re-packaged in discourses of inclusion rather than assimilation. Regardless, the symbolism of “rehabilitation” is telling because it evokes a “white savior” complex by assuming a settler stewardship role in protecting 2SQ people who are incapable of doing this work themselves. Simpson (2017) asserts that these actions placate Indigenous resurgence by “deploying the politics of grief: a set of tools the state uses to avoid structural

change” (Simpson, 2017, p. 239). The logics of trauma/victimhood appear to work in tandem with the “white savior” approach of these reconciliation reports.

This is most emblematic in its political objective of a state apology, which the report argues “would send a powerful and progressive message about LGBTQ2SI equality and human rights” (Egale, 2016, p. 87). Similar to the TRC, the JSR is focused on receiving a state apology that recognizes “the harm done” to queer subjects in a historical lens. The JSR introduces the term Two Spirit in the History section of the report and focuses entirely on its identity marker and disregards its political origins as a critique of settler colonialism. The emphasis is placed on Two Spirit being an umbrella term for Indigenous peoples along the LGBTQ spectrum. In many respects, it appropriates this term for its own political volition, which is to “honour the truth and make it right” (Egale, 2016, p. 20). Ironically, the JSR turns to the work of Thomas King (Cherokee) in the conclusion of the report by stating that “Thomas King encourages Canadians to think about the importance of social narratives and how they construct social reality” (Egale, 2016, p. 111). Unfortunately, the JSR does not live up to its own directive based on its engagement with queer Indigeneity.

The JSR also fails to “honor the truth and make it right” in its deployment of an intersectional analysis. In the report, Two Spirit people are the *only* (racialized) identity in its “intersectional” analysis. The JSR claims to be predicated upon an intersectional analysis because “Intersectionality provides a basis for broadening the scope of an apology to a more comprehensive and meaningful declaration.” (Egale, 2016, p. 12). It defines intersectionality as “The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage: through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better

acknowledge and ground the differences among us” (Egale, 2016, p. 100). However, the operationalization of its intersectional analysis fails to situate its findings and recommendations in Canada’s role in anti-Black violence, nor does it mention any other queer people of colour in its analysis. This supports my analysis of the JSR failing to “honor the truth and make it right” because its intersectional lens – which originated in Black feminist scholarship in the 1980s – fails to address anti-queer Black violence in its report (Carastathis, 2014; Lenon, 2018). In this light, the deployment of an intersectional analysis lacks critical engagement and asserts more of a check box approach to reconciliation. What these oversights reveal is a lack of understanding of intersectionality, colonialism, reconciliation, and allyship.

Returning to the analysis I made in Chapter Two, queer decolonial allyship is absent in this report in a number of ways. First, the JSR is focused on an outcome, receiving a state apology, rather than on building processes of relationality, which failed to “[address] the survival and resilience of Indigenous peoples and nations” (Greensmith, 2018, p. 33). The report fails to embody a “decolonial queer praxis” because it does not move “away from White supremacist logics and systems and toward more respectful and accountable ways of being in relation to one another and on the lands we live on, while not appropriating Indigenous knowledge” (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p. 168). Moreover, the report fails to “[account] for [white lesbian/gay/queer lives] under conditions of white supremacy and settler colonialism” (Lenon, 2018, p. 566). In other words, the storying of 2SQ people within the JSR is a homonationalist one.

What are the political consequences of “Two Spirit Reconciliation”?

Returning to the analysis I provided in this chapter, the erasure of 2SQ people from the TRC allows us to understand the scope of this relegation from life and politics. But, why does Two Spirit Reconciliation matter within the context of Queer Indigenous life and politics? It

matters because these spaces act as the repository of storying the narrative of 2SQ people. Two Spirit Reconciliation attempts to transform queer Indigenous people and politics into homonationalist subjects. As Million (2013) reminds us, “this therapeutic ethos has often lent itself to a reconciliation that does not change the colonial structures but adapts the colonized to the colonial systems as they change” (p. 178). This resonates with the “jagged worldview” framework as Indigenous peoples are thrust into settler colonial orientations and understandings within the project of Two Spirit Reconciliation. In this way, what gives Two Spiritedness meaning is a narrative of colonization, rather than Indigenous conceptualizations and lifeways. These frames of reference produce different political projects. Two Spirit Reconciliation is then politically damaging to queer Indigeneity because it attempts to contain its radical possibilities.

The JSR and TRC reveal different problems with the operationalization of reconciliation with queer Indigenous life and politics. Two Spirit Reconciliation engages with queer Indigeneity by reinforcing discourses of victimhood, romanticizing an Indigenous past, and propagating “white savior” actors in the resurgence of 2SQ people and traditions. In this chapter, I have shown that “Two Spirit Reconciliation” was established over 2SQ peoples within a political project intent on homonationalist objectives rather than engaging in transformative reconciliation.

Million (2013) explains that Canada’s engagement with Indigenous peoples has centered the narrative on “healing” trauma as opposed to structural changes that would take transformative reconciliation seriously. Similarly, Simpson (2017) highlights how successful trauma-based mobilization has been in making state apologies and “setting up commissions and inquiries as a mechanism to account for past injustices” (p. 238). This has been the case within the political project of Two Spirit Reconciliation. Within both reports, there is no attention to

ongoing forms of violence 2SQ people contend with, nor the ways in which mainstream queer spaces perpetuate racism and colonialism⁷.

Queer Indigeneity is consumed within the larger narrative of queer citizenship and the desire to rectify past injustices and advance the rights of queer citizens. The politics of victimhood has been instrumental in placating transformative reconciliation because the only legible form of queer Indigeneity is one that is homonationalist. The version of queer injustice that is being told in the JSR is one that is entirely encased in settler sexuality, institutions, and politics. Specifically, the JSR consumes Indigeneity within settler orientations and understandings that relegates the lived realities and stories of 2SQ folkx from this reconciliation project. There is no critical engagement with the way queer settlers have also, and continue to, enact various forms of violence against 2SQ people.

While these reports are problematic, they are important because they demonstrate how 2SQ folkx are relegated to the periphery of Indigenous life and politics. Additionally, these reports further the settler-homonationalist narrative that deepens the legitimacy of these perceived “gay-friendly” institutions and processes by cultivating queer loyalty to them. This allows white queer organizations and individuals to “sustain racial difference and settler colonial oppression” by evoking diversity which “obscure the ways that social service organizations are deeply embedded in and sustain whiteness” (Greensmith, 2018, p. 58). Specifically, mainstream queer spaces rely on “funding structures that dictate how money can be spent and for whom...[which] typically propels organizations into relationships with the state” (p. 59). These

⁷ For instance, Edmonton Pride cancelled its 2019 festival due to mounting pressure by Indigenous and queer people of colour, who raised concerns over racism and policing within Pride. Ironically, a member of Edmonton Pride called police during one of their joint meetings citing “safety concerns”.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/edmonton-pride-festival-cancelled-2019-1.5093276>

relationships are then reinforced and maintained by attaching material consequences to their compliance. This has detrimental consequences to building decolonial allyship because challenging the ways in which mainstream queer spaces reify settler colonialism threatens their relationship and privileges with the state. Accordingly, decolonial activities are viewed as too divisive and contrary to the unifying features that mainstream queer spaces seek to portray themselves as (Dryden, Lenon, & Awwad, 2015; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013). Therefore, disrupting the narrative of Two Spirit Reconciliation is imperative to building decolonial allyship and moving towards transformative reconciliation and resurgent mobilization. There is a growing resurgence of 2SQ politics and decolonial allyship as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four and Five, however, settler-homonationalism has become pervasive within everyday queer spaces and politics which is why it must be unsettled.

Conclusion

Two Spirit Reconciliation does not produce transformative reconciliation. Instead, it assumes the role of Two Spirit spokesperson, which is grounded in the logics of trauma (Million, 2013) and operationalized in the “saviour trope” (Henry & Tait, 2017) wherein 2SQ people are in need of a “white saviour” to help them “restore” Two Spirit traditions. The JSR does not active resistance and freedom for 2SQ people, it furthers the politics of grief that “place white Canada in a position of moral authority” to then determine the solutions (Simpson, 2017, p. 240). In this way, my argument for moving “Beyond Two Spirit Reconciliation” is in reference to the lack of transformative reconciliation in this political project. Moving “Beyond Two Spirit Reconciliation” is about building decolonial queer allyship. There is a need to engage in transformative reconciliation in mainstream queer spaces and politics if settler-homonationalism is to be challenged. Settler-homonationalism creates political agents within the queer community

who are invested in protecting the rights and privileges that come with being good queer citizens. But these rights and privileges are still interwoven with the oppressive structures of settler sexuality, economics and politics.

Interrogating the sexualized and heteronormative landscape of settler-colonialism is imperative to decolonization, without it there is a risk in reproducing the harmful colonial narratives within political projects like Two Spirit Reconciliation. In particular, queer settler-state loyalty must be interrogated and analyzed if decolonial movements are to build resurgent mobilizing coalitions. Simultaneously, shifting attention and support to geographically specific relational modes of being offer the strongest pathways to activating 2SQ resurgence. In Chapter Four, I examine how the politics of traditionalism and homonationalism play out in the lives of four 2SQ Blackfoot individuals. In my analysis, I also demonstrate how these individuals engage in personal acts of resistance and freedom, which set the stage for broader resurgent mobilization.

Chapter 4 – Queer Indigeneity: Reflections on Traditionalism, Homonationalism, and Relationality

Having traced the way Two Spirit identity is taken up in the political project of ‘Two Spirit Reconciliation’, I now turn to the ways 2SQ Blackfoot people are relegated to the periphery of life and politics in Blackfoot society and in contemporary queer spaces, and how these experiences shape their understandings of what is needed to activate broader forms of resurgence. In chapter one, I introduced Simpson’s (2017) concept of “Queering Resurgence” as a possible way forward for enacting resistance and freedom for 2SQ Blackfoot people. However, as some scholars have pointed out, the resurgence of Indigenous governance and lifeways must deal with the imposition of heteropatriarchy and the ways in which anti-queer violence is ensconced in Indigenous nationhoods. Viewed in this light, the calls for “Queering Resurgence” seem to be directed at non-queer Indigenous peoples and nations and the need to *make space* for 2SQ people. Taking this a step further, this chapter will argue that the act of *taking space* illuminates the ways resurgence can be activated in larger political contexts by 2SQ people.

In order to provide my argument on how to activate a queer Indigenous politics for Blackfoot people, this chapter asks the following question: How do the experiences of 2SQ Blackfoot people navigating Indigenous and queer spaces shape how they come to know, think about, and understand what is needed to enact broader forms of resistance and freedom? This chapter will consist of three sections that are based on the interview questions that I asked. The first section includes participant reflections on what it means to be 2SQ and Blackfoot. I will include commentary that describes 2SQ history, traditions, and terminology to situate the intra-Indigenous politics of gender that now constitute Blackfoot life and politics. The second section includes participant accounts within queer spaces, and the challenges associated with these sites

as platforms for activating 2SQ resistance and freedom. The final section outlines a set of conclusions as potential pathways for activating 2SQ Blackfoot politics. This chapter is about the restoration of fractured relational networks between 2SQ people, the sharing of personal stories of traumas and triumphs, and the convergence of everyday individual acts of resistance into explicit actions of collective freedom.

Data Collection and Analysis

In the introductory chapter, I explained my closeness to this research study and how this goes against the grain of what social science research advocates. The storying of my journey to this study created a closeness rather than intellectual distance, which means that my research never leaves my consciousness, it is intimately connected to me at all times. More than this, though, is the deep sense of obligation I have to fulfilling this research study as it is interwoven with Blackfoot affirmative inquiry. This intellectual closeness allows me to write from within an Indigenous polity that creates a series of different methodological and ethical considerations. For instance, this work does not stop when my thesis is over because the intellectual study emerged out of the conversations that were already taking place before I decided to write about it. Likewise, the relationships that were cultivated and strengthened over the course of this study mean that I am accountable to these relationships outside of the scope of what university ethics requires of me. My personal experiences, and the experiences and stories shared with me by my 2SQ Blackfoot kin, shape the methodology of this research but also shape our collective political project and voice. Therefore, as I write, and I do my best, to make visible the experiences, stories, and thoughts of 2SQ Blackfoot people, I am simultaneously thinking about how these individual expressions of Indigenous storywork shape the broader narrative of 2SQ Blackfoot resistance and freedom.

Here, I offer a brief introduction to the four research participants, highlighting their understandings of Blackfoot conceptions of queerness, and their lived experiences being 2SQ within Blackfoot territory. None of the people who were invited to participate in an interview said no, however I sent invitations to two other people who did not respond to my request. I recognize that this is a small sample of participants, but this research study was motivated by the desire to hear the stories of other self-identified 2SQ Blackfoot people to develop an understanding of the Queer Blackfoot life and politics. All of the participants in this study self-identify as Blackfoot and Two Spirit, but three also identified with more specified Blackfoot terminology. One participant identified as Akiina, which is a Blackfoot word used to describe the gender variant of within the Blackfoot language; it can be translated to a gay man. Two participants identified as Awowaki. One participant defined this as the equivalent to transgender-female and another participant defined it as the equivalent to a masculine gay woman. In the proceeding pages, I will explore the politics that are associated with queer Indigenous language.

Rose Heavy Head (I-oh-geet-h-moh-gee) is Blackfoot from Kainaiwa (Blood Tribe) and a current pipe holder in the Piercing Sundance Society on the Blood Reserve. Rose is considered a Two Spirit elder among Blackfoot people for her traditional knowledge. Rose grew up on the Blood Reserve and is a residential school survivor. Trained as an addiction counsellor, Rose has worked on a variety of projects that raise awareness on Blackfoot culture and traditional healing practices. Currently, Rose has been working on providing presentations to different non-profit organizations in Southern Alberta on Two Spirit traditions.

Shawn Singer is Aapaitstapi (White Weasel People) from Moses Lake on the Blood Reserve. He refers to himself as Akiina, which is a gender variant within Blackfoot that refers to an individual that is woman-man. He was raised by his grandparents and great-grandparents and

considers himself privileged in cultural knowledge. As a young boy, Shawn spent a lot of time at Sundance with his grandparents, which is where he acquired a lot of his Blackfoot teachings. He is also a fluent Blackfoot speaker working on reclaiming 2SQ Blackfoot terminology. Shawn is also formally educated with a Bachelor of Social Work degree. He is currently the program manager for the Lethbridge Friendship Society and organizes events for Indigenous youth in the city. Currently, Shawn is working on a cap-stone project that engages with 2SQ Blackfoot historical figure Peigan Woman.

Evans Yellow Old Woman is Blackfoot and a member of the Siksika Nation and refers to himself as Two Spirit. He has been working in the City of Calgary as the Health Services Coordinator for the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary. Evans is also a co-founder and board member of VOICES, a coalition of LGBTQ2SIA+ people of colour committed to advocating for racialized and marginalized communities in the City of Calgary. Over the years, Evans has actively advocated for LGBTQ2 Indigenous peoples living in the City of Calgary.

Sable Sweet Grass is Blackfoot and a member of the Kainaiwa Nation and identifies as Awowaki, which means “Crossing over”. She considers Moh-kins-tsis (Calgary) her home but also grew up throughout Southern Alberta having spent time living on the Blood Reserve, in Lethbridge, and Magrath. She has been a longtime advocate for urban Indigenous people in Calgary and uses her experience as Awowaki to help other Two Spirit/Queer people by raising awareness on Indigenous transgender/transsexual issues. Sable has a Master of Fine Arts from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. Her transgender play *Awowakii* was performed at the Rubaboo Aboriginal Arts Festival in Edmonton and at Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto. She currently works as a Community Investment Officer with Calgary Arts Development.

What are the experiences of 2SQ Blackfoot people navigating Indigenous and Queer spaces?

In the proceeding pages, I detail the complex forms of relationality that inform queer Indigeneity through the perspectives of 2SQ Blackfoot people. While this paper is anchored in Blackfoot conceptualizations there are also broader meanings within the tensions that exist between queer Indigeneity, traditionalism, and settler-homonationalism. The relationship between Queer Indigeneity and traditionalism is important to understand as anti-queer, and heteropatriarchal practices, originate within selective Indigenous intellectualisms. According to Mohawk scholar Beth Brant (1994), heteropatriarchal violence includes the formulation of what constitutes “true Indigeneity”, which is one that adopts heteronormative ideals. Specifically, she argues, “Our sexuality has been colonized, sterilized, whitewashed...When we fight amongst ourselves as to who is a better Indian, who is a more traditional Indian, we are linking arms with the ones who would just as soon see us dead. Homophobia has *no* justification within our Nations” (p. 59-60). Similarly, settler-homonationalism helps us understand how queer Indigeneity loses its radical potential within mainstream queer spaces and the political projects of advancing queer citizenship.

What this section will demonstrate are the barriers that currently exist for 2SQ Blackfoot people to activate their freedom and resistance within contemporary Blackfoot governance structures, as well as within mainstream queer spaces. This will set the stage for my main argument that I introduced in chapter one. The creation of a 2SQ Blackfoot Society offers radical possibilities for the resurgence of queer Blackfoot people because it activates queerness within Blackfoot intellectualism. In this sense, queerness and Indigeneity are complementary rather than in tension with one another.

Queer Indigeneity and the “Jagged Worldview”

During the interviews it became clear that queer conceptualizations within the Blackfoot Confederacy have been subject to what Blackfoot scholar Leroy Little Bear calls the “jagged worldview”. Specifically, he explains:

“By force, terror, and educational policy, it [colonization] attempted to destroy the Aboriginal worldview – but it failed. Instead, colonization left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples. They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview. Their consciousness became a random puzzle, a jigsaw that each person has to attempt to understand” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 84).

This framing of Indigenous thought and relationality helps position the narratives of 2SQ Blackfoot people within the broader theme of 2SQ relegation from Indigenous life and politics. What has become clear from the group conversations is the presence of heteropatriarchal governance that has propagated anti-queer violence, gender regulation, and discordant relationality. The “jagged worldview” in this case is the fusion of Indigenous lifeways with settler conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality, and the consequences this engenders for 2SQ people.

During the gatherings, I opened the discussion by asking members in the group if they knew specific terminology or history regarding Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness. Overall, everyone in the group was able to contribute something on this topic. Collectively, we were able to identify five gender variants: *Aakiinaa* (homosexual male), *Ninaakii* (homosexual female), *Ninowaakii* (masculine female), *Aawowaakii* (transitioning to female), and *Akaowotaakii* (transitioning to male). According to Rose, “Our Blackfoot language is very descriptive, so it’s how something behaves or looks, that’s usually how they’ll name it. So, to me, when somebody walks back and forth; Awow...it means they are walking back and forth or

spacing. And then they put words together, like aki, so Awowaki; this first part here means that they are going back and forth; and the last part is aki, so they feel they are a female” (Heavy Head, 2019). But these words are also connected to Blackfoot creation stories and historical figures, such as Running Eagle and Peigan Woman, to name a few. There were also two other words that Rose, Shawn, and Sable identified as being contemporary language, they included Aniskaksi (acts like a man) and Awow-skaksi (acts like a woman). These words were described as derogatory and a demonstration to the corruption of the Blackfoot language by settler-colonial influence. They were identified as derogatory because they are devoid of Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness, and are instead, reflections of settler interpretations translated into Blackfoot.

Simultaneously, there are contrasting interpretations for the specific language used to describe gender difference and sexual orientation diversity. Both of these are interrelated as they emerge out of this jagged worldview that now shapes Indigenous life and politics. For instance, some of the members in our group defined *Aawowaakii* as an all-encompassing definition for Two-Spirit or queer folkx, whereas others defined it as a “transgender female”. This is further evidence to the “jagged worldview” and the ways in which Indigenous peoples are trying to make sense of their Indigeneity according to their own lived experiences. Reclaiming language has been an important part of this process as we redefine queer Indigeneity within Indigenous ontologies.

As I discussed in the introduction of this thesis, my relationship to this topic is deeply personal, as this research topic emerged out of my own frustrations with feeling disconnected from Blackfoot lifeways. This was in large part due to the absence of a substantive connection to Blackfoot queer language, history, and teachings. Relatedly, many of us shared stories of

encountering anti-queer violence within Blackfoot spaces. In particular, when Sable was a young child, she vividly remembers her mom getting phone calls in the middle of the night from her uncle “threatening to kill her and her faggot” (Sweet Grass, 2019). Sable was constantly under surveillance while growing up, from family members and other Blackfoot people, but also from educators while attending high school in Lethbridge. This meant that she could not fully be herself whenever or wherever she wanted to, and the relationships she was able to develop could not be maintained because they were disrupted with every new move. During the group conversation, she recounted several interactions with so called “knowledge keepers” who threatened her with physical violence. Specifically, she shared a story of being physically assaulted by someone who claimed to be a Blackfoot knowledge keeper when she was working at the Glenbow Museum. Similarly, Evans recounts having to conceal his identity because “it just was not safe to come out” because the “homophobia and transphobia was so rampant on the reserve” (Yellow Old Woman, 2019). Both Rose and Shawn shared stories of queer folkx who were murdered or went missing throughout their lives.

A common theme among our experiences was the limited number of elders that knew this knowledge. In particular, the different Blackfoot gender variants that were described all had specific stories and meanings behind them, but there are very few individuals who have this knowledge. The context in which these identities are situated are different from the context of today. For this reason, some of the participants had preferred to use words like Two Spirit or Queer because they were all encompassing. This is telling because Blackfoot people have become detached from this language, which demonstrates this breach in Blackfoot relationality. In many respects, we have become estranged from our kin relations that helped shaped Blackfoot life and politics.

For instance, Evans Yellow Old Woman describes his process of learning about Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness as one beginning with moving away from the reserve to attend university. He first encountered the term Two Spirit during a native studies class, which initiated his journey to learn more about Blackfoot terminology. He remembers feeling disconnected from Two Spirit traditions because this was not his experience, “[Two Spirit people] were painted as these mystical/magical beings, you know they were respected and revered in their communities, and people looked up to them; there was just so much reverence” (Yellow Old Woman, 2019). What is more, based on these descriptions of queer Indigeneity Evans assumed that Blackfoot people “probably did not have Two Spirit people because where I grew up, the homophobia and transphobia was pretty rampant, so I didn’t feel safe coming out” (Yellow Old Woman, 2019).

The increased exposure to Two Spirit identity in the classroom sparked interest in Evans to learn more about Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness. After returning home, he had reached out to his uncle, who is a fluent Blackfoot speaker, and asked him if there are any words used to describe gay, lesbian, and trans-folks in Blackfoot. His uncle gave him three terms but could not provide background on where they emerged from: “There’s Akiina, which is man-woman. Ninowakii is woman-man. And, I guess for people that are trans, they would be Awowakii, but I don’t know for sure” (Yellow Old Woman, 2019). This was an important moment for Evans because this was validation that Blackfoot gender diversity did exist in pre-colonial times. However, he had a similar experience when reaching out to Blackfoot elders to learn more about these words: “And unfortunately with all the work I’ve been doing, it was the same thing. Elders would either acknowledge that we had [Two Spirit/Queer folks] or that we didn’t, and you know that was it. That kind of sparked my interest because if we had words for

them, then why are people saying that we didn't have those people in Blackfoot?" (Yellow Old Woman, 2019).

Part of the reason why having this knowledge is so important, at least for Blackfoot people, is that queer conceptualizations now operate within a fractured collective memory that has induced feelings of isolation, frustration, resentment, and an unwavering desire to dream of new possibilities. It was agreed upon that as these words fade away from the collective memory of Blackfoot people, so too does the history and stories of queer Indigeneity. Evans believes that is for this reason that a lot of Blackfoot people, who do not have this privileged knowledge, adopt Two Spirit as their identity.

However, Shawn cautioned against relying solely on pan-Indigenous terminology because "today's terms of being Two Spirited, being part of that acronym of LGBTQ, all that stuff, it's really challenging to Pan-Indian it because it is sexualized" (Singer, 2019). After asking him to clarify what he meant by this, Shawn explained that the narratives that give Two Spirit meaning are a reflection of the dispossession of 2SQ people, and that becomes the backdrop of what makes someone Two Spirit. He explained that while he understands why Two Spirit is important for people who have become estranged from their communities and traditions, it is too closely connected to mainstream queer culture and politics, which emerge out of the settler homonationalist narratives of Canada. For Shawn and Rose, this narrative is in stark contrast to the narratives of self-determination that inform Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness, and the ways we understand queer kinship and relationality.

According to Shawn, queer politics and culture are centred around citizenship, marriage equality, and the ever-expanding rights that come with being good queer citizens. For Shawn and Rose, these are in direct contestation with Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness, which they

argue are predicated on a long history of resistance to settler colonialism. Rose explained that Running Eagle was an active resister during the days of settler encroachment into Blackfoot territory, especially during the whiskey trade. But even before settler colonization, Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness surpassed homonormativity and settler sexuality by having more robust ways of doing “citizenship”. For almost every queer Blackfoot historical figure, there are stories that speak about the special relationships they had with *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* (Creator) and the special abilities that they were imbued with to provide to the Confederacy (Dempsey, 2003; Hungry Wolf, 1980). In this sense, their understanding of citizenship not only included their relationships and responsibilities to Blackfoot people, but also to the spirit beings whom they had a special relationship with. These spiritually imbued abilities made them active participants within Blackfoot governance and lifeways. According to Shawn, Peigan Woman and Running Eagle all became leaders of their camps, not because they asked for permission, but because people were drawn to them for their abilities and leadership. Part of the reason why reclaiming language is so important for many members in our group, is due to the fractured relationships that occurred in their absence. As Rose articulately pointed out, “our language has spirit in it”, which is why we must reclaim these words in our efforts to enact resistance and freedom for 2SQ people.

When I asked why these words are no longer practiced, the responses I received pointed to Christian indoctrination and intra-Indigenous policing and violence. Shawn (2019) explained that Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness “went into hiding” when the Church became actively involved in targeting queer people and ideas within the Confederacy. It was explained to me by Shawn and Rose that some queer children went missing in residential school, particularly those that were unable to conform to the standards of settler frameworks. Reflecting on her own

experiences going to the St. Mary's Indian Residential School on the Blood Reserve, Rose described her experience in the schools as one of constant bullying and forced gender regulation. Rose explained that these schools were designed to disrupt the relationships along gender lines by literally separating girls and boys in separate wings of the school. In addition to this separation, she remembers how the nuns manipulated the students by getting them to spy on each other and then rewarding them for their compliance. Specifically, she remembers being forced to wear a dress at school, in some cases, she was threatened with physical punishment if she failed to comply. Today, she attributes the violent gender policing of Church officials to the contemporary practices of gender policing that now exist in Blackfoot spaces, such as the Sundance. Shawn also explains that Blackfoot people "carry a lot of the Christian doctrine/dogma/philosophy with us without realizing it" (Singer, 2019). He said that this is most visible in spaces like Sundance, where members of the Brave Dog Society are tasked with enforcing gender protocols, particularly dress protocols. While it is difficult to attribute dress protocols as a feature of Christianity or traditionalism, what is clear is the violence that emanates from this practice. And if we return to the stories of Running Eagle and Peigan Woman in the introduction, we know that gender enforcement was not part of Blackfoot thought or lifeways in those cases.

All of the participants identified Christianity and the Indian Residential School System as an important moment in the shifting conceptualizations of Blackfoot life and politics. For this reason, the absence of recognizing the destructive effects of settler sexuality onto Indigenous family systems and governance structures from the TRC is all the more disturbing. Both Rose and Shawn explain that the politics of tradition is used by Blackfoot knowledge keepers and leaders to erase 2SQ people from Blackfoot Oral Tradition and relational practices. According to

Shawn and Rose, many Blackfoot elders and knowledge keepers interpret creation stories based on Christian doctrine, which is a reflection of their experiences growing up in the residential school system. Rose explains that there are a lot of Blackfoot knowledge keepers and ceremonialists who follow both Catholicism and Blackfoot lifeways, which becomes an issue when anti-queer practices are insulated from critique because they are defended as being “traditional”. Specifically, Rose was recounting an interaction she had with a relative who told her that being Two Spirit was in direct contradiction to what it meant to be Blackfoot, and that she needed to “cleanse [her] sins” if she wanted to make it to “the other side” (Heavy Head, 2019). Her relative was a member of the Horn Society and is currently a practicing elder on the Blood Reserve.

These personal encounters with anti-queer violence are important to understand why so many people are unaware of Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness. What this demonstrates is that many of the gatekeepers of Blackfoot knowledge have been influenced by Christian doctrine and have weaponized “traditionalism” within settler conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality. It also shows that a selective Indigenous intellectualism is harbored within the politics of tradition, because without it, these anti-queer practices cannot be justified using Blackfoot Oral Tradition. The politics of tradition helps contextualize the difficulties on relying on Blackfoot elders to provide this knowledge, which is why some individuals in the group looked outside the Blackfoot Confederacy to activate their personal acts of freedom.

While our group agreed that outside forces like, Christianity and settler institutions, were instrumental in re-shaping Blackfoot life and politics, we also agreed that these harmful practices are reproduced through the politics of tradition. Specifically, our group agreed that this has placed limitations on the full participation of queer folks in Blackfoot life and politics. For

instance, Societies are a hallmark of Blackfoot governance and relationality and they have become an important site of resurgence and decolonization for many people, including my own story of reconnecting with these spaces. However, they are also sites where 2SQ people encounter various forms of violence and exclusion. The stories shared in the group gatherings and individual interviews point to the politics of tradition as the force that keeps 2SQ people outside of broader forms of relationality and the collective repertoire of knowledge.

Queer Indigeneity and storied freedom.

During our group conversations, we were able to contrast traditional teachings with the views and interpretations of members in our group. This was important because it helps identify how Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness are encased in the “jagged worldview”. Members of our group referred to contemporary interpretations of Blackfoot lifeways as the “hetero-male versions” that have emerged from the “jagged worldview”. In this section, I want to compare and contrast three Blackfoot Creation stories that challenge these “hetero-male versions”, and why reconnecting with these stories are salient in activating resurgence for queer Indigenous people.

The first story is about *Aakiipisskan* (Women’s Buffalo Jump) and the first treaty between women and men. According to Blackfoot elder Narcisse Blood, “people received the laws or values at places such as *Aakiipisskan* (Women’s Buffalo Jump near Cayley, Alberta), where the people not only hunted buffalo but where Náápi initiated the first marriage between men and women” (Chambers & Blood, 2009, p. 261). This story demonstrates the power, strength, and self-sufficiency of all Blackfoot people, not just the men, which directly challenges the “cultural teachings” made by various male knowledge keepers whom argue that women are not supposed to speak in ceremony, or that their primary goal in life was “being married to a

successful man, having children, and keeping a lodge” (Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, 2002, p. 18).

As I understand it, women brought order to Blackfoot Society as they took pity on the men for the way they were living (Hungry Wolf, 1980; Ladner, 2000; 2018; Singer, 2019; Wissler & Duvall, 1908). At this time, women and men had been living separately in different camps; women were self-sufficient and doing far better than the camp of men (Kehoe, 1995; Ladner, 2000; Singer, 2019). It was not until women took pity on the men for their living conditions that they had agreed to form an alliance together, but the agreement made between the two camps was that the women would pick their partners, and they would teach the men how to maintain a camp (Kehoe, 1995, p.124-125). As Shawn explains, “[women] are creators of life, and they are that powerful, they didn’t need men. They had their own clan and tribe system. So, what does that tell us? The men approached them; they were trying to be with them” (Singer, 2019). This is a creation story that demonstrates the importance of women in Blackfoot Society and the important role they play in maintaining the Confederacy and Blackfoot way of life. This was a treaty made by women and men to create a better life for everyone, but it was the women who were in the higher ground for negotiating the treaty. As Beverly Hungry Wolf explains, “The chief of the women told Napi that he could make the first decision, as long as she could have the final word. He said that was all right, and the old people say that ever since then it has been this way between men and women” (Hungry Wolf, 1980, p. 140). This story demonstrates that women were never submissive and docile beings to men, on the contrary, they had agency and self-determining authority that men desired. This arrangement brought transformational change to the Blackfoot people, so the heteropatriarchal practices deployed today are at odds with this story.

The second story explains the origins of *Aakokatssin* (Sundance) and has important ethical teachings on queer Indigeneity, but again these teachings are not conveyed in conventional interpretations. The conventional version of this story that is often told by *male* elders goes as followed:

The headdress of the Sun Dance's Holy Woman carries a token of a second ancient woman, Woman Who Married Morning Star. This beautiful young woman gazed on the brilliant Morning Star and wished aloud that she could marry him. He appeared before her and took her to the Above World, into the tipi of his parents, Sun and Moon. There the young couple lived happily, the bride bearing a son to Morning Star, until one day she disobeyed [Sun and Moon's] warning to avoid digging up prairie turnips, a root vegetable frequently cooked in stews by the [Blackfoot]. Woman Who Married Morning Star one day noticed an especially large and fine prairie turnip and impulsively dug it up with her digging stick. Then she could see, through the hole in the sky land, her people in their camp below. Homesickness filled her heart. [Sun and Moon] recognized it and regretfully sent her and her baby back down. Her prairie turnip and her digging stick are now in the Sun Dance (Natoas) bundle, carried by the Holy Woman as a sign of the power of woman to move between the Holy People of the Above World and the people below. The hide ropes tying the rafters of the Holy Lodge are those along which Woman Who Married Morning Star slide from the Above World to earth (Kehoe, 1995, p.117)

Shawn explained that this particular story tends to be interpreted alongside the Christian story of Adam and Eve, and there tends to be an emphasis placed on the wrongdoings of "Woman Who Married Morning Star" by being disobedient. However, Shawn explains that this version leaves out important details pertaining to women and queer Indigeneity. He told me that the woman in the story and the child she had with Morning Star "was the first demi-god in our culture; half-human/half-star. That's where the power of two began" (Singer, 2019). Moreover, Shawn explains that "Morning Star also saw the future of what was going to happen to us, and he feared for his children, that his child would be discriminated against; to be treated different because of the power of both; the power of his mother and the power of his father" (Singer, 2019). It was due to this fear that *Natosi* (Sun) and *Kokomi kisomm* (Moon) gave "Woman Who Married Morning Star" the Sundance, among other ceremonial items, that would provide guidance and

protection to her people. And today, Sundance cannot start without engaging in ceremony that honors this relationship with “Woman Who Married Morning Star” and other-than-human relations.

This story also illustrates the ways that queer individuals are directly responsible for receiving the ceremonies and practices of engendering new possibilities for Blackfoot people. This story provides an account of Blackfoot Oral Tradition that places a mother and her queer child at the centre of transformational change for Blackfoot people. This is the first “Two Spirit” individual in Blackfoot Society, which does not get mentioned in the contemporary story told by elders (Singer, 2019). This child was responsible for bridging the earthly realm with the spiritual realm, which also included the ceremonies and practices that would later inform Blackfoot political practices and lifeways. This was when Blackfoot people had not only developed their governance structures according to their ecological context (Ladner, 2003), but also with their relationships to the cosmos. This draws a clear connection with other-than human relations that are at the centre of Blackfoot ways of knowing and being.

Lastly, the story of how the Seven Stars came into being provides important lessons on relationality. Without getting into too much detail, the story talks about a time of impending doom and chaos that would ensue as a result of failing relationality. In the story there are eight siblings, one daughter and seven sons. According to Shawn, the “hetero-male version” talks about the daughter falling in love with the leader of the Bear people, which angered the woman’s camp because their people were at war with each other. What followed was the decision of the seven brothers to kill the leader of the Bear people, which led to horrific violence that saw the near destruction of their peoples. This interpretation emphasizes the bravery and the successful warring capabilities of the brothers that saw the successful triumph of their people. After the

conflict had settled the brothers decided to leave this world for the sky-realm because they no longer had living relatives here, and this is how the seven stars, or the Ursa Major, came into being. In short, this story emphasizes the mistakes and lust of a woman that “caused chaos, so the boys had to come and save the day” (Singer, 2019).

This was the story many of us in the group were familiar with, but when we unpacked it further based on our own lived experiences, or *Ninnohkanistssksinip* (speaking personally; the way we understand it), this was a story about neglect and disharmony. Specifically, Shawn described this story as one “about responsibility as a family because her brothers left her out. You know, she went out and found something of her own because they didn’t value her. They screwed up the relationship, so they ascended into the sky not as heroes, but as a reminder of how they screwed up” (Singer, 2019). In this contrasting traditional teaching, the brothers are a reminder of what happens when neglect and disharmony exist in the nation. When understood in these terms, these actions are a reminder of the disharmony that now constitutes Blackfoot life and politics with the relegation of 2SQness from participation in lifeways, but also removal from memory.

Queer allyship and the utility of looking outwards.

The jagged-worldview is a helpful framework to understand anti-queer violence wormholes that exist within Indigenous nationhood spaces. In other words, no matter where we go within Indigenous nationhood spaces, anti-queer violence and settler sexuality are ever-present in the running of Indigenous governance and politics. Specifically, as the participants have identified, the deployment of the politics of tradition are culpable for the relegation of 2SQ from Indigenous life and politics. These relational practices are the reason some participants turned to queer spaces as potential alternatives to build networks of support to activate resistance

and freedom. In addition to the intra-Indigenous politics of gender, a central theme within all of the participants' experiences was the utility of cultivating relationships outside the Blackfoot Confederacy. However, the group also identified proceeding with caution within these spaces, as many individuals in our group identified these spaces as settler-homonationalist organizations, such as Pride in Calgary and Lethbridge. Nevertheless, some group members, identified these sites as places that allowed them to activate freedom through self-expression, but also by developing supportive relational networks with other queer folkx. Specifically, queer organizations like Voices and the Two Spirit Society of Montana were identified as examples of decolonial queer allyship.

These sites are important to interrogate as many Indigenous peoples turn to them as potential sites to activate their queer Indigeneity. In particular, these spaces are sought after as perceived pathways of freedom for 2SQ people that are dispossessed from Indigenous communities. In this section, I will utilize Sarah Hunt's concept of "decolonial allyship" as a way to position the experiences of 2SQ Blackfoot people, by unpacking what it means to be in "good relations" within inter-Indigenous contexts and among non-Indigenous queer folkx, and what the potentialities are in cultivating these relationships. Specifically, I will build from her analytic on individual acts of everyday resistance to the broader forms of resistance that emerge when decolonial allyship is present.

Each participant spoke about their experiences attending Pride events, as well trying to build partnerships within these political spaces. All of the participants identified a lack of trust within Pride spaces, as they confronted attitudes of white supremacy, complicity to settler-colonialism, as well as issues of exploitation. Both Shawn and Rose asserted that there are too many Blackfoot folkx being drawn into mainstream queer spaces with the promise of acceptance

and inclusion, but these spaces are where the radical potentiality of queer Indigeneity “goes to die”. Rose explained that these are spaces that “break down the already fragile spirits of Two Spirit people” when racism and white supremacy are present. Moreover, Rose and Evans explained that mainstream queer spaces have appropriated Two Spirit identity as a way to advance their own organizational objectives. In Rose’s case, she explains that she was approached by a local organization in the City of Lethbridge to see if she would be willing to help them build programming for Two Spirit youth in the city. However, Rose believes that she was used by this organization to only draw in new funding that they never intended to use for Two Spirit initiatives. This practice draws similarities to the JSR and the tokenization of Two Spiritedness, and they both emerge out of a “white savior complex”. Similarly, Evans explained that Voices was created to counter the appropriation of Two Spirit and other racialized queers by the mainstream queer community in Calgary. A recurring issue within the queer community in Calgary was individuals “speaking on-behalf of Two Spirit people” and the presence of the “white savior complex” (Yellow Old Woman, 2019).

At the very least, Sable explained that mainstream queer spaces, like Pride, are places where Indigenous peoples can gather for socializing. However, Sable described these congregations as “quite literally taking place in the dark corners of the gay community in nightclubs where no one can see us” (Sweetgrass, 2019). And in some cases, Sable recalls being removed from gay nightclubs for “not being part of their clientele” (Sweetgrass, 2019). Again, these are stories of being relegated to the periphery of life and politics in queer spaces. As I mentioned in chapter two, conditions are made on the presence and inclusion of 2SQ folkx within mainstream queer spaces. Similar to the JSR, the deployment of Two Spiritedness is only acceptable in instances that help bolster mainstream queer political projects. For this reason,

members in the group explained that our resistance and freedom cannot come from within these spaces.

Within mainstream queer spaces, the agency and self-determination of 2SQ Blackfoot people has been denied. The responses made by 2SQ Blackfoot people confirm the presence of settler-homonationalism in contemporary Queer politics in Southern Alberta. Simultaneously, we all identified queer spaces like Pride, to be extremely racist and exclusionary. For the most part, participants' engagement in queer spaces has resulted in conflict and an affirmation that these spaces are not conducive to enacting resistance and freedom for 2SQ Blackfoot people. However, members of the group asserted there is a usefulness in looking outside Blackfoot spaces to activate personal expressions of freedom, as well as collective sites of resistance.

Despite encountering settler-homonationalist elements in mainstream queer spaces, the group also identified queer organizations like Voices and the Two Spirit Society of Montana as important in their individual paths to freedom and resistance. As a founding member of Voices, Evans has used his position to build a coalition of “people of colour- both trans & cis, queer and straight – committed to advocating for racialized and marginalized communities in the City of Calgary” (Voices, 2019). Voices helped create a platform to raise awareness on issues of racism within the queer community in Calgary, as well as provide a space for racialized and marginalized LGBT2SI+ people to cultivate kinship bonds.

Additionally, Rose explained that the Two Spirit Gathering in Montana was salient in initiating her own acts of freedom and resistance. It is a place where she was able to “finally be herself”; it was a place that allowed her to be fully “queer” and “Indigenous” (Heavy Head, 2019). Their mandate states: “The gathering will provide a safe, healthy, drug and alcohol-free environment. Its purpose is to encourage all people to heal the damage wrought by racism,

sexism, ageism, colonialism, ableism, transphobia, and homophobia and the negative impacts these have on health” (Montana Two Spirit Society, 2019). The Two Spirit Society of Montana was where she established supportive relationships with other Indigenous peoples. These relationships were important for Rose because this provided her with the opportunity to learn from other queer Indigenous people, especially, Two Spirit elders. This was also the place where she encountered the stories of Running Eagle and other queer historical figures in Blackfoot history, which became a jumping off point to the work she now does in the community.

According to Rose, the experiences and relationships she built and maintained over the years at the Two Spirit Gathering have become an important source of strength in the work she is now trying to accomplish. Specifically, she is trying to create more space for 2SQ Blackfoot people in ceremony. As a previous member of the Piercing Sundance Society of *Kainaiwa*, Rose has activated the knowledge she received which included the transferring of rites to perform ceremony. She uses her position as a knowledge keeper to create space for 2SQ people in ceremony. Rose explained that some members of the Blackfoot community have criticized what she is doing in the community because “they say Blackfoot people never had Two Spirit elders” (Heavy Head, 2019). However, Evans argued that this is not about “cultural revisionism” it is about making ceremony accessible to 2SQ folkx.

Indeed, these stories help elucidate the lack of 2SQ presence in Blackfoot society, which has allowed heteropatriarchal violence and gender regulation to be defended as “traditional”. Most importantly, these stories confirm that there is an issue of anti-queer violence within the Blackfoot Confederacy that has made spaces like ceremony unsafe for 2SQ people. Overall, all of the participants, including myself, have expressed the need for bold action in creating space for 2SQ Blackfoot people. Despite our experiences with anti-queer violence within the Blackfoot

Confederacy, especially in ceremonial spaces, what has been made clear is that cultivating the right relationships can help support the broader efforts of enacting resistance and freedom for 2SQ Blackfoot people. We also refuse to believe that our resistance and freedom cannot be activated within the peoplehood frameworks of the Blackfoot Confederacy. These group gatherings have demonstrated the utility of looking outside our communities as pathways for strengthening our everyday acts of resistance and freedom.

For instance, Shaw activated his personal queer resurgence by developing a close kinship relationship with Peigan Woman. He came across Peigan Woman while researching Blackfoot conceptualizations of wellness for a capstone project. In his research, he found that 2SQ Blackfoot people were actively involved in a ceremony that is commonly known as the “Shaking Tent”. According to Shawn, this ceremony came from Chief Mountain – an important sacred site for Blackfoot people; often consider the birth place of important Blackfoot ceremonies. This was a ceremony used to inform important political decisions and governance matters by directly communicating with the spiritual realm (Singer, 2019). As Shawn describes, “In the 1850’s, there was an Akiina, who existed...Their name was Peigan Woman, or Piikanaki. And, they were an Awowakiina, a medicine person, or they had spirits. And they did a ceremony called the Shaking Tent Ceremony” (Singer, 2019). This was a very spiritual moment for Shawn as he had developed a strong kinship relationship immediately after learning about this individual: “It’s because I found out through ceremony, that this person actually does exist. So, for me, that’s validation enough to know, that pursuing this idea, reclaiming who we were, meaning all of us, that this is who we are, who we were, and who we still are and can be” (Singer, 2019). What is more, he re-animated Blackfoot queer conceptualizations with his artistic representation of them for his capstone project. This presentation was important for Shawn because he was giving it in

the presence of some Blackfoot elders. He used Peigan Woman to anchor his interpretations of Blackfoot creation stories and queer relational practices.

Immediately after giving his presentation on Peigan Woman, he received some unexpected feedback from a Blackfoot elder in the crowd. To his surprise, after he had concluded his presentation, and before anyone else could comment or ask questions, the elder stood up and told him and the crowd, “Kika, Amohk Niskuni Iit-dahn-eee” (What my younger brother says here) “Eee-mun-eee” (He’s right!), “Everything he said is right”... You guys have to understand our creation stories, our traditional stories; they are not myths or legends. They are given to us to learn. Every scene in them, when you learn to interpret them, they have different teachings. They have multiple teachings. We have to continue to understand those traditional stories because our ancient people were *so* intelligent, they were able to contain tons and tons of information in one story” (Singer, 2019). Not only that, but a Blackfoot elder was able to draw connections to other Blackfoot Creation Stories they knew once this presentation was given. For instance, during the elder’s remarks to Shawn, he also confirmed the presence of 2SQ Blackfoot people in the story of *Katoyis* (Blood Cut), who was a child that had transformed from male into female after birth. *Katoyis* is described as a trickster figure like *Napi*, but unlike *Napi*, they are described as “a more heroic figure who exemplifies good behavior and was sent to help the Niisitapi” (Lanno & Wilson, 2016, p. 61).

This is very telling because it resonates with the concept of *Ao'tsisstapitakyo'p*, which means “to be cognizant and to discern the tribal connections” (Bastien, 2004, p. 1). It is directly connected to *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi* because it is through the lived experiences of an individual, and the gifts they have been given by Creator, that activates Blackfoot knowledge. For this reason, the work that Shawn had put into reconstructing this knowledge was an act of resurgence. As

Bastien (2004) explains, “When individuals reconstruct the traditional ways of knowing, it means they are reclaiming the tribal alliances of *Siksikaitstapi*. They are renewing the traditional knowledge that unites and strengthens the natural and cosmic worlds. This will generate ways of being that balance *Niipaitapiyssinni* [our way of life]” (p. 5-6). He brought this knowledge back to life in his artistic portrayal of Peigan Woman, which led to the public witnessing of a Blackfoot elder, who had confirmed this knowledge in other Blackfoot creation stories.

Conclusion

Scholars of queer Indigenous studies have examined how Indigenous societies were strategically reconfigured to position Indigenous men as the primary benefactors in this realignment in order to ensure the continuity of settler sexuality and heteropatriarchy, which would ensure greater access to land and resources (Barker, 2017; Morgensen, 2011; Simpson, 2017). Over the last year, I have been working alongside other 2SQ Blackfoot people to understand Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness and the politics that are associated with it. Additionally, a recurring theme amongst participants’ engagement with queer spaces points to the issue of queer individuals speaking for Indigenous peoples, as well as offering assistance, to then be bulldozed later. These spaces have repeatedly justified the hesitations 2SQ Blackfoot people have in engaging with these sites as places to build decolonial allyship (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). On the other hand, some of the participants pointed to organizations like Voices and the Two Spirit Society in Montana as examples of how decolonial allyship and inter-Indigenous relationality can be sites for strengthening 2SQ Blackfoot resurgence activities.

All of the participants included in this research study have exceptional backgrounds in cultural knowledge, community development, political activism, and advocacy work. These individuals are well-known in their communities as some of the strongest voices of 2SQ people.

What has become clear in our conversations is the need to cultivate stronger relational bonds amongst ourselves in order to strengthen our collective voice. All of the participants have encountered some form of anti-queer and racialized violence in their lives, but the stories they have shared with me are not formulated around victimization. Instead, the violence that these individuals have encountered forms the basis for the work they now engage in, which corresponds with the political framework of resurgence. All of us started at different levels of cultural knowledge and locations of engagement, but we have all developed a renewed connection with Blackfoot queer terminology and history.

Overall, all of the participants, including myself, have expressed the need for bold action in creating space for 2SQ Blackfoot people. All of us have made attempts to create larger community gatherings but to no avail. However, what was lacking with those efforts was the absence of other 2SQ Blackfoot people who were also committed to creating broader forms of relationality. These experiences shape the way we understand 2SQ Blackfoot life and politics and what is needed to enact broader forms of relational modes of being in our collective resistance efforts. Based on these conversations, a path has opened up for 2SQ Blackfoot people to establish a formalized *Kana'kaaatsiiks* (society). Moving forward, the task to create this society will be to find supportive allies and other 2SQ Blackfoot people to support its establishment as an active society, as well as defining what its role and function will be.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion: Pathways to a Queer Indigenous Politics

What I have emphasized in this research study is the power of storywork in activating political spaces. In chapter two, I introduced the analytical framework of the “jagged worldview” to anchor the theoretical and methodological orientations of this thesis. I utilize the jagged worldviews framework to contextualize the complex forms of relationality that emerge out of queer Indigenous life and politics. Specifically, in chapter two I argued that resurgence and reconciliation struggle to address queer Indigeneity because they are problematized in the politics of traditionalism and settler-homonationalism, respectively. I demonstrate this first in chapter three by empirically showing how the political project of “Two Spirit Reconciliation” subverts the political resurgence of, and transformative reconciliation for, queer Indigeneity, by propagating settler-homonationalism. Then, in chapter four, I showed how the “jagged worldviews” framework elucidates the ways in which the politics of traditionalism is evoked to activate anti-queer Indigenous thought and practices within the Blackfoot Confederacy. Additionally, chapter four set the stage for understanding how 2SQ Blackfoot people navigate the politics of traditionalism and settler-homonationalism in their everyday lives.

The Blackfoot concept of *Ninnohkanistssksinip* (Speaking Personally) has been salient to building the theoretical and methodological arguments of this thesis. This concept also sets a pathway to 2SQ resurgence by animating the collective storying of queer Blackfoot folkx. The contributions made by 2SQ Blackfoot people subverted narratives of traditionalized anti-queer violence by offering alternative interpretations of Blackfoot creation stories. For many of us, we had not heard queer interpretations of Blackfoot creation stories, so it was in many ways an act of resistance and freedom because the anti-queer narratives used to erase queerness or justify our exclusion were no longer admissible using Blackfoot Oral Tradition. The stories shared in the

group gatherings activated a queer Indigenous politics by weaving together personal stories with Blackfoot Oral Tradition that gave them a whole new meaning. These stories allowed us to activate our queer Indigeneity by re-interpreting Blackfoot creation stories and reflecting on the lives of Running Eagle, Piegan Woman, Four Bears, and other Blackfoot queer individuals. The politics of traditionalism is then an expression of Indigeneity that is not in fact “traditional” but an expression of the “jagged worldview”. From this standpoint, the resurgence activities of 2SQ Blackfoot people includes resurrecting queer memory and kin relations that lay dormant in the “jagged worldview”.

In this concluding chapter, I present my arguments on how 2SQ resurgence is activated for Blackfoot people. Returning to the central argument of this thesis, I argue that resistance and freedom for 2SQ Blackfoot people can be activated through *Kana'kaaatsiiks* (Blackfoot Society Governance) which is a “queering of governance” and rejection of the politics of traditionalism and settler-homonationalism. The relegation of 2SQ people from life and politics is related to our attempted erasure from Blackfoot memory and governance societies. This has allowed protocols and practices of anti-queer violence, gender policing, and heteropatriarchal governance to be evoked in frameworks of traditionalism. Therefore, part of the resurgence activities for 2SQ Blackfoot people includes challenging the “hetero-male” versions of Blackfoot history, terminology, and relational practices. The lived experiences of 2SQ Blackfoot individuals make clear that the politics of traditionalism is a selective interpretation of Indigenous thought and lifeways, which is why resurgence activities must be careful in their deployment of “tradition”. As Briggs-Cloud (2015) states, “tradition requires us to do more than simply attend a ceremony; it requires us to radically transform and decolonize the way we live” (p. 256). In this chapter, I will show how a 2SQ Blackfoot Society accomplishes this.

How is a 2SQ Blackfoot politics activated?

Returning to Blackfoot affirmative inquiry, the concept of *Ninnohkanistssksinip* (Speaking Personally) is important in addressing the removal of 2SQ storywork from Blackfoot practices and lifeways. In the gatherings, we discussed the ascendancy of anti-queer violence and heteropatriarchal practices that came with the imposition of settler-colonial morality structures. Specifically, these conversations illustrated the way the politics of tradition engenders selective Indigenous intellectualism. Selective Indigenous intellectualism was described as selective interpretations of Blackfoot Oral Tradition that are used to justify anti-queer violence and heteropatriarchal practices, like exclusionary membership into Blackfoot Societies. At the same, the sharing of Blackfoot creation stories allowed us to critically engage with the ways in which Blackfoot storywork is selectively interpreted to relegate queer people from participating in Indigenous lifeways. Sable explained that storytelling is one of the ways we can activate 2SQ resistance and freedom. In our conversations, she emphasized the need to reflect on our own stories as a way to activate broader meanings from them in our collective efforts to restore balance in the Blackfoot Confederacy. This is an embodied practice of *Ninnohkanistssksinip* (speaking personally), as well as a pathway to 2SQ resurgence, which provides a framework for engaging in conflict-ridding spaces that evoke the politics of traditionalism.

2SQ Blackfoot resurgence activities are guided by the objective of restoring the damaged relationships that exist within the Blackfoot Confederacy as a result of heteropatriarchal violence. This was made clear in the stories that were shared by participants in their experiences with blatant forms of gender violence, as well as the exclusion some experienced from participating in Blackfoot Societies due to the strict gender membership and protocols attached to them. Recognizing the presence of heteropatriarchal violence within the Blackfoot

Confederacy allows us to engage in relational practices that seek to disrupt it. As 2SQ Blackfoot people identified, it is important for other Blackfoot people to recognize that complicity to anti-queer violence is no longer defensible using traditional justifications. At the same time, there is a need to reflect on the ways in which Blackfoot society has been shaped by settler colonial influence, and how these experiences have reinforced gender violence that relegates women and 2SQ people from Blackfoot life and politics.

A common thread in our stories was the absence of a 2SQ Blackfoot community that we could turn to for support and guidance during the difficult times of our lives. Shawn speaks to this dissociation queer Indigenous people constantly feel when he says,

“You know inside us, we know there is a place where we are supposed to be, and we can search the entire planet and never find it, because it is right here in this room. We know that we are supposed to be doing something, but we’re not exactly sure what that is. We’ve all had these thoughts and feelings, but what hasn’t been done yet, is that all of us have a conversation about it, that is why these gatherings are so important” (Singer, 2019).

This statement was very telling because it captures the haunting truth of queer Indigeneity, the constant searching for freedom and decolonial futures that can contain both our queerness and Indigeneity. This statement helps organize the thoughts and experiences shared in the group gathering sessions in two interrelated ways.

First, is this idea of searching for belonging that many of us could not find in our own communities due to anti-queer violence, but it is also about being rejected in contemporary queer spaces because of our Indigeneity. Returning to the idea of the “jagged worldview”, the experiences of 2SQ Blackfoot people navigating Indigenous spaces have been mixed. For those in the group that are not fluent Blackfoot speakers, our experiences were different in terms of having foundational knowledge of Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness. During our conversations it has become clear that the politics of tradition (Belcourt, 2016; Briggs-Cloud,

2015; Simpson, 2017) is a problem that either attempts to erase or contain queer Indigeneity. By evoking a politics of tradition, many of the people in our group shared stories of what this did to their understandings of Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness. The politics of tradition, and the harmful practices that emerge out of it, are a negation to the complexity, fluidity and adaptability that exists within Indigenous thought and lifeways. When engaging in complex questions of queer Indigeneity and tradition, it is important to unpack ‘traditions’ that may form the basis for enacting freedom and resistance for some, but then disempower and oppress others, like women and 2SQ people.

Second, is the idea of coming together in a nationalist way, particularly because we have all encountered anti-queer violence in Blackfoot spaces, but also refuse to detach ourselves from being *Siksikaitstapi* (Blackfoot) in the pursuit of queer Indigenous resistance and freedom. For many of us, freedom is about not having to choose between our queerness and Indigeneity. Stated more bluntly, the group agreed that our freedom must be generated from within Blackfoot lifeways and practices. This firm insistence on engaging with Indigenous governance structures as a pathway to enact resurgence contradicts what Belcourt (2016) refers to as the “domestication or traditionalization of queer indigeneity, a slowing down of its semiotic velocity, and a distancing from the kinds of subjectivities that the traditional cannot containerize” (p. 29). There is a tension that exists between Indigenous governance frameworks and queer Indigeneity based on this perceived incompatibility. However, I would argue that Indigenous governance systems can strengthen and focus the radical potentialities of queer Indigeneity. As Shawn pointed out, the narratives that now inform “Two Spirit” and “queer Indigenous” emerge out of the settler-colonial narrative. For Shawn, Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness offer radical potentialities that “Two Spirit” and “Queer Indigenous” cannot offer Blackfoot people. In this

particular case, reconnecting with traditional conceptualizations of Blackfoot queerness has increased and strengthened the political organizing of our group. For most of us, this was the first time we were able to share our stories with other Blackfoot people on their own terms. These group gatherings became the conduit to activate broader forms of resistance, freedom and participation for 2SQ Blackfoot people.

The system needs a good smudge.

During my conversations with Evans, he described some of the activities Voices has been involved in over the past few years. One of these activities includes their annual Pride demonstrations that are designed to raise awareness to the issues present in both Indigenous and queer communities. At last year's demonstration a member of Voices had a sign that said, "The System Needs a Good Smudge." This was an eloquent way of making visible the discordant relationality that has emerged from the institutions of settler-sexuality. The governance structures of both Indigenous and settler societies are indeed needing "a good smudge". Within Indigenous thought, smudging is understood as a practice of cleaning an imbalance, and in this case, the imbalance is the "cystem" of heteropatriarchal governance and relationality. This is directly connected to the politics of tradition and anti-queer violence. Gender regulation is the opposite of *kimmapiiyipitsinni* (kindness, caring, and generosity), which is one of the most salient values to *Siksikaitstapi* society (Bastien, 2004, p. 207). These gender protocols are now used to measure an individual's knowledge and understanding of Blackfoot ways of being and knowing, as ceremony and the transfer of knowledge have adopted these settler colonial understandings of gender.

The group discussions on the politics of tradition afforded an opportunity to engage in this larger scholarly debate on Indigenous restoration projects and "neo-traditionalism". The

politics of tradition has made it difficult for 2SQ people to engage with Indigenous practices given the imposition of heteropatriarchal violence and relegation of 2SQ people from life and politics. As Indigenous peoples work to preserve their way of life and languages, rigid understandings of tradition have been adopted by traditionalists (Brant, 1994; Briggs-Cloud, 2015; Simpson, 2017) to justify the oppression of women and 2SQ people. This means that 2SQ voices, perspectives, and knowledges are no longer made visible in Blackfoot life and politics.

In particular, this is an issue for Blackfoot people because the interpretations that are made to describe Blackfoot culture and society have been influenced by settler conceptualizations of sex, sexuality, and gender. As the personal narratives of 2SQ Blackfoot people have demonstrated, these teachings are commonplace in Blackfoot society. Indeed, these heteropatriarchal practices have been adopted by the Blackfoot Confederacy, as they are ever present in the way anti-queer violence is evoked in community settings, such as: the erasure of 2SQ people from Blackfoot Creation Stories; gender regulation in ceremonial spaces; and the limitations that prevent 2SQ participation in current Blackfoot governance structures. These interpretations contradict some important creation stories in Blackfoot Oral Tradition, which I have detailed in the previous chapter. Indeed, the burden then rests on the shoulders of those that appear “aberrant or inauthentic” to this “de-facto center” to justify their existence and voices within Blackfoot life and politics.

Akin to my own experiences as a queer Blackfoot man, I have witnessed the policing of women and 2SQ peoples’ bodies in places like *Aakokatssin* (Sundance), where some members of the Brave Dog Society, who are tasked with maintaining peace in the camp (Bastien, 2004; Ladner, 2003), enforce all kinds of regulatory protocols related to dress; specifically, those that require women to wear skirts and those that compel 2SQ folks to conform to the gender binary.

For the most part, the individuals that enforce these protocols are not aware of the rationale, or cultural teachings behind why they are doing it. Instead, this has become another way to exclude and shame people into a particular rendition of Blackfoot life. This is why the “system needs a good smudge”, Indigenous lifeways have been conflated with settler conceptualizations of gender, sex and sexuality.

Indigenous kinship networks, including familial and nationalist governance frameworks, have been influenced by settler conceptualizations of gender, sex and sexuality. According to Ladner, “gender likely did not matter in traditional Blackfoot nationalism, but that it likely matters” today because of settler colonial influence (p. 52). This account of pre-colonial Blackfoot life and politics is important in highlighting *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi* (radical individualism) as the process for activating relational practices, which are predicated on an individual’s gifts over their gender identity. However, this account of pre-colonial Blackfoot life as being gender-neutral, whereby all individuals were treated as equals, is problematic. While it is not the task of this study to investigate this particular empirical puzzle, this narrative is important to the central argument of this thesis. It is problematic because this narrative of “everyone was equal” has been used among elders and knowledge keepers to devalue the specific roles, responsibilities, and stories of women and 2SQ people. And in its place, the stories and escapades of Blackfoot men are privileged and unquestioned, and then used as the primary reference when discussing Blackfoot history, politics, and ceremony.

This selective Indigenous intellectualism is then used to inform contemporary political practices and thought. And in doing so, Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness have been fragmented and labelled as unimportant to Blackfoot resurgence or presented as an aside to Blackfoot political thought and governance. Correspondingly, I argue that this has prevented the

participation of 2SQ people in contemporary Blackfoot governance and lifeways and has relegated queer Indigeneity to periphery of life, politics and memory.

These practices are reflective of the disharmony that now constitutes Blackfoot life and politics, which has relegated 2SQ people to the periphery. It is important to note, too, that membership into some Blackfoot societies require individuals to be in a heteronormative and monogamous relationship, which further limits the participation of single women and 2SQ people in Blackfoot spaces. It is important to emphasize that while these protocols are defended as being part of Blackfoot traditionalism, they do not reflect the history or values of *Siksikaitsitapiipaitapiiyssin* (Blackfoot way of life), or they are not contextualized within Blackfoot oral tradition; they have become dogmatic protocols devoid of any meaning behind them that are designed to regulate and exclude. However, while I agree that most Blackfoot knowledge keepers are not deliberately engaging in anti-queer violence, the absence of queer knowledge has allowed heteropatriarchy and anti-queer violence to remain unchallenged. This break in knowledge is why 2SQ Blackfoot people have engaged in nuanced approaches to re-animating this knowledge and activating broader modes of relationality; our access points to engaging in resurgence activities are different.

But Blackfoot systems are not the only ones in need of a good smudge. Non-Indigenous queer folkx must also transform their relationship with 2SQ people. Using the TRC and JSR as proxy for understanding “Two Spirit Reconciliation”, there is a lot of work to do in mending the mistrust queer Indigenous people have towards mainstream queer spaces. In other words, the “cystem needs a good smudge” here as well, but in this case the “cystem” is in reference to the settler homonationalist politics that uphold homonormativity and settler sexuality within queer spaces. While these reconciliation reports exclusively focus on historical events rather than

power structures, they also highlight the power of storying and relationality. Throughout the thesis, I have made a case for the importance of storying within queer Indigenous resurgence. For instance, in the TRC, the power of Indigenous story was presented in survivor statements. These stories rejected a long-standing settler-colonial narrative of Indigenous inferiority that was central to the IRS system. Likewise, the stories of 2SQ Blackfoot people dismantled the dominant narratives of anti-queer violence and heteropatriarchy that are ensconced in the politics of tradition. Transformative reconciliation has been an important part for many of the participants in this study, including myself.

Queering governance.

There is a common practice utilized by Indigenous scholars that turns to storywork (Archibald, 2008; Driskill, 2016; Justice, 2018; Ladner, 2018; Womack, 1999) as a way to “provide a foundation for decolonization and resurgence of Indigenous legal, political, spiritual, and economic traditions” (Ladner, 2018, p. 251). These stories are central to understanding pathways to a queer Indigenous politics for Blackfoot people. Having introduced the concept of *Ninnohkanistsksinip* (Speaking Personally) as part of Blackfoot affirmative inquiry, this concept guides the collective actions of our group asserting space within the Confederacy. As Bastien (2004) reminds us, “the responsibility of seeking knowledge is fundamental to the identity of *Niitsitapi*. Knowledge is generated for the purpose of maintaining the relationships that strengthen and protect the health and well-being of individuals and of the collective in a cosmic universe. In this respect, seeking knowledge is a fundamental responsibility for contributing to the collective good” (p. 2). The collective storying of 2SQ Blackfoot people has also activated a pathway to engage in Blackfoot governance.

Shawn explained that if we are going to reconnect ourselves to the Blackfoot Confederacy, there needs to be “*no more fear*”. Specifically, he said, “We’ve conformed to this idea of the western perspective of the way we should be living and treating other people... We can’t just say we can evolve and change it, *no*, let’s follow what the ancestors have left. Because it is still in our language, we still have those ceremonies, we have all the medicines, we have the creation stories, we have these people we are discovering, we have these sacred sites, so once we get our minds and our pasts in tune we can begin this journey. It is a returning to the circle” (Singer, 2019).

As program manager for the Lethbridge Friendship Society, Shawn has been able to work closely with Blackfoot elders and knowledge keepers, which has allowed him to have more of these important and uncomfortable conversations. One of the most important conversations he has had was with the current leader of the Horn Society. Through this relationship, Shawn was able to share his knowledge of Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness and the presence of anti-queer violence within the Blackfoot Confederacy. What is surprising about this interaction is the acknowledgement made by the leader of the Horns Society that this knowledge has indeed been fractured from contemporary Blackfoot society and the run of the confederacy. These interactions could have gone awry, but what followed was an act of transformative reconciliation. The leader of the Horns Society has the ability to sanction new practices within Blackfoot legal practices, and he transferred rites to establish a 2SQ Society. This occurred during a Blackfoot witnessing ceremony where the leader publicly announced the new name of the society, *Iiyikitapiiks* (Fearless People Society).

As Starblanket and Stark write (2018), decolonization and resurgence activities “are centrally driven by the need not just to revitalize Indigenous cultural practices, but to do so in

ways that are not reliant upon Western resources, whether ideological or material” (p. 196). This includes restoring the damaged relational networks that have resulted from heteropatriarchal violence that sought to eliminate 2SQ Blackfoot people. With the creation of *Iiyikitapiiks* (Fearless People Society), 2SQ Blackfoot people now have a platform to “[make] visible and audible those members of our communities who are being silenced, forgotten, erased, and spoken over” (Hunt, 2018, p. 293). During our group conversations, we had agreed that we would set up camp at the next Sundance in order to make ourselves visible. With the creation of a 2SQ Blackfoot Society we now have the authority to establish our own membership rules that are not predicated on settler-conceptualizations. What has occurred with the creation of this group is the activation of decolonial possibilities for 2SQ Blackfoot people. Cree scholar Alex Wilson (2018) calls this “Coming In” which is “an act of returning, fully present in ourselves, to resume our place as a valued part of our families, cultures, communities, and lands, in connection with all our relations” (p. 171).

While this is definitely one of the main objectives of the newly established 2SQ Blackfoot Society, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, conflict and pushback will be present. There are still individuals emboldened by the power and privilege they retain under heteropatriarchal practices and thought. However, we now have space and a platform to engage in broader forms of resistance and freedom that emerge from within Blackfoot lifeways. The sharing of knowledge affords new opportunities to critically engage with contrasting interpretations of Blackfoot thought and practices. Specifically, the policing of non-conforming identities will need to be changed in spaces like Sundance. Presently, members of this group are actively challenging individuals who enforce these exclusionary practices. Plans have been put in place by members of our group to meet with leaders of the other societies, whose members are

responsible for maintaining the camp, to share our knowledge and experiences on the harm these practices engender. We have also made plans to set up our camp at Sundance to meet with elders and leaders to share our knowledge, or *Ninnohkanistsksinip* (Speaking Personally; the way we understand it), about Blackfoot conceptualizations of queerness. The 2SQ Blackfoot Society should not be seen as the only group responsible for dismantling these harmful practices. As I prepare for my future involvement in the Horn Society, I think about the responsibility I have to use my privileged position to create space for women and queer individuals in that capacity as well. In many respects, the smudge has not happened yet, but our group has our sweetgrass ready in our hands.

Queer Indigeneity and transformational reconciliation.

This thesis has allowed me to understand the importance of relationality and transformational reconciliation, and how these are salient in “smudging the system”. For instance, when I was working as a student counsellor at the University of Lethbridge, the university funded my participation in a professional certificate program on sustainable community development, which was centred around the TRC Final Report in Canada. The program took place on *Snuneumuxw* territory at Vancouver Island University and included Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from across Canada and the United States. The program was structured around introducing the TRC Calls to Action and what reconciliation means in a practical sense. From my own observations, most of the participants were focused on wanting to learn how to implement the TRC Calls to Action in their respective workspaces. But there were also a handful of individuals who wanted to understand what their role was as settlers, in advancing a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples. These conversations went beyond the TRC’s Calls to Action and into decolonial futurism.

Throughout the program we visited different organizations and businesses, we also met with *Snuneumuxw* council members, and city officials, to hear what they were doing to advance reconciliation. In some instances, we encountered individuals who claimed that because they did not work directly with Indigenous peoples, they did not have a role to play in reconciliation. It was during these tense moments of exchange when my non-Indigenous colleagues took an active role in engaging with these individuals by pressing them with questions about settler privilege and what their role was in addressing ongoing forms of colonial violence. This was something I was not accustomed to growing up in Lethbridge, a place where racism is commonplace and rigid divisions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are vehemently expressed. This experience was an important lesson in understanding the nuances of “reconciliation” by differentiating “non-transformative reconciliation” from “transformative-reconciliation” (Asch, et al., 2018).

The most important lesson I took away from this experience had nothing to do with the content surrounding the TRC, but the importance of solidarity making with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. It revealed the importance of having uncomfortable and unsettling conversations. This was also where I had built new relationships with other queer folkx, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, which led to constructive conversations about queer colonialism and queer Indigeneity. Nonetheless, the criticism that has come from activists, scholars, and community members regarding the recent reconciliation movement is an important one to understand; especially for 2SQ people who are exhausted from the continued daily forms of violence they contend with in both Indigenous and queer spaces. At the same time, I understand reconciliation as *Aawaatsimihkaasatai* (return to balance) or the “smudging of the system”, which was salient throughout this research study as relationships were brought back into balance.

This was also apparent in the transferring of rites from the current leader of the Horn Society to establish a 2SQ Blackfoot Society.

According to Borrows and Tully (2018), reconciliation and resurgence are interconnected approaches as “robust resurgence infuses reciprocal practices of reconciliation in self-determining, self-sustaining, and inter-generational ways” (p. 5). In this sense, resurgence requires reconciliation with non-Indigenous peoples in order to build alliances in advancing decolonization. Additionally, these authors caution against using a framework of constant refusal to reconciliation-based models because “while measured separation may be very appropriate in some settings, it cannot be regarded as a comprehensive strategy that is healthy in all circumstances” (Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 7). Throughout the thesis, I have made a case for deploying both. Generative refusals to the politics of traditionalism must be at the centre of 2SQ Blackfoot resurgence, but “truth-telling”, or *Ninnohkanistssksinip* (Speaking Personally; the way we understand it) has also been at the centre of restoring relationships and alliance making.

As Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T'lakwadzi (2009) explain, “truth-telling” from an Indigenous vantage point “are critical to the resurgence of [Indigenous] communities” (p. 139). The survivor statements in the TRC were stories of survival and resistance that propagated a nation-wide, multi-tribal, movement of reconciliation that has brought multiple Indigenous identities into contact with non-Indigenous entities. Whether or not these stories are depoliticized (Million, 2013) within settler spaces, they have activated spaces where the prospects of decolonial allyship are strengthened. The stories of 2SQ Blackfoot people within Blackfoot spaces has also led to the creation of a 2SQ Blackfoot Society as a result of engaging in conflict-ridding conversations, which led to decolonial allyships. While it is easy to disregard

reconciliation as a mode of political engagement, when it is done correctly, it holds decolonial potential.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I engaged in a contentious and controversial topic that challenges the ways in which traditionalism is used to activate anti-queer violence and heteropatriarchy among Blackfoot people. The analysis and arguments made in this thesis directly challenge the traditional/modern binary that now constitutes Indigenous thought and lifeways. This personal political project has shown me that a 2SQ Blackfoot Society offers radical possibilities as our group begins to understand and engage in alternative frameworks of relationality that challenge the politics of traditionalism. In particular, the imposed settler morality structures of gender, sex, sexuality, and family are the reason why 2SQ Blackfoot people have been relegated from Blackfoot life and politics. All of these have influenced the broader governance structures of the Blackfoot Confederacy, particularly in the way these governance structures are run, which have limited the participation of 2SQ folkx. As Shawn explains, this political project is also about challenging the way we understand our broader relationships, and what it means to be in good relations with them. Shawn argues that the decolonial futures of Blackfoot people requires that we challenge “the western perspective of the way we should be living and treating other people” (Singer, 2019) which our group asserts has wreaked havoc and created disharmony for Indigenous peoples in a number of ways.

As the study of Indigenous politics grows, there is a need to broaden our theoretical scope when engaging complex questions of Indigeneity, especially when the primary focus of Indigenous politics has been geared towards the binary Indigenous-Settler relationship (Voth, 2016; 2018) or traditional/modern understanding of Indigeneity (Starblanket & Stark, 2018).

These approaches (Alfred, 2009; Belanger & Lackenbauer, 2015; Cairns, 2000; Coulthard, 2014) obfuscates the conflict-ridden reality of Indigenous life and politics. In particular, these conversations are important not only for queer Indigeneity, but on how contemporary Indigenous political thought and practices are insulated from critique when they are encased within the politics of traditionalism.

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Appendix A: Individual Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I was hoping to hear about your experiences being 2SQ and Blackfoot living and working in Blackfoot territory. I would like to also remind you that this interview will be digitally recorded, and all information will be kept confidential. The digital recording will be securely destroyed after being transcribed.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

- 1) First, I was hoping to learn a little more about yourself. What would you like to share?
Prompting Questions:
 - a. Tell me about your journey? Where have you been? Where are you now? And where do you want to go?
 - a. Do you identify as Blackfoot? How do you identify yourself?
 - b. Did you grow up on reserve or off reserve?
 - c. Where do you consider home?
 - d. Do you identify as Two Spirit? What are your thoughts on using Two Spirit as an identity marker over Blackfoot terminology? What are your understandings of Blackfoot conceptions of gender?

- 2) How do you access your traditional knowledges and how have they influenced your life practices?
Prompting Questions:
 - a. How would you describe your relationship to Blackfoot traditions and practices?
 - b. What about ceremonies? If yes, can you share some examples?
 - c. Has anyone shared any ‘do’s and don’ts’ or traditional stories about Blackfoot Two Spirit traditions?

- 3) Next, I was hoping you would share your experience being Blackfoot and 2SQ living and working in traditional Blackfoot territory?
Prompting Questions:
 - a. How would you explain your experience being 2SQ in Blackfoot spaces? What have been your experiences attending community events or ceremony? What challenges do you as a self-identified 2SQ Blackfoot person face when attempting to engage in cultural ways of knowing?
 - b. How would you explain your experience being Blackfoot in queer spaces? Have you attended any Pride events? If so, what specific things were you hoping attending pride events would provide? Were your needs met? Were there needs that were not met? Which ones?

- 4) How would you describe the current 2SQ community in Blackfoot territory?
Prompting Questions:
 - a. What do you think the barriers are in building a strong 2SQ Blackfoot community?
 - b. What do you think is needed to strengthen the 2SQ Blackfoot community?

This concludes the interview. Did you have anything else you would like to share about what we covered today?

Thank you for your generosity in sharing your knowledge and experience, I am very grateful!

Appendix B: Sequential Group Discussion Topics

Week	Theme	Main Question(s)	Prompting Question(s)
1	Introduction to research study/consent	<p>Provide information on research project</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to change or add to these questions?</p> <p>Do you have any questions for me about this research study?</p>	<p>Allow input from participants on research methods.</p>
2	Blackfoot Conceptions of Two Spirit Queer Identity	<p>What does Two Spirit mean to you?</p> <p>What are your understandings of Blackfoot conceptions of Two Spirit queer identity?</p> <p>How has Blackfoot conceptions of Two Spirit queer identity been impacted by colonialism? How has it been influenced by Christianity?</p>	<p>Does Two Spirit reflect Blackfoot conceptions of queer identity?</p> <p>What terminology was used to describe Queer Blackfoot people pre-colonial?</p> <p>Do you think these words reflect the identities of LGBTQ2 Blackfoot people today?</p> <p>Should we be looking at developing new terminology that reflects the identities of Two Spirit Queer Blackfoot people?</p> <p>Do you think Blackfoot cowboy culture created a hostile environment for LGBTQ2 people?</p> <p>Do you think ceremony is restricted for Two Spirit Queer Blackfoot people?</p>
3	Blackfoot Two Spirit Queer Politics	<p>What does it mean to be Blackfoot and LGBTQ2 today?</p>	<p>Do you think Blackfoot Two Spirit Queer people have been removed from the larger community?</p> <p>Do you think the voices of Blackfoot Two Spirit Queer people have been silenced by the larger community?</p>

		<p>Which community do you identify your sense of belonging to? And why?</p>	<p>Do you think Blackfoot Two Spirit Queer people are treated negatively in Blackfoot spaces?</p> <p>Do you think Blackfoot Two Spirit Queer people are treated negatively in LGBTQ spaces?</p> <p>Have you attended any Pride events? What have been your experiences?</p> <p>Have you attended any cultural/ceremonial events? What have been your experiences?</p>
4	Blackfoot Two Spirit Resurgence	<p>How would you describe the state of the Blackfoot Two Spirit Queer community?</p> <p>Do you think the creation of a Two Spirit Queer Blackfoot society would be an appropriate space to look towards for building a strong Two Spirit Queer Blackfoot community?</p>	<p>How important do you think it is to have a connected Blackfoot Two Spirit Queer community?</p> <p>What does the resurgence of Two Spirit Queer Blackfoot people look like?</p>