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Migration, Mobility and the Health and Well-Being of Aboriginal Two-Spirit/LGBTQ People: Findings from a Winnipeg Project.

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings from a research project designed to explore the trajectories of migration/mobility of Aboriginal people who identify as Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer and the impact of mobility on health and wellness. This included migration from First Nations reserve communities to urban centres or rural communities (and back and forth). The research also examined the intersection between sexual and gender identities with cultural/Nation and other identities within the historical and present context of colonization in Canada.

The research utilized a community-based, qualitative design. Aboriginal research principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) were adopted as the guiding framework to ensure that there was a commitment to produce and share meaningful knowledge in a way that respects the integrity and rights of Indigenous peoples and communities. Twenty-four Aboriginal Two-Spirit /LGBTQ people in Winnipeg were interviewed (either as individuals or in focus groups). The findings indicate that participants in this study have moved many times in their lives (often starting with experiences of forced mobility, such as foster care and residential school). They spoke of struggles with gaining acceptance for the different parts of their identities (for example as gay, male, Aboriginal, youth) both within First Nation communities or rural communities and within urban gay and lesbian communities. Their experiences of dislocation often had a negative impact on their health and well-being. At the same time many participants showed great resilience in their efforts to create a sense of belonging, community and home. To understand and hear the truths of diverse Aboriginal Two-Spirit/LGBTQ peoples, it is important to understand the colonization experience that has created a shared history for them, shaping distinctive conditions of health, risk and resilience.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we report on a Winnipeg research project that explored the trajectories of migration of Aboriginal people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit and/or queer (LGBTQ) and the impact of mobility on health and well-being. Winnipeg is home to the largest urban Aboriginal population in the country. As reported in the latest census results (Statistics Canada, 2009), more Aboriginal people live in the city of Winnipeg than in any other major city in Canada on a total number and per capita basis. Winnipeg is home to 68,385 Aboriginal peoples (which is 10.2% of the population of Winnipeg). In Manitoba, there are 63 First Nations communities, encompassing six of the twenty largest bands in the country. The predominant

First Nations linguistic groups in Manitoba are Cree, Ojibway, Dakota, Ojibway-Cree and Dene. There is also a large Métis population, many who speak French as a first language.

DEFINING TERMS – ABORIGINAL AND TWO-SPIRIT

For the purposes of this project, we use the term *Aboriginal* to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples (First Nations Centre, 2007). This definition includes all status, non-status, and people of blended ancestry that choose to self-identify as Aboriginal (Guimond, 2003; Siggner, 2003a and 2003b).

We also use the term *Two-Spirit* to refer to all sexual and gender variance among people of Indigenous North American descent: in other words, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer identities. The term *Two-Spirit* has multiple contemporary meanings and also highlights historical elements regarding the possible positions of Two-Spirit peoples in their communities and their place in the sacred circle (Wilson, 1996). The term was coined at the Third International Two-Spirit Gathering in 1990 in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004, p. 31; Roscoe, 1998, p. 109). Walters, Evans-Campbell, Simoni, Ronquillo, and Bhuyan (2006) emphasize the political implications for some people who have chosen to use the term Two-Spirit. They indicate that the term is used to reconnect with specific (Indigenous) Nation traditions related to sexual and gender identity; to move beyond Eurocentric binary categories of sex and gender; to state the fluidity and non-linear nature of identity processes; and to fight against heterosexism in Aboriginal communities and racism in LGBTQ communities. Furthermore, Wilson (1996) emphasizes that Two-Spirit identity affirms the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity - therefore including gender, sexuality, community, culture, and spirituality. However recognizing that not all Aboriginal LGBTQ people identify as Two–Spirit, we asked participants how they self-identify regarding their Aboriginal identity, sexuality, and gender. We did not impose our definitions but use the self-definitions of our participants.

HEALTH CONCERNS OF ABORIGINAL TWO-SPIRIT AND LGBTQ PEOPLES

It is impossible to consider research regarding the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people without considering the historical impacts of colonization and its contemporary effects – what Fieland, Walters and Simoni (2007) refer to as "historical and contemporary trauma" that interacts with socio-demographic vulnerabilities to negatively affect the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (p. 268; see also CIHR, 2007; Walters & Simoni, 2002). We must also consider the marginalization, stigma, and ongoing prejudice LGBTQ people experience in their daily lives and in accessing health care. The impact of structural oppression including homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and racism are all likely to play a role in the health and well-being of Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people (Taylor and Ristock, 2011; Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition, 2004; Matiation, 1999).

Specifically, however, there has been very little health research conducted regarding Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people. The most comprehensive review has been done by Fieland et al.

(2007) and reflects an American context. Fieland et al. (2007) have used existing data regarding American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) peoples and amalgamated it with research that has been done regarding LGBT health in an attempt to present an emerging perspective on Two-Spirit health. They focus on four key areas: morbidity and mortality; mental health; substance use; and sexually transmitted infections (including HIV). They conclude that both communities face significant health disparities in the four key areas that they reviewed and that these have not yet been adequately measured. Further their review shows the ways in which Two-Spirit health is affected by both interpersonal and structural factors. Historical trauma, health care system inequities, hate-motivated violence, and childhood physical and sexual abuse are some of the determinants that can be linked to negative health outcomes for Two-Spirit people.

Consistent with the review by Fieland et. al (2007) are the findings of the needs assessment of trans and Two-Spirit people in Manitoba (Taylor, 2009) which reported high incidence of multiple forms of violence that had a negative impact on mental health. The Manitoba study involving seventy-eight participants found that there was a continuum of violence from all sources in the everyday lives of the trans and Two-Spirit participants from childhood to adulthood that resulted in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder including depression, anxiety, impaired memory and low self-esteem.

Finally, we know that Aboriginal peoples in Canada are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS and that men who have sex with men, Two-Spirit and transgender people have all been impacted by the epidemic. A recent study points to the need to consider the social determinants of health and found that inequities in socio-economic and housing conditions exist between Caucasian and Aboriginal persons living with HIV. Further, Aboriginal people with HIV were more likely to be younger, female or transgender women when compared to Caucasian participants (Monette et al., 2011). As Matiation points out: "There are stories of Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS being driven off the reserve or denied housing. There is often fear of disclosing HIV status because of homophobia and AIDS phobia, and concerns about ostracism, threats, and violence" (1999, p. 10). Thus we also know that Indigenous and LGBTQ individuals move to seek health care and/or as a result of marginalization (in addition to other reasons).

Forced Mobility

It is important to acknowledge the historical context of forced mobility that existed as a result of colonization practices enacted against Indigenous nations. Residential schools and experiences of foster and adoptive care in the child welfare system have been the main sources of forced mobility, although forced relocation of entire communities has also been well-documented (Environics Institute, 2010). In the most benign version, children were removed from their families, prohibited from speaking their first language, and taught ways and customs alien to their home communities. Many survivors report experiences of sexual, physical and emotional

abuse resulting in shame about their Indigenous identities, an interruption in cultural development and functioning, and a substandard education to that received by non-Aboriginal children (Dickason, 2006; Ray, 2005).

The "Sixties Scoop" is a term used to describe the removal of 'neglected' or disadvantaged Aboriginal children and placement of these children with white families, either in foster care or as adoptees (Dickason, 2006, p. 229). This practice was very common in the 1950s and culminated in the 1960s and 1970s with as many as 15,000 Indigenous children adopted into non-Native families, 3000 from Manitoba alone. These children were placed in locales across Canada and the US, with some sent even further away (Dickason, 2006).

Mobility

Beyond the history of residential schools and foster care, a considerable amount of research has explored experiences of urban Aboriginals in Canada. Over half of Aboriginal peoples today (54%) live in urban areas while maintaining connections to their original communities (this is up from 47 % a decade earlier) (Statistics Canada, 2009). As such, Aboriginal mobility is common. For instance, between 1991 and 1996, more than half (55%) of the Aboriginal population changed residences within Canada. This compared to just 40 percent of non-Aboriginal persons reporting changes in that time period (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003). Recent census data indicates that all Aboriginal groups experience higher mobility when compared to the non-Aboriginal population. For example 12% of Aboriginal people reported moving to a new home compared with 8% of the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2009). Mobility patterns and levels of urbanization differ across Aboriginal groups, just as there is much diversity within First Nations populations in each city. For example, some cities are home to many nations (e.g., Cree, Ojibway, Mohawk), while the First Nations people in other cities come primarily from one or two nations of origin (Environics Institute, 2010).

Obviously, we know that Aboriginal people moving to cities contend with some of the same challenges as people moving from other countries or rural and northern communities to new cities – issues such as integrating into urban economies, interacting with different people from many places, and finding suitable housing and education. Similar to the experiences of other people who immigrate to a new city or country, many Aboriginal people also maintain close links to their communities of origin. Unlike immigrants, however, Aboriginal people are moving within their traditional lands (Newhouse & Peters, 2003).

Most recently, the *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study* (UAPS) found that Urban Aboriginal peoples and groups differ significantly in their degree of urbanization – the most urbanized groups include Non-Status First Nations peoples and Métis (most likely to have lived in their city 20 years or more) with the least urbanized being the Inuit and Status First Nations. Aboriginal peoples move to the city for family, education, and work opportunities, as well as the amenities and services available. One gender difference that was exhibited among UAPS

participants was that women noted family and education more typically as reasons for moving along with leaving to escape a bad family situation. Men on the other hand cited moving to the city primarily for work. Although the UAPS included those who identified as Two-Spirit they have not yet completed the analysis of their responses (Environics Institute, 2010).

Regarding health, the UAPS found that most respondents rated their health as excellent, very good, or good. Not surprisingly, perceptions of health are higher for younger participants, more educated participants and those with higher incomes. As well, participants in Halifax, Vancouver, Calgary and Montreal were slightly more likely than average to say they are in excellent-to-good health (Environics Institute, 2010).

While the UAPS findings are generally positive, one study conducted specifically on migration with Two-Spirit youth indicates a different reality. Teengs and Travers (2006) found that Two-Spirit youth in their sample moved to the city to avoid homophobia and seek a better life. In the city they identified a number of challenges such as finding housing and employment, dealing with racism and exploitation, and experiencing barriers in accessing services. They also found that migration could have a positive impact on Two-Spirit identity formation. Thus more research is needed beyond this one study to understand Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ peoples' urban experiences.

In our study, we hoped to bring forward Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ peoples' experiences of moving and the accompanying positive and/or negative impacts on health and well-being.

METHODOLOGY

We designed a qualitative, community-based research project to explore the mobility of Aboriginal people who identify as Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ). Our focus on migration included movement from First Nation reserve communities to urban centres or rural communities (and back and forth) as well as staying or moving within one place. We were interested in the impact of mobility on health and well-being, as well as, the intersection between sexual and gender identities with cultural/Nation and other identities within the historical and present context of colonization in Canada.

Our research was conducted in two different Canadian cities (Winnipeg and Vancouver). The research processes in each site were responsive to and driven by the differing advisory committees and the differing Aboriginal communities and needs. In this article we report on the findings from the Winnipeg site.

RESEARCH PROCESS: Community Consultations and Advisory Committees

From the beginning of the project, we engaged in a process of community consultation (Cahill, Sultana, & Pain, 2007; Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Wilson, 2008) for a six to eight month period.

Key community members and stakeholders were identified and contacted to identify issues, interests and concerns related to Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people and migration. In Winnipeg we consulted with 28 people from 24 programs across 18 organizations (including both Aboriginal and LGBTQ health care, resource and social service organizations). These initial consultations helped inform the research questions and data gathering processes. Further, some of the community consultants became advisory committee members.

The advisory committee included those who identify as Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people from a number of different agencies as well as service providers that do not identify as Two-Spirit or LGBTQ but who work with and within those communities. The research team and the advisory committee adopted the Guiding Principles for Research with Aboriginal Communities that were developed by the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network and the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) (First Nations Centre, 2007) in order to work with/within Indigenous communities in an ethical and respectful way. Before finalizing the role of the advisory committee, all members discussed their understanding of the principles for the research project. This is consistent with the CIHR guidelines for health research involving Aboriginal people and reflects the desire for meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the research team, advisory committee and Aboriginal communities. For this project, ownership meant that the advisory committee along with the research team would have authority over all stages of the research process (including research design, recruitment, data analysis and dissemination of findings). Control meant that the advisory committee and the research team were involved in shared decision-making throughout all stages of the research project. Access meant that the advisory committee had the right to access, use and share the research findings within Aboriginal communities and organizations. Finally, possession meant that while the principal investigator was responsible for maintaining the integrity of all original data collected (recordings, transcripts, consent forms) data set summaries that did not reveal the identity of participants could be shared with the research team and the advisory committee. Further, we agreed that the research team would not sensationalize problems within Aboriginal communities but would strive to present a balanced portrait of issues when analyzing the data and producing the final report. We produced a written document outlining our agreed upon principles of research collaboration for the project and distributed it to all advisory committee members. In accepting these guiding principles, all members committed to working together in producing and sharing meaningful knowledge in a way that respects the integrity and rights of Indigenous peoples and communities (CIHR, 2007; First Nations Centre, 2007; Kovach, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Ethics certification for the project was received through the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board.

Advisory committee members helped to promote the study and recruit participants through their community connections. At each stage of the research process, over a two-year period, a meeting was held with the advisory committee to provide an update, ask for feedback and guidance, and to plan together for the next steps. Meetings with the advisory committee helped

to ensure that the research plans for the project were culturally appropriate and would protect participants from harm, ensure confidentiality, and provide them with real benefits. Members of the advisory committee were also involved in the data analysis process by reviewing preliminary themes identified by the research team, suggesting further themes to look for, and then in interpreting the themes to complete the final data analysis. Several drafts of a final report were circulated to all committee members before it was finalized. As well PowerPoint presentations that were developed were also circulated to advisory committee members for input and approval. Finally, advisory committee members have been active in sharing the findings through workshops, at conferences and community forums.

Recruitment and Data Gathering

We recruited participants by placing posters at key organizations in Winnipeg, through handbills describing the project that were distributed by advisory committee members at relevant community events, and through word-of-mouth. Criteria for participation in our project included people 18 years of age or older who self-identified as Aboriginal (including First Nations, Inuit and Métis); and who self-identified as Two-Spirit, and/or LGBTQ, or as women who sleep with women (WSW) or men who sleep with men (MSM); with experiences of migration/moving; and a minimum of conversational English.

People had a choice of participating in individual interviews or in focus group discussions. Individual interviews were held in private rooms at a local library and focus groups were held in Aboriginal community organizations. After securing consent, participants completed a set of background demographic questions including age, education, sex, gender, ethnicity, types of moves, numbers of moves, residential schools and child welfare experiences, sources of livelihood, and connection to traditional practices.

A semi-structured set of interview questions was then used to help facilitate the interviews and focus groups. These questions focused more specifically on participants' experiences of migration and the factors that motivated them to move or stay in place. We explored their understandings of community, home and belonging. We asked about the positive and negative impacts of moving on health and wellbeing and finally about recommendations regarding services for Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ peoples. Participants were provided with the questions at the beginning of the interview along with a map of Manitoba First Nations communities to facilitate getting started. The interview questions offered a framework for discussion with flexibility to allow the research coordinator and participants to engage in more of a mutual conversation. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded. The length of individual interviews varied from thirty to ninety minutes, while focus group discussion ranged from sixty minutes to over two hours. (See Appendix A for interview and focus group questions). Honoraria and a list of community resources were provided at the end of each interview/focus group.

Data Analysis

The research coordinator tabulated the responses to the demographic questionnaire items using descriptive statistics. Transcripts were produced from the audio recordings by a professional, confidential transcriber at the University of Manitoba. These were then reviewed by the research coordinator for accuracy and culled of identifying information. A template with categories related to the main research question was constructed to assist with coding the transcripts and with accurately capturing the experiences of the participants. The categories included: types of moves, examples of movements, description of identities, connections between movement and identities, positive and negative impacts of moving, impact on health, use of services, and recommendations. We also remained open to including information not captured by these initial categories if mentioned in people's narratives (Tracy, 2010). The research team each coded several transcripts using the template to ensure reliability in how we were identifying the themes. The research coordinator then reviewed all transcripts and completed a template for each one. Members of the advisory committee were involved in reviewing the themes that were generated after all transcripts had been coded. They suggested further areas to explore and the research coordinator went back to the transcripts to undertake further coding and analysis. When the final thematic analysis was presented, the advisory committee members offered interpretations to assist in the development of the overall analysis of the findings.

FINDINGS

I. Demographic Information

We spoke with a total of 24 participants in 13 individual interviews and 3 focus groups (one for transgender, one for youth, and one group that included gay men and lesbians). The table below summarizes the response of participants to our demographic questionnaire. The numbers presented in the table do not always add up to twenty-four because for some questions participants could choose as many items as were relevant from a list while in other cases not all of the participants completed the question. Of particular relevance to our focus on mobility is that thirty-three percent of the participants in this sample indicated they were forced to move from their home community because of their gender expression or sexual identity. Their responses also indicate that they have moved many times in their lives often beginning with child welfare or residential school experiences.

Table 1: Summary of Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

	Participants (n=24)
Aboriginal Identity	
Métis	6
First Nations	18
Language	

First language English	15
First Language Indigenous	3
Second Language Indigenous	3
Age	
19-24 years	6
25-29	4
30-34	5
34-39	3
40-44	5
45-49	1
Gender Identity (check all that apply)	
Female	14
Male	3
Two-Spirit	2
Transgender	8
Transsexual	1
Sexuality (check all that apply)	
Two-Spirit	10
Gay	3
Lesbian	6
Bisexual	7
Straight	3
Queer	1
MtoF transgender	6
Poly	1
Community: Primary home	
Winnipeg	20
City	2
Town	1
Reserve community	1
Community: Secondary home	
First Nation	6
Rural Town	1
Winnipeg	4

Housing	
Rent house or Apartment	12
Own home	1
Rooming house	1
Homeless	2
Living situation	
With relatives	5
With partner	6
With friends	3
Live alone	2
Children	
Live with them full-time	4
Live with them part-time	3
No children	17
Mobility:	
From First Nation or Métis settlement to city:	17
2-4 times	8
5-9 times	2
10 or more times	4
Moves Within City	
1-4 times	7
5-9 times	4
10-15 times	4
20 or more times	1
Forced mobility:	
Forced to move out of home community due to sexual or gender identity.	8
Child Welfare: Taken from biological parents.	
Adopted	4
Foster care:	9
Placed 1-3 times	5
4-5 times	1
6 or more	3
Residential schools	
Self	3
Grand-parents	10
Parents	7
Other relatives	9
Education (highest level completed)	
Some grade school	2
Some high school	12
High school diploma	4
Some college/university	4
University degree	2
Specialty certificate	1

Health Concerns (check all that apply)	
Weight	8
Diabetes	5
HIV	5
Hepatitis C	4
STIs	3
Cancer	3
TB	2
Other	2
Violence in Relationship	19
No health concerns	4
Income (check all that apply)	
State-sponsored assistance	10
Disability benefits	1
Full-time employments	4
Part-time	4
Casual work	3
Student Aid	1
Sex work	9
Drug trade	6
Pan-handling	1
Traditional Cultural Practices (check all that apply)	9
Ceremonies	8
Singing	7
Medicines	7
Spiritual practices	6
Drumming	4
Living on the land	4
Language	4
Healing	4
Dancing	3
Art	1
Cooking	1
Pow wows	

II. Main findings from qualitative interviews/focus groups:

In this section we report on main findings that emerged from our interviews and focus groups. These include participants' views of their identities, the types of moves participants made, the negative impacts of moving, the positive impacts of moving, and a theme of resilience.

Description of Identities: Layered and Complex

Participants in our study describe many layers and complexities when speaking about their identities. For example, a 20-year-old Two-Spirit, First Nations man described his struggles in determining his identity:

> *Well, you know, I'm trying to find myself. I'm trying to live, but it's hard because I don't have a place to live and I don't have a place to grow and I don't have a drawn out line yet. Which is why I'm cookie dough, because I need to find who I can be right now so that I could be ready to be who I have to be in the future. It's complicated being me right now.*

One young woman, indicated that she finds her different identities confusing and in conflict – she even used the word "war" to describe her feelings about being Métis, bisexual and Catholic.

> *And I'm just like which one should I lean to? Because each one is telling me that this is wrong. This is wrong. I'm just like, what? There's this big war going on in my head, and I don't know what to do.* (19 years).

A number of participants also spoke directly about what it means for them to be Two-Spirit. People mentioned the spiritual and positive power of being Two-Spirit and how the term is connected to both sexuality and to being Aboriginal.

For example, one woman spoke about the significance of the term for her.

> *Two-Spirit is a very, very new term. It only came to light in 1991 and prior to that people really didn't have a reference point as to how we wanted to identify because we weren't gay and we knew that we weren't gay. 'Gay' is too, it's too broad. It doesn't really define who you are as a person. One of our Aboriginal elders had a vision that, she was told this is what we would be called and she gave it to us. And she said, if you are Aboriginal and you are gay, you can identify as Two-Spirited. That's what we were in the traditional sense of who we are as people, as Aboriginal people, in our community… Gay for us meant going to gay bars, getting high, being drunk, going to bath houses and all that stuff and it had nothing to do with being spiritual, being Two-Spirited…And so a lot of us took on the term Two-Spirit because we wanted to be identified as Aboriginal men and women.* (40 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, transwoman).

Reasons for moving: Push and Pull

Participants identified many push and pull factors affecting their migration (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003) such as moving away from negative circumstances or experiences such as violence, discrimination and abuse, and moving towards hope for something better. One woman stated,

Like I wanted to literally commit suicide out there because nobody accepted me because of the way I thought about women. Out here everything changed for me, like I used to be really dark, and like Winnipeg, basically this is a bit forward or too much, but like saved my life, almost, yeah. (19 years, Métis, bisexual).

Another shared her story of seeking recovery through moving.

Well actually like my reasons to come to Winnipeg, I tried moving back home to _____, you know, for - it was sort of like, I had a lover who was really unstable and we were into lots and lots of drugs and we had a situation where I was in real danger and I kinda had that moment where, I was like, if I wasn't doing like mountains of cocaine, I wouldn't be in this situation. Like I need to change everything and so ...I moved home and stayed there for nine months. (29 years, Métis, Two-Spirit, bisexual, poly, queer, female).

Another participant spoke about being bullied in his reserve community for being too feminine. He presents coming back to the city from the First Nation community to be with other gay/Two-Spirit people.

Yeah, yeah, and I was, I definitely by that time knew I wasn't like every other boy. I knew I was um, I knew that I had a secret. So moving was like okay, sure whatever. Let's go. And then I thought I'd be better, you know, my people, I'm gonna go and stay with people who want me. (20 years, Two-Spirit, male, gay).

Participants spoke about moving to seek a safe community and to make sense of themselves. In this way they were pulled into moving toward something positive or hopeful. In this, we heard people talk about moving "to be myself", "to find myself", "to find people like me", and "to find a partner". Participants also spoke about the draw of a big city where there is a visible LGBTQ community and where it is big enough to be anonymous. Others talked about accessing services (like medical and addictions treatment) while others moved for reasons of work or study.

Push factors compel people to move away from something – often seeming like being literally pushed away from/out of their home or community. Examples include, falling out with family, friends/roommates, experiences of discrimination and resulting feelings of isolation. One participant who had been feeling suicidal because of their marginalized sexuality spoke about how a friend suggested moving to the city for support. This example illustrates how it is possible to have both push and pull factors operating to influence mobility.

Okay, I, as a teenager I actually started having suicidal thoughts because I didn't know what my sexuality was or what it meant or what it was about. People weren't actually willing to talk to me about it because actually nobody knew. And I actually started having like anxiety attacks, depression, suicidal thoughts because I couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. And that's how I felt, what is wrong with me? ... Something

came to me, I guess, when I was about 16, I had met people that had actually lived in Winnipeg and they said, you really should consider moving to Winnipeg because one of my friends told me, you're gonna die here if you don't leave. And that was just by my own hand, you know, because I was having already suicidal thoughts at that time. I didn't know where to go for support. (40 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, transwoman).

Negative Impacts of Moving

Under any circumstances, moving is a change and can be a difficult transition. For those that moved to the city from reserve or rural communities, the culture shock experienced cannot be minimized. For example, issues such as finding a place to live, having limited social support networks, as well as dealing with the loss of their home community and connections are just some of the specific issues that people confront after making a significant move. Participants also spoke about the stress of moving and the ways they tried to mediate the difficult adjustment. For example some spoke of using alcohol or drugs – sometimes as a coping mechanism and sometimes in the context of too much partying.

Feelings about moving were further impacted by negative experiences of racism and transphobia in the gay community:

> *Yeah, like you know, it's, the community is like, there's a lot of like, I don't know how to put it, there's like, they hate on us Two-Spirited trannies…and I don't understand that?* (23 years, Aboriginal, Two-Spirit, transwoman).

In participants' stories, we also heard about the secondary impacts of moving such as getting involved in the sex trade, seeing friends die (due to sex trade, drug use, murder, HIV), dropping out of school, and homelessness. For example one participant spoke about the secondary impact of AIDS:

> *Yeah, it was actually because the reason I drank, the reason I drank was because I couldn't deal with being gay…Oh, I really hit the jackpot when I came out here because when I came out, AIDS came out. And AIDS was killing people left, right and centre. And I was like, holy crap! ….but the thing was the only way I knew how to deal with it was drink and forget about it, like just drink myself into oblivion. Because people I was meeting were dead like a month later and it was like, okay, like what's going on here. So there was a lot of fear and a lot of confusion… because I kinda had a sense that I might be gay…And that's when I really fell into depression when I was a teenager and started looking at killing myself because I thought, oh my god, is this what I'm looking to go into, you know? Is this my life? Is this it? Am I gonna go to a city and die of AIDS?* (40 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, transwoman).

Negative Impact on Health

In asking about experiences of migration, people spoke about encountering physical and sexual assaults on the street, as well as the physical manifestations of stresses on the body: trouble sleeping, homelessness, drug use, survival sex work, HIV and fatigue. Living in poverty can be difficult at best and dangerous at worst as revealed by this participant:

> *I know. (All laughing) I don't have to watch TV. I just open my curtains and watch outside. (All laughing) That's how dangerous it is on (street) in the North End. Um hum. So I just stay at home or I'm usually at my friend's, where I'm comfortable and on the rez. On the week-ends, I usually take off. I'm never at home.* (41 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, straight, transsexual, female).

Participants also shared the emotional and spiritual strains of moving, like feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stress exacerbating any existing mental health issues and/or relationship issues. Loneliness also caused some participants to stay in or return to relationships they know they don't really want.

Positive Impacts of Moving

In addition to the difficulties identified, participants also spoke about many positive aspects of their moves. For example many accessed valuable resources in the areas of health, social services, culture. In addition to the exhilaration of being in a new place, participants spoke about finding a specific community. For example, in the city, some transwomen were able to meet other transwomen and get help with dressing and transition.

> *But then, I came out and everyone's like, yeah, we knew you were gay. You can sort of tell. And then I didn't start dressing up until like 3 years ago. I met my first trannie... Yeah, so she dressed me up and so I could be a very pretty girl, so like, hey. And yeah, I've been dressing up ever since and I like it…It's like, this is who I am.* (19 years, First Nations, female, transwoman).

Other positive impacts identified included moving away from abuse or discrimination, reuniting with previously estranged family members, and accessing Two-Spirit cultural teachings. Some participants reported accessing teachings that were unavailable in their family or original communities. For these participants, these connections became a positive impact of moving. For example,

> *I felt when I was coming to Winnipeg, I joined one of the programs in _____ and I've been in there for 2 years now ….cause my family's not traditional in any respect, so it's different coming from my family who has no religious views and spiritual views. They're scared of our teachings and I think that's a whole other issue about my family and my*

past that I don't have any control over. So I really felt like I needed to reclaim something I lost because they lost it. (20 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, gay, male).

Finally some people spoke about how finding a safe community allowed them to stay in place. As one participant described:

You just go around and around and you stop where you feel accepted. Like there's places here. You'll stop there. You won't stop there because you're discriminated there. You go here. (41 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, straight, transsexual).

Resilience

While participants in this study have experienced both negative and positive impacts of moving, in many stories we also heard their resilient efforts to create spaces and places where they could fully be themselves and bring forward all aspects of their identities.

For example, one participant spoke about the need to be honest with family and community members about his sexuality and HIV status. This participant experienced a strengthening of his relationships as a result.

But it's like, if they don't know that you're positive and you're gay, how can you fit in? How could they accept you? …You know, my whole family just turned around on me because I didn't say anything, but they knew. So I started telling them and saying things, saying it, eh, and they finally said, okay, he's accepting it. He's understanding it. He knows what he's doing. You don't have to be worried about touching him or shaking his hand, you know, so now they know, and they're all just hugging me and that, you know, and people that I see, you know, they say, how you doing? Taking your pills and stuff, and staying straight? I says, not staying straight. (All laughing) I'm gay every day. But that was a big part. (24 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, gay, male).

Other participants spoke of the strength they found in being comfortable with their identities as a way to resist and confront negative judgments.

For example:

Well for myself, I'm comfortable with who I am. I don't care if people judge me about who I am, you know. This is me and I'm not gonna change for anybody. (31 years, First Nations, lesbian).

I kinda decided when I disclosed about the sexual abuse to Child and Family Services when I was 16 that I wouldn't be hiding anything ever again because it makes me sick. I had allergies that were like really, really bad, I think as a result of like lying for a lifetime, you know, and hiding things. So it was kinda like a deal I made with myself, like, if I tell just one more secret, there ain't gonna be any more secrets ever, you know.

So I'm a pretty open book. Like I don't hide the fact I'm queer from anyone, even if I'm fairly confident they're gonna be homophobic, I'd rather challenge that and accept it, you know. I always disclose that I'm Métis .... I don't feel at home anywhere. It's just I bring all my parts with me, for sure. (29 years, Métis, Two-Spirit, bisexual, poly, queer, woman).

Finally for some participants, despite moving and growing away from their first communities, their resilience is evident as they continue to seek strong ties to their Indigenous Two-Spirit identity and worldview.

Yeah. For me, the little bit I know about Two-Spiritedness, is that we were special. We were pillars in the community for all facets of the tribe. We were there for everything. We were multi-taskers... So I look back at my family or people in the community who are making changes, social change or whatever, I feel like I'm not doing enough. I feel like I have to be living up to what I am. I think as a Two-Spirit, there's so much more I need to know about my culture. So much I need to know, so much that needs to be found. (20 years, Two-Spirit, gay, male).

DISCUSSION

Two overarching themes stand out from our findings for this study on the trajectories of migration and mobility and the impact on health and well-being: a theme of seeking home, community and belonging and a theme of disconnection.

Everyone in our study described the struggles they encountered because of being stigmatized and marginalized as Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Aboriginal peoples. They spoke of seeking a sense of belonging through finding a safe community. Community is rooted in relationships and the connections that people have with each other. For example as on participant said:

Because when I was younger, I always thought, why am I like this? And how come I don't see anyone else? And then I always felt like I was alone. So moving to Winnipeg and seeing, it was just like wow. (23 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, transwoman).

As well, all participants shared the importance of creating chosen families (Weston, 1991) - friendship connections that became family connections, outside of blood relations.

I've come to realize that I am not the only person. Like that's, that's, that's the big issue for me. I'm not the only person. I have lots of people that I care about deeply and I, you know, like people come and go. Yes they do, but when you form relationships and family, family is very important to me. It's something I didn't have as a kid. I kinda made my own family as I went along. Like my children, and then, you know, my friends

along the way. That's my family. Yeah, it's family that keeps me here. (25 years, First Nations, straight, transwoman).

Most participants reported that they have a good sense of home, community, and belonging in their current context and would not change their circumstances right now. Moving helped them discover and clarify what matters to them. Thus, participants moved in search of something and in order to create community and a feeling of belonging. As the results show, some were very successful in building new families, in finding and offering support, in developing richer relationships and strong multi-layered identities. Yet interwoven with this positive trajectory is the experience of disconnection.

A larger context of colonization, abuse and discrimination was also evident in the stories that we heard. The intergenerational impact of forced mobility was also significant. This larger context can lead to experiences of disconnection as LGBTQ and as Aboriginal people. Some participants spoke about the loss and grief they experienced from leaving their home communities or from not ever having a connection to an Aboriginal community. Two examples from participants speak to this:

> *One of the things that people don't realize, like for me, that isn't realized until, you know, much too late in life, but that there really is a sense of loss in having to leave somewhere and you carry that with you, you know, until you find a place where you can actually let it go.* (40 years, First Nations, Two-Spirit, transwoman).

> *One of the things that is very significant to me personally is the absence of home. This is my perspective as an urban Aboriginal person who has always lived in an urban context. I have no connection to a land base or to Aboriginal community.* (38 years, First Nations, lesbian).

These examples reflect the historical and cultural costs of colonization for the Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Aboriginal people that we spoke with. A legacy of abuse, pain, loss and for some, shame, can result in further stigma. In new places, Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people may be ill-prepared for life in a large city and shocked to experience racism (in housing and employment for example and in the larger LGBTQ community), homophobia in Aboriginal circles, sexual exploitation and isolation (as reflected in the findings of this study).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants made a number of important recommendations for services in the city (i.e. in Winnipeg) and for work to be done in First Nations reserve communities.

In the City: **The need for supports that are both culture and sex/gender sensitive.** Some participants spoke positively about coming to the city and finding services that opened a door to cultural teachings they were unable to access in their home communities. Additionally, many

spoke about the need for sensitive and informed workers (particularly for understanding transgender issues) in services like child welfare, education, health and housing.

The need for transition services to assist people when they first move to the city. Numerous participants suggested having a safe 'transition' house and Aboriginal LGBTQ centre for people to come to when they first come to the city to connect with their culture, their sexuality and to access resources (housing, employment) – to prevent people from being on the streets.

The need for community activities and events without alcohol or drugs. Participants spoke about how the gay bar is often the first entry point to an urban gay community. The bar can be a place of substance abuse, and unhealthy relationships. Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ participants indicated they want places to gather and activities that promote positive connections and community well-being.

The need to shift away from client services to a focus on community well-being. These suggestions included accessing Two-Spirit positive teachings and Two-Spirit Elders and mentors, as well as building other inter-generational connections.

In First Nations Reserve Communities: The need for community workers who can talk about gender and sexuality, the need to provide anti-homophobia and diversity education, and the need to ensure gay or transgender representation on council.

For those living in the city and feeling estranged from their First Nation communities, these changes might help them feel more comfortable returning to their home communities.

CONCLUSION

Colonization is sometimes presented in public policy discourse and even in some anti-racist theorizing as a thing of the past (i.e. it's "done"). This results in the concerns and interests of contemporary Indigenous peoples being rendered invisible and current enactments and effects of colonization being ignored and even enabled. To counteract this, we have attempted to bring forward the voices of Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people about their experiences of identity, movement and health.

Overall, the words of the participants speak powerfully and we hope the findings we have presented will provide the impetus for action. The recommendations from participants indicate that there is a desire for visible and accepting services in cities and in First Nations and Métis communities to address the specific needs of Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people and to widen sacred and spirit-based understandings of gender and sexuality.

This study was exploratory in nature and has many limitations including the small and non-representative sample. Future research is needed in a number of different areas: to further explore the identities and experiences of Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people who live in their original (reserve or rural) communities; to explore the ways positive spaces are being

created and expanded for Two-Spirit and LGBTQ to receive and share Two-Spirit teachings and participate in ceremonies; to explore on a larger scale Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ experiences of movement and migration and the impact on health in communities across Canada. In facilitating community-based research, we can ensure that Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ peoples' lives are acknowledged, valued and understood while also documenting the specific recommendations they have to share.

The findings and recommendations offered are lessons in building good and safe communities for everyone, so that all members can participate and fulfill their place in the sacred circle. We hope these findings can be used so that Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people moving to and within the city can have help with difficult transitions and can more easily find a place to call home, find people and places to call community, and can feel a sense of well-being and belonging.

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APPENDIX A: Interview and Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. Where were you born and where are some of the places that you have you lived?
2. Why did you decide to move? (What are some of the reasons you have had for moving?)
3. How did you decide to come to Winnipeg?
4. Have you had any problems while living in Winnipeg?
5. What are some good/positive things about living in Winnipeg?
6. How do you define community?
7. What communities do you belong to in Winnipeg? (gay/lesbian? Aboriginal? Women's, other communities etc.)
8. Do you feel you can move freely through different communities in Winnipeg? Are you the same person in each community?
9. Where do you experience a feeling of belonging?
10. How do you define "home"?
11. How have your moves influenced the way you make sense of yourself, where you belong, and/or where you find "home"?
12. What are some of the ways you have coped with moving?
13. What do you see as the impacts of moving on your health and well-being (positive or negative)?
14. Does your family support you? What supports do you have?
15. What are some services that would be helpful to you and other Aboriginal two-spirit/lgbtq people? (housing, healthcare, education)
16. Is there anything else you would like to add to help us understand your experiences of moving as an Aboriginal lgbtq person?