

Running head: ON BEING TWO-SPIRITED IN EEYOU ISTCHEE

ON BEING TWO-SPIRITED IN EEYOU ISTCHEE

by © Patrice Larivée

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ABSTRACT

Two-Spirited people were traditionally considered gifted individuals among the First Nations of Canada and held respectful positions within their society. Colonization and the introduction of religious doctrines caused a paradigm shift of their traditional beliefs, especially in regard to sexual orientation and gender identity. Little is known about the Two-Spirited people still living in reservations and the challenges they face in their life journey. This phenomenological study explored the lived experience of being a Two-Spirited person in the actual Cree communities of James Bay, Quebec. Giorgi's (1985) method was used to identify significant themes arising from the collected narratives of ten participants. Data analysis revealed a migratory path divided in four themes: (1) *I Am Different*, (2) *It Was War*, (3) *I Had to Run Away*, and (4) *I Wanted to Go Home*. The findings can inform health care service providers and program developers on the unique challenges facing Two-Spirited individuals in order to adapt their professional practice and propose interventions that are culturally congruent.

Keywords: Two-Spirited, reservations, Cree communities, phenomenology, migratory path, sexual orientation, gender identity, coming-out, nursing, youth clinic

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List of Abbreviations

AANDC	Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development Canada
CBHSSBJ	Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay
CMC	Community Miyupimaatisiun (health) Centre
CHR	Community Health Representative
CSB	Cree School Board
CW	Community Worker
FNC	First Nations Centre
GCC	Grand Council of the Crees
HCW	Home Care Worker
HEY	Healthy Eeyou Youth
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
LGBTQ2+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirited, and others
MSSS	<i>Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux du Québec</i>

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NAFC	National Association of Friendship Centres
NAHO	National Aboriginal Health Organisation
NADAPP	National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Program
PPRO	Program Planning and Research Officer
SERC	Surveillance, Evaluation, Research and Communication
STBBI	Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The traditional Cree territory of James Bay is called Eeyou Istchee and covers over 400000 square kilometers in northern Quebec from the eastern shores of James Bay to the south-eastern shores of Hudson Bay. Parts of the traditional lands are located in northern Ontario. In Quebec, the *Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux* (MSSS) recognises the territory as the socio-sanitary Region 18: the Cree-Lands-of-James-Bay. The Grand Council of the Crees (GCC), the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB), and the Cree School Board (CSB) were all founded in 1978 and represent the three pillars of the self-governance model of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee. There are nine communities in Eeyou Istchee ranging from a population of 800 to 4693 and the total population as of July 2016 was 17810 people (CBHSSJB, 2017). A tenth community is in the process of being integrated in Eeyou Istchee, while the eleventh, located in Ontario, maintains a special link with the GCC. A population map is presented in Appendix A.

The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) is responsible for the administration of health and social services on the territory. Its mandate is defined in Chapter S.5 of Quebec provincial law: Law on health services and social services for Cree Natives. Within each of the nine communities, the CBHSSJB operates a Community Miyupimaatisiun Centre (CMC), which offers general medicine and nursing care, dentistry, pharmacy, allied health (nutritionists, occupational and physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, etc.), psychosocial services (psychologists, psychoeducators, etc.), and social services (social workers, National

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Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Program (NADAPP) workers, etc.) The CBHSSJB also operates a 29-bed regional hospital in Chisasibi.

In addition, the Pimuchteheu Department of the CBHSSJB is managing the Pre-Hospital Emergency Services and Emergency Measures, the Youth Healing Services (through three homes for youth at risk), the Youth Protection, the Program Development and Support, and the Regional Public Health Department, located in Mistissini. Three Wiichihituwini offices (liaison offices) in Chibougamau, Val d'Or and Montreal ensure access to specialized health care services not available on the territory. Lastly, the Nishiiyuu department oversees organizational quality and cultural safety. An organizational organigram of the CBHSSJB is presented in Appendix B.

All health care professionals are legally bound by their professional association or order such as the *Collège des Médecins du Québec*, the *Ordre des Infirmières et Infirmiers du Québec*, the *Ordre des Dentistes du Québec*, the *Ordre des Hygiénistes Dentaires du Québec*, the *Ordre des Psychologues du Québec*, etc. Presently, most of these professional positions are filled by non-Native personnel. A cultural sensitivity course is actually provided to newly hired nurses and will eventually be offered to all non-Native health personnel. Cree people occupy all other positions within the organization, including some areas of health care services. Community Workers (CW), Home Care Workers (HCW), and Community Health Representatives (CHR) work closely with the health care professionals and provide some areas of nursing and medical care: the CHR, for instance, receive training on diabetes management and teach insulin injection techniques to newly diagnosed patients with diabetes. Similarly, Home Care Workers are the eyes and ears of the Home Care nursing staff and facilitate

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communication with the Elders who often only speak Cree. There is an increasing number of young Cree people attending nursing school and since 2008, three cohorts of 20 Cree students attended a special nursing education program (in English and culturally adapted) developed in partnership between the *CÉGEP de St-Félicien*, the *Centre d'Études Collégiales à Chibougamau* and the Cree School Board. Presently there are actually more than 15 Cree nurses and also one Cree doctor working in the Chisasibi Regional Hospital. These people are very inspirational and serve as role models to youth interested in working in the health professions.

In 2006, I began working in Nemaska as a clinician at the nursing outpost – the creation of the CMC and their organigram would actually occur five years after my arrival in the community. The population of Nemaska was small (less than 700) and the nursing team was also small: one Head Nurse, two clinical nurses, and one Home Care nurse. I remained in the community for eight years - a significant amount of time amidst a high turnover of nursing staff, and thus became very involved in the community life: I was frequently invited to traditional gatherings and celebrations, weddings, and funerals. I showed a deep interest in the Cree culture and their traditional ways of life, and although not a hunter, I joined in banquets to celebrate the Goose Break (in the spring) and the Moose Break (in the fall). I was invited to peoples' cabins in the bush and learned a great deal about the Cree connection to the land. In truth, I had a deep sense of belonging to the community.

I moved to Mistissini in early 2014 to become a Nurse Counselor on Sexual Health for the Regional Public Health Department. This position led me to travel across

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all nine communities of Eeyou Istchee, and to educate doctors, nurses, and CHR on all matters related to sexual health and to contribute to the containment of outbreaks of infectious diseases.

In 2012, the Regional Department of Public Health was mandated to develop a model of health care services especially designed to facilitate access for youth with the long-term goal of implementing “Youth Clinics” within the nine communities of the territory: Mistissini, Ouje-Bougoumou, Waswanipi, Nemaska, Waskaganish, Wemindji, Eastmain, Chisasibi and Whapmagoostui. To better assess the needs of this segment of the population, a working group was created, and members completed a tour of five out of the nine communities. Semi-structured interviews and focus-groups involving stakeholders, health care workers, youth, and Elders took place across the territory. Data analysis revealed an awareness of health, social, emotional, and spiritual issues specific to the youth as well as a deep desire to establish youth friendly services to respond to these needs (Caron et al., 2017).

Upon my transfer, I was asked to join the Youth Clinic working group and by reviewing the transcripts of the interviews and notes from focus groups that had been conducted shortly before my arrival, I noticed that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and Two-Spirited (LGBTQ2+) people had not been specifically involved in this process. Consequently, little was known about the specific health care needs of LGBTQ2+ youth living on the territory. Since the stories of Two-Spirited Cree individuals could contribute to a better understanding of their life experience in the Cree communities of James Bay, Quebec, and consequently, provide significant information in

designing youth friendly health care services that respond to their needs, I proposed to undertake a phenomenological study to explore this phenomenon.

The context of this study, the rationale and problem statement, and the research question are further detailed in this chapter.

Background

Colonization of North America has come at a great price for the countless First Nations tribes and communities who populated this land. Cultural dissonances and a clash of belief systems led the way to years of conflicts. First contacts with European diseases, such as the Small Pox epidemic of 1781, killed 90% of the Aboriginal population leaving them vulnerable to missionaries and colonizers (2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, n.d.). The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development Canada [AANDC], 1996) further highlights how subsequent policies on Aboriginal people have wronged this population over the years. The assimilation process in the nineteenth century undertaken by the Canadian federal government to absorb Aboriginal people into the wider society aimed at eradicating them as distinct peoples. For instance, the reserve system instigated with the *Indian Act* has contributed significantly to the breakdown of families and communities (Papillon, 2008). Furthermore, government initiatives, such as the Indian Residential Schools, have undermined their culture, their language, their values and their traditional ways of life. The Crees (Eeyou) of James Bay (Eeyou Istchee) in northern Quebec have not escaped this fate.

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Aboriginal people have shown strong resilience in the face of adversity. In Eeyou Istchee, for instance, close relations between the Government of Quebec and the Cree Nation Government has led to significant accomplishments. The “James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement” (1975) led to the foundation of the Grand Council of the Crees, the establishment of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, and the creation of the Cree School Board in 1978. The “*Paix des Braves*” treaty, signed in 2002, further deepened the “nation-to-nation” relationship between the Crees and the Government of Quebec while promoting the involvement of the Crees in land exploitative projects (mining, forestry, and hydroelectric) occurring on their territory (CNG, 2018). These significant milestones emphasize the strong desire of the Crees to claim back their cultural identity and stand tall as a Nation in their relationship with the provincial and federal governments.

In directing their efforts toward rediscovering their past and reconnecting with their traditional ways of life, First Nations must acknowledge the strong influence of Western values brought on during colonization on their beliefs and values. For instance, within the context of colonial oppression, one impact of the relations between Native and non-Native societies was particularly evident by the reduction of a multiple-gender sexuality to a binary model and its associated gender-specific social roles and expectations (Hunt, 2016). Aboriginal people traditionally believed that Two-Spirited people carried both male and female spirits in their psyche. It was an honor to behold such a gift. Two-Spirited people could carry tasks that were traditionally reserved to the other gender without fear of rejection or stigmatization: Two-Spirited women could participate in the hunt and Two-Spirited men could partake in preparation of meals and

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crafts. These individuals often occupied valued position in their communities such as educator, teacher and caregiver (2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, n.d., 2016.) The First Nation Centre (FNC, 2012) states they were also visionaries, healers and medicine people and could therefore contribute in special ways to the development of their tribes. These people had a place in Aboriginal culture and were considered fundamental elements of their society. Heteronormativity was not the foundation of Indigenous views on sexuality (Hunt). Acceptance of same-sex relationships was easier in those traditional times than it is today (Newhouse, 1998) and there were women who married other women and men who married other men (2-Sprited People of the 1st Nations, 2016).

The term “Two-Spirit” was coined by Albert McLeod at the *Third Annual Inter-Tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference* held in Winnipeg, in 1990 (Filice, 2015). The expression is not limited to the categorization of one’s sexual identity and cannot solely be summarised as one’s sexual preferences. It rather reflects the fluidity of one’s own sexual uniqueness and its connection with spirituality (Walters, Evans-Campbell, Simoni, Ronquillo, & Bhuyan, 2006). Not all LGBTQ Natives identify as Two-Spirited, and for those who do, the concept encompass their spirituality and their cultural roots (FNC, 2012). The term ensures the acknowledgment of the Aboriginal identity within the LGBTQ movement (J. Brazeau, *Femmes Autochtones du Québec*, personal communication, May 22, 2018). The designation was further added to the existing acronym “LGBTQ” with the number “2” (or sometimes “2S”), to create “LGBTQ2+”¹. Thus “Two-Spirit” is a term that expands

¹ The + sign is used for the sake of simplicity and refers to all other sexual orientation minorities

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beyond the western categorizations of gender and sexuality and holds individual and societal meanings (Hunt, 2016). Many Two-Spirited people express a desire to reconnect with the Elders of their communities and to receive from them the teachings on their traditional roles and values thus reclaiming their very own cultural identity (National Association of Friendship Centres [NAFC], 2008). While Hunt states that some Aboriginal communities have resisted assimilative measures and have allowed people to live and embody a non-binary expression of their gender and sexuality, the actual entanglement of politics and religion that I witnessed in the Cree Nation of Quebec (Eeyou Istchee) suggests a very different picture.

Rationale and Problem Statement

On a community level, the reality can be quite difficult for Two-Spirited Aboriginals: they often face abuse, homophobia, poor housing, unemployment, and increased difficulties in accessing health care services (Monette, Albert, & Waalen, 2001). There is a vast amount of literature related to the challenges facing Two-Spirited youth and describing the potential of prejudices and social rejection from fellow community members. In fact, in many studies, respondents had been forced to leave their communities of origin and had to start anew in urban centres (Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg) in response to prejudice, homophobic threats, and fear for their own safety within their reservation. In the dispensaries of Eeyou Istchee, LGBTQ2+ people are usually discreet and rarely disclose their sexual orientation to the clinical staff. They also rarely acknowledge the violence and hardship they experience on a regular basis even though they may seek nursing and medical care as a direct consequence of such violence.

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Denial of the severity and precariousness of their situation is common. Referrals to social services are often dismissed offhand. In light of such a harsh reality, health care providers and program planning and research officers (PPRO) definitely need to consider the specific needs of this population in order to offer culturally congruent services and provide a safe environment for LGBTQ2+ individuals.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of being a Two-Spirited person living in a Cree community of James Bay, Quebec. A phenomenological approach, with its focus on the understanding of human behavior and human experience, allows a greater understanding of the reality of Two-Spirited people and has the potential to help frontline nurses provide more culturally congruent health care services. In addition, the findings can also guide nurse administrators and PPRO in planning services that can reach out to this population while offering them a safe haven from the hardship they may experience within their own community.

Research Question

The research question for this study is: “What is the lived-experience of being a Two-Spirited person residing in a Cree community, in James Bay, Quebec?”

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A thorough literature review was completed using the CINAHL and PUBMed databases, as well as the Cochrane Library. General computerized searches using commercial search engines led to various reports from associations supporting LGBTQ2+ people. The keywords used were: “Aboriginal”, “Indigenous”, “Two-Spirit”, “Homosexuality”, “Health”, “Health care services”, and “Access to health care”. Two-Spirited people are largely overlooked in the scientific and health literature (Hunt, 2016). Indeed, it became rapidly clear that a vast amount of the scientific literature on Two-Spirited individuals was related to specific health and social issues targeting this population rather than on the exploration of sexual and gender conceptualizations and their expression. A lot of researchers focussed on exploring the associations between societal trauma (deportation, Residential School program, confinement to life on a reservation) with health issues and psychological distress, but little is known about the challenges facing Two-Spirited people on their quest to self-acceptance and self-affirmation.

The following section highlights the findings categorised by themes: on the legacy of colonization, on the importance of the land, on systemic racism, on forced migrations, on violence and victimization, on substance abuse, on sexual health, and on mental health and suicide.

On the legacy of colonization

The impact of colonialism upon the culture and traditions of the First Nations of Canada have been widely documented (AANDC, 1996). For instance, in traditional First

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Nation culture, the term “2-Spirit” referred to an ancient teaching describing people as especially gifted with the spirits of both male and female who were perceived as a third gender and honored within their communities (2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, 2016). Various First Nations tribes of North America had different visions of “gender identity, gender roles, and social expectations around sexual behavior” that were quite different from Western European views on human sexuality (Raymond, 2016, p. 811). Further efforts by the missionaries and a progressive conversion of Aboriginal people to Christianity led to the stigmatization of nonheteronormative behavior (Raymond). Two-Spirited and LGBTQ Aboriginal people were ostracized from their communities and a significant exile towards urban centers took place.

The north American gay rights movement made significant strides in the 1970s, especially following the Stonewall riots of June 1969 in New York in which all shades of the LGBTQ population rallied and rebelled against the authorities. The subsequent creation of the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activist Alliance are milestones in radical gay and lesbian activism. The foundation of the Gay American Indians (1975) further helped Aboriginal people who had left their communities and lived in San Francisco (Raymond, 2016). In Canada, homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969 following the approval of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (Bill C-150). Multiple movements promoting the recognition of gay rights were born across the country such as the *Front de Libération des Homosexuels* (1971) in Montreal (SRC, 2008) and the Gay Alliance Toward Equality (1971-1980) in Vancouver (City of Vancouver, n.d.). It is not, however, until 1990, that the term *Two-Spirit* is chosen as a “pan-Indian gloss” to reconcile similar and diverging expressions of gender identities and sexual orientations

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across First Nations cultures. Although the term is a modern construct that cannot encompass all the subtleties and variances of these expressions, it does, nevertheless, “provide greater recognition of both similarity with and differences from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered identities” (Raymond, 2016, p. 813-814).

The legacy of colonization is still present in First Nations reservations by means of rampant homophobia and transphobia. Two-Spirited people still living in their home reservations face prejudice and discrimination. The massive conversion to Christianity also impedes progress in the recognition of Two-Spirited people rights and freedoms. Some Native people who have embraced fundamental Christian views do not want to concede that their culture has, at one point in time, valued and honored a third gender (Raymond, 2016). The sacred roles of Two-Spirited people seem to have been forgotten (2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, n.d.) Therefore Two-Spirited people remain today doubly stigmatized: neglected by civil gay liberation movements (for being Aboriginal) and discriminated by their own community (for being LGBTQ2+).

This phenomenon is clearly described by Walters et al. (2006) in their article, “My Spirit in my Heart”. The authors used a phenomenological approach to analyse the narratives of five American Indian Two-Spirited women of various ages and socio-cultural backgrounds. Their resulting critic of modern theory on lesbian identification process marked a paradigm shift from the process of *coming-out* to the phenomenon of *embracing one’s Two-Spirit self*. For these participants, the expression of one’s gender identity went beyond sexual preferences to include traditional and cultural values and spirituality. Being of service to the community was also an important aspect of being Two-Spirited: “it’s like this community always seems like it takes priority to me” (p.

129). The authors highlighted the homophobia experienced via their community fellows and the racism expressed by the non-Native LGBTQ community: “I think the term two-spirit came out of [...] trying to have that identity outside of [...] the prejudice from the Native community and the prejudice from the White gay-lesbian community or non-Indian gay-lesbian community” (p 131). Furthermore, they believed that the Two-Spirited identity had the potential to rally communities in their struggle over non-Native influence and dominance. In that sense, Two-Spirited people could reclaim a role that was theirs traditionally but had been taken away in the midst of colonization. Community and personal wellness seemed to be connected to the expression of this sacred identity. These authors also believed that educating younger generations of Two-Spirited people was key to the survival of First Nations communities.

The colonization clearly caused a paradigm shift of Aboriginal views on sexuality, moving from a spectrum of gender expressions, sexual orientations, and community roles and expectations to a binary system defined solely by the Western European concepts of male and female gender identities. An ongoing movement of Two-Spirited liberalism is reclaiming the traditional array of sexual identities and sees its re-appropriation as a potential way of undoing the legacy of colonization (Walter et al., 2006). Lastly, the term “Two-Spirit”, although a modern construct different from the non-Native categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) remains however clearly connected to them (Raymond, 2016). Today, Two-Spirited people “walk carefully between the worlds and between the genders” (2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, n.d., p. 1).

On the Importance of the Land

Family belonging and connection to the land are key components of Aboriginal Cree identity. “As our ancestors knew, the Land heals, and this understanding provides the foundation for the *Nitahuu Aschii Ihtuun* (Land-Based Healing) program” (CBHSSJB, 2017, p. 58). Although not directly related to the specific health care needs of Two-Spirited people, the importance of the land was also identified as a determinant of health in a phenomenological study involving six Maori people, in New Zealand. They took part in semi-structured interviews and the data analysis identified two significant aspects of one’s health: family (genealogy) and connection to the land (Mark & Lyons, 2010). In Eeyou Istchee similar links have also been identified (Caron et al., 2017). Furthermore, two land-based healing programs are operational across the territory: first, the Chisasibi *Miyupimaatisiun* Committee in collaboration with *Nishiiyuu Miyupimaatisiun* Department developed a program in which young participants accompany Elders in the bush to get reacquainted with the traditional ways of life, and second, the Mobile Traditional Healing Program led by Charles Esau in Waskaganish in which youth from across the territory go on canoe expeditions to reconnect with traditional lifestyle and reacquire survival skills. Mr. Esau claimed that participants often experienced inner peace and returned from their trip transformed and enabled to face life’s challenges and difficulties (personal communication, November 4, 2014).

These programs however have not been subjected to any form of scientific evaluation. As per Western standards, an evaluation research is usually done to determine if a program should be maintained, if it requires changes or (cultural) adaptation in order

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to be maintained, or if it simply should be abandoned. Polit and Beck (2012) specify that this type of research usually aim at determining whether an intervention is effective or not while also learning how it actually creates its impact upon the participants. More specifically, an evaluation can focus on the implementation of the program to measure if it meets the intended goals and assess its practical strengths and weaknesses. A formative evaluation, done while the program is ongoing, can lead to significant course corrections before the intervention is completed while a summative evaluation, done once the program is completed, can assess its overall worth and impact (Polit & Beck). Up until two years ago, very few of the Cree initiatives and programs were evaluated: data collection tools were seldom developed and put in place, and very few people had the skills to analyse data and produce meaningful findings.

Funding agencies however do require ongoing reports in order to maintain the financing of activities. For instance, Health Canada is financing one full-time Home Care Nurse position per CMC but require in return monthly reports detailing the number of clients and the type of nursing care dispensed to the clientele. Consequentially, there has been an increasing insistence from Cree leadership that all programs and interventions developed also include an evaluation tool prior to their implementation and be formally assessed to ensure their recurrent funding. Nurse counselors and PPRO of the Regional Public Health Department and the Program Development and Support Department are now required to produce annual operational plans and to define and measure key performance indicators (KPI) to assess progress of their projects.

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Although these two Cree land-based programs have not been evaluated as per Western scientific standards, their high attendance, and the verbal praises from the participants and the organisers still reflect a deep conviction of the association between a healthy mind, body and spirit and the land, a phenomenon observed in other Aboriginal cultures (Mark & Lyons, 2010).

On Systemic Racism

Whether they live in urban centres or in a reservation, Two-Spirited people are often faced with institutions that are not designed to meet their specific needs. Some articles explored this situation.

The paucity of specific research on Two-Spirited people was identified as a significant issue by the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) when they reviewed their programs and services delivery model. Their report, entitled “Supporting Two-Spirited peoples” (2008) highlighted the difficulties encountered in their research process: the authors indicated that some of their conclusions were in fact extrapolations of findings on heterosexual Aboriginals or non-Aboriginal LGBTQ people and that some of their respondents did not know about Two-Spirited people and their lived realities. The scarcity of research specific to Two-Spirited people is therefore reflected in the lack of specific services to this population as “they must navigate mainstream programs, that are blind to their distinctive socio-cultural reality and lack the cultural byways and spiritual direction that Two Spirited/LGBT[Q] people long for” (p. 3). Two-Spirited people faced a double challenge when confronted to both racism and homophobia from mainstream agencies. For instance, the emotional confusion surrounding the coming out process and

the quest of gender identity were often ignored by service providers. Furthermore, the authors stated that this limited knowledge of Two-Spirited people within their organization was also present within the health care system where professionals worked in a heteronormative environment and used screening tools that were not appropriate to assess Two-Spirited people. Education was identified as key to a better understanding of Two-Spirited people: education of professionals but also education of community members. Only then, could the development of non-discriminatory policies take place.

Another example of institutional assessment was incited by the resistance of gay American Indian men in accessing HIV-testing and subsequent treatment. Burks, Robbins, and Durtschi (2011) investigated this behavior with a rapid assessment of their services delivery model. Identified barriers included social discrimination, a lack of trust with the health care system, and significant obstacles in accessing services (service hours, location, and lack of transportation). These findings illustrate how the development of culturally congruent health care services was paramount to ease access to screening and management of a life-long illness. Chae and Walters (2009) also focussed their attention on the issues of discrimination and its impact on the health of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and other sexual-minority American Indians and Alaska Natives. Through logistic regression, these researchers were able to show that discrimination could have a detrimental effect on individuals with low level of self-actualization. In that sense, discrimination becomes a risk factor for Two-Spirited individuals.

Lastly, using a mixed approach, Walters, Horwath, and Simoni (2001) examined the biases experienced by LGBTQ2+ American Indians and the attitudes of service

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providers toward American Indians. First, a survey completed by 31 participants revealed that rates of bias experienced by LGBTQ2+ American Indians were greater than those experienced by non-LGBTQ2+ American Indians. In a sub-group of 14 American Indians identifying as LGBTQ2+, 100% claimed having received verbal insults, 79% had been threatened of attack and 57% had been chased or followed. On the other hand, a sub-group of 22 participants who were service providers reported feeling “very comfortable” (50%) or “comfortable” (46%) when interacting with LGBTQ2+ American Indians. The second intervention included eight focus groups of three to eight people (total of 34 participants) to address the problems facing LGBTQ2+ American Indians and the barriers in accessing services. Invisibility, discrimination, trauma, and identity were the major themes identified by the participants. More precisely, a context of heterosexism within Aboriginal communities increased the isolation of Two-Spirited people and “community members just don’t consider being gay or lesbian as a possibility or a Native reality” (p. 141). Two-Spirited people experienced further discrimination through racism from the non-Native LGBTQ2+ population in urban centres and homophobia from their community heterosexual fellows. Historical traumas of emotional and mental abuse were also associated with fear of anti-gay violence. These hostile elements often led Two-Spirited people toward alcohol consumption and substance abuse: “we numb the pain of being gay [while dealing] with parental and cultural anti-gay attitudes” (p. 143). Lastly, this harsh context in addition to the loss of connection with traditional knowledge hindered the development of a well-balanced identity. Service providers highlighted the need for community-based discussion on sexuality and the realities of LGBTQ2+ people,

promotion of safety, and training for all staff regardless of their sexual orientations as ways to improve the quality of interventions.

On Forced Migration

A nonexperimental descriptive study undertaken in Canada by Monette et al. (2001) and commissioned by *2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations*, a non-profit organization supporting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people living in Toronto, also explored the experiences of Two-Spirited men who had left their community of origin and moved to Canadian cities. First, focus group data from seven young gay men was analysed by four researchers to identify key-themes to be considered in the development of a survey. These themes were: the processes of self-identification and coming-out, relationships, discrimination, poverty, use of social services, abuse, unlawful activities and coping skills. Survey questions covered a wide range of topics: education level, mobility, notions of family, support network, services available, safe sex, spirituality, and HIV/AIDS. Further questions were added following a literature review by the authors on various topics: the difficulties of coming out in the community of origin, a perceived shift from traditional integration of Two-Spirited people to an actual ostracizing of people who identify as gay, homophobia from family, and the discrimination from the members of the reserves and from their leaders. Questions related to demographic data (age, length of stay in a city, Aboriginal identification, first language, housing situation, occupation, and income), information on relationship, hope, social factors, sexual activities, and attitudes about sex, opinion on sexual orientation,

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alcohol consumption, and knowledge about HIV/AIDS were added to the final version of the survey.

The authors received 189 survey responses. However, the total number of surveys initially mailed out is not indicated in their report thus making it impossible to assess response rate. Major findings revealed a strong fear of homophobia with 51% of the respondents stating that their community of origin would consider it wrong for a man to have sex with another man and 42% affirming their family would have the same belief. Homophobia was rated fifth in the sociological factors affecting the respondents' life. Fear of not being welcomed back into the community of origin rated third among the 52% of respondents who feared going back to their community of origin; homophobia and HIV status rated fifth on the same scale (under the "other reason" category). Furthermore, fear of discrimination based on sexual orientation rated third in the reasons for not accessing health care and/or social services. Other lifestyles risks were identified such as smoking (78%), alcohol consumption (69%) and poor diet (56%). More than half of the respondents (58%) did not have a steady sex partner and of those who answered "yes" only half (53%) stated that they were sexually exclusive (and 30% said they did not know whether or not their sex partner had sex with other people). Use of condoms was explored as well: more than half of the participants claimed using when engaging in anal sex (55% in "insertive" anal-genital sex and 57% in receptive anal-genital sex). Participants identified many reasons for not using a condom: alcohol or drug use was the main reason reported by 57% of respondents. These findings correlate with some of the concerns and fears expressed in the Eeyou Istchee community consultations by health care workers, parents, and Elders (Caron et al., 2017).

Similar findings were unravelled by Teengs and Travers (2006) who interviewed 13 Two-Spirited youth in order to understand their migration from reservations to Toronto and the impact on HIV vulnerability. Participants described a need to escape a harsh environment where abuse and oppression were omnipresent. They also described the challenges facing them upon arrival in a city – racism, poverty, and unemployment - and the means they were forced to use in order to survive, such as sex work, which would contribute to increasing HIV infection rates.

Lastly, in their research report entitled “Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ – Migration, Mobility and Health,” Ristock, Zoccole, and Potskin (2011) also explored the migration paths of Two-Spirited people as they moved in and out of reserves as well as their experiences of services provided in urban areas. Their literature review targeted mobility, forced mobility, and health concerns. This exploratory research has provided quantitative and qualitative results via an individual questionnaire and focus groups. Indicators of health, cultural identities, impacts of moving and resilience were identified in the major findings.

On Violence and Victimization

Hunt (2016) described how the imposition of gender and sexual norms upon Aboriginal people has translated in higher rates of discrimination and homophobia. As such, Two-Spirited people are at higher risk of experiencing violence in their communities. Actual statistical data on violence is lacking due to Aboriginal’s mistrust in the judicial system and subsequent lack of complaints filed with the police. Furthermore, the array of services available to those who do report being victims of violence is limited.

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Colonization can be linked with an increase of violence among First Nations, more specifically of violence towards women in general, and even more pronounced towards women who identify as lesbian or bisexual. To this effect, research by Lehavot, Walters, and Simoni (2009) revealed that as lesbian and bisexual, women are more often sexually assaulted (85% of their participants) and physically abused (78% of their participants) than heterosexual Native women and non-Native lesbian women. Participants also experienced an increased level of mental and physical health issues. The authors highlighted the importance of “mastery” as a mean for these women of sexual minorities to regain a sense of control over their lives and to increase the likelihood of escaping dangerous relationships.

The study by Simoni, Walters, Balsam, and Meyers (2006) with members of an American Indian community also illustrated that Two-Spirited men were an extremely vulnerable population. The survey findings revealed that Two-Spirited men were more likely to engage in lifetime HIV high-risk sexual behaviours even though they reported comparable level of substance use than their heterosexual counterparts. The authors identified the concept of “victimisation” as a strong influence in the life of Two-Spirited men. Bias-related victimization was associated with a significantly higher rate of violence against Two-Spirited people.

Similarly, domestic violence was also identified by Ristock et al. (2011) in their report on Aboriginal migration. In fact, 23 out of the 25 respondents claimed they had been victims of violence from their spouse or partners.

Fear of violence and homophobia were shown to be important barriers to accessing health care services, more precisely HIV/AIDS prevention and education services in a report by Zoccole, Ristock, Barlow, and Seto (2005). Authors surveyed 86 Two-Spirited youth and the staff of six organizations serving Aboriginal people in order to provide recommendations on the development of organizational policies. Eighty-seven per cent of the Two-Spirited participants were open about their sexual orientation but only 54.1% were open about it when entering organizational settings. Most respondents stated having experienced some level of homophobia, either verbally or physically. Almost half of the organizational staff reported being aware of homophobic incidents, mostly verbal abuse and gossip. These homophobic instances happened despite clear anti-homophobia policies in place in 75% of the institutions. Two-Spirited participants stated that the organizations could offer more culturally adapted health care services as a mean to increase their level of comfort.

On Substance Abuse

In general, researchers have shown that Two-Spirited people in Canada and the United States are more likely to experience mental health issues and to resort to alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms (Hunt, 2016). The impact of having attended residential school (or being raised by someone who attended residential school – a first glimpse of the existence of a transgenerational trauma) on Two-Spirited people was explored by Evans-Campbell, Walters, Pearson, and Campbell (2012) in a study revealing a strong association with tendencies toward illicit drug abuse.

Difficulties in accessing addiction services and the paucity of culturally adapted rehabilitation facilities are additional obstacles facing Aboriginal people (Zoccole et al., 2005). A similar concern was identified in the Eeyou Istchee community consultations (Caron et al., 2017) when health care professionals identified drug abuse and alcohol bingeing as important health concerns for youth; some parents and Elders also associated higher rate of consumption with the transgenerational Residential School trauma. A lack of specialised services in regard to drug and alcohol dependencies was also identified as a significant obstacle in facilitating recovery of youth suffering from addiction on the territory.

On Sexual Health

The consequences of high-risk sexual behaviors were widely researched. Indeed, an impressive number of articles detailed the high incidence of unplanned pregnancies among Aboriginal teenagers (Devries, Free, Morison, & Saewyc, 2009; Rutman, Taulii, Ned, & Tetric, 2012), the high rates of sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI) among Aboriginal groups (Devries & Free, 2010, 2011), and the high rates of Hepatitis A, B, and C infections (Moses, Mestery, Kaita, & Minuk, 2002). The factors associated to high rates of HIV/AIDS were also well documented: poverty (Calzavara, Bullock, Myers, Marshall, & Cockerill, 1999; Jolly, Moffatt, Fast, & Brunham, 2005), street drugs use (Chavoshi, et al., 2012), being a woman (Mill, 1997), and low self-esteem (Devries & Free, 2010; Mill). The higher rates of STBBI and HIV/AIDS within Aboriginal settings were identified as the consequences of poor sexual education and the low impacts of national intervention programs (Smylie, Maticka-Tyndale, & Boyd, 2008).

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Mendyka (2001) used ethnographic observations with Watson's Model of Human Care to explore HIV related illnesses among American-Indian communities. He described how ethnicity can lead to disenfranchisement and marginalization of HIV-positive patients. The participants described being victims despite attempts to provide culturally congruent health care services.

One article discussed HIV vaccine in an Aboriginal setting (Newman, Woodford, & Logie, 2012) and another addressed HIV treatment among Aboriginal gay men (Schulz, 2001).

The incidence of HIV infection is very low in Eeyou Istchee with less than ten cases officially declared on the territory (P. Lejeune, personal communication, May 18, 2018). However, given the higher rates of other sexually transmitted infections such as Chlamydia trachomatis and Neisseria gonorrhoea in Eeyou Istchee (INSPQ, 2017), the possibility of an HIV outbreak among the youth population remains a real concern.

While all these topics are important when addressing health issues with young Aboriginal, none of these studies explored the specific needs of Two-Spirited youth.

On Mental Health and Suicide

In a study on American Indian and Alaska Natives, Frazer and Pruden (2010) affirmed that generally, LGBTQ people were more likely than the general population to suffer from mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, due to stress. They also affirmed that the stress experienced by LGBTQ people contributed to substance abuse, such as smoking and drinking alcohol. Looking for the roots of this disparity, the authors

addressed a wide range of co-factors, both institutional and personal: difficulties in accessing health care services, experiences of racism and stereotyping within institutions, having multiple identities (being Native and Two-Spirited, being mistakenly taken for somebody of a different ethnic group, etc.), low rate of employment, low self-confidence, and languages issues. The authors recommended the establishment of an infrastructure that can take into consideration the needs of Two-Spirited people and LGBTQ Native people, and the provision of culturally congruent health care services that can address mental health issues, substance abuse, and other addictions.

The report from the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC, 2008) also indicated a need for preventative services for emotionally distressed and suicidal youth. A search on the website of the National Aboriginal Health Organization led to a series of booklets addressing different health issues. One entitled “Suicide prevention and Two-Spirited people” (First Nations Centre, 2012) reported that risk factors related to suicide were more pronounced within the Two-Spirited group than those found among the heterosexual First Nations. Indeed, while suicide rates vary among First Nations communities, national rate of suicide was twice as high in the Aboriginal reserves as in the rest of Canada and rates of suicide among Aboriginal youth were the highest around the world (Health Canada, 2013). Education was identified as a key element in the fight against discrimination for this population.

Conclusion

In summary, this literature review revealed a strong association between the terms “Two-Spirited” and “LGBTQ” people. Most of the studies however focussed on health

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issues related to this population such as high rates of STBBI, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis A, B and C., inconsistent use of condoms, and drug and alcohol consumption. These findings mirror the concerns expressed in the Eeyou Istchee community consultations (Caron et al., 2017). Reports from various organisations (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, and the National Association of Friendship Centres) contributed significantly to this literature review by describing social issues relevant to Two-Spirited people, such as homophobia, racism, fear of violence, threats, discrimination, forced mobility and trans-generational trauma, which all combine to increase the emotional burden of young Two-Spirited people often leading to high risk behaviors.

Of significance, all of the qualitative studies were conducted outside Aboriginal reserves and the participants were Aboriginal people who had left their community of origin, a clear indicator of the difficulty to access the population of interest to this study.

No scientific literature on the topic of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee was found.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology used to conduct this study was phenomenology as defined by Giorgi (1985). This approach emerged from philosophy through the works of Edmund Husserl and is now used across a wide range of disciplines, including nursing. Through the analysis of recorded interviews, themes emerge that describe the lived experience of a phenomenon of interest. Because human experience is at the core of nursing practice, this method can help health professionals better understand the human experience of topics relevant to nursing. Furthermore, the exploratory nature of phenomenology makes it an efficient method to investigate topics that are not well documented or poorly understood, such as the reality of being a Two-Spirited person residing in Eeyou Istchee. Lastly, phenomenology can be used with small samples of participants, which was an expected concern given the sensitive nature of the topic of the study.

In this chapter, the philosophical foundation of phenomenology is presented, before the scientific approach developed by Giorgi (1985) can be explained step-by-step. The strategies deployed to recruit participants, and the process of data collection and data analysis are also detailed to illustrate the measures taken to ensure authenticity of the data. The ethical considerations for the study are also explained in light of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. Lastly, measures taken to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of data are described in light of the specificities of qualitative study.

Philosophical Background

As a philosophy, phenomenology has its roots in the works of Edmund Husserl, who defined it as the “direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced free from unexamined preconceptions and free of causal theories” as cited in Welch (1999, p. 236). For Husserl, it is through the lived experience of phenomena, that knowledge is generated. However, in order to access that knowledge, one must follow the steps of the philosophical phenomenological method.

Giorgi (1997) describes this philosophical process: phenomenological reduction, description, and search for essences. First, phenomenology doesn't automatically acknowledge that a given phenomenon is actually taking place, but rather seeks to understand the motives for a human being to claim that the phenomenon is occurring. To do so, the phenomenological reduction process is used to step back from the phenomenon, bracket former knowledge of this phenomenon and offer a more precise description of the experience of the phenomenon. Second, a linguistic expression of the phenomenon as experienced is developed since it is “through the medium of language [that] one is able to communicate to others the objects of consciousness to which one is present, precisely as they are presented” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 241). Third, aspects of a phenomenon are changed to see whether what remains is still identifiable despite the modifications. This process leads to the identification of essences, units of meaning that cannot be removed or modified without altering the phenomenon. This philosophical method allows the production of meaning through human experience of a phenomenon.

Phenomenology as a Science

From these philosophical premises, phenomenology emerges as a science that focuses on the study of human experiences. It is a “rigorous, critical, [and] systematic investigation of phenomena” (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). At its core, consciousness remains as the mean through which individuals experience the world (Giorgi, 2005). Similar to the philosophical method, the scientific approach is descriptive and deductive in nature. The researcher collects the narrative of a participant who is an “embodied conscious being who bestow meaning in the world” (Giorgi, 2005, p. 79). Using “bracketing” prevents the researcher from inferring or linking his own knowledge and experiences to the phenomenon of study thus making it possible to claim that the narrative collected is the actual lived experience of the phenomenon as described by the participant (Giorgi, 1997). Through a process of reduction, reflection and imaginative variation, themes proper to each subject’s own experience of the phenomenon of interest emerge and can further be linked to other participants’ experience of the same phenomenon. As these “units of meaning” accumulate from one narrative to another, a more accurate description of the phenomenon can be attained. In essence, “this scientific process brings to language human experiences” (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011, p. 93). Since this method is more suitable to the exploration of the depths of human consciousness, it was the most appropriate approach for this study.

Qualitative approaches allow the exploration of life events through the analysis of their subjective experience. These methods also recognise the importance of accepting different ways of knowing, and different ways of seeing (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011).

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As such, these methods are excellent to investigate people with different world views, people who have experienced a significant paradigm shift in their belief system, and people who experience cultural shock. Because they are fundamentally intuitive in nature, the design of qualitative studies often evolves over the course of the study (Polit & Beck, 2012). This is generally due to the sensitive nature of topics of investigation and the vulnerable populations experiencing the phenomenon of interest. For instance, phenomenology has been used to study pregnant women who used drugs (Miles, Chapman, Francis, & Taylor, 2014), the relationships between Public Health nurses and their clients (high-risk families) in Northern Canada (Moules, MacLeod, Thirsk, & Hanlon, 2010) and prisoners serving a life sentence without parole (Sliva, 2015). Some topics can be difficult to address putting both the participants and the researcher at risk: on one hand, the participant may feel distressed and vulnerable when asked very personal questions; on the other hand, the researcher must continuously be aware of the intrusive and potentially prejudicial nature of his inquiry (Streubert & Carpenter). Indeed, while the researcher wants to gain new insights into the topic of study, he must also assess whether that potential gain is worth the possible emotional damage to the informant.

First Nations people are identified as a vulnerable population. Their culture and their traditions have been profoundly affected by colonization and massive conversion to Christianity. More specifically, the Residential School program, established in the late 19th century by the Canadian government and operated by various Catholic churches, aimed specifically at assimilating Aboriginal children in Western culture. Bishop Vital Grandin said it clearly in 1875:

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When they graduate from our institutions, the children have lost everything native except their blood. They have forgotten their mother tongue and, in this way, cannot live native life anymore; we instill in them a pronounced distaste for the native life so that they will be humiliated when reminded of their origin (Bial, 2016).

The last of these Residential Schools closed its doors in 1996 and it is estimated that 150000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children attended these institutions and that over 6000 died within their walls (Miller, 2018). Although former students were able to gain recognition and restitution via the *Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement* of 2007, the long-term consequences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse are still evident to this day. First, some of those who survived returned home feeling alienated from their own people. Survivors claim that they had been forced to speak English or French – and severely punished if caught speaking their mother tongue – and consequently, some had forgotten their tribal language. Others integrated a self-loathing bias toward their own people: “When I came out of Residential School, I was prejudiced against myself. I didn’t like being an Indian” (Chaboyer, K., n.d. in Miller). Having been removed from their family at a young age, survivors lacked role models as parents and therefore were ill-equipped to become parents themselves. I have met with young mothers who were desperate for guidance in raising their children and who claimed that they had nobody to teach them the ways. Furthermore, they could not pass on the traditional ways of life of their people because no one had been able to teach them. I have seen generations still carrying that cultural gap and seeking to reconnect with their Elders. Cree Nation institutions are now striving to re-center around their traditions and include Elders as

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consultants in all aspects of management in order to ensure that the nation strived in a culturally appropriate way. There is even a sense of things improving for Cree Two-Spirited individuals. For the past few years, community members of Mistissini have been holding an annual gathering for Two-Spirited youth outside the territory and are planning to extend the invitation to members of other Cree communities. In 2018, they received for the first time an acknowledgment of their importance to the Cree Nation by the Grand Chief of the Crees, Dr. Abel Bosum (Bell & Smith, 2018).

Two-Spirited people still remain a very vulnerable subpopulation of First Nations across Canada and across Eeyou Istchee. The lived experience of being a Two-Spirited person living in Eeyou Istchee has, however, never been studied before. As a long-term clinician within the CBHSSJB and a member of a small Cree community, I found myself in a privileged position to conduct a qualitative study in order to investigate a very sensitive topic not accessible to outsiders.

Given the cultural aspect of the topic of research, an ethnographic approach could have been used with the population of interest. In general, ethnomethodology seeks to discover cultural knowledge by trying to unravel the norms and beliefs that are deeply ingrained in people's psyche: in essence, it attempts to unravel how people perceive the world and how they make sense of daily life (Polit & Beck, 2012). Through the analysis of their actions and the events shaping their lives, ethnographers aim at exploring the worldview of their subject in order to describe their culture, their customs, their beliefs, and their behaviors.

Streubert and Carpenter (2011) list six fundamental characteristics of ethnography: the first three can be associated with other qualitative approaches, while the latter three are unique to ethnography. There are therefore parallels to be drawn between ethnography and phenomenology but, in the end, phenomenology was the best option.

First, the “researchers are instruments” who through their close connection and intimacy with participants can collect information about the people and the culture they study. The researcher who is accepted within the culture of study also benefits from an increased level of trust from the participants. Lastly, however, ethnographers cannot claim to have fully gotten the insider’s (emic) view and thus, the ways members of the culture envision their reality and their world escape them (Polit & Beck, 2012). Similarly, phenomenologists can also be perceived as instruments: they collect narratives from their participants in order to better understand the lived experience of a phenomenon of interest, often sensitive in nature and requiring intimacy and trust. Themes and essences emerging from data analysis, however, reflect the experiences of the participants and cannot be generalised to an entire population or culture. In this study, I interviewed people and asked them to describe their lived experience of being Two-Spirited. The topic was sensitive and required trust and intimacy. Safeguards had been ensured in case of emotional breakdown. Similar to ethnographers, I still cannot claim to have gained an emic perspective of their reality: what I have gained from the participants is a clear description of their experience of identifying as LBTQ2+ in Eeyou Istchee.

The second characteristic of ethnography is “fieldwork”. Ethnographic research occurs in the field, not in a laboratory: researchers usually spend months in the field and

try to participate in the cultural activities of the people under study in order to develop a deeper level of trust and intimacy with them. This approach can therefore be very time consuming. Polit and Beck (2012) specify that three broad types of information are usually investigated: cultural behavior, cultural artifacts, and cultural speech.

Phenomenology is more concerned about the perceptions of participants on the topic of interest and on how these perceptions give meaning to their lives. Similar to the ethnographers, phenomenologists do collect their data in the field through interviews and direct observations of their participants. This phenomenological stance leads to accurate description as free as possible from biases and preconceived ideas. My long-term employment within the CBHSSJB has led me to live among the Cree for 12 years. This involvement in the community life, beyond the walls of the nursing outpost and the CMC, has greatly contributed to establishing trust with the participants, even those whom I had not met before.

The third characteristic is the “cyclic nature of data collection and analysis.” As they unravel similarities and differences between the culture under study and their own, ethnographers often find themselves with an ongoing flow of emerging questions in need of answers. As such, they are engaged in a cycle of collecting data, analyzing it, and returning to the field to collect more. At the end of their investigation, the culture is still not completely understood, and some questions remained unanswered: it ends “because time and resources are exhausted” (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011, p. 173). Lawless (2000, 2015) postulates that there is a need for an ongoing exchange between researchers and their participants beyond the data collection stage. She explains that “reciprocal ethnography” includes an additional step in which the researchers send their analysis and

their findings to the participants for feedback. Although she doesn't advocate that participant should be given censorship privileges, she argues that analysis and findings should be reviewed by participants prior to publication. The dialogue should be integrated as a chapter of the final publication as a way to recognise similar and diverging opinions about the studied culture (Lawless, 2015). This additional step requires time and resources but Lawless (2000) believes that when an exchange of ideas is reciprocal, there is an opportunity to learn from each other and no voice is more important than the other. Under the phenomenological approach, researchers are also engaged in a cyclic data collection as multiple interviews are sometimes required (Polit & Beck, 2012) but the inquiry ends when saturation is achieved: when new individual input don't seem to add new significant information to the data, phenomenologists stop the data collection and proceed with the analysis. In this study, I asked participants to take part in two interviews because I believed that it would take more than one interview to fully explore the lived experience of being LGBTQ2+ in the Cree communities. I stopped the data collection when I reached saturation.

The last three characteristics are unique to ethnography. The fourth one is the "focus on culture." The goal of ethnography is to better understand the lifeways of people sharing a set of beliefs and to explain and document what connects members of a given group. This is not something phenomenologists seek in particular. Although, some topics of study, such as the lived experience of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee, are an integral part of a given culture, the goal of phenomenology remains to better understand the phenomenon as experienced by the participants and to extract from their descriptions its *essences*, themes, and meanings, not to describe the culture from which it emerges. My

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study is not about the culture of LGBTQ and Two-Spirits within the broader Cree culture, but rather about the lived experience of being LGBTQ2+ in Eeyou Istchee.

The fifth characteristic is the “cultural immersion.” Ethnographers need to fully immerse themselves in the culture they intend to study by spending months, even years, living among their participants and participating in their daily activities and other ceremonies (Polit & Beck, 2012). This immersion does foster trust and facilitate the intimacy required to pursue deep interviews and insightful observations.

Phenomenologists are not required to spend extensive periods of time with their informants: a distance is rather necessary as they are asked to “bracket” their own beliefs and perceptions in order to remain neutral and not influence their analysis. Ethnographer Ilja Maso (2001), questioned the objectivity of “bracketing” claiming it could at best be described as an attempt to refrain from being influenced by preconceived dispositions about the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, given the dominant Western culture and the subjectivity of “bracketing,” some “results of phenomenology [research] have been criticized as representing a male, white, middle-class standpoint” (p. 140). Although I did feel like a member of the Cree community, I could never fully escape my non-Native status or my role as a clinician. Bracketing my own experiences while pursuing this study has been a challenge. I cannot, however, deny that my own lived experience among the Cree has greatly facilitated my research: I petitioned and received a quick approval from the CBHSSJB, the personnel of the CMC facilitated the recruitment of participants by putting up the poster and directly informing Two-Spirited people they knew of the upcoming study, and some participants who already knew me from my time as a clinician

jumped at the occasion to share their story. An outsider with no prior connection with the Cree culture would not have been able to complete such a study.

Lastly, the sixth characteristic is “reflexivity”, which can be described as “the struggle between being a researcher and becoming a member of the culture” (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011, p. 174). Indeed, being fully immersed in a foreign culture for an extended period of time can lead to difficulties in recognizing the researchers’ own influence upon the collected data. Similar to phenomenologists, ethnographers seek to remain neutral and objective, but as they become members of the culture they study, they alter it nevertheless. Allen (2004) specifies that it can become increasingly difficult for the researchers to maintain their outsider status when familiarity and distance are both needed at the same time. This challenge is unique to ethnography (Streubert & Carpenter) since the simple presence of the researcher is enough to alter the culture of study. Phenomenologists do not share that struggle as they do not attempt to fully immerse themselves in the culture, but rather solely in the collected narratives and observations. My own extended stay within a Cree community, however helpful in setting up this study, must also be acknowledged as a potential bias in both data collection and subsequent analysis even if steps were taken to minimize the impact of my own perceptions and beliefs.

There are indeed multiple similarities between phenomenology and ethnography, and also some significant differences. The goal of my study was not to unravel the culture of Two-Spirited people, nor describe what role they may play within the broader Cree culture. Instead, I wanted to explore experiences of Two-Spirited people in Eeyou Istchee

in order to better understand the lived reality of being LGBTQ2+ within the Cree communities. Given these circumstances, phenomenology thus appeared to be the best choice. This method also has the potential to identify other topics of interest worthy of further investigation and could therefore lead to other research projects with the Cree population.

Recruitment of Participants

A qualitative method allows the exploration of a topic in depth by uncovering multiple realities. Phenomenologists are concerned about finding information rich participants that have significant knowledge of the phenomenon of interest and who will be able to discuss it at length (Polit & Beck, 2012). Therefore, the sampling approach is usually purposive in nature: participants are not chosen randomly, but rather chosen for their potential contribution. Samples tend to be small, but studied intensively (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). Selection criteria are set in order to determine eligibility to the study. Usually in a phenomenological study it is difficult to determine the exact number of participants in advance and the literature related to sampling strategies for this approach is inconsistent (Guetterman, 2015). The anticipated sample for this study was 10 to 12 participants who would represent most of the subpopulations of the LGBTQ2+ community.

The target participants for this study were therefore individuals who were at least 18 years of age, and who identified as Two-Spirited, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. They had to be Cree and live in one of the nine Cree communities of James Bay, Quebec. Participants could have moved out and lived outside the territory at an

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earlier time, but they had to live on the territory at the time of the interviews. Métis and non-Native were not accepted in the sample: although restricting the spectrum of participants reduced the breadth of experiences, it enhanced the likelihood of recurring themes proper to the reality of being Two-Spirited within a Cree community.

Recruiting advertisement was done via local postings on billboards throughout the communities to promote the study among the Cree population (see Appendix C).

Advertisement did include a brief description of the study and the seeking of participants. A cell phone was dedicated to this effect: it had the caller ID disabled and an outgoing message describing the study. A generic e-mail address was also created to communicate with participants. A 25\$ iTunes gift card was offered to participants who completed both interviews. In a population in which oral tradition is very strong, mouth-to-ear was hoped to spread the information effectively. The most reliable source of recruitment, however, was expected to be the “snowball” sampling, in which some key participants who already participated in the study would refer other potential participants. These people would then be contacted to seek participation in the study.

Ten participants contributed to the study: the sample consisted of six cisgender men and four cisgender women. There was no transgender participant. All participants identified on a binary model of gender, as either male or female. Nine saw the recruitment poster advertising the research and only one was referred by another participant. Five of them completed both interviews. The other five either did not reply to emails, did not return phone calls, or did not show at the appointed time for the second interview. One participant became upset when contacted to schedule the second interview and stated

having said everything she had to say on the topic, and only agreed to the second interview after a lengthy negotiation. The sense of having said it all at the first interview may explain why only 50% of the participants chose to complete both interviews. The first interview may also have stirred up emotions and discouraged them to revisit their past and to contribute any further.

To ensure participants met the inclusion criteria, each one was asked whether he or she identified as a Two-Spirited, lesbian, gay, or transgender person. Five cisgender men described themselves as being gay men and one as a bisexual individual while the four cisgender women described themselves as being lesbian. Lastly, although all participants had spent some amount of time living outside the territory, they were all living in Eeyou Istchee at the time of the study. As such, all ten participants met the requirements of the study.

One of the major difficulties in studying Aboriginal people is the establishment of trust (Leininger & McFarland, 2006). My long-term employment with the CBHSSJB did facilitate this process to some extent. To objectify this level of trust, however, I used the “Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler Guide” (see Appendix D) developed by Leininger and McFarland to score each participant at each interview. The “Enabler Guide” allows honest reflexivity as the researcher moves from a status of stranger to a that of a trusted friend while entering the world of the informants (Leininger & McFarland). Specifically, the guide allows the assessment of six indicators of trust: the tendency to protect oneself and others (acting as a gate keeper of the knowledge), the level of attention toward the interviewer (listening and watching closely), the doubts about the motives of the

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researcher (questioning goals and wondering what will happen with the findings), the reluctance to share cultural secrets (being protective of one's own culture), the discomfort in establishing trust and friendship (being late, absent or withdrawn), and the tendency to offer inaccurate data (lying or omitting information). The scale has two columns:

“Stranger” and “Trusted Friend.” The researcher assesses each indicator and marks the corresponding column according to his perception of the actual situation. The final score is calculated by adding each column and comparing the results: a higher score in the “Stranger” column indicates that there is still resistance and trust issues to overcome, while a higher score in the “Trusted Friend” column indicates that trust is building up with the participant. In general, trust was established quickly, and participants showed clear signs of comfort in discussing their experience with a non-Native stranger. While men were generally more talkative than women and required less prompting to tell their story, the range of scores did not differ when compared by gender. At the onset of the first interview, nine participants scored 5 or 6 under “Trusted Friend” while one scored 4 under “Stranger”. On the second interview, one participant's score increased from 5 to 6 under “Trusted Friend”, a sign of growing trust. Interestingly, the participant who scored 4 under “Stranger” was the one who had been referred by another participant: this participant's signs of mistrust may have been the product of peer pressure or a sense of duty to the cause of Two-Spirited people in Eeyou Istchee. Overall, the use of Leininger and McFarland's scale allowed an objectification of the level of trust the participants experienced thus contributing to the authenticity of the collected data and, subsequently, to the validity of the study findings.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews took place in four different communities of Eeyou Istchee. Participants were offered the possibility to have their interviews conducted in an office of the local Community *Miyupimaatisiun* Centres (CMC) or in a venue of their choice. To this effect, for the first interview, three chose to meet at the Regional Public Health Department building, two were interviewed in their homes, four chose the CMC option, and one was met at work. There was no recourse to the use of webcam or any Internet technology such as Skype or FaceTime. Only five participants completed the second interview. Four of those were conducted in person (at the Regional Public Health Department building, the local CMC or at home) and one was conducted over the phone. Without being necessary as per Giorgi's method, I believed that a second interview might be useful to allow the participant to review their contribution and amend it, if desired. I also wanted a chance to explore some topics and ask more specific questions arising from my first immersion in the transcripts. The cyclic nature of data collection in qualitative research often requires multiple interviews (Polit and Beck, 2012).

The interviews ranged between 45 and 90 minutes and were recorded using the Voice Record app on an iPhone. Audio files were encrypted by the software and stored in a password protected iCloud account. Although direct observations of informants are usually part of the data collection in phenomenology, I did not take notes when attending cultural ceremonies as they were not relevant to the topic and I did not attend specific Two-Spirit gathering or celebration – to my knowledge, none is taking place on the territory. I also took very few field notes as the interviewing process was too intense:

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breaking eye contact to write down observations would have broken the intimacy of the moment. Furthermore, many participants required frequent promptings to tell their stories. The use of open-ended questions, usually facilitating story-telling, was not always productive and silences, to help the participant gather their thoughts, were sometimes perceived as lack of preparation. Therefore, more energy was devoted to keep the participant talking by asking more specific questions (while remaining neutral and non-directive) than on writing field notes. As such, the collected data is 100% interview based.

The experience was very emotional for most of the participants who relived painful memories as they shared their life journey; for some of them, the interview was the first opportunity they had to talk about their struggles. In a few instances, the recording was paused to allow emotional outburst, and, on one occasion, the interview was ended as the participant was steering away from the issue at hand and wanted to discuss another topic. These reactions were anticipated given the sensitive nature of the topic of discussion. As such, participants had previously been informed of the possibility to be referred to a psychologist, a Cree therapist, a social worker, or a health care worker for counselling if needed. In these instances, such referrals were offered, but ultimately declined by the participants.

Transcriptions of the verbatim of narratives were done by Scribes Transcription Services: audio files were uploaded on a secure server and Word documents were sent back via the same platform. Each transcript was then read while listening to the recording of the interview: this additional step ensured transcription was accurate while beginning

the “immersion in the data” process. Audio files and Word documents were password protected and kept on an external hard drive to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Printed material was kept in a locked fireproof filing cabinet within an office in the Regional Public Health Department building, in Mistissini, Quebec.

A copy of the password-protected transcripts was sent to each participant, by email, so it could be reviewed prior to the second interview. The password was provided by phone or via a text message. The second interviews were similar in length and allowed for a deepening of the narrative and clarification of some details. Of note, only one out of the five participants who did the second interview stated having read the transcript and expressed some concerns regarding anonymity and requested that the names of people mentioned and referred to be modified if cited in the present thesis. The second password-protected transcripts were emailed to participants with instructions to write back if any changes to their transcript were necessary. Again, passwords were provided by phone or via a text message. Up to this date, no one has requested to modify the content of their transcript. Giorgi (1985) does not specifically state that informants must review the collected data, nor do they need to approve it. However, since the topic was very sensitive, I believed that the informants should have the opportunity to review their contribution and to edit it if they were now uncomfortable with what they had shared with me. I saw in this exchange, a last endeavour to increase trust with the participants since I was not planning on sending them my analysis and findings before publication, as is the case in reciprocal ethnography. The lack of response may indicate that they were at ease with the recorded interviews.

Data Recording and Analysis

Consistent with Giorgi's (1985, 1997) phenomenological method, a seven-step procedure to methodological interpretation of data was followed thoroughly for the data analysis process.

The first step involved reading the entire description of the experiences without initiating any analysis. This first step had already been taken while reviewing exactitude of the transcripts. Giorgi also recommends a second reading (as the second step) to deepen the global sense of the data. Following the process, each transcript was read at least three times to achieve full immersion in the descriptions of the phenomenon.

The third step consisted in identifying the transition units of the experience. Since phenomenology is investigating the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon, the division of the narrative into parts is "meaning discrimination" within the perspective of a given discipline, in this instance, nursing (Giorgi, 1997, p. 246). The software NVivo facilitated the coding of each transcript and the extraction of meaningful excerpts. Through a slow re-reading of each narrative, segments of the stories expressed in the participants' own words that contained meaning related to the lived reality of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee were isolated for deeper analysis.

The fourth step was to elaborate on the meaning of each constituent. Significant extracts of the narratives were compared with other elements of the same narrative thus eliminating redundancies and confirming validity of each component. These constituents were then put into perspective of the whole narrative to allow further connections and

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associations of meaning to emerge. This “discovery-oriented” step leads to the emergence of unexpected meanings (Giorgi, 1997).

The fifth step requires the researcher to remain with the language of the participant (Giorgi, 1985). To this effect, professional sensitivity allowed the identification of significant units of meaning. These included, among others: fear, searching for an explanation, first attraction to a same-gender person, sexual abuse, trans-generational trauma, loneliness, rejection, violence, blaming parents, influence of the Church, homophobia, mental health issues, suicidal thoughts, feeling trapped, running away, another family, allies, embracing changes, returning home, and helping others.

In the sixth step, the concrete language of the participants was transformed in the concepts of science. Participants described their experience of the phenomenon of interest using everyday language. In order to unravel the *meaning* of their experience, and to express the emerging themes in terms proper to nursing science, a transformation was done through reflection and free imaginative variations (Giorgi, 1985). This transformation allowed the identification of “conceptual categories” that were central to the experience (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). The voices of the informants were not erased, but the *essences* giving *meaning* to the experience were extracted and brought along the line of the discipline to offer a description of the essential structure of the lived experience of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee.

At last, in the seventh step, the various themes of each narrative were isolated, and patterns of relationships were established among them. They were then reduced to their essential essences: (1) I am different (becoming self-aware), (2) It was war (coming out to

others), (3) I had to run away (escaping the community), and (4) I wanted to go home (helping others). A final comparison across narratives led to the description of a migratory path common to all participants which actually formed the essential structure of the lived experience of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee.

Ethical Considerations

The 2nd edition of “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans” (Canadian Institute of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014) has a chapter dedicated to the ethical specificities of research involving First Nations, Inuits and Métis. The provisions of these policies were considered in writing a research proposal that was approved by the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Research Ethics Authority (see Appendix E) as a requirement for all Memorial University of Newfoundland graduate students intending to conduct research.

At the same time, the Surveillance, Evaluation, Research and Communication (SERC) committee of the CBHSSJB was also sent a research proposal detailing the objectives and nature of the study. The SERC director, Jill Torres, presented it to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors which granted final approval (see Appendices F and G). The recommendations from SERC have been integrated while planning the study.

At the onset of the study, each participant received a consent form (see Appendix H). The consent introduced the topic of the research, the interview process, the measures taken to maintain confidentiality and the dissemination of findings. This official

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description of the study was then verbally explained to each participant to ensure their comprehension. The consent form was signed prior to the first interview.

More precisely, participants were asked to participate in two interviews each ranging in length from 45 to 60 minutes. Participants were also informed of their right to not answer questions and to leave the study at any time, if they found the interview process overwhelming or too difficult. If counselling was needed, participants could be referred to the local clinic to meet with a psychologist, a Cree therapist, a social worker, or a health care professional.

Anonymity of participants was paramount to the study: participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used instead of their real names and that their communities of residence would not be identified. The pseudonyms were taken from a website listing the most popular baby names in English language. I selected six male first names and four female first names at random and assign one to each participant in accordance with their respective gender identity. The participants were also told that all electronic data (audio recording, Word files, etc.) would be kept on an external hard drive and be password-protected. Transcripts would be kept in a locked filing cabinet in an office in the Department of Public Health building in Mistissini, Quebec. When emailed, these documents would be password-protected, and the password provided to them over the phone (by text messaging or a phone conversation). Participants who did not have access to a computer could receive the transcripts of their interview in person or by regular mail.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity of Data

Engaging in qualitative research requires methodological rigor to ensure authenticity of data and accuracy of findings. Quantitative researchers rely on criteria of validity and reliability to assess the worth of their findings (Krefting, 1991). However, because the object of study in phenomenological research is the subjective meaning of the lived experience of the phenomenon of interest as experienced by each participant, these criteria are not appropriate to the assessment of data. To resolve this issue, Guba (1981) developed a model of assessment of trustworthiness of data in qualitative research based on the identification of four aspects of trustworthiness: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Krefting offers a summary and interpretation of the model while Beck (1993) presents lists of questions used to assess each criterion.

Truth value refers to the level of confidence the researcher has in regard to the authenticity of the data. Guba (1981) used the term *credibility* when referring to truth value. Credibility measures how faithful the description of the lived experience is (Beck, 1993; Yonge & Stewin, 1988). Although, the use of in-depth field notes, including a description of the possible effect of the researcher's presence on the narrative collected is recommended (Beck), no field notes were collected in this study by fear of breaking the flow of the conversation. However, providing each participant with a detailed transcript of the interview and obtaining a validation from him/her following a reading of the transcript increased credibility. At the onset of the study, the participants were informed that they would receive the transcripts of their first interview shortly after completion, and that they would have the opportunity to validate its content during the second interview.

The five participants who did not take part in a second interview still had the opportunity to offer editorial changes but none of them chose to do so and their transcripts were considered to be in accordance with their story. The five participants who did take part in the second interview all agreed that the content of their transcript was appropriate and reflected their experiences. One participant asked that the names of the people named in the transcript be changed if cited in the thesis to maintain anonymity. Shortly after the second interview, the five participants were sent by email the transcript of the interview with a request to reply if any changes were necessary. No replies were received, and the transcripts were considered in harmony with their story. This final approval thus ensured credibility of the collected data.

Applicability refers to the possibility of applying findings to other subjects, or in a different context; it is the possibility to generalize findings to a wider population (Krefting, 1991). Simply put, applicability is not suitable to this phenomenological study because its purpose is to describe the unique lived experience of being Two-Spirited by each participant. Thus, generalisation was not the goal of this study. However, Guba (1981) describes a second perspective to applicability by referring to it as *fittingness*, a measure of the potential of the findings to fit in a different context. To help assess fittingness, Beck (1993) suggests selecting a wide range of participants, not to manipulate data to make it appear more similar than it actually is, and to assess whether or not the findings really fit the data they are generated from. The sample of participants in this study encompassed various gender identities and sexual orientations, and participants originated from both small and big communities adding to the variations of the lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest. Each step of this study, from the recruitment

of participants to the data analysis was also clearly detailed thus another researcher could easily repeat the study within a different setting such as a different First Nations or Inuit community.

Consistency refers to the potential for replication of findings with the same sample of participants and within the same context (Krefting, 1991). In qualitative research, consistency is defined in terms of *dependability*. It implies the possibility to account for variations by identifying specific sources of influences. In phenomenology, the accounts of the lived experience of the phenomenon of interest are expected to cover a range of different experiences, not describe an average one (Krefting). Guba (1981) refers to *auditability* as a tool to increase dependability. The establishment of an audit trail allows another researcher to examine how data was collected and analysed in order to assess the processes of investigation used within the study. Beck (1993) suggests using a tape recorder during the interviews, clearly identifying the selection criteria of the participants, and providing the readers with in-depth description of strategies used to collect and analyse data including the social, physical and interpersonal context of the interviews. All of her suggestions were taken into consideration while conducting this study.

At last, neutrality is the fourth criterion of trustworthiness. Neutrality refers to the fact that findings emerge solely from the participants' narrative and are free of biases and motivations of the researcher (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991). In this study, extended contact with each participant increased the level of comfort, which then led to rich descriptions of the lived experience of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee. Furthermore, the "Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler Guide" (Leininger & McFarland, 2006) was used

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to objectively define the level of trust achieved with each participant. Guba specifies that the objectivity of the investigation is insured by strict adherence to methodology. This chapter presented each step of the Giorgi's (1985) method to illustrate that bracketing of personal biases and motivations was effective and guaranteed the objectivity of the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings which emerged from data analysis reflecting the lived experience of being a Two-Spirited, gay, lesbian, or bisexual person living in a Cree community of Eeyou Istchee. Since there were no transgender participants, the findings cannot be applied or extended to them. Thorough analysis of the collected narratives using Giorgi's (1985) approach led to the identification of four distinct themes that describe a migratory path common to all participants on their journey toward acceptance and self-identification: (1) *I Am Different*, (2) *It Was War*, (3) *I Had to Run Away*, and (4) *I Wanted to Go Home*. The names which appear after the quotations are pseudonyms.

A Migratory Path

Participants described a long and eventful journey unfolding in four steps as identified by the themes: (1) *I Am Different* here participants described a becoming aware of their inner desire for other people of the same gender, (2) *It Was War* participants reported sharing their true nature with others while managing a hostile environment and facing dire consequences, (3) *I Had to Run Away* involved leaving the community to complete their self-acceptance and affirmation processes, and (4) *I Wanted to Go Home* included a returning home to reconnect with community and family and to help others. This migratory path is not a one-way ticket and it doesn't occur only once as many participants repeated steps three and four of the migratory path for various reasons: for some, a claustrophobic and highly homophobic environment simply pushed them out of their remote community and back into urban centres while others simply pursued other

interests such as higher education or better work opportunities. The details of each step of this journey supported by the participants' narratives are described in this chapter.

Theme 1: I Am Different (Becoming Self-Aware)

To open the dialogue and initiate the narrative, participants were asked to recall when they first became aware of their attraction to other persons of the same gender and to describe how they felt at the time. All participants recalled feeling a bit different from their peers, and it was that sentiment that initiated an inner reflection. Some remembered exactly when it happened while others could only venture a guess. Some participants remembered being quite young when it occurred but for most of them, realization took place in the early years of adolescence:

I was a child . . . younger than 8 years old. (James)

I was always the tomboy as a kid. (Sophia)

I suppose the first time I remember ever becoming aware that I might be a two-spirit was probably when I was eight years of age. (Oliver)

I kind of knew at a pretty young age as well, but I just didn't admit it to myself. (Olivia)

I was, like, probably around 15, 14, that I started to notice, like, I don't know, crushes and stuff, like, developing. (Emma)

Becoming aware of their difference was an emotional event that brought feelings of shame and self-hatred, tremendous fears of abandonment, and a foreboding sense of

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rejection. All participants fought an inner battle as they tried to resolve their inner dilemma: being true to themselves while avoiding family disappointment and community segregation. Furthermore, the participants mentioned that growing up in isolated communities with little to no resource available to guide them through this inner journey added to the challenge. To this effect, a severe lack of role models and allies was mentioned on a few occasions:

You can't really confide in people, not even your best friend, of course. Um, there's just a lot of fear. (Oliver)

There wasn't anybody to talk to about being Two-Spirited. (Isabella)

I didn't have someone to talk to about—like, I wasn't comfortable I guess you could say. I didn't have, like, no gay best friend. . . . Even though they were my friends, I still didn't trust them of coming out to them and talking to them about my sexuality and what I'm going through. (Jackson)

I had no idea what I was gonna do, where am I gonna go, who can I run to?
(James)

The sense of isolation and loneliness, reinforced by the geographical isolation and remoteness of the Cree communities, only exacerbated the sense of being at an impasse. In the face of such adversity, Two-Spirited youth described that they were going through a “phase” and they recalled doing a lot of things to change the state of affairs. For example, Jackson remembered trying to deny the whole situation and kept thinking: “I am gay, but it's so wrong. I don't want to be like this. I hate myself. I hate being like this.”

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Isabella did watch a video in class depicting two gay men and thought “ ‘Wow, good for them,’ and I was like so happy for them [laughs]. But I didn’t even think of looking at myself.” Even Lucas, after having struggled through the process of acceptance, could not bring himself to accept his true nature: “Even though I came out, I still didn’t accept myself.”

Rising anxiety and frustration at being different led the way to anger. Some participants became upset with their friends for life seemed easier for them than for themselves:

I started to, you know, have a barrier against even my own friends because they were so happy, and they were okay with being with their lovers, their female lovers, their male lovers and female lovers, you know, their heterosexual lovers. And I couldn’t be that way. (James)

Jackson was so angry at the world that he contemplated suicide although he had moved out of his community: “I tried to attempt suicide once or even twice when I was intoxicated and that was because of all the hate that I had growing up.”

As a way to bargain, some participants entered into relationships with members of the other gender with the hopes that it would cure them or at least deflect suspicions long enough while they figured a way out of their struggles:

I figured maybe I can—if I have a girlfriend, that I would just erase my—my thoughts of—of men or boys or whatever at that time. . . . I knew eventually I was gonna have to hurt her and tell her, you know, it’s over. And I already knew it from the very first week that we started dating. But I went along with it, thinking

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maybe if I stay a little bit longer, a little bit longer, a little bit longer, that it's gonna disappear, the thoughts of guys. (James)

Some recalled extremely difficult relationships that they endured convinced it was the best they could hope for in their lives:

Yeah, my first homosexual relationship was really toxic because back then, you know, it's like there's nobody else at home, and I'd go inside there and be alone. Like I didn't know a lot about relationships in general. But yeah, it was pretty bad. (Lucas)

I had a big problem, a big problem with my boyfriend at that time. We had very serious problems. I became suicidal at that time. I was cutting myself. . . . During the last year of our relationship, he started doing heavy drugs. He became violent. He just changed completely, became a different man. He became abusive toward me, manipulative, and, um, I had a lot of scars now because of him. (Oliver)

As bargaining became less and less sustainable, shame and hopelessness of being Two-Spirited began to emerge:

I knew that it was not normal and I got to thinking about it afterwards . . . I was not—I wasn't me. I wasn't comfortable being in my own skin, you know. (James)

Where you, you develop most of homophobia is through television. Like I said, you know, like, watching television, I began to realize all the more, and it was seen as a wrong and made me feel more abnormal maybe. (Oliver)

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And I remember, um, people—people in my family, like, talking about Two-Spirited people like it was something, uh, like shameful. (Isabella)

I remember thinking, . . . and I started praying, like, why are they, you know, attracted to me? Why is it so—and I hated that. I hated it. (Logan)

In the grip of shame, some Two-Spirited participants lashed out at others, but not without consequences as this internalised homophobia being expressed out loud only hit them back in its tracks:

With all the gay bashing I would call it, because when you call somebody gay, even if it's out of—you know, just having fun, you know, teasing uh, within friends uh, it—it does eat at you—eat away at you... (James)

Hardship, therefore appears to be the first experience of Two-Spirited youth as they become aware of their true nature. Unable, at this early stage, to stand their ground, their silence only grants additional power of judgement to others. Hearing homophobic comments from relatives and friends, witnessing bullying and acts of violence towards other LGBTQ youth, Two-Spirited youth enter a vicious circle that feeds this inner sense of failure and powerlessness while further promoting isolation. Profound distress leads the way to internalised homophobia, a force that will delay their affirmation among friends, family, and ultimately their community.

Theme 2: It Was War (Coming out to Others)

Still struggling to accept their identity, the participants were not yet ready to boldly claim their true nature to all those around them. At first, feeling fundamentally

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different from their peers, participants were terrified of losing their friends and their status among them:

We had such a good relationship and uh, I didn't want to lose that because um, she was, like, my first best friend, you know, uh, that I could really call best friend.

And it was really hard for me to tell her because I thought I was gonna lose our—our—our friendship over it. (Emma)

I had disappointment with friends that just, I don't know, vanished. (Mason)

And I couldn't be that way. So, in a sense that I couldn't speak to any of my friends uh, because, you know, the high status and I just didn't want to, you know, drop to the bottom because I knew that was gonna be the case if I just announced it. (James)

All ten participants however, sought some form of validation from their friends and it appeared to be a necessary part of their journey toward self-acceptance. Indeed, they recognized the need to eventually disclose their true nature to friends and family even though they were concerned about the opposition they could face. Thus, friends and peers (classmates, cousins of the same age) are the first people the participants turned to when they overcame their fear. Some of them made their announcement under the pretense of being a bisexual person to soften the blow of their revelation:

I was, like, probably fifteen at this point, and there was her and three of my closer friends, and, uh, she was talking about the girl and why we were talking about her.

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And then, uh, that's when I told him. I said, 'You know, like, I—I think I'm bi,' is what I said. (Sophia)

That's when I realized and started telling some friends, you know. But I started off saying that I was bisexual like just to be a little safer, in a way, because it still wasn't talked about around that time. (Lucas)

Some revelations turn out to be positive experiences. Whether the friend already suspected something or simply didn't care, these positive reactions to an important revelation helped Two-Spirited participants in coming to term with their identity:

I said it and then she was, like, "Oh, that's cool." You know, she kind of, like, brushed it off. She was, like, "I thought you were, like, dying or something." [laughs] Yeah. (Emma)

Well, I told my parents, my kids, my friends. . . . Um, it was all right. It was all right. Nothing big. Uh, I guess I came to, uh, like, not caring what other people think . . . like, living my truth. (Isabella)

We had a conversation and she said—she never cared. She always—she knew. She—she knew, deep down she knew and she never really cared. She just waited for when it was the time for me to bring it up. (James)

I found it easier to come out to, um, I first came out to kind of like my guy friends. Um, I came out to them, and then they were okay with it. They were, always included me in anything really, and then after that, that's when I went to talk to

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my, well, not girlfriends, but my friends that are girls, and then I slowly went out to them. But they were the ones that helped me through it. (Olivia)

Even the most positive show of support, however, can become detrimental if not well intended. Lucas was excited by his friends' initial positive reactions, but he soon noticed that they were extremely concerned for him and were not all that supportive as they attempted to push him back into the closet as a mean to protect him:

Even [they] themselves didn't really know . . . how to approach it. Like thinking back on it now, when they said they accepted it, I don't think they realized that they didn't—thinking back on their actions that even then to their being cautious and safe. Like whenever I'd be doing something or behave in a way that maybe I identified as gay, or, ah, they would kind of like tell me like, "[Lucas], you're blooming," and I would be like that's, that was my cue like to sort of try to be more chill again or . . . to tone it down. (Lucas)

For other participants, the experience of coming out to their friends was difficult: some face clear rejection, breaks of communication, social ostracism, and bullying. These negative reactions, often based in ignorance, significantly impacted young Two-Spirited people, like James, whose suicidal thoughts and ideations were never far:

And I told him "I'm ready", and he says, "What?" And I told him, "I'm gay." And uh, he—he was surprised. He was scared. He was—he didn't know what to say. I did not feel a sense of weight being lifted off my shoulders. I did not feel that. In fact, I kind of wanted to end my life even more knowing that he knew. (James)

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Others did react differently to social rejection and moved past the unfortunate incidents. It left them, however, with a sense of social rejection that eventually cumulated to the point of pushing them to leave their community:

Or the person you know, just like, not liking you anymore after that, even if it was your friend, they'll look at you differently. [I] had actually, uh, some friends do that to me before, so called friends, you know, like, I would—like, when I'm coming back to this community as an openly gay person from college, a lot of people turned their backs on me, like, ignore me and not want to be friends with me anymore. (Oliver)

I didn't tell anyone till I graduated high school and moved out of where I am from. (Jackson)

Regardless of the issue of their coming out to their friends, the participants eventually wanted to expand the network of informed people. For Jackson, this became very clear once he gained enough self-confidence and realized that his friends weren't the right people that he had chosen to come out to: "I needed to come out with the people that I grew up with, which were my parents and my family." And thus begins the process of coming out to family members and relatives.

Unsurprisingly, all of the participants described high hopes of finding solace within their family, an important element of the Cree identity. Beyond simple belonging, the maintenance of positive associations with parents, siblings, and the extended family, is essential to family harmony and personal growth. Unfortunately, for most of the participants, their family was not the safe haven they were hoping for and they quickly

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realized that their secret had the potential to break down a significant connection to their own identity. First, they were aware of the stigma attached to LGBTQ and Two-Spirited people and how their siblings and parents felt about homosexuality:

I remember, um, people—people in my family, like, talking about Two-Spirited people like it was something, uh, like shameful? (Isabella)

I was brought up a Christian. I was raised in a Christian home and, and, yeah, it was, like, considered a taboo. (Oliver)

And that was the last thing that I wasn't to do was hurt anybody because that's not me. (James)

I remember one time my mom, me and her were watching a show and there was this scene of two guys making out. Her reaction to that was, "Oh, that's so disgusting." The way she said it, like, oh—that really, like, shook me—shook me up. (Jackson)

This thinly veiled, and sometimes bluntly expressed, homophobia set the stage for a difficult but necessary revelation. The participants eventually noticed that the sentiment spread beyond the limits of their families and that even their community as a whole could not offer a secure environment:

[I noticed that] people . . . were not educated about this. That they don't—they are so close minded I guess that if you don't live the way we are, then [pause] I don't know, like, you're an outsider, bullied. (Jackson)

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Maybe a little more changed because now being gay is slowly making its transition to being accepted in most places. But it's still kind of hard here in the community. (James)

All the families are very homophobic . . . and they're Christian. They're all related, and they're all families. So, there's, like, this really um, tight connection, you know, where it becomes too invasive. (Oliver)

Despite these obstacles, the participants finally disclosed their sexual identity to their family: generally, first to their brothers and sisters, then their mother, and lastly, their father. They described a wide range of reactions that either helped them in their journey of self-acceptance or hindered their progress by attempting to push them back into secrecy. Whether it went well or bad, participants also explained that the topic of their sexual identity is very often avoided and never discussed again within the family unit: "When I came out to my mom, that love, like, bloomed. Our relationship grew. [But], we still don't talk [about] boys. We're still—we're taking baby steps." (Jackson) In addition, several participants described their experience as an opportunity to bond deeper with their siblings:

And then she [my sister] was like, "Is it a girl?" I'm like, I think she was--she was trying to make it safe that it's okay for me to tell her. It's like, no. It's like, is it a boy? I said, "Yeah." I got emotional and cried, you know, and it's like--and then she's like, "It's okay. Like don't worry about it." (Lucas)

The first person I came out was my sister [...] and we would talk about everything, everything. Like, even for her, for, like, her own sexual experiences.

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So, that kind of opened my door too, [...] to be open and [...] to be each other's confidant. (Mason)

[My brother] knew I was Two-Spirited, and he says he couldn't care less. That I would always be his little brother no matter what. That he was there to protect me from whoever or whatever. (James)

My sisters knew of my relationship with her as well, and they were fine with it. [However], I think that maybe my sisters were hoping that it was a phase. (Sophia)

For others, though, revealing their secret to siblings turned out to be quite a challenge. Some faced violent outburst that threatened their safety while others could not miss the look of disappointment caused by their revelation:

So, at first, I came out, like, uh, while drinking with my brother, my older brother. And uh, sure enough, he was, I don't know, surprised I guess. And um, we got into a fight, a fist fight. I—I fought back— [...] And yeah, cops were involved and, you know, a lot of, you know, swearing back and forth. (Mason)

My sisters were hoping that it was a phase. . . . I remember telling one of my sisters that I liked [*name omitted*]*—uh, the first girl that I kissed, that I liked her a lot. And she had a look of disappointment. And I said, 'Why do you—why are you looking at me like that?' She's like, 'I don't know. I'm just disappointed.'* (Sophia)

When it was time to come out to their parents, either their mother or father, the research participants were afraid of being rejected, and even cast out of their family. They

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also anticipated anger and resentment. On some rare occasions, parental support came as a surprise and turned out to be an asset in an unfriendly environment:

‘You know—’ I said, ‘You know, this person’—I said her name, and then she says, ‘Yeah?’ and I—and I said, ‘You know, like, she’s got my heart in the palm of her hands and I can’t do anything about it.’ And she got teary eyed. . . . She said, ‘I know.’ So, I went to bed, and then the next morning, well, you know, my mum was always supportive. (Sophia)

[I was] crying on the phone with my dad and my dad’s, like, “What’s going on?” And he was, like, getting really mad because he had no idea what’s going on. And I—I never told my dad. I never told my dad yet. So, I had to come out to my dad to tell him what’s going on. I told him I was going out with somebody and uh—and uh, I told him it was a girl. And he was, like—he just, like, stood up and I was, like, I’m really scared. I was, like, what is he gonna do? And he just, like—he—he opened up his arms and he gave me a hug and I was, like, okay. [laughs] Uh, he just, like—he was just, like, holding me and uh, he was, like, “I thought you were pregnant.” [Unfortunately], that didn’t last [laughs] very long. (Emma)

On one occasion, the revelation became a trigger that stimulated the parent in reconciling past experiences with current events:

My mother was a homophobe in the past, and she told me, you know, like, ‘I never thought my own son would turn out to be a gay person, you know, because when I was younger, you know, I always discriminated against this person in the community that was a homosexual, and always called him names. You know, I

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had no respect for him whatsoever, and now my own son is born a gay to me, you know, like,' so, that really affected her, you know, like, where she had to, like, accept it and, I guess, forgive herself. (Oliver)

Unfortunately, others did not experience this unconditional love and coming out to their parents was simply another obstacle to overcome, one that would further delay their self-acceptance process:

And I said to her—to my mum, “Remember the time,” I told her, “remember the time at the age of 13 when you told me, ‘[James], if I ever find out you’re gay, I brought you into this world, I can take you out.’” I said to her, “I still remember that.” I had a knife in my pocket. I handed it to her. I said, “Well, here’s your time.” And she broke down crying... (James)

I told my mom around that time too . . . she kind of, like, tensed up. She was, like, “You’re too young. You don’t know. You don’t—you don’t know what you’re—what you’re talking about,” and stuff like that. ‘Cause I was only—yeah, 15, 16, around there. . . . I was, like, “How do you know? Do you know? Like, have you went through what I went through, you know? Like, were you, like, gay once—once upon a time, you know?” (Emma)

I was scared because, ah, my parents were a little, are religious. They're Anglican [and] when I came out to my mother, it was pretty not, not that pretty. She didn't know a lot of the subject and didn't know what to expect, and also . . . being [a churchgoer] she took it bad, and she didn't, she wasn't too, ah, happy about it, and

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she was like practically yelling at me at one point. And yeah, a lot of hurtful stuff was said. (Lucas)

I told him when [*name omitted*], who is now my wife, when she moved up here [*date omitted*]. He was furious. . . . By the time that I came home, the dust had settled a little bit. It was a little awkward, but I never spoke about it. (Sophia)

And then for him, for him and again, this is a vivid memory of, you know, that whole conversation, he—he told me, like, “[Mason], you better not go out with anyone.” So, I’m not going out with anyone. [And it still has an impact today because] I just see him say that and—I don’t know, I think it has something to do with—if I want to go out with someone and he said it— [I am not doing it.]

(Mason)

Yeah, my parents are, um, um—even when the time was so, uh, tough for them to really believe that their son would be—you know, because I told my mom I’m struggling with this and that. And then, um, “I think I like boys.” And then, it was very hard for them, because they—you know, they wanted to have a son to have a family. (Logan)

Searching for allies that are non-existent, for support from hostile family environment, and for help from friends they are afraid of losing, the study participants experienced a tremendous amount of pressure to conform from all fronts. They sought an explanation for their situations: some blamed an absent father (Olivia), or an overbearing mother (James) as the reason for their Two-Spirited nature. Others blamed the overall colonization process as the reason behind a significant cultural dissonance:

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Why do they bully, uh, Two-Spirited people so much? . . . I think it's because we've lost our way, I guess, as Cree people. . . . Well, we've been colonized [and] ever since this foreign encroachment upon our mother land, you know, like, you have these values that are strange to you. You have these foreigners coming in, and—and they're imposing their way of life which is very destructive. . . . It's a toxic culture also, you know. (Oliver)

We're so far removed from our own—from our own ways, the Eeyou ways. Too—too much outside influence. (Isabella)

Lastly, more than half the participants believed that the Church with its conservative and heteronormative values could explain their social rejection. In some instances, the values of the Church have replaced traditional beliefs: Emma, for instance, was asked by her “born-again” father to get rid of a traditional hand-drum, a powerful Cree symbol. The Church also led the Residential School programs that have impacted First Nations families across the country by creating a trans-generational trauma that has left a whole generation unable to properly fulfill their parental role:

I believe, uh, a lot of this began with the residential school era. . . . It affected the people then, the generation, you know, that were molested by priests, by males. And so, I believe a lot of the residential school survivors today impacted their children, [and] told them wrong about gay people. Because I know some of these people. I would hear, like, stories that they would tell to their children, ‘Oh, don't talk to [Oliver]. He's a faggot. He's a gay. He's going to touch you in places that is inappropriate, you know. That's what gay people do. (Oliver)

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In the end, all the pressure experienced from their friends, their family, and their community is assimilated and transformed into an internalised homophobia from which escaping is no easy task. The participants described tense family relations and unrealistic behavioural expectations:

I was forced into things that I didn't like. Like, for example, hockey. Like, they—they wanted me, like, to be like a normal boy I guess. (Jackson)

There was no privacy and my mom was always looking around in my stuff. And she found letters and—of uh, like, love letter—love letters from my girlfriend and she . . . told me to break it off. (Emma)

Some sought refuge in sports or immersed themselves in their work as a mean to isolate themselves voluntarily from a difficult environment. Some try to “act straight” to avoid unnecessary confrontations: “I was really, you know, macho, masculine. I kind of—I hid everything, and I was more comfortable.” (Mason). Some ended up having to deal with the law as they rebelled against all forms of authority. In addition, some became suicidal and considered ending their lives:

I was about 20 . . . when I really had my last straw. I had uh, a rope, I had a knife, I had a syringe that I stole from the clinic. . . . I wanted my mom and my father and my brothers to be able to have an open casket, to see me laying there without having any marks on me, you know. . . . What I told him [my brother] was, “I want to do it by syringe. I would like to poison myself because then it does not affect my body.” I just don't know what solvent I'll use. I was thinking Javex. (James)

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Lastly, others fell into alcohol and drug abuse to escape reality:

The more I bottled it in, the more that I wanted to express myself, but I couldn't.

And so, I turned to alcohol and I was just drinking so much . . . because I was . . . not really dealing [with or] handling my sexuality and . . . I wanted to disappear.

(James)

After high school, that's when I uh—I found drugs. . . . Drugs to numb—numb the pain I guess from high school. And I found alcohol, and I abused it. I was working and living off—paycheque to paycheque and then just blowing off my money on uh, alcohol and drugs. (Jackson)

During that four-year period, I of course, you know, turned to—I turned to—I don't know how to say it, but to alcohol. I—I drank. [laughs] So, um, yeah, so, that was my—my way of escaping. (Mason)

Eventually, all research participants reached a limit in trying to reconcile their desire to be themselves with the high level of resistance they encountered from their respective community. For some, hitting that wall became a revelation upon itself:

I [had] to do something, either accept [myself or] find more information, find something, right, to not make me feel like I'm an abomination that the Church [made] me out to be kind of thing. It's like I kind of had to take the stand for myself and to truly accept [who I was.] (Lucas)

The participants described how they evolved in a toxic environment. Beyond their friends' discomfort and their family rejection, they sensed that entire communities were

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not receptive to the idea of harboring Two-Spirited individuals: “They’re not too—too uh, open minded here. So, it’s really hard for me to stay”, mentioned Emma. Some stated that having a limited pool of possible partners, either because the other persons were not out themselves (Lucas), or had limited shared interest (Mason), or simple character incompatibility (Sophia), was a deterrent of staying in their community. They also claimed that a lot of community members were homophobic, and they didn’t feel welcomed:

Like here in [*name of community omitted*] there are a lot of homophobic or a lot that just don’t want to deal with that. (James)

I still have that fear today, yeah, especially when I have, like, uh, little social “get togethers” with my friends, my close friends. But after, you know, the res, [the] social gatherings, [the] parties here... I still have that fear today. Like, someone was gonna try to beat me up ‘cause of being a Two-Spirited and—yeah, it’s always there. (Jackson)

I’m more vigilant with strangers. . . . ‘Cause I don’t know if they’re homophobic or not. (Sophia)

All the families are very homophobic almost, and they’re Christian. They’re all related, and they’re all families. So, there’s, like, this really um, tight connection, you know, where it becomes too invasive. (Oliver)

Facing continuous confrontations, concerned for their own safety, and worried that their parents and sibling might be judged by the community members, all ten participants

made the decision to leave their community and move in urban centres. Some remained in Quebec while others reached Ontario. The next section describes this segment of their journey.

Theme 3: I Had to Run Away (Escaping the Community)

Torn between their desire of self-expression and the climate of social rejection of their community of origin, all ten participants decided to leave Eeyou Istchee and to move to a city. Although a difficult step, leaving friends, family and community members behind, seemed however an integral part of their journey toward self-determination. This section highlights the participants' reasoning prior to moving and describes the negative and positive experiences they endured while coming to term with their sexual and gender identity.

At first, the participants described their communities as locales with little to no social life. They found community life boring and lacking in gathering venues and interesting participatory activities. They all described various factors that precipitated their departure. Olivia simply went through the motion of adolescence and “hated the world”, a feeling shared by Emma who simply “felt stuck” in her community. For Oliver, living in the community, was like “living under a microscope” in a place moving at a “very slow pace”. He subsequently started to take anti-depressant medications to cope: “It’s very depressing, you know. It’s not a very healthy environment for somebody like me.” James enjoyed his community but as episodes of public humiliation accumulated and he became the object of gossip, he felt the need to “run away and hide.”

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Difficulties in finding a partner and developing a meaningful relationship was also an incentive to leaving. Indeed, one breakup led Sophia to realize that she would never find a soulmate within the limited pool of potential partners in her community. Hiding and wishing to remain invisible for safety reasons is counterproductive when looking for a partner and can lead to poor choices as evidenced in the narratives:

Like back then I didn't know a lot about relationships, so, it's just kind of like, oh, found a, another gay person, you know, we should try a relationship. And that wasn't the best choice. (Lucas)

“It is hard to find good friends that are like me, [Two-Spirited], I mean”, added Mason. Thus, growing up in remote and isolated communities appears extremely challenging for people who identify as a minority group.

Furthermore, a severe lack of local resources and professional services also impeded the personal growth of Two-Spirited people. Mason pointed out that “[*Name of community omitted*] was too small, too boring. ... There was nothing really offered back then for youth.” Although each community does have a Cree Youth Nation Council, local initiatives and activities were simply not meeting the needs of Two-Spirited youth.

There were also no sex education class, which Lucas and Mason believe would have greatly benefited them. There were no opportunities to learn how to be “in a relationship, like how to date” claimed Lucas, who also believes that he should have had the opportunity to learn about which sexual behaviours were acceptable and which were considered abusive: “[all] throughout my life I had to navigate all that through trial and error.” (Lucas).

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Professional services can also be challenging to access. Sophia could not get couple counseling in her community. She was told by a health care professional that no worker felt comfortable meeting her and her partner and that they should seek professional help outside the community:

[Name of partner omitted] and I, ... We couldn't get couples counselling because it was recommended — it was highly suggested that ... the community workers here were not, uh, equipped to speak with a lesbian couple. (Sophia)

Such an unprofessional attitude simply reinforced her sense of being a stranger on her own land: “I have moments I feel like I don't belong...”, she added later on in her interview.

Evolving in a claustrophobic environment led the participants to assess their options. Lucas was afraid of remaining in the vicious cycle of substance abuse: he had the strength to step back and observed his friends misusing alcohol and drugs, which inspired him to take a different path. Social rejection forced Emma who found people “not too open minded” and Sophia who didn't have a sense of belonging, to actually leave their community. Sophia would later confide that she would have committed suicide had she not left, a sentiment also expressed by Jackson: “I think [leaving] was a lifesaver 'cause I was on uh, the road of suicide that time.”

Leaving the community became more and more critical for all the participants. Some were able to access higher education outside their community and they made their transition with the support of the Cree School Board. Jackson accessed an international youth movement which allowed him to leave the country for months on end. Since lack of

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employment was also an issue, some like Oliver, claimed to be looking for new work opportunities while some simply expressed a desire to explore new horizons and escape the ever-present lack of housing for single people on the territory. Participants were quite unanimous that this new segment of their life allowed them to complete the integration of their Two-Spirited nature, a process they were unable to achieve while residing on the territory of Eeyou Istchee.

Moving to a big city is, however, not an easy process for Native people. The cities bordering Eeyou Istchee (Chibougamau, Val d'Or, Amos, and by extension Gatineau and Ottawa) do have significant Cree segments of population and tensions between Natives and Non-Natives are omnipresent, as made clear by Oliver and Sophia:

Well, there was, uh, bullying, but on a different level. Like, here in this community, it was mostly bullying because of my sexual orientation, because of my mannerisms, I suppose. ... But when I was in Gatineau, I was receiving—I was experiencing discrimination because of my, uh, ethnicity. (Oliver)

But in a town where there's a lot of Natives. And, uh, we were out and we were kissing. ... Everything was fine, and then someone in her entourage showed up. ... All of a sudden, she's looking at me and says, 'What the fuck are you doing? ... You fucking dyke.' She grabbed me by the hair and she smashed my face on her knee. (Sophia)

These unfortunate experiences illustrate the difficulties underlying such a significant move: leaving an entire community with all its points of references behind can be challenging for anyone but for Two-Spirited people, the dual challenge of having to

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cope simultaneously with homophobia and racism can lead to catastrophic consequences. Oliver, for instance, was ill prepared for his journey and his escape from the community turned into a nightmare:

I was just abandon[ing] this relationship, and I wanted to go live in Val-d'Or and then I ended up in Montreal for a while ... on the streets, working as a prostitute, uh, because I was also becoming an alcoholic. I was living in the streets. I didn't care about anything. I just ran away from home. (Oliver)

Oliver would later describe his subsequent imprisonment, the hardship he experienced while incarcerated, and the ongoing consequences of his incarceration.

Fortunately, several participants described more positive experiences. Overall, they appreciated their newly gained freedom. Lucas just “needed to get out of there and be able to feel comfortable.” Emma expressed a sense of being able to breathe again and be herself:

It just kind of clicked. I was, like, yeah, that's who I am. And I didn't know that until I actually left [*name of community omitted*]. I could see ... myself changing ... because I felt more comfortable than I was here. (Emma)

Jackson finally felt free and comfortable in being himself:

It's so much easier to live outside the res. Especially to be yourself and just to live freely and not—not being afraid, like, someone will judge you because of the way you walk or something or the way you talk. (Jackson)

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Olivia saw her values and beliefs evolving: “Living down in Montreal ... helped me not be so judgemental or helped me be open ... I learned my manners. I learned ... [to] be open [and] free.”

Furthermore, most participants explained that meeting other LGBTQ people helped them come to terms with their own sexual and gender identity:

This was the first time I was actually spending time with other Two-Spirited people. ... It was nice to be around them and the way they acted [and] their sexuality ... inspired me. ... Like, I guess to be more accepting towards myself. Instead of all this hate that I'd developed being in the res. (Jackson)

I got to see a lot of ... other gay people, you know, like being comfortable. I'd always go check out the gay village and just observe. Even like going out to party, I tried there a few times, and it was just, you know, relieving to be free and not worry about anybody like telling me to tone it down. (Lucas)

When you go to Montreal you see it around. Everybody is very open to it. You'll see men holding hands. (James)

Experiencing the “gay scene” and evolving within the relative anonymity of a big city helped the participants in coming to term with their Two-Spirited nature. All of them acknowledged that moving out of the community had been a necessary step towards self-acceptance and a milestone in their personal growth. For Jackson, living in a city helped him recover from his substance abuse:

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Being sober and feeling all these kinds of emotions that I was numbing ... from the drugs I took and the alcohol that I was intaking, all these emotions came—came back to me. And there was somebody there to teach me how to deal with them. ... I was starting to love myself, and then to accept myself for being a Two-Spirited. (Jackson)

This newly gained confidence eventually helped the participants in facing the adversity within their family and community circles:

I told [my mother] that it's time to live my life, and I told her that I want to love myself for who I am. And I was tired of being somebody that I'm not when I come home, and I just want to be who I am around people that I love, I told her: "I'm out, and I live the way I want to live." And ever since then, I'm happy. [pause] I'm happy to be back at home. I'm happy to be back in the res. (Jackson)

Like today, I don't care what people say, I really don't. ... I have this new mentality now where I'm like I just want to be treated like everybody else, like you see couples walking down the street holding their hands. If I have a date, I'll, if I'm walking down, I'll hold his hand, kiss somebody at the door ... it's something new I've tried. (Lucas)

Although the move out of the community was a significant step for the participants, they all acknowledged a longing for home and family. Eventually, each one of them began considering a return to their community. For Emma, who had left with the support of the Cree School Board, family ties were important regardless of the challenges she faced prior to moving out:

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I lived [in this community] until I was like 16, 15, and I always was around family. And then, then going to school [in a city] ... You kind of miss that home. ... Family, family value is big around here because we have big families. We have huge families. We're always pretty—constantly, um, around them. We even work with them too. (Emma)

Furthermore, Mason felt accountable to the institution that allowed him to move out to a city:

With the sponsorship I got from the Cree School Board, it was a lot of money and I thought about it. Like, there's so much money is going through a student. So, why not give it back? Even though my, my pay is, you know, petty. [laughs] I don't get paid a lot. But, you know, I want to give it back. (Mason)

This accountability to the Cree people was also felt in Mason's desire to take part in this study: "I really want to, you know, help at least one person, one person. So, this is one reason why I'm doing this [interview]."

On the other hand, some participants dreaded returning to their community of origin. For Jackson, it was like stepping back into the closet in order to conform with his family pressure: "I had to be in the closet I guess, coming—coming here, back in the closet..." Even for Mason who had a strong desire to return and help his people, returning home was a significant setback: "In [*name of city omitted*], everything was out in the open, but now, you know, it's behind closed doors kind of thing, and I don't know how to go back to that again." Lucas anticipated that things would not be much different: "I still knew like back home not much has changed in nine months." Furthermore, both Oliver

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and Mason truly felt a gap had developed between them and their friends, as if their experiences outside the community had allowed them to grow more than their counterparts back home:

I have friends here in [*name of community omitted*], but I'm not as close with them as before. [They] just want to talk ... about ... pointless things. I mean, it's not really, you know, serious conversations I have with them. (Mason)

The people [here] are just difficult to live with: they [are] just too small-minded. (Oliver).

There was therefore a real struggle between choosing to remain on their own in a big city and a desire to reconnect with family and community life. Several participants clearly expressed opposite positions about this topic. Emma didn't want to return to her community: "I did not want to come back. I was, like, no, I'm done with this place." and yet she also claimed missing her family. Oliver kept experiencing cultural shocks each time he moved in and out of the community due to his dual nature of being Native and Two-Spirited, and as such, felt unable to find a place to settle down and be himself.

Eventually, all ten participants chose to return home regardless of the hardship they would face upon their return. Some undertook the journey back with an open mind while others dreaded the return to a close-minded community. The next section details their experiences.

Theme 4: I Wanted to Go Home (Helping Others)

All participants were eventually driven back to their community of origin by different longings. Some felt accountable to the Cree nation and believed that their community should benefit from what they had learned and gained by living in the cities. Mason, for instance, chose to complete a college degree in events planning with a specialty in the organization of outdoor activities knowing he would be able to contribute significantly to the offer of services available in his community. Sophia, Jackson, and Lucas felt more confident and wanted to share their newly gained happiness while hoping to reconnect with their family. Lastly, some participants, like Emma and Isabella, simply missed home and wished to reunite with friends and family and resolve old conflicts. Regardless of the reasons behind their desire to return home, all participants clearly stated that they were however coming back transformed by their experience of the city life and they felt more confident:

When we first met, it was horrible. I did not want to be inside [shopping mall] with her. There was no way I was going to go in there with her. Today [after returning from the city] I can go in there with her ... Now I'm starting—I'm starting to, you know, be more comfortable. (Sophia)

I want to live my life the way I want it instead of trying to please my parents. I—I don't want to live by their point of view anymore. I'm done. I was done with it. I wanted to live the way I wanted to live as a gay man. (Oliver)

Furthermore, the participants felt they were coming back as agents of change and thus were determined to improve their living condition. James finally received the

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apology he had been expecting for so long from his mother. Jackson simply refused to go back into the closet and stated that he now lives as an outspoken gay man: “I’m out, and I live the way I want to live. And ever since then, I’m happy.”

Although they were expecting a difficult return, they courageously undertook the journey back home with the knowledge that they could also have a positive impact on those around them and thus reclaim their rightful place within their community, a significant paradigm shift from their initial sense of being hopeless victims without any means of escape:

But at least [my relatives] were able to ... be in the present and like for feasts ... I brought him over to my mom's like once or twice, and she was okay with it. It was just like still not really engaging in them. But even just like last week, I brought a, a date over to a family feast, and my parents were talking to him. (Lucas)

The participants hoped that the living conditions of Two-Spirited people would continue to improve. Unfortunately, although some noticed that more community members were more accepting of LGBTQ people, others, like Oliver, saw the honeymoon of their return cut short:

I would hear, like, stories that they would tell to their children, ‘Oh, don’t talk to [Oliver] He’s a faggot. He’s a gay. He’s going to touch you in places that is inappropriate, you know. That’s what gay people do.’ ... They say, ‘It’s true. Gays are pedos.’ Because when you’re in a community and you know that you’re a homosexual, it’s a very, very lonely experience. Very, very lonely, I’ll tell you that. (Oliver)

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The housing had not improved in their absence and thus remained a significant barrier to being able to stay in the community: “Coming back, [sigh] it was okay. It's just I still wish I had my own space apart from my parents.” (Lucas) Emma also faced difficulties when trying to live her relationship openly. Although her parents had claimed to be fine with her being Two-Spirited and had even invited her and her partner to stay in their house, they did not want people in the community to spread the word, which therefore mitigated their alleged acceptance:

We were allowed to stay at the house, but we couldn't sleep in the same bed. ... So ... I was out, but, anything to do with my family—I didn't want to make them uncomfortable. So, I'd always ... kind of hide it a bit. You know, like, tell the white lies. (Emma)

Both Emma and Ernest repeated the steps three and four of this migratory path multiple times: both returned to their community or origin, found a job, worked there for a while, faced covert or open hostilities, then decided to leave and return to a city for a while. Then, they would miss their family and community and would return home only to repeat the cycle one more time.

Other participants acknowledged that things in their community and family were improving:

I think the people are slowly starting to have a bit of an awareness of what's happening within their communities and who these people are. And starting to see like, you know, these people that are Two-Spirited, that are just not, you know, they're individuals themselves that care, that feel, that, that have heart. (James)

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Some of them now want to help out and to become the role models they were themselves lacking growing up:

I have this one friend. She's been Two-Spirited for quite a while. She's a little bit older than me. She's very, very shy and ... I help her out once in a while, like, ... when she needs somebody to talk to about ... her relationship and all that. ... I'm helping her out. ... She's very grateful of me. ... She feels comfortable talking to me. And um, [pause] I don't mind helping her and stuff like that because I know how it is here. (Emma)

Lucas and Jackson both participated in and helped organising conferences for Two-Spirited youth in their community. These events were the initiative of a Two-Spirited young man's mother but are now planned by local Two-Spirited people. The goal is to help those struggling with their sexual orientation and gender identity while fostering links between Two-Spirited people of Eeyou Istchee:

We try to recruit Two-Spirited people in the community, and we go out for like either, probably, most likely a two-day workshop, or a two- or three-day workshop out in the city, either Ottawa or Montreal, just to pull everybody out and like create, to have a safe space. (Lucas)

For Jackson, these gatherings gave him the chance to explore his own reservations about coming out and led him to reveal his sexual orientation to his family:

So, this [past] one, that's when they helped me. Like, your life will be so much easier if you're—if you're out to your parents and all these motivational words. It

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really got me thinking, you know. Okay, it's time. It's been 29 years, and I can't live like this. I want to go into my 30s as who I am. (Jackson)

On their last interviews, participants did not know what their future had in store for them. Mason was still trying to find his way and secure an interesting position involving outdoor activities. Sophia was facing difficulties with her partner and was considering a move out of her community to ease things up. Oliver had to move out of the community but, lacking funds to return to the city, found a cabin in the woods where he can live in peace. Emma was considering quitting her job and her community due to the high pressure from her family to conform to Church doctrines and their hopes to see her relationship fails. Lucas was rejoiced to see his mother coming to terms with his sexual orientation. Logan was still happily married, and his faith remained a constant source of strength. James chose to take a distance from the community: he was going through judicial issues but felt secured by his partner's presence and support.

Several, in their own way, felt they were on a journey to pave the way for others. Sophia married her partner and Emma hopes to get married one day:

Marriage is, you know, coming around the corner there. I don't know how that's gonna work out. [laughs] ... Me and my girlfriend, we do talk about marriage and we try to figure out how we would do that. (Emma)

Isabella wished that the Cree nation could accept and celebrate Two-Spirited individuals by having "ceremonies and stuff for [them]." James recently learned that his niece was Two-Spirited and that his brother and sister-in-law were very supportive:

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I think maybe a part of my story and part of what happened with me [could] be part of what opened up their eyes, and they are more accepting of who their children are as individuals. (James)

Someone even asked Logan for guidance in regard to his gay son:

And I said, “There’s nothing you can do but except who you love and pray for them. You know, pray to God that they’ll be—that they’ll never catch anything, AIDS, or STDs, that he would enjoy his life to the full extent in, you know, the culture, everything.” (Logan)

All the study participants definitely wished things had been different for them growing up. They had to embark on a very important journey of self-discovery that eventually took them out of their known environment and thrust them in the midst of urban life before leading them back to their community of origin. Although their forced migration turned out to be the key to self-acceptance, they did not wish it upon the next generations of Two-Spirited youth and they were trying to find ways to change the state of affairs (Mason, Isabella, Lucas).

In summary, these themes, as supported by the participants’ narratives, highlight the experience of being a Two-Spirited youth living in the Cree communities of Eeyou Istchee. Evolving in a hostile environment shrouded in heteronormative values, the participants described a journey punctuated by a series of challenges that pushed them out of their community before pulling them back in at a later stage. Fortunately, now enriched by their own experiences and their extraordinary adventure, they all hold the means to reclaim their Two-Spirited heritage.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This study was undertaken in order to explore the lived experience of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee. Exploratory in essence, this study received support from the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay in hope that its findings may contribute to the improvement of health care services provided to LGBTQ and Two-Spirited youth and adults across the territory. In this chapter, key study findings are reviewed in light of relevant scientific and conceptual literature. Some study findings resonate with the results of other studies on Aboriginal LGBTQ2+ while others have a unique cachet specific to Eeyou Istchee.

From the beginning, I noticed the very little use of the term “Two-Spirit” by the participants. While all of them recognized the term as being a Native concept associated with their Aboriginal heritage, most of them specified rarely using the term when interacting with other Aboriginal people and generally used the terms “gay” or “lesbian” when engaging with friends. In fact, the terms “Two-Spirit” and its derivate adjective “Two-Spirited” were sparingly used by informants during their interviews and, often, only in response to a question containing the expression. None of them mentioned using the expression when coming out to friends and family. Although some participants mentioned having researched the topic online in order to learn more about their ancestral traditions and values, the concept of “Two-Spirit” is not yet fully integrated in their self-realization process. Still, those who researched the matter hoped to find a way to bridge the gap between an imagined reality prior to colonization and the harsh reality facing Two-Spirited people these days:

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Interviewer: Homosexuality [seems to] be such a taboo in Cree culture.

Sophia: Mm-hmm. No, not in Cree culture. . . . It's the Church. . . . There are stories [that] if two women or two men live together, they—they didn't used to make a big deal out of it.

Interviewer: The Aboriginal people in general, you mean?

Sophia: Yeah. . . . You know: I really think that it's the Church that made everything so wrong. (Sophia)

I did read somewhere that, like a long time ago and how we Natives thought Two-Spirited people were kind of sacred in a way. (Olivia)

I hear people say, you know, like, in the—in the old times, Two-Spirited people were very revered. They were respected people. But today, you know, like, we lost, like, uh, a lot of our—we just lost our way, I guess. (Oliver)

This state of affairs seems to indicate that colonization did erase the collective knowledge about a third gender and its honorific position within the Cree communities, at least for these informants. Furthermore, the widespread use of Western expressions to describe themselves also appears as a manifestation of the deep impact of colonization.

When asked about their first awareness of being LGBTQ2+, most of study participants claimed they became self-aware of their sexual orientation at a young age, between 8 and 14 years old. Dorais (2014), stated that the vast majority of the 250 urban LGBTQ youth who participated in his study became self-aware of their sexual orientation

between 11 and 16 years of age and initiate first intimacy two years later. Although the participants of this study did not distinguish clearly between their first moment of awareness and their first moment of intimacy with a same-sex partner, their early awakening indicates that they were more precocious than the participants in Dorais' study.

This study's participants also described a long inner journey of self-acceptance strewn with pitfalls, self-hatred, shame, and a constant fear of abandonment. A significant period of time also elapsed between their first moment of awareness and their coming-out to others. In that period of time, they experienced bullying, verbal abuse and violence. While they eventually emerged from their reflections with a better sense of their true nature, it was very often shrouded in shame. Monette et al. (2001) also reported that Two-Spirited Aboriginal people living in cities experienced dissatisfaction with their sexual identity: "I was raised in the catholic Church which instilled a lot of shame about sexuality in general and self-hatred because of my homosexuality" (p. 38). Similarly, in a study exploring families of (non-Native) youth who came out to their family, Tanner and Lyness (2003) noticed that young LGBTQ people have a lot of questions and evolve in a climate of shame and fear. These questions are specific to LGBTQ people and include concerns about finding allies who can be trusted and testing the limits of that trust by revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity. Indeed, current models of happy and fulfilling lifestyles do not embrace homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, and transgenderism as potential options (Dorais, 2014). Urban youth, both Natives and non-Natives, also face resistance, obstacles, and homophobia on their path toward self-acceptance. The initial experience of Two-Spirited Crees attempting to make sense of

their diverging sexual orientation and gender identity is thus not fundamentally different from that of urban LGBTQ youth. This could be related to the actual influence of Western values, brought and imposed during colonization, upon traditional beliefs regarding Two-Spirited people who were until then revered and considered gifted individuals (2-Spirited people of the 1st Nations, 2016).

Study participants further identified the lack of information and local resources as a significant impediment to their emotional growth. They learned by trial and error with no allies to support them. They also claimed that the absence of role models was detrimental to their healthy development. Their geographical isolation and the remoteness of their communities could explain the paucity of resources. Dorais (2014) also identified that few of his research participants had in their entourage people who could guide them throughout their journey. Although the media have in recent years presented more LGBTQ characters in films and television series (and have also allowed public figures to come out as LGBTQ), LGBTQ youth remain ill equipped to handle their urges and desires while assessing their options and navigating a viable and safe path. Indeed, some of this study's participants had to deal with episodes of depression and suicidal ideations, a phenomenon also noted by Hillin, McAlpine, Montague, and Markham (2007) whose research highlighted the high rates of mental health disorders and distress in same-sex attracted youth in Australian Aboriginals. They further revealed that the most common barriers to accessing health care services were a lack of knowledge and staff attitude towards this specific clientele.

The self-acceptance process described by this study's participants is similar to the five stages of grief developed by Dr. Kübler-Ross (1969): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. At first, they refused to embrace their difference when becoming aware of their attraction to same-sex gendered peers and instead sought ways to pass as heterosexuals, often by becoming involved in a relationship with a member of the opposite gender. They harboured resentment and anger and became homophobic towards other Two-Spirited people and eventually towards themselves. Guilt often accompanies bargaining as the grieving process pushes people to reassess past choices and decisions and the changes that could have been made to be spared the grief (Kübler-Ross). Participants also mentioned feeling guilty about the pain and the sadness they were causing to those around them, especially their parents: they were torn between their desire to ease their pain while remaining true to themselves. The heteronormative paradigm of family (and community), which manifests through the unspoken expectations that all members of the unit is attracted to members of the other gender, will eventually get married and have children (Tanner & Lyness, 2003) makes it extremely difficult for struggling LGBTQ2+ youth to break free of the cycle of grief. As things seemed to settle and become irreversible, the participants all suffered some form of psychological distress and/or suicidal ideation. All participants moved back and forth between these steps until finally, they achieved some level of acceptance and felt capable to share their true identity with others.

Coming out to others was indeed a lengthy process for all study participants. They were concerned about their status within their circle of friends, or worried about becoming objects of bullying and violence; they were also afraid to disappoint and bring

shame to their family. While they needed time to prepare for the reactions of others, it was often the burning desire to share with those around them a new relationship that pushed them to reveal their secret. Similar findings were reported by Dorais (2014). First, the questioning, the doubts and the fears of his participants were the same as those of this study's participants. Furthermore, some participants also waited to be in a relationship before coming out. The intense desire to share the joy of a new-found intimacy was associated with a hope that parents would be more sympathetic when confronted with an established fact and more likely to be happy and hopeful rather than sad and worried to find out that their son or daughter was LGBTQ. Brotman, Ryan, Jalbert, and Rowe (2002) also identified isolation, exclusion and rejection by families as having a significant negative impact on LGBTQ people and potentially delaying their self-affirmation process. According to these authors, the act of coming out can be perceived as a rejection of Aboriginal identity and a mean to embrace Western values: pressure to conform arising from the community can therefore prevent the completion of this process. Both on-community Two-Spirited Crees and urban LGBTQ people expressed fear of being rejected and outcast by their family. Despite all these deterrents, study participants found the courage to come out, and usually did it without a safety net.

Dorais (2014) noticed the same strength of character among his participants. When asking them how their parents reacted to the revelation, 60% and 75% of his participants stated that their parents reacted "rather well" or "very well" to the disclosure of their sexual orientation, which is quite different from the experiences shared by the participants of this study. Moreover, Dorais stated that for those whose parents did not react well, 21% of boys stated that their parents wanted to change them and 15% of boys

stated that their parents were ashamed of them. When exploring the motivations for such hard reactions, the participants mentioned the influence of the Church as a significant force against LGBTQ people, especially with older generations and born-again Christians. On the topic of religious beliefs and spirituality, Brotman et al. (2002) also identified tension arising from conflicts between traditionalists (people withholding pre-colonization values and traditions) and Christians (those who have embraced the post-colonization Christian values). Interestingly, most of the participants of this study also mentioned the strong influence of the Church upon their parents' negative attitude towards Two-Spirited people. Although it would appear that Church influence is similar in both societal context, family rejection has far greater implication for Two-Spirited Crees. Indeed, in Eeyou Istchee, family rejection usually leads to community exclusion. With homelessness being non-existent on the territory, Two-Spirited people who are rejected by their family must find other allies within their community to lodge them. Housing shortage was mentioned as a significant issue for independent living across the territory, a finding also identified by Hunt (2016). Developing a circle of gay or lesbian friends can be easy in cities, but it is not a possibility in Aboriginal reserves. Unless they choose to "return in the closet," Two-Spirited Crees of Eeyou Istchee are left with the sole option to leave the community.

Denying one's true nature comes with consequences. Participants mentioned different ways to escape reality. They used and misused alcohol and turned to other drugs in order to avoid an uncomfortable reality. This observation was also found in the report from the NAFC (2008), which stated that a lot of urban Two-Spirited/LGBTQ youth and adults made unhealthy lifestyle choices in order to reduce stress and to cope with a harsh

reality including binge-drinking and drug abuse, but also sexually risky behaviors. The report also mentioned that these factors accounted for elevated rates of depression and contributed to suicidality. The First Nations Center (2012) also found that the rate of mental health issues was higher among the Two-Spirited community and contributed to a higher risk of suicidal ideation and attempts. Lastly, a study by Parker, Duran, and Walters (2017) identified a correlation between bias-related victimization and stigmatization and generalised anxiety disorders in LGBTQ and Two-Spirited Alaska Natives. Lacking a support network capable to sustain and support them in a period of crisis, all the study participants made the difficult decision to leave their community of origin, a phenomenon discussed at length by Ristock et al. (2011).

The study participants described their community as a toxic environment. They found it difficult to meet other Two-Spirited people to share the journey and they complained about the difficulties of finding a boyfriend or girlfriend within a very limited pool of potential partners. They also didn't know where to access information on being Two-Spirited and they perceived the lack of sexual education programs as a significant gap within the school curriculum. The research by Brotman et al. (2002) revealed that even though health care and social services have attempted to create a sense of neutrality in regard to sexual orientation, this lack of attention to sexual orientation has been perceived by the LGBTQ clientele as equally detrimental and ineffective to reduce homophobia and heterosexism. In this study, some participants were too shy to discuss their sexuality with non-Native health care professionals or were concerned about confidentiality and their risk of being exposed. They simply didn't trust the clerical personnel even though all staff signs an oath of confidentiality upon hiring. Lastly, one

participant was unable to access couple counseling for her and her partner within her community and was told to seek professional help outside the territory. Other reasons must be identified, therefore, to explain the discomfort of these professionals who could not provide appropriate health care services to Two-Spirited people in their community.

The NAFC (2008) and Walters et al. (2001) agree that any health care services designed for Two-Spirited people would need to be culturally-based and sensitive to the specific needs of Two-Spirited people while beholding clear confidentiality guidelines. Bakker and Cavender (2003) also highlight the importance for school nurses to develop cultural competencies in order to develop trusting links with the youth in general and Two-Spirited ones in particular. Furthermore, the strategic position of school nurses allows them to advocate for the specific needs of this population and to link with health care professionals from the medical clinics in order to improve the quality of interventions (Hirsch, Carlson, & Crowl, 2010). In fact, these strategies should also be developed and implemented for all nurses who work with First Nations in order to increase their critical thinking in regard to the culture, the sociopolitical context, and the societal issues susceptible to influence their nursing care (Browne, 2005; Foster, 2006). The cultural gap between non-Native health care workers and Aboriginal clients can be important. Indeed, Walters et al. (2006) emphasise the fact that for some Two-Spirited individuals, the process of coming to terms with their sexual orientation or gender identity may not meet the actual criteria of western LGBTQ politics or societal paradigms of “coming out”. Nurses, who believe themselves to be open-minded, could still be at risk of cultural bias if they have not received proper cultural safety training. It would be wrong, for instance, to suggest that Two-Spirited people living in Cree communities should

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simply behave like LGBTQ people in urban centers – or worse, that they should simply move to a bigger city and leave their family and community behind, a statement I have often heard from health care professionals. The stakes of moving out are indeed extremely high and leaving has significant consequences:

When I moved out of [*name of community omitted*], I did not simply move to another city... I left everything behind: all my family, all my friends, and also all my points of reference like my school, my workplace, the Band Council building, etc. It was like moving out forever, and that is huge because I didn't think I would be able to come back. Ever. That is so different from what you [the non-Native researcher] go through when you move from a city to another. It's easy for you to go back, not for me, not for us. (Sophia, personal communication, February 18, 2018)

Two-Spirited Cree of Eeyou Istchee share homogeneous stressors and risk factors with their LGBTQ urban counterparts. The first awareness of being different is for most LGBTQ2+ the beginning of a long journey towards self-acceptance. Coming out to others is not a once-in-a-lifetime event but an on-going journey. Each new friendship, new classmates, and new colleagues may lead to yet another coming-out (Dorais, 2014). That journey, both in urban centers and Cree communities is also filled with challenges and obstacles. Dorais specifies that LGBTQ youth are particularly afraid of being treated differently, to be bullied and humiliated, and of potentially losing friends. Participants of this study shared the same fears:

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And I—that was the last thing that I wasn't to do was hurt anybody because that's not me. (James)

And it was really hard for me to tell her because I thought I was gonna lose our—our—our friendship over it because I know, like, some people are not really accepting of it. And plus I was—I guess I was scared to admit it too I guess, to come out. (Emma)

I was slowly coming out to people. But then again, I was kind of ashamed to tell the people that I loved. Like, I didn't want to be a disappointment. (Jackson)

I got beat up for it. I got beat up for it many, many times. (Sophia)

Shame is another trait shared by many urban LGBTQ and Two-Spirited people. Shame is born from repeated verbal aggressions, ongoing intimidation, harassment, and threats that become engraved into one's psyche and one's memory: shame is therefore a physical reaction to a hostile environment (Ébiron, as cited in Dorais, 2014).

The reality of Two-Spirited people living in Cree communities also differs from the lives of their urban counterparts. Heterogeneous stressors and risk factors specific to the Cree of Eeyou Istchee contribute to an increased level of vulnerability. Specifically, Two-Spirited people are geographically isolated in small communities and lack the network of Two-Spirited allies that LGBTQ people can develop in cities. Participants complained about the lack of local or regional network and the difficulties in finding allies. They also have limited resources when they start questioning their sexuality. Although there are some provincial services available to them, such as the Suicide

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Prevention Helpline (*S.O.S. Suicide*) or the Gay Helpline (*Interligne*), participants did not feel at ease contacting them and would rather attempt to find local help. This level of isolation influences their capacity to come out to family and friends since it increases the stakes of rejection. Indeed, participants evolve in closely knitted communities where family ties are extremely important and where the behavior of one member can impact the family unit and can have repercussions beyond the family circle. Furthermore, the fact that all 10 participants felt the need to escape their community can be perceived as a sign of non-acceptance from family and community members. The strong influence of the Church upon residents of Cree communities was also clearly stated by the participants as a powerful obstacle to overcome at home and within the community:

I remember one time my mother quoted a verse to me. Like, Adam was made for an Eve. (Jackson)

He literally said that I was going to hell. Like, his own daughter is going to hell just because of the way [she] live[s]. . . . I was really upset (...) about the whole Christianity thing, 'cause I blamed—I blamed that, you know, the bible. (Emma)

He's not going to get into heaven, or like what will his parents think? (Lucas)

By opposition, the influence of the Church was mentioned by Dorais' (2014) participants only in reference to their grand-parents learning about their sexual orientation. The impact of religious beliefs seems therefore more intense and more deep-rooted in Cree communities than in urban centers. All these elements make it really difficult for Two-Spirited to come out and affirm their identity. Lastly, when they leave their community, Two-Spirited people do not simply move from a suburb to a city as do a lot of urban

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LGBTQ people: they leave behind family ties, their institutions and all their cultural references. Therefore, nurses require cultural safety training to become aware of these cultural aspects in order to avoid providing improper counseling and interventions.

The access to health care premises should also be a positive experience free of judgement and biases. Monette et al. (2001) discovered that 36% of their participants did not feel welcome at their health care centre and 29% feared discrimination based on their sexual orientation. In exploring the experience of health care barriers within and outside Aboriginal communities, Brotman et al. (2002) discovered that many of their participants felt that health care workers were judging their Two-Spirited nature and condemning it as a mean to reclaim their long-lost traditions and history. This contributed to the need to leave the community and was associated with poor health status. Similar to the participants of this study, theirs also described experiencing an inner turmoil of denying their identity and eventually having to leave their community in order to complete their coming out as Two-Spirited individuals.

The study participants described both positive and negative experiences when finding themselves in the midst of city life. At first, they were thrilled to explore new horizons and escape the confinement of their communities. They all stated that moving to a city had been key to completing their self-affirmation process: through exposure to a bigger LGBTQ community and through inspiring encounters with other Two-Spirited people, they were able to finally embrace their Two-Spirited nature. They were however, also confronted to racism based on their Aboriginal status. Discrimination, in the guise of homophobia or racism, seemed to follow them wherever they might end up.

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This migration of Two-Spirited Aboriginals from the reservations to urban centres has been described in the scientific literature. Teengs and Travers (2006) found that their Two-Spirited participants sought to escape the homophobic environment of their reservations by moving to Toronto. Newhouse and Peters (2003) identified multiple reasons behind the migration of Aboriginal people among which finding suitable housing and better education resonate with the findings of this study. They also pointed out that, unlike immigrants who come to Canada from other countries, Aboriginals do migrate within what used to be their traditional lands, a factor contributing to the cultural dissonance underlying racism.

Ristock et al. (2011) studied the various trajectories of migration of Aboriginal people who identify as Two-Spirited individuals. They also investigated the consequences of that migration on their health and well-being, while assessing their interactions with health care institutions and services. Sixteen of the 25 participants felt they had been forced to leave the community because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Their main motivations were to join a bigger LGBTQ community, to come out of the closet, and to be more open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Walters et al. (2006) further explained that for Two-Spirited people, the coming out process could in fact be conceptualized as *becoming out*, a process of transformation, of becoming who they truly are rather than abandoning and leaving who they were behind to embrace a new identity. These themes resonate with those expressed by the participants of this study. Their positive experiences are also in harmony with the findings of other researchers. It would thus appear that the exile of Two-Spirited Crees of Eeyou Istchee is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a segment of their journey that has universal manifestations.

Urban life can however be challenging for Native people. Ristock et al. (2011) specified that Two-Spirited Aboriginals experienced more racism and discrimination, especially when looking for housing, employment, and accessing health care services. Some of their participants also described being victims of physical abuse from their partner – a statement that resonates specifically with the stories of Sophia and Oliver. Lastly, they believed that these difficult living conditions could also contribute to mental health issues such as depression and suicidal feelings, something that, again, resonates with Oliver’s story. The researchers identified two main themes emerging from their collected data that are similar to those of this study. First, a “search for home, community and belonging” in which people are moving back and forth between reservations and cities in order to build a community that will be able to support them (in hopes that it could eventually be within their community of origin). Second, a deep “disconnection” from traditional values due to colonization, residential schools, and social discrimination and leading Two-Spirited people to lose their rightful place among their culture. These themes are also consistent with reports from the participants of this study.

Other researchers specifically explored the violence experienced by Two-Spirited people when living in urban centres. The participants in this study were vague about their stay in urban centres. They mostly focussed on the positive aspects of city life. Some did mention that it was difficult and that they experienced racism, but only a few described being victims of violence. Contrary to these findings, the analysis of narratives collected from American Indians who were LGBTQ or Two-Spirited by Walters et al. (2001) rated verbal abuse (79%) and threat of attack (70%) as the two main sexual orientation biases experienced when attempting to access health care services. Lehavot et al. (2009) also

found that American Indians and Alaska Natives who identified as Two-Spirited experienced disproportionate levels of physical violence. They believed that the legacy of colonial violence was responsible for the slow “erosion of Native women’s sense of agency in combating violence in their lives and seeking justice” (p. 275). Decolonization was at the heart of Dakin’s (2012) vision for Two-Spirited youth movements. She believes that it was the only way to undermine racism, heterosexism, and homophobia. Furthermore, she recognised that Indigenous people were often marginalised within urban LGBTQ associations because these groups usually did not acknowledge Indigenous culture, language, and tradition as core values of Two-Spirited individuals. As such Cree Two-Spirited people may feel alienated within urban LGBTQ alliances and groups. More research could be done to explore in depth the lived experiences of Cree Two-Spirited people who moved, even though temporarily, to a city to assess whether their experiences correlate with those collected in the above-mentioned studies.

The participants of this study all clearly stated that while they were enjoying their lifestyle in cities, they also missed their home. In fact, all of the 10 participants did return to their communities determined to face obstacles and find their niche. Some mentioned a desire to give back specifically to the institution that allowed them to leave and others felt the need to give back to their community as a whole. Overall, the participants were also hopeful that things would have changed while they were gone. They were able to point out areas in need of improvement such as the provision of culturally congruent health care services, an easier access to health care (especially for youth in questioning), a removal of barriers and sexual orientation or gender identity biases, better informed and trained staff,

better sex education at schools, and a return to ancestral values by addressing colonization impacts on traditional knowledge and culture.

Similar findings were reported by Walters et al. (2006) when analysing the narratives of five Two-Spirited women who were also Native activists in order to understand the impacts of the concept of “Two-Spirit” upon Aboriginal communities. There are multiple similarities between their findings and the narratives of the participants of this study. First, the notion of being Two-Spirited goes beyond sexual preferences and encompasses the person in its entirety: it is about removing the sexual component at the centre of the label and replacing spirituality at the core of the identity. Second, the responsibility of giving back to the people was significant and participants talked about the importance of being “community caregivers” (p. 129). Third, the participants also believed that Two-Spirited people had the potential not only to push back non-Native influences and colonization values but to initiate social mobilization in order to unite against racism, heterosexism, and “internalised oppression” (p. 133). Lastly, these women stated that only their Native community could provide them with a deep sense of belonging and thus, they also believed that family and community could grow and become a source of strength for Two-Spirited individuals. This last statement resonates with the strong belief expressed by the participants of this study who also sense that their community in general and their family in particular are evolving and are becoming more accepting of Two-Spirited people.

Indeed, participants felt they were coming back as agents of change and believed they could make a difference for themselves and for other struggling Two-Spirited

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individuals. They gave fine examples of changes they had witnessed within their family units and among their friends. Lucas and Jackson also mentioned conferences for Two-Spirited people, a local initiative aiming at helping young Two-Spirited people to network with others and attending workshops to help them grow and move towards self-acceptance. With time these conferences have grown to include people from the entire territory. In February 2018, this conference took on a whole new meaning as three significant people gave an opening speech at the event. First, Dr. Abel Bosum, the Grand Chief of the Crees of James Bay reiterated the importance for all nine communities to be inclusive of all their members, including Two-Spirited people (Bell & Smith, 2018). He stated that there was not enough Crees in Eeyou Istchee to afford losing people due to homophobia (personal communication, February 19, 2018). His statement resonates with the vision of Walters et al. (2006) of Two-Spirited people as social mobilisation agents. Then, Bella Petawabano, chairperson on the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay acknowledged that homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia were strong in Eeyou Istchee (Bell & Smith) but she also clearly stated that sexual orientation should never be a barrier to accessing health care services and that biases related to sexual orientation and gender identities had no place within the institution (personal communication, February 19, 2018). Her statement echoes the recommendations of NAFC (2008) to implement within Aboriginal communities health care and social services that would take into consideration the specific needs of Two-Spirited people. Already the NAFC was pointing at the need to address discrimination based on sexual orientation and to create safe havens in which Two-Spirited clients could express themselves without fear of being judged or ridiculed. As such, ensuring the physical and

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emotional well-being of Two-Spirited individuals should underlie programs development. Clear non-discriminatory policy should be developed and integrated in the actual recruitment process. To this effect, the NAFC recommends the use of the Rainbow Health Assessment tool which contains 25 questions to measure inclusiveness of any organisations. Lastly, Kathleen J. Wootton, chairperson of the Cree School Board (CSB), also reaffirmed the willingness of the CSB to fight homophobia and reduce bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation (Bell & Smith). Schools should be safe places for Cree children, a place where they can learn to accept and embrace differences around them (personal communication, February 19, 2018). Her statement is in harmony with Hirsch et al. (2010) who stated that since Two-Spirited youth spend a lot of time in schools, these institutions need to be a safe place for them. The authors emphasised the role of school nurse as an ally who can advocate for them while also providing education on sexual minorities. Furthermore, the school nurses are in a key position to network with the staff of medical clinics (CMC in Eeyou Istchee) thus promoting changes within both institutions.

Multiples similarities appear between the themes emerging from the narratives of the participants of this study and the findings of other researchers on similar topics. In fact, three out of the four themes emerging from the essence of this phenomenological study have been discussed in various studies: the struggles to (be)come out, the rampant homophobia within Aboriginal reserves, and the exile to the cities. What makes this particular study stand out from the others is that it was conducted within actual Cree communities with people who had returned home after their exile. Their unique perspectives added to the understanding of their journey towards self-acceptance and their

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subsequent desire to become advocates for other Two-Spirited people, especially the youth. The recent involvement of key leaders of Eeyou Istchee do favor the development of policies and strategies of inclusion and integration of Two-Spirited people. Time will tell if their promises hold, but for now Cree Two-Spirited have gained significant and powerful allies that could shape the better future they envisioned for them and their peers.

Chapter 6: Strengths, Limitations, and Implications

The final chapter of this thesis outlines the strengths and limitations of this study. It also describes the implications of its findings in regard to nursing practice, health care program development, and nursing research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study.

Strengths and Limitations

Several strengths are noteworthy and contribute to the authenticity and accuracy of the findings. The four aspects of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981) – credibility (truth value), fittingness (applicability), dependability (consistency), and neutrality – which were described in Chapter 3, were used to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of data as well as an analysis as free of bias as possible. This attention to the quality of collected data and the its subsequent analysis contributed to the credibility of the findings.

The qualitative design and the phenomenological approach were both well suited to the study since the main objective was to explore and better understand the lived experience of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee, a topic which had never been studied before (Polit & Beck, 2012). To this effect, strict selection criteria were defined to ensure that only participants who identified as Two-Spirited or LGBTQ and were living on the territory at the time of the interviews could contribute to the study. The sample encompassed two gender identities (six cisgender men and four cisgender women) and three homonormative sexual orientations (five homosexual men, four lesbian women, and one bisexual man) thus providing a sufficient range of experiences for a first analysis of this nature conducted in this context. Participants also came from four different

communities of various population sizes thus adding to the breadth of experiences shared. Participants were interviewed by a researcher who has spent the past 12 years among the Crees of Eeyou Istchee thus ensuring cultural sensitivity to the interview process. Lastly, participants were interviewed in their community which granted the possibility to study their lived experience in their natural settings.

The scale “Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler Guide” developed by Madeleine Leininger and McFarland (2006) was used during the interviews to assess the level of trust established between the researcher and each participant. The high scores obtained on the scale (under “Trusted Friend”) add trustworthiness to the data and the truthfulness of the narratives.

Audio recording of the 15 interviews ensured faithful adherence to the narratives. Each subsequent transcript was then read while listening to the audio recording to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Transcripts were further validated by each participant who had the opportunity to make changes if necessary. This step significantly increased credibility of the collected data (Beck, 1993).

Each of the seven-steps of the Giorgi’s method (1985) was meticulously described and the procedure was rigorously followed to support the emergence of credible results. A thorough analysis of the collected narratives led to the unravelling of the essential structure of the lived experience of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee: the four steps of a migratory path. The fact that this migratory path is common to all participants further adds credibility to the findings.

Lastly, during the data analysis phase, the technique known as “bracketing” was used to improve objectivity, maintain neutrality, and eliminate potential bias due to personal knowledge, experiences, and beliefs.

There are also several limitations to this study that relate to the sampling of participants and the data collection process. First, a convenience sampling method was initially used by recruiting participants via posters on billboards in different venues across Eeyou Istchee. The snowballing effect did not occur as anticipated. While convenience sampling is simple and effective, it is not always the best approach since it may not provide the most “resources-rich sources” (Polit & Beck, 2012, p. 516). In fact, this sampling method may have left out potential participants: those who came forward and expressed an interest in taking part of the study had obviously reached a certain level of self-acceptance and they were comfortable in sharing their story. Other Two-Spirited people still struggling with their sexual orientation or their gender identity may have felt unable to contribute due to internalised homophobia, shyness or simple mistrust. Their stories might have shed a different light on the findings. An anonymous online questionnaire could have been used instead but would have had a detrimental impact on the breadth and depth of the collected data.

The sample was also small with a total of ten participants all identifying on a binary model of gender identities, rather than on a spectrum thus limiting the exploration of various gender expressions and identities. Furthermore, all of the informants were cisgender and the lack of transgender participants makes it impossible to extrapolate the

findings to them. Therefore, the lived experience of being transgender in Eeyou Istchee remains unexplored.

Only half of the informants completed the second interview. Reasons of attrition of participants remain unclear. Sharing a personal story with a non-Native researcher may also have deterred some people from taking part in the study. Snowball sampling was hoped to occur more often and would have had the potential to reach people who might have otherwise felt uncomfortable in study participation. This happened only once, and that participant scored 4 on under “Stranger” on the “Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler Guide” (Leininger & McFarland, 2006), a clear sign of mistrust and an indication that the participant may have felt pressured into taking part in the study rather than being truly interested in contributing to the project. As a non-Native interested in an Aboriginal phenomenon, my study had a top-down approach that may have had a deterring effect upon recruiting informants. Had I developed the entire research project with some Two-Spirited key-people, I might have been able to pursue a more purposive sample strategy and had the option of selecting cases that would have benefitted the study most significantly. At last, there were no field notes taken during the interviews so non-verbal cues could not be analysed, which can be detrimental to the truth value of the data collected (Guba, 1981).

Although there are limitations present in this study, the strict adherence to a well-known and proven method of analysis led to credible findings that describe the migration path undertaken by Two-Spirited people of Eeyou Istchee in their journey towards self-

acceptance. These findings also highlight the challenges and obstacles that they faced and the struggles they had to overcome before being able to assert their true identity.

Implications of the Study

Two-Spirited people are evolving in a difficult environment and face multiple challenges on their journey towards self-acceptance and in taking their rightful stance within their communities. Registered nurses working within the CBHSSJB need to acquire knowledge on being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee if they wish to offer culturally congruent care. Furthermore, as a whole, the institution needs to consider the specific needs of Two-Spirited Cree people in order to define a service offer that can meet their needs. Lastly, the findings of this study have raised additional questions and as such have implications for future nursing research.

Nursing Practice

A significant portion of the scientific literature on Two-Spirited people addresses issues of sexual health, including high rates of HIV infections and unplanned pregnancies. None of the participants of this study mention HIV infection as a concern. Instead, they were more worried about feeling different from their peers and not having a safe place to meet others like them to share their discomfort about being Two-Spirited. They felt very isolated and could not understand the grieving process they had to undertake in order to come out as Two-Spirited individuals. Furthermore, they didn't know where to access reliable information on homosexuality and its Aboriginal concepts and nuances: "Well, there's—there's, um, nothing. There's nowhere to go. [No] safe spaces [...] to find somebody to talk to." (Isabella) In collaboration with the Cree School Board, the *Chi*

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kayeh program on sexual health has been tested in 2006 in two communities as a pilot-project and subsequently implemented across all the communities in 2008. The program is offered in high school. The main goal of the program is to promote sexual health and prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV through education on building positive self-image and healthy relationships. The school nurse is usually invited to give a presentation on sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancies, and the proper use of condoms. More specific topics, such as the recourse to post-exposure prophylactic treatment (PEP) and the more recent pre-exposure prophylactic treatment (PrEP), which are available on the territory, are taught to nursing staff (including school nurses) via the nurse counselor on sexual health from the Regional Public Health Department. It is actually unknown to what extent school nurses teach about PEP and PrEP in classes, but they are educated to discuss these options with their patients. Condoms are available at no cost via the school nurse and in the public bathrooms of the CMCs. So far, the rate of HIV in Eeyou Istchee has remained very low, contributing to a reduced fear of the infection among youth. However, the region has rates of Chlamydia trachomatis and Neisseria gonorrhoeae much higher than the provincial rates and thus, the youth remain a high-risk population (INSPQ, 2017).

This study reiterates the need for clinical nurses to gain additional knowledge on the lived reality of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee in order to properly serve their clients. The actual cultural safety training offered to new recruits addresses the history of Indigenous people and the impacts of colonization upon their culture and their politics. It covers the history of the Crees, the political agreements established with the Government of Quebec, and the Residential Schools system and its impact upon the people of Eeyou

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Istchee. It should also specially describe the history of Two-Spirited people, their honorific positions and fundamental roles in Aboriginal culture prior to colonization, and the opposing views of settlers on sexuality and their detrimental effects upon Indigenous beliefs. The actual nursing and medical personnel should receive this cultural safety training in order to provide health care services in a culturally congruent manner. Mental health care professionals such as therapist, psychologist, grief counselor, couple counselor, and National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADP) workers should also be properly trained in cultural safety. The training should also be provided to the outreach workers as they need to be aware of the reality of being Two-Spirited and be sensitive in reaching out to youth they believe might need professional services.

Furthermore, clinicians must understand the grieving process Two-Spirited people are going through and be able to identify at what stage of this process their client is when seeking help. When self-acceptance has been achieved, clinicians still need to be open-minded to the unique challenges facing Two-Spirited people: seclusion reinforced by geographical isolation, lack of local resources and gathering venues, limited pool of potential partners, and their belief that they may have to leave the community in order to be themselves and escape rampant homophobia and the omnipresence of the Church. It is paramount that nurses do not compare the experiences of Two-Spirited Crees with those of urban LGBTQ people as this could narrow their understanding of the specific cultural implications that Cree youth are facing when coming out within their communities.

Clinical nurses are in a critical position to advocate for the needs of their Two-Spirited clients. They should be familiar with local (if any) resources and be able to

redirect their clients to organisations outside the territory, if necessary: a Gay Helpline service, for instance, can provide assistance for struggling Two-Spirited individuals. Consequently, their interventions should aim at alleviating their sense of isolation by promoting access to support networks via Internet technologies.

Lastly, the inclusion of cultural competences and cultural safety in the curriculum of nursing programs has been a topic of interest among Canadian Schools of Nursing (Rowan et al., 2013). More than ever, clinical nurses must consider the cultural background of their patients when assessing their health needs and delivering services (Capell, Veenstra, & Dean, 2007). While cultural competencies courses specific to all First Nations, Inuits and Métis should be included in nursing educational programs and college and university curriculums, special attention should be paid to the ongoing consequences of colonization, more specifically the paradigm shift these societies experienced in regard to their worldview, and the impacts upon the matters of sexual orientation and gender identity. The findings of this study could be included in such courses as the starting point for nursing students' introspection and reflection on the reality of Two-Spirited people living in reservations and their specific health care needs.

Health Care Services Development

At a different level of the institution, planning, programming and research officers (PPRO) in charge of developing health care services, such as the upcoming Healthy Eeyou Youth (HEY) and its nine local Youth Clinics, should also gain knowledge on the reality of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee. This study demonstrates that coming out is essential to good physical and mental health. The creation of safe spaces for Two-

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Spirited youth is a good and effective public health promotion strategy and can lead to improved self-esteem and resilience (Brotman et al., 2002). The health of Two-Spirited youth is also shaped through their first experiences of the health care systems (Hunt, 2016). PPRO should thus ensure that their programs can address the needs of all groups and sub-populations of Eeyou Istchee, and specifically those of the Two-Spirited youth.

First, the premises should feel safe to Two-Spirited clients. An anti-homophobia, anti-transphobia, and anti-heterosexism policy should be developed and approved by the Board of Directors. All levels of personnel (administrative, maintenance, outreach, and health care professionals) should be familiar with it and be accountable to its implementation. It should be written in plain language and be posted in waiting areas so that all clients understand its tenets. Consequences for not respecting the precepts of the policy should also be clear (such as the removal from the premises, for instance) and followed through in the event of an infringement.

Evaluation tools, such as the *Halifax Rainbow Health Project Inclusion Program Assessment Tool* (Halifax Rainbow Health Project, 2007) or the *Workplace Assessment Tool and Personal Assessment Tool – A Positive Space is a Healthy Space* (Ontario Public Health Association, 2011) could be adapted and used to assess the level of actual LGBTQ2+ cultural competence within the organisation, the overall ease of access to services by LGBTQ2+ people, and the quality of care provided to these patients.

Lastly, the premises should contain computers with Internet access to offer the possibility to navigate the web in all privacy and access resources located outside of Eeyou Istchee.

Nursing Research

The findings of this descriptive phenomenological study reveal a migratory path undertaken by all participants that first led them out of their community in order to complete their self-acceptance process before leading them back to their community of origin.

Although it would be presumptuous to assume that Aboriginal people were uniformly accepting of a non-binary gender model and of sexual fluidity, there are studies and oral accounts on how well respected Two-Spirited people were prior to colonization (Hunt, 2016, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, 2016). Further research on the traditional roles and positions held by Two-Spirited individuals within the Cree society prior to colonization might prove helpful in addressing actual conflicts arising from opposing spiritual and religious doctrines. A deeper analysis of religious doctrines present within the Cree society could also shed additional light on the reasons why Two-Spirited individuals feel the need to escape their community.

Lastly, family and community are both central to the identity of Cree individuals. All participants mentioned either a desire to reconnect with estranged family or a sense of accountability to Cree institutions, as a justification for moving back to their community. Therefore, a study on the meaning of family and community in the definition of the cultural identity of Cree people might help explaining that segment of the migratory path,

especially since some participants experienced this migration multiple times and seemed caught in a vicious circle.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee. To answer this research question, a phenomenological approach was selected as the best method to study a phenomenon not well documented and poorly understood. It involved ten participants who lived on the territory at the time of their interviews. Data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant and audio recordings of these interviews were transcribed for analysis using Giorgi's (1985) method.

The findings of this study revealed a 4-step migratory path that all participants undertook to complete their self-affirmation process as Two-Spirited individuals: (1) *I Am Different*, (2) *It Was War*, (3), *I Had to Run Away*, and (4) *I Wanted to Go Home*. Each one of these steps was described in depth by the participants: they shared very personal stories, often without any reservation, in order to reveal deep wounds and ensuing healing processes. Their collective story was one of profound resilience.

A discussion on these findings followed and many parallels were drawn with other studies on Aboriginal people in general and on Two-Spirited ones in particular found in the scientific and conceptual literature. The findings of this study however present an unprecedented in depth understanding of the lived reality of being a Two-Spirited individual choosing to live in Eeyou Istchee. While the health of Two-Spirited people is dependent on multiple social determinants, challenging the binary gender model imposed

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during colonization is essential to allow Two-Spirited people to regain their rightful places within their communities.

Strengths and limitations of this study were also identified. Further implications in regard to nursing science were made to highlight specific issues of interest to nursing practice, health care program development, and future nursing research. These findings may be used to help better educate clinical staff, to promote the development of health care initiatives that are relevant to Two-Spirited people, and to influence future nursing research on topics hinted at in this study but which could not be pursued at this time.

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Appendix A

Population of Eeyou Istchee



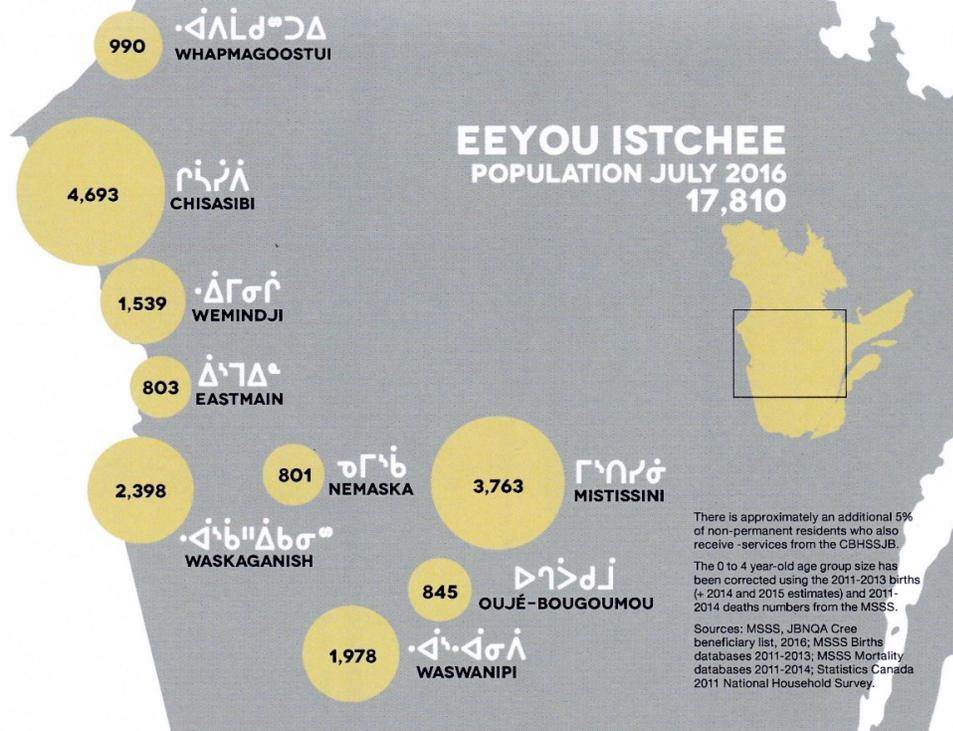
ABOUT THE CBHSSJB

Founded in 1978, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) is responsible for the administration of health and social services for all persons residing either permanently or temporarily in Region 18, the administrative region of the Ministry of Health and Social Services of Quebec corresponding to the Cree territory of James Bay. Our mandate is defined in Chapter S-5—An Act respecting health services and social services for Cree Native persons.

In each of the nine communities of Eeyou Istchee, the CBHSSJB operates a Community Miyupimaatsiuiun Centre (CMC), which is similar to a CISSS elsewhere in Quebec. CMCs offer services in general medicine, home care, dentistry, social services and allied health.

In addition to CMCs, the CBHSSJB operates the 29-bed Chisasibi Regional Hospital, three homes for youth at risk, a Regional Public Health Department and program planning unit, Wiichihiituwinn (formerly Cree Patient Services) liaison offices in Chibougamau, Val-d'Or and Montreal, and a recruitment office in Montreal. The Head Office is in Chisasibi.

The CBHSSJB is governed by an elected Board of Directors whose Chairperson is Bella M. Petawabano. Advisory Committees and Councils report directly to the Office of the Chair, as do the Service Quality and Complaints Commissioner and the Medical Examiner. The Interim Executive Director is Mr. Daniel St-Amour.

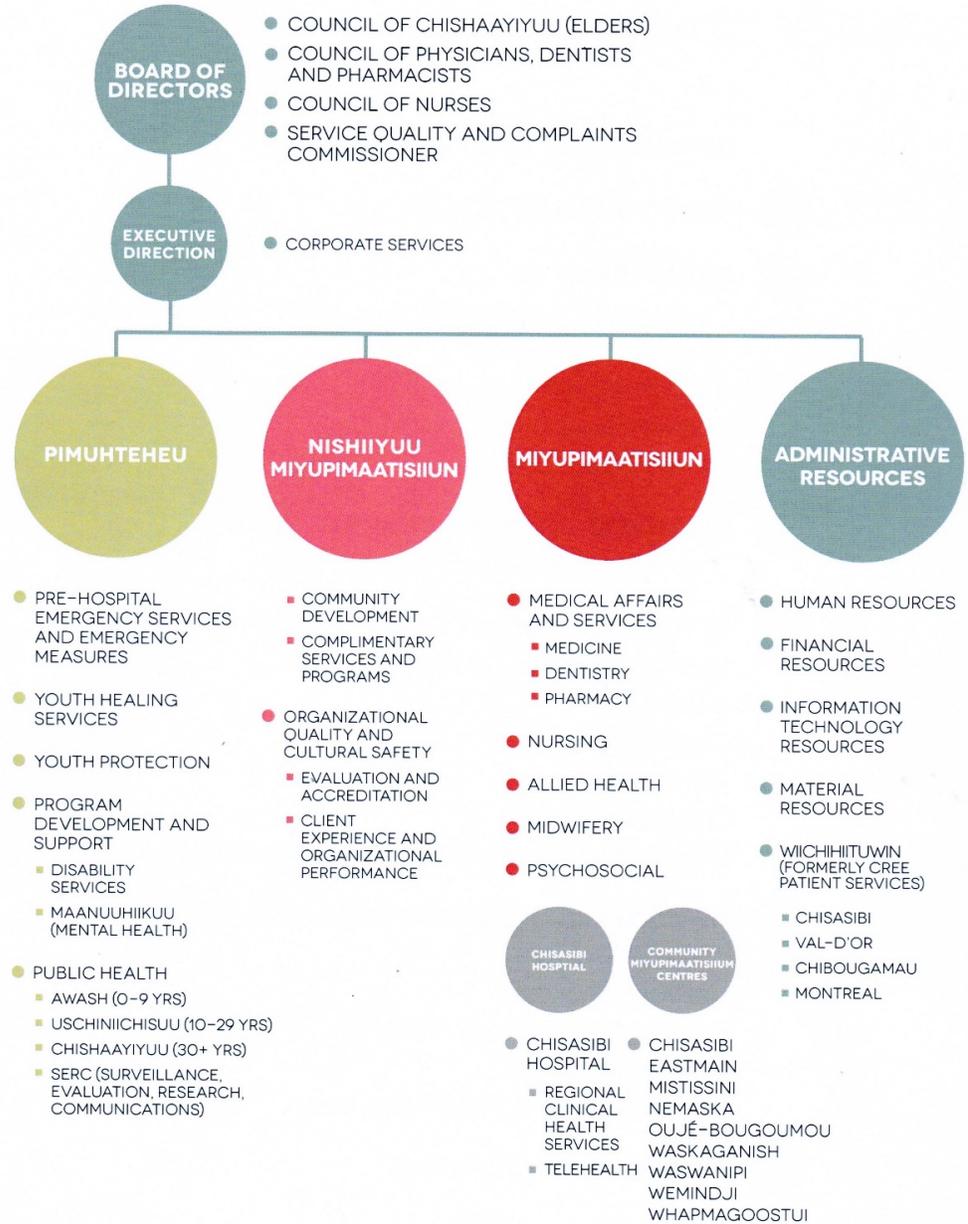


(CBHSSJB, 2017)

Appendix B

CBHSSJB Organigram

CBHSSJB ORGANIGRAM



(CBHSSJB, 2017)

Appendix C

Recruitment advertisement on billboards

SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I am a registered nurse and a graduate student enrolled in nursing from

Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN)

and a long-term employee of the Cree Board of Health and

Social Services of James Bay.

The title of the research: **On Being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee**

I am looking for candidates who are Cree, men and women, at least 18 years old, live on the territory (in one of the nine communities of Eeyou Istchee)

and identify as Two-Spirited, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered.

Participation requires taking part in two interviews of 45 to 60 minutes to discuss your experience as a Two-Spirited person living in Eeyou Istchee.

A 25\$ iTunes gift card will be given to all participants who complete both interviews.

Contact me: being_two_spirited_in_eeyou_istchee@hotmail.com and/or 418-770-4659

This research has received the approval of the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Research

Ethics Board (HREB) as well as the approbation of the

Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay.



Conseil Cri de la santé et des services sociaux de la Baie James
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Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay



Appendix D

Madeleine Leininger: “Stranger to Trusted Friend Enabler Guide”

The purpose of this enabler is to facilitate the researcher (or it can be used by a clinician) to move from mainly distrusted stranger to a trusted friend in order to obtain authentic, credible, and dependable data (or establish favorable relationships as a clinician); The user assesses him or herself by reflecting on the indicators as he/she moves from stranger to friend.					
	Indicators of Stranger (Largely etic or outsider’s views) Informant(s) or people are:	Date noted		Indicators as a Trusted Friend (Largely emic or insider’s views) Informant(s) or people are:	Date noted
1	Active to protect self and others. They are “gate keepers” and guard against outside intrusions. Suspicious and questioning.		1	Less active to protect self. More trusting of researchers (their ‘gate keeping is down or less’). Less suspicious and less questioning of researcher.	
2	Actively watch and are attentive to what researcher does and says. Limited signs of trusting the researcher or stranger.		2	Less watching the researcher’s words and actions. More signs of trusting and accepting a new friend.	
3	Skeptical about the researcher’s motives and work. May question how findings will be used by the researcher or stranger.		3	Less questioning of the researcher’s motives, work, and behavior. Signs of working with and helping the researcher as a friend.	
4	Reluctant to share cultural secrets and views as private knowledge. Protective of local lifeways, values and beliefs. Dislikes probing by the researcher or stranger.		4	Willing to share cultural secrets and private world information and experiences. Offers most local views, values, and interpretations spontaneously or without probes.	
5	Uncomfortable to become a friend or to confide in stranger. May come late, be absent, and withdraw at times from researcher.		5	Signs of being comfortable and enjoying friends and a sharing relationship. Gives presence, on time, and gives evidence of being a ‘genuine friend.’	
6	Tends to offer inaccurate data. Modifies ‘truths’ to protect self, family, community, and cultural lifeways. Emic values, beliefs, and practices are not shared spontaneously.		6	Wants research ‘truths’ to be accurate regarding beliefs, people, values, and lifeways. Explains and interprets emic ideas so researcher has accurate data.	

Appendix E

Health Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval



Ethics Office
Suite 200, Eastern Trust Building
95 Bonaventure Avenue
St. John's, NL
A1B 2X5

February 11, 2016

126-765 Bourget
Montreal, Quebec
H4C 0A5

Dear Mr. Larivée:

Researcher Portal File # 20161979
Reference # 2016.021

RE: "On being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee"

This will acknowledge receipt of your correspondence.

This correspondence has been reviewed by the Chair under the direction of the Health Research Ethics Board (HREB). **Full board approval** of this research study is granted for one year effective **February 4, 2016**.

This is your ethics approval only. Organizational approval may also be required. It is your responsibility to seek the necessary organizational approval from the Regional Health Authority (RHA) or other organization as appropriate. You can refer to the HREA website for further guidance on organizational approvals.

This is to confirm that the HREB reviewed and approved or acknowledged the following documents (as indicated):

- Revised Research Proposal, approved
- Revised Informed Consent Form dated 20-Jan-2016, approved
- Response Letter dated 10-Feb-2016, approved
- Seeking Research Participants Poster, approved
- Interview Framework, approved

MARK THE DATE

This approval will lapse on February 4, 2016. It is your responsibility to ensure that the Ethics Renewal form is submitted prior to the renewal date; you may not receive a reminder. The Ethics Renewal form can be found on the Researcher Portal as an Event form.

ON BEING TWO-SPIRITED IN EYYOU ISTCHEE

If you do not return the completed Ethics Renewal form prior to date of renewal:

- **You will no longer have ethics approval**
- *You will be required to stop research activity immediately*
- *You may not be permitted to restart the study until you reapply for and receive approval to undertake the study again*
- *Lapse in ethics approval **may result in interruption or termination of funding***

You are solely responsible for providing a copy of this letter, along with your approved HREB application form; to **Research Grant and Contract Services** should your research depend on funding administered through that office.

Modifications of the protocol/consent are not permitted without prior approval from the HREB. **Implementing changes without HREB approval may result in your ethics approval being revoked, meaning your research must stop.** Request for modification to the protocol/consent must be outlined on an amendment form (available on the Researcher Portal website as an Event form) and submitted to the HREB for review.

The HREB operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Health Research Ethics Authority Act (HREA Act) and applicable laws and regulations.

You are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research, notwithstanding the approval of the HREB.

We wish you every success with your study.

Sincerely,



Dr Fern Brunger (Chair, Non-Clinical Trials Health Research Ethics Board)
Ms. Patricia Grainger (Vice-Chair, Non-Clinical Trials Health Research Ethics Board)

CC: Dr. Robert Meadus

ON BEING TWO-SPIRITED IN EYYOU ISTCHEE

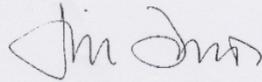
5) Please develop any internal CBH communications plans with your CBH supervisor.

The Committee feels this project will benefit the CHB because we have no information on the experience of the two-spirited and this is especially needed for planning our programmes in public health and services, including appropriate mental health and health promotion resources.

The Research Administrator, Tracy Wysote, will be in touch with you regarding a Letter of Understanding.

We thank you for developing this project, and we all look forward to helping you to see it through successfully and safely.

Yours truly,



Jill Torrie
Ass't Director of Public Health

Cc: Interim Research Committee
Executive Committee
Pimuheteu Management Committee

Appendix G

Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay Letter of Approval



Conseil Cri de la santé et des services sociaux de la Baie James
σ D d b a b b Δ r Δ Δ Δ a Δ a a b r C b σ D b
Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

SUBJECT: Approval of Research Project: On Being Two-spirited in Eeyou Istchee

The Executive Committee of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay having met by WebEx on the 16th day of July 2015.

PREPARED BY: Adelina Feo
PRESENTED BY: Adelina Feo

WHEREAS the CBHSSJB has no information about the vulnerable population of two-spirited persons in Eeyou Istchee;

ACTION: Approved

WHEREAS the Nurse Counselor for Sexual Health, Patrice Larivée, proposes to carry out qualitative interviews to understand the experience of being two-spirited in Eeyou Istchee to fulfill requirements for his Master of Nursing from Memorial University;

Copy of the Executive Committee recommendation

WHEREAS once approval has been granted, the Research Office will negotiate a Letter of Understanding with the researcher and the researcher, along with his CBHSSJB supervisor, will develop a communication plan for use within the CBHSSJB;

Recommended on: July 16, 2015

WHEREAS the Interim Research Committee reviewed the proposal and provided recommendations to ensure client safety;

Daniel St-Amour
Executive Director by interim

WHEREAS the Interim Research Committee recommends the project for approval to the Executive Committee because it categorizes this as a sensitive project, which requires strong organization support.

BE IT RECOMMENDED:

THAT the Executive Committee approves the research project 'On being two-spirited in Eeyou Istchee' to be conducted by Patrice Larivée; and

THAT the Executive Director hereby mandates the AED Pimuhteheu to do all things necessary to give full effect to this Executive Committee recommendation.

Appendix H

Consent Form

Checklist

This checklist is to be completed and submitted with this consent form.

It is to be removed from the final version of the consent document.

- Most recent version of consent template (October 2015) has been used**
- Footer includes consent version, study name, line for patient initials**
- Font size no less than 12 [except for footer]**
- Left justification of text**
- Grade 9 or lower reading level. Assessed reading level is: 7**
- Accepted definitions for specialized terms used where applicable**
- Plain language principles used for study specific wording – no jargon, no acronyms, short words, short sentences, active voice and, where appropriate, bulleted lists**

Standard, required wording (in bold type) has been used in the following sections:

	Yes	No
Introduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefits (Q6)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Liability Statement (Q7)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Privacy and confidentiality (Q8)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Questions or problem (Q9)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signature page	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signature page for minor/assenting participants if applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered No to any of the above, please give the rationale for these changes below:

No minor will be selected for this study: participants will be aged 18 to 30 years old.

TCPS2 guidelines provide a list of the information required for informed consent.

Please refer to TCPS2, Chapter 3, available at:

<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter3-chapitre3/>.

The HREB Policy Manual provides detailed information on specific consent issues including: consent to research in emergency health situations; the use of substitute decision makers; assent for children; research involving special populations (children, cognitively impaired); managing consent in situations of difficult power relationships; and community consent to research involving Aboriginal communities. Please refer to [the HREB Policy Manual on the HREA website: www.hrea.ca](#)

1. Introduction/Background:

The reality of being a Two-Spirited individual living in Eeyou Istchee is not well known. Indeed, little has been written about what it is like to be a Two-Spirited individual growing up in an Aboriginal reservation: most of what we do know comes from people who have left their community of origin and moved in urban centres. Being a Two-Spirited person living in one of the nine communities of Eeyou Istchee has not been studied until today.

The findings of this study will be shared with the Director of Public Health and the Uschiniichisuu team who is working on the Youth Clinics initiative. It is our hope that this will help make better services available to Two-Spirited youth in the territory.

2. Purpose of study:

This study focuses more precisely on the experience of being a Two-Spirited person living in one of the nine communities of Eeyou Istchee: the goal is to better understand what it is like to live as a Two-Spirited person in Eeyou Istchee.

3. Description of the study procedures:

By agreeing to contribute to this research, you accept to participate in two interviews. These interviews will be recorded using the Dictaphone app on an iPhone. Additional hand notes may be taken in a journal dedicated to this use to describe non-verbal cues.

The interviews will be about your experience as a Two-Spirited, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered person.

A written transcript will be sent out to you and you will have to review it. For safety and confidentiality purposes, files sent by email will be password protected while printed documents will be sent by registered mail.

ON BEING TWO-SPIRITED IN EEYOU ISTCHEE

A second interview will take place shortly after you received the transcript. The researcher will ask you for feedback on the transcript and make notes of the corrections you see fit. It will be a time to discuss specific issues that may have not been clear in the first interview, or to bring up things you may have forgotten to say the first time around.

A second transcript will be sent to you and you will have to review it. Again, for safety and confidentiality purposes, files sent by email will be password protected while printed documents will be sent by registered mail.

Then, over a phone conversation, you will have a chance to make final corrections to the transcript, if any.

At the end of the research, you will receive a copy of the findings.

4. Length of time:

The first interview should last 60 minutes.

You will receive a transcript of the interview within two weeks of completing the first interview.

Within another two weeks, a second interview of about 45 minutes will take place.

Two weeks later, you will receive a transcript of the second interview.

Within two weeks, you will receive a phone call from the researcher to discuss the transcript and make changes, if any.

5. Possible risks and discomforts:

The researcher does not anticipate any physical risks should be taking part in this study. However, discussing issues of such personal nature as sexual orientation and

the lived experience of being Two-Spirited may become emotionally difficult for some people.

If you find the interview process overwhelming or too difficult, you may leave at any time. If counselling is needed, you will be referred to the local Community Miyupimaatisiun (health) Centre (CMC) where a psychologist or a Cree therapist will be available.

6. Benefits:

It is not known whether this study will benefit you.

7. Liability statement:

Signing this form gives us your consent to be in this study. It tells us that you understand the information about the research study. When you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights. Researchers or agencies involved in this research study still have their legal and professional responsibilities.

8. What about my privacy and confidentiality?

Protecting your privacy is an important part of this study. Every effort to protect your privacy will be made. However, it cannot be guaranteed. For example, we may be required by law to allow access to research records.

However, to maximise confidentiality, the researcher will not use your real name but rather use a nickname instead. The name of your community will not be specified. The recordings and the electronic files of the transcripts will be kept on an external hard-drive. Each file will be encrypted with a password. The hard drive along with the printed versions of the transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office in Mistissini, Quebec.

When you sign this consent form you give us permission to

- Collect information from you

ON BEING TWO-SPIRITED IN EEYOU ISTCHEE

- Share information with the people conducting the study
- Share information with the people responsible for protecting your safety

Use of your study information

The research team will collect and use only the information they need for this research study.

This information will include:

- The information you will reveal during the study interviews

Your name and contact information will be kept secure by the research team in Quebec. It will not be shared with others without your permission. Your name will not appear in any report or article published as a result of this study.

Information collected for this study will be kept for five years.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information collected up to that time will continue to be used by the research team. It may not be removed. This information will only be used for the purposes of this study.

Information collected and used by the research team will be stored on an external hard drive (interviews will be password protected) and in a locked cabinet (transcripts) in the researcher's office in Mistissini, Quebec. Patrice Larivée is the person responsible for keeping it secure.

Your access to records

You may ask the researcher to see the information that has been collected about you.

9. Questions or problems:

If you have any questions about taking part in this study, you can meet with the investigator who is in charge of the study at this institution. That person is: Patrice Larivée.

Principal Investigator's Name and Phone Number

Patrice Larivée

(418) 770-4659

Or you can talk to someone who is not involved with the study at all, but can advise you on your rights as a participant in a research study. This person can be reached through:

Ethics Office at 709-777-6974

Email at info@hrea.ca

This study has been reviewed and given ethics approval by the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Research Ethics Board.

10. Declaration of financial interest, if applicable

The researcher, Mr. Patrice Larivée, is not receiving honorarium for conducting this study.

After signing this consent you will be given a copy.

Signature Page

Study title: On being Two-Spirited in Eeyou Istchee

Name of principal investigator: Patrice
Larivée

To be filled out and signed by the participant:

Please check as appropriate:

I have read the consent. Yes { } No { }

I have had the opportunity to ask questions/to discuss this study. Yes { } No { }

I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions. Yes { } No { }

I have received enough information about the study. Yes { } No { }

I have spoken to Patrice Larivée and he has answered my questions Yes { } No { }

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study Yes { } No { }

- at anytime
- without having to give a reason
- without affecting my access to health care
- without affecting the quality of my health care

ON BEING TWO-SPIRITED IN EEYOU ISTCHEE

I understand that it is my choice to be in the study and that I may not benefit. Yes { }
No { }

I understand how my privacy is protected and my records kept confidential Yes { }
No { }

I agree to be audio taped Yes { } No { }

I agree to take part in this study. Yes { } No { }

Signature of participant Name printed Year Month Day

Signature of person authorized as Name printed Year Month Day

Substitute decision maker, if applicable _____

ON BEING TWO-SPIRITED IN EEYOU ISTCHEE

To be signed by the investigator or person obtaining consent

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Signature of investigator

Name printed

Year Month Day

Telephone number: _____