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Impacts of colonization on Indigenous Two-Spirit/ LGBTQ Canadians' experiences of migration, mobility and relationship violence

Janice Ristock
University of Manitoba, Canada

Art Zoccole
Executive Director, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, Toronto, Canada

Lisa Passante
Social Worker, Pembina Trails Schools Division, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Jonathon Potskin
University of Sydney, Australia

Abstract

An exploratory, community-based research project examined the paths of migration and mobility of Canadian Indigenous people who identify as Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ). A total of 50 participants in Winnipeg, Manitoba and Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada were interviewed, many of them telling stories about the multiple layers of domestic violence, violence in communities, state and structural violence that they experienced. In order to better respond to relationship violence experienced by Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTQ people it is necessary to understand the specific and historical context of colonization in which relationship violence occurs. We further need to align our efforts to end relationship violence with broader anti-violence struggles.

Corresponding author:
Janice Ristock, Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and Professor in the Women's and Gender Studies Program 208 Administration Building University of Manitoba Winnipeg MB R3T 2N2 Canada.
Email: Ristock@umanitoba.ca

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Introduction

This article reports on an exploratory community-based research project that examined the experiences of migration and mobility of Indigenous peoples who identify as Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ). In the larger project we were interested in learning about the trajectories of 'migrating' from one geographic place to another (for example, from First Nations communities to cities, from rural communities to urban centres, from one province/territory to another) as well as experiences of ongoing 'mobility' rather than stability in relation to place, and their impacts on health and well-being and on gender and sexuality identities. While our research was not directly focused on experiences of violence, we ended up hearing many stories about the multiple layers of domestic violence (including in relationships and in families), violence in communities, and state and structural violence that participants experienced. As a result we developed a secondary research question; how did our participants experience relationship violence and other forms of violence in this context of migration and mobility?

We used the term *Aboriginal* in this research project to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples (as per the *Canadian Constitution Act*, 1982). This definition includes all status and non-status people, as well as people of blended ancestry who choose to self-identify as Aboriginal or Indigenous (Guimond, 2003). While the term Aboriginal reflects the official terminology used in Canadian law and policies, the term Indigenous is being used more widely to convey transnational connections between Indigenous groups as well as to employ a term that was not imposed by colonizers. We use the terms Aboriginal and Indigenous interchangeably in this article. We also use the term *Two Spirit* to refer to all gender and sexual variance among people of Indigenous North American descent: including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer identities. The term *Two Spirit* has many contemporary meanings and also reflects historical elements regarding the possible positions of gender and sexually variant peoples in their communities. Walters et al. (2006) emphasize the political implications of the term indicating that for some the term is used to reconnect with specific Indigenous 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 Indigenous communities and racism in LGBTQ communities. In our research project we relied on participants' self-identification regarding their Indigenous identity, sexuality and gender identity.

Our article also uses the term 'domestic violence' to refer more broadly to violence in intimate relationships as well as in families and the terms 'relationship

violence' and/or 'partner violence' to include violence in same-sex/gender relationships. We acknowledge that the naming and categorizing of violence is troublesome given the assumptions and limitations embedded in our framings (for example, the term, 'hate crime' assumes a known motivation) that may limit what we are able to see and understand (Ristock, 2011). Rather than only relying on established categories of violence we also describe the level or source of the violence (for example, violence in the streets, structural violence).

Our qualitative research project was undertaken in two different Canadian cities: Vancouver, British Columbia and Winnipeg, Manitoba (see also Ristock et al., 2011 for results of the Winnipeg study). Vancouver is home to roughly 40,310 Aboriginal peoples, or 1.9% of the population, while Winnipeg is home to approximately 68,385 Aboriginal peoples, or 10.2% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2009). Winnipeg is home to the largest urban Aboriginal population in the country with more Aboriginal people living in the city of Winnipeg than in any other city in Canada on a total number and per capita basis. The province of British Columbia is home to 198 First Nations and has the greatest diversity of Aboriginal cultures in Canada with linguistic groupings that include Haida, Tsimshian, Salish, Athapaskan and Nisga'a. In the province of Manitoba, there are 63 First Nations, encompassing 6 of the 20 largest bands in the country with at least 6 different languages apart from English (Statistics Canada, 2009). Given these differences, the research processes developed in each site were responsive to and driven by the differing Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTQ communities and needs.

Background: A context of colonization and forced migration

A large and varied body of literature exists addressing LGBTQ migration and includes a focus on international immigration, transnationalism, sex tourism, travellers and asylum seekers to name some of the more common issues (Luibheid, 2008). When discussing mobility and migration of Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Indigenous peoples in Canada, it is first important to consider the historical context of forced migration 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 migration, although the evacuation of pregnant First Nations women from rural and remote regions and forced relocation of entire communities has also been well-documented (Lawford and Giles, 2012; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). The 'Sixties Scoop' refers to the removal of Aboriginal Indigenous children from their homes and placement with white families, either in foster care or as adoptees. Already a common practice in the 1950s, it culminated in the 1960s and 1970s with as many as 15,000 Indigenous children adopted into non-Indigenous families. Children were placed in locales across Canada and the USA, while some were sent further abroad (Dickason, 2006).

Within both residential schools, and foster and adoptive families, survivors often report experiences of sexual and/or physical and/or emotional abuse resulting

in shame about their Indigenous identities, an interruption in cultural development and understanding, and a substandard education (Dickason, 2006). Another substantial negative impact of the residential school system noted by the Urban Native Youth Association (2004) is that homophobia is now rampant in most Aboriginal communities in Canada. The Christian religious dogma of residential schools erased a proud history of Two-Spirit people in most Indigenous nations where there had been room for alternative genders and sexual identities beyond that of male/female gender binaries and heterosexual orientations (Taylor and Ristock, 2011). Indigenous women in Canada experience higher rates of domestic violence than non-Indigenous women, which may be related to the vulnerabilities created by the long-term impact of forced migration such as residential schools and the evacuation practices already noted (see Brownridge, 2009).

Mobility of Indigenous peoples in Canada

Beyond the destructive colonial history of forced and coercive migration, researchers have explored the voluntary migration experiences of urban Indigenous people in Canada. Like other people who migrate to a new city or country, Indigenous people moving to cities contend with the challenges of issues such as integrating into urban economies, interacting with different people from many places, and finding suitable housing, employment and education. Many Indigenous communities have provided support for their individual members to go to the city to attend colleges and universities, and over half of Indigenous people today live in both an urban centre and their original communities (Environics Institute, 2010).

Only one Canadian study in addition to the one we report on here has been conducted to specifically address the migration of Two-Spirit people. Teengs and Travers (2006) interviewed Two-Spirit youth who had moved to Toronto, reporting that the Two-Spirit youth in their sample did so to avoid oppression and to seek a better life. Their study acknowledged the positive effects migration can sometimes have on Two-Spirit identity formation but they further report that these youth face many challenges of life in a big city including difficulties finding housing and employment, dealing with racism and exploitation, experiencing dating/relationship violence and encountering barriers when accessing services.

Relationship violence in Two-Spirit LGBTQ Indigenous lives

Given the high rates of violent crime known to be experienced by Indigenous people generally and the high rates of domestic violence in particular (Chartrand and MacKay, 2007), it is concerning that there have been no published studies on relationship violence in the Canadian Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTQ population. A few agencies providing services for Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTQ people have attempted to provide appropriate resources and services. One example is 2 Spirited People of the First Nations in Toronto, Ontario, which has produced a set of fact sheets on domestic violence (www.2spirits.com). In addition, some studies refer to

partner violence in Indigenous LGBTQ relationships as part of a larger focus (see Taylor and Ristock, 2011).

There seems to be more information on the multiple forms and sources of violence in Indigenous LGBTQ people's lives internationally. For example Balsam et al. (2004) compared the experiences of 154 heterosexual and 25 LGBT people, all of them urban American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) adults, with respect to trauma, physical and mental health, and substance use. Compared with their heterosexual counterparts, AIAN LGBT participants reported higher rates of childhood physical abuse and more historical trauma in their families. In addition, Lehavot et al. (2009) interviewed 152 sexual minority AIAN women as part of an investigation addressing the health concerns of Two Spirit persons. Women in their study reported disturbingly high prevalence of both sexual (85%) and physical (78%) assault during childhood and adulthood, both of which were associated with worse overall mental and physical health.

Based on this review there is certainly a need for more research with the Indigenous LGBTQ/Two-Spirit community that addresses both experiences of mobility, migration and relationship violence. In this article, we bring forward the sources and experiences of violence that we heard in people's mobility/migration stories.

Methods

The research process: Community consultations and advisory committees

From the beginning of our project, we engaged in a process of collaboration and community building within Winnipeg and Vancouver. Key community members and stakeholders were contacted to raise issues related to Indigenous Two-Spirit and LGBTQ peoples and migration. In Winnipeg we consulted with 28 people from 24 programmes across 18 organizations (including Aboriginal and LGBTQ health care, resource centres and social service organizations). In Vancouver contacts were made with 15 people, including staff from 12 programmes/agencies that provide health, resource and social services to Two-Spirit people. These consultations helped inform the questions developed for our research project and reflected our commitment to ethical practice whereby Indigenous Two-Spirit peoples have direct input into the development of research questions and processes. Further, some of the community stakeholders became advisory committee members. Advisory committee members and the research team members included those who identify as TwoSpirit/LGBTQ as well as those who do not but work within Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Communities. The research team and advisory committees in Winnipeg and Vancouver adopted the Guiding Principles for Research with Aboriginal Communities and the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) (First Nations Centre, 2007). These principles are necessary in order for researchers to work with/within Indigenous communities in a respectful and ethical way and in the light of a history of researchers objectifying,

mistreating and often harming Indigenous communities. In accepting these principles we all committed to working together to produce and share meaningful knowledge in a way that respects the integrity and rights of Indigenous peoples and communities (Kovach, 2009). Ethics approval for this project was secured from the Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. (See Ristock et al., 2011 for more detail on the research process).

Recruiting participants

Criteria for participation included people of the age of majority (18 years in Manitoba, 19 years in British Columbia) or older who self-identified as Aboriginal; who self-identified as Two Spirit and/or LGBTQ, or as women who have sex with women (WSW) or men who have sex with men (MSM); who had had experiences of migration and moving (including movement from First Nation reserve communities to urban centres and/or rural communities (and back and forth) as well as moving across provinces/territories and within one geographical place); and who had some level of conversational English.

We relied on advisory committee members to help promote our research project, we distributed posters at key organizations and events, and we relied on word-of-mouth for recruitment. People were given a choice of participating in a focus group discussion or an individual interview. Based on the advice of our advisory committee we wanted to offer either the safety of a private, confidential interview or the security of a group where people could share and benefit from hearing one another's stories. Our choice of methods reflects our focus on uncovering narrative descriptions of migration and mobility and the impact on identity and health and wellness.

The study purpose, procedures, risk and benefits were reviewed with all participants and group confidentiality agreements were reviewed for focus group discussions. After providing consent, participants completed a set of background demographic questions. A semi-structured set of interview questions focused more specifically on participants' experiences of migration and factors that motivated them to move or stay in place, including experiences of home, community and belonging. We asked about impacts of moving on health and well-being, as well as their use of services and recommendations for services. The demographic questions and interview guides used in Vancouver and Winnipeg were very similar, with minor variations that reflected their specific contexts (see Passante, 2012 for more on this). All participants received a $25 honorarium to acknowledge their contribution to the study and a list of relevant community resources.

Data analysis

Transcripts were produced from the audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups. A template with an initial coding scheme related to the main research question was constructed. This was expanded to include information not captured

by the initial categories but mentioned in people's narratives. The research team coded all transcripts and identified major themes until saturated from the raw data (see Ristock et al., 2011 for more information). Advisory committees reviewed the emergent themes that were generated and suggested further areas to explore. 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. Presentations of the preliminary findings were also made to members of the Two-Spirit/LBGTQ communities in Winnipeg and Vancouver (including project participants) as a way to further ensure validity, trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis.

The research participants: Demographic information

We spoke with a total of 50 participants (24 in Winnipeg and 26 in Vancouver) including 13 interviews and three focus groups in Winnipeg and eight interviews and three focus groups in Vancouver. Most participants identified as First Nations (40), some as Métis (10) and one as Inuit (the numbers reported in this section do not always add up to 50 because participants could choose more than one descriptor for different questions). Participants ranged from 18 to 61 years of age. More specifically 15 participants were from 19–29 years of age, 13 were from 30–39 years of age, 13 were from 40–49 years of age, 6 were 50–61 years of age and 2 did not specify their ages. In terms of gender, 22 participants identified as female, 11 as male, 13 as Two-Spirit, 11 as transgender, 4 as transsexual, and 2 as queer. Regarding sexuality, 24 identified as Two-Spirit, 8 as gay, 8. as lesbian, 10 as bisexual, 5 as straight, 2 as queer, 8 as transgender, 1 as poly and 1 as butch. Participants' self-definitions do not always mirror the dominant understandings of these categories. Participants reported diversity in their educational background with 5 completing some grade school, 16 some high school, 9 a high school diploma, 11 some college/university and 11 others graduating from college or university. Some participants in this study reported living on state-sponsored assistance (26) while others worked full-time (14), part-time (9), or had casual work (10). Some received student funding (5) and others (18) reported income from work in the sex or drug trade (for more extensive demographic data see Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2011).

The demographic questionnaire also asked questions about experiences within the child welfare system, experiences of residential schools and experiences of domestic violence. We learned that similar numbers of Winnipeg and Vancouver participants had child welfare experiences with a total of 27 reporting they had been taken from their biological families. Of these 27, 9 reported that they were adopted while 18 were placed in foster care (8 reported being placed in more than six different foster care homes). Eight participants had direct experience in residential schools. In addition they reported that their parents (27) and/or grandparents (24) also attended residential schools. Responses to the one question that asked about experiences of domestic violence were very high with 43 out of 50

participants indicating they had experienced domestic violence. In Winnipeg, 19 respondents indicated that this was violence that occurred in a same-sex relationship whereas in Vancouver, 24 participants indicated they had experienced domestic violence that may have included experiences of partner violence as well as family violence. Stories of violence thus emerged in our exploration of migration and mobility even though that was not the primary focus of the interviews.

This article presents representative examples from our study of the differing forms and layers of violence experienced by many participants in our study. Our presentation of the findings is not meant to be definitive or generalizable but rather seeks to interrogate our understandings of and responses to relationship violence within the personal social context of migration and mobility, and the larger social context of state and structural violence. As Andrea Smith (2005: 151) writes, 'our strategies to combat violence within communities (sexual/domestic violence) must be informed by approaches that also combat violence against communities, including state violence – police brutality, prisons, militarism, racism, colonialism and economic exploitation'. Our analysis is further informed by the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality has been proposed as an important theoretical framework for studying relationship violence so that the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, class and the systems of oppression and privilege that create the social conditions for relationship violence are also examined (Kanuha, 2013). In our findings we show the multiple layers and intersections of structural and interpersonal violence with gender, sexuality, race and class in the lives of our participants and are reminded that there is not one simple story of relationship violence, migration and mobility.

Layers of violence: Mapping the violence in people's lives

Relationship violence

The findings from our larger research project indicate that participants in this study have moved many times in their highly mobile lives, often starting with experiences of forced migration, such as foster care and residential school as noted earlier. They spoke of struggles with gaining acceptance for the different parts of their identities (for example as gay, male, First Nations, youth) both within Indigenous communities and within urban LGBTQ communities. Their experiences of dislocation often had a negative impact on their health and well-being including increased substance use, increased stress and mental health issues, exposure to physical and sexual assaults and contracting HIV.

Some participants spoke of physical abuse in a relationship being the reason for them moving to another location, as in the following three accounts:

> You know, the reason why I left was because she held a knife to my throat . . . And I couldn't stand the fact that I was being walked all over. (First Nations, lesbian, female, 30s, Winnipeg)

> I've definitely been in relationships that have been abusive, one being emotionally – it really goes hand in hand – abusive, which was escalating towards the end and I got out, just because I couldn't take it anymore. (Métis, TwoSpirit, lesbian, female, 40s, Vancouver)

> I had to get out of this abusive relationship that I was in and I chose Vancouver because my sister, my older sister lives here, and if I went back to [name of city], my ex would have found me and it would have been really horrible. (First Nations, lesbian, 30s, Vancouver)

However, others described being alone and vulnerable and then entering into an abusive relationship after recently migrating to an urban centre:

> Actually he moved from [name of town] to Winnipeg. He never wants to go home. I empathize with him. He's got no parents. I get along with him. He's a little abusive but I can, I can put up with him. I like him, I love my friend. (First Nations, TwoSpirit, gay, male, 40s, Winnipeg)

> I was with an abusive man for about four years. He was really mean to me, you know . . . because the way we'd argue and fight and physically he used to fight me and I'd never fight back because I loved him so much . . . That was my first gay love ever, and I left him. That was the first man I've ever loved. (First Nations, gay, male, 20s, Winnipeg)

Most of the participants' experiences of relationship violence reflect what we have come to know from other research on LGBTQ relationship violence; for example, the pattern of abuse occurring in a first same-sex/gender relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Ristock, 2002) – 'That was my first gay love ever' – and occurring in contexts of dislocation such as being new to a city, alone, vulnerable and without support where having an abusive partner may be seen as better than having no partner at all (Ristock, 2002) – 'He's a little abusive but I can put up with him'. We also see the way dominant discourses of love often underpin domestic violence (Donovan and Hester, 2014) – 'I loved him so much'; 'I loved my friend' and we see a pattern of some leaving when the abuse becomes more physically violent (Ristock, 2002) – 'The reason why I left was because she held a knife to my throat'; 'I couldn't take it anymore'. And we perhaps see the relevance of intersectionality in the particular power of intimacy, despite the negative experiences of violence in their relationship, for same-sex couples from the same racial/ethnic group who share similar experiences of marginalization.

The majority of participants that we interviewed did not seek out domestic violence services which is also consistent with the findings of many other studies addressing help-seeking behaviours in relation to same-sex/gender partner violence (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Ristock and Timbang, 2005). In fact, when asked about why they did not access services, participants in our study spoke of the

need for culturally-specific resources that would have helped them transition from Aboriginal communities to the city and that would acknowledge their identities as both Indigenous and LGBTQ within specific histories of cultural loss and trauma. For example:

> I needed some other Aboriginal person or community or resource that can help me transition from the reserve, which is very limiting, to me is very limiting to understanding what the city is all about. How can I adapt to the city life? The transition period to me was, I almost wound up on the street. I almost wound up selling myself just to get money. (First Nations, Two-Spirit, male, Vancouver)

> If I had a magic wand, I'd have a centre for Two Spirits, to focus on their health, their problems. What we face is definitely different from gay people because we're coming from a position of power that was taken. This is completely different. (First Nations, Two-Spirit, gay, male, 20s, Winnipeg)

The statement 'what we face is different from gay people because we are coming from a position of power that was taken' is important to highlight as the participant is referring to the specific cultural history where Two-Spirit people once had a valued cultural role in pre-contact First Nations that has been lost through colonization. This is a very different experience from that of many non-Indigenous gay people who have gained power in mainstream society in recent decades and generally have no sense of losing a higher social status held in an early period of history.

The term 'minority stress' has been developed to refer to the negative impact of an oppressive culture on members of stigmatized and marginalized minority groups (Meyer, 2003). Experiences of minority stress have also been correlated to experiences of LGBTQ relationship violence (Balsam and Szymanski, 2005). However, while important as a psychological concept, a focus on 'stressors' whether internal or external does not adequately capture the unique and specific cultural loss and structural roots of the dislocation being described by the participants in this study as noted earlier (see also Donovan and Hester, 2014 for a critique of minority stress). The experiences of participants in our study also reinforce the findings of other studies that have shown how domestic violence services working within an individualistic model that flattens complex and powerful social contexts into personal stressors, have suppressed the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender and sexuality in their responses and have thus created barriers for sexual minorities of colour who wish to seek help for abuse (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

A framework of intersectionality informed by historical and social analyses of the contexts that support and normalize violence is needed to fully understand our participants' experiences of violence within their relationships. What stands out is the large number of participants whose lives are saturated with violence from childhood onwards. Early dislocation from family of origin and home communities is very common amongst our participants as reported in the demographic

information. It appears that the connection between LGBTQ relationship violence and other experiences of violence is often subtle, either because the other kinds of abuse happened in the past, or because the violence is normalized as part of life's everyday backdrop. Yet sometimes participants are very clear about the concentric circles of connection between their domestic violence experiences (including family violence and partner violence), the violence within their communities, and a larger context of colonization. It became evident through this study that if we were to only bring forward and examine experiences of partner violence we would be lacking a complete understanding of the ways in which multiple layers of violence intersect to affect the lives of many participants. Experiences of violence are clearly not neatly separated or contained within intimate relationships but are informed by and co-exist with experiences of violence in the street, and in communities, as well as through structural and state violence (see also Holmes, 2009). As such, established siloed categories like hate crimes, family violence, and so on, can become even more difficult to mobilize because of what they cannot contain. As Pantalone et al. (2011: 204) state about their research on pathways to partner violence for sexual minority men with HIV: 'interpretation of this data is problematic if analyzed outside the larger context of institutional heterosexism, structural and economic violence and prejudice in which the respondents live . . . it is critical to take into account the very real structural conditions under which sexual and gender minorities negotiate their everyday lives'.

Violence in the streets and in home communities

In taking into account the larger contexts surrounding experiences of relationship violence we heard stories of struggle to find home, safety and belonging. Participants who moved to urban centres from smaller communities often spoke about their experiences of violence in the streets of their new neighbourhoods. Sometimes the violence reflected homophobia and/or racism (what might be called hate crimes) and sometimes it was the result of gangs, drugs and unstable situations related to poverty. The overall lack of safety and the volatility of the new communities that people now found themselves in are reflected in their accounts:

> In certain parts of the city, I would hold my boyfriend's hand. But not around here, [name of area], you know. It's not safe. You could get clubbed, you know, from behind or something. Like I got stabbed in the neck by a girl with a pen, cause she was trying to hit on me . . . And then my boyfriend came and sat beside me and kissed me, and I said this is my boyfriend. She got really angry and she just three times stabbed me in the neck. (First Nations, gay, male, 20s, Winnipeg)

> I got held up at gunpoint, you know, last week. I'm okay. It happens. Which sounds dysfunctional. But he obviously, you know, he was Aboriginal – we grew up together, best of friends. He left to, he was gone into care and floated around for awhile, you know, fell through the cracks a lot of the time and then finally moved in with some

> white people. I'm not saying that they weren't good ... it's affected him and he's not an apple but he's red, who had to conform to be white in order to survive. (First Nations, Two-Spirit, gay, male, 20s, Winnipeg)

> I was in hospital for a year, 13 months. I was on life support ... I was mugged, yeah. I don't know ... I don't think it was a gay-bashing because I went to a party prior to that, and the people that were at the party they're the ones that jumped me. I had booze on me, plus I had some weed. (First Nations, TwoSpirit, gay, male, 40s, Winnipeg)

At the same time, many people spoke about the lack of belonging and support that they experienced within their home communities to which they often returned:

> I went to a Powwow just recently, on my mom's reserve, [name], and the people there, like I saw absolutely no Two-Spirited people ... Because it's sad, but some, not most, but some Aboriginal people are also homophobic. They're not supportive of Two-Spirit people. (Métis, bisexual, female, 18, Winnipeg)

> I don't think a lot of people from the Aboriginal community would recognize me as an Aboriginal person because of the colour of my skin. It's very light. But that's something I grew up with, even on reserve, you know, you're too white man. Don't live here. Go back to where you came from. (First Nations, TwoSpirit, male, Vancouver)

Thus for many participants in our study, they lacked social support and had no sense of belonging either within their home communities because of lateral oppression (Fieland et al., 2007) or within their new neighbourhoods. For many participants, life at the intersection of traumatic histories of gender, sexuality and indigeneity in Canada was a mobile life experienced as profound exclusion and danger, as belonging nowhere and finding safety nowhere.

State and structural violence

Beyond personal encounters of violence in relationships, streets, and in home communities, participants' narratives also reveal differing forms of racist, homophobic state and structural violence. Many spoke directly of negative encounters with the police:

> I'd probably have to say I've had some discrimination by cops. Just because they think of me as another Indian. I've had a couple of experiences that I wasn't too happy with about that. (Vancouver focus group)

> We phoned the ambulance for this elderly lady we go visit, right. There was an incident that was happening up the street and ... they had the street crime unit and stuff like that and then the paramedics, the lady paramedics is like, I think you girls should

> go ... Go if you don't want to get tased by cops. (First Nations, TwoSpirit, lesbian, bisexual, female, 30s, Winnipeg)

Other participants spoke about difficulties finding employment and housing:

> I have applied for work at a various number of restaurants, and I found too that they are very racist and prejudiced. I applied for this one particular job one time. I went there at a specific time for an interview and ... the waitress was saying the chef was busy at the time ... I went back and returned a few minutes later and she went to the kitchen and the chef was looking through the window by the kitchen, and when I was there, he looked out, looked over at me and seen that I was a Native, and the waitress came back and said, oh the job was taken just now. And I was so shattered, you know. (Vancouver Focus Group)

> There seems to be like a lot of problems with affordable housing. Yeah, cause I know like people who appear as a visible minority, especially when they're Aboriginal, like if they sound Aboriginal on the phone, they don't get the call back ... [Also] like I know a lot of landlords get really upset if they figure out that, like those two roommates aren't roommates, you know. (Métis, Two-Spirit, bisexual, queer, female, 20s, Winnipeg)

In addition to lacking community support, participants could not expect any support from police and struggled to negotiate the systemic discrimination they encountered when looking for work and for housing. Their experiences reflect what we know: that generations of Canadians have been exposed to racist discourses about Indigenous people as a way to justify the residential schools systems, the reserve system and other forms of colonization. We also know that Indigenous people are over-represented in Canada's prison system as a result of poverty, discrimination and marginalization, suggesting systemic bias in policing and the criminal justice system (Taylor and Ristock, 2011). Based on the experiences of these participants, state systems seem to particularly endanger and fail Indigenous people living at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Colonization

Finally, many participants spoke directly about the impact of colonization in their lives and in their relationships with their families, their cultures and their identities as TwoSpirit/LGBTQ as reflected in the following:

> ... at one time Two Spirited people, we had a special place in the community, but in modern times, we're looked on as trash even by our people, cause of the European mainstream influence ... they've been Catholicized or assimilated by the Roman Catholic church, they've taken those values to heart and they look down on gender diversity and sexual diversity. (First Nations, lesbian, transgender mtf, Vancouver)

> You know, the Europeans have won in that respect. They took away our identity, our niche in our own community is gone. It's stripped away. It's hard, I would be lucky to find that in Canada, I think, to find a community where they go, oh you're Two Spirited. Wow. Welcome. (First Nations, TwoSpirit, gay, male, 20s, Winnipeg)

Because of the blatant evidence of such experiences of the ongoing legacy of colonization in Indigenous Two-Spirit LGBTQ people's lives, some researchers have proposed that colonization be considered as a broader social determinant of health for Indigenous people (Czyzewski, 2011). Lindhorst and Tajima (2008) argue for the need to consider contexts such as the intergenerational transmission of historical trauma in our understanding of the varied experiences of intimate partner violence.

Conclusion

Participants in our study often experienced a lifetime of violence from childhood through adulthood. Their experiences reveal the specific intersections of personal, state and structural violence experienced by many Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Indigenous people living in Canada that are tied to a larger historical and social context of colonization. Colonization has been inadequately considered in the research literature on LGBTQ relationship violence and requires greater attention. The experiences of participants in this study also reveal the way various forms of violence are supported by structures that sustain and create disadvantages and inequalities. In this way the findings support an intersectional framework for understanding relationship violence. Finally we can see the way experiencing violence from multiple sources can have a normalizing effect – in this context domestic violence can seem ordinary, almost expected and not easily challenged. And we see how living at the intersections of indigeneity, class, gender, sexuality, forced mobility and migration can create vulnerabilities such as lack of social and formal supports, isolation, disconnection, and lack of options for staying safe.

While the findings from this small, exploratory qualitative study are not generalizable they do have implications for future research. More studies are needed to explore multiple and layered experiences of violence so that we can better understand the way structural violence impacts experiences of relationship violence and vice versa. Further we need to better understand the cumulative impact of multiple forms of violence on experiences of victimization and help seeking. Finally we need more community-based research within Canadian Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTQ communities given the lack of research on relationship violence and migration.

This interrogation of domestic violence in the context of mobility and migration shows that we need to keep our efforts at responding to relationship violence aligned with the broader struggles against oppressive systems that sustain and rationalize state and structural violence in its many forms. At the same time we need to attend to the specifics of relationship violence in people's lives in order to understand the differing contexts in which violence takes hold and is reinforced.

This means recognizing and understanding the diversity of spaces in which domestic violence occurs so that we do not construct some people's experiences as the exception or keep them at the margins (Holmes, 2009; Ristock, 2011; Taylor and Ristock, 2011). It also means examining the ways in which the dominant paradigms to understand relationship violence (gender, power and control) still often centre white people's experiences and reproduce gender and sexuality binaries and normativity instead of looking at larger contexts that create and sustain the conditions in which violence occurs (Ristock, 2002). Further, as Smith (2005: 153) states, instead of asking, 'What should a domestic violence program look like?', we need to ask 'What would it take to end violence against these people?'. Her reframed question is a challenging one that reminds us of the transformative imperative that needs to underlie all work on domestic violence.

In Canada, part of the answer might be to work towards reconciliation and for large scale education about the residential school system and other forms of colonization and its social and family effects on Indigenous people in order to counter lingering racist colonization discourses of Aboriginal disposability (Taylor and Ristock, 2011). It also means developing innovative community responses to violence that move us beyond and outside of our established responses that more often treat relationship violence as something separate from sexual assault, and separate from homophobic and racist attacks (hate crimes), and separate again from moving to a new city (see Russo and Spatz, 2007). The participants in our study made several recommendations for services including transition services that are sensitive to the interlocking effects of gender, sexuality and the impact of colonization in Indigenous cultures to better assist those who are moving to new cities. They also recommended enlarging the focus from client-based services to fostering community health and well-being.

Finally, in spite of all of the experiences of violence, migration, mobility and the impact of colonization on Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTQ people, it is important to acknowledge the resilience of the participants in our study, many of whom remained hopeful and open to relationships at all levels. One participant, in particular, offered this hopeful vision of future belonging:

> My sense of belonging is that I am appreciated by all societies, be it straight, gay, lesbian or transgendered, whatever. I am accepted by all societies and they feel, they make me feel real welcome and feel protected, like that I never have to look over my shoulder. (First Nations, TwoSpirit, trans mtf, female, 40s, Vancouver)

Thus researching and responding to LGBTQ relationship violence is also about creating a world without violence that allows all people to feel welcomed and protected, never having to look over their shoulders in fear or shame, not consigned by the ongoing impacts of colonization to lives of repeated dislocation in search of community. If Indigenous Two-Spirit LGBTQ people are to have a place in that world, service providers, policymakers and researchers need to understand and respond to the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, class, indigeneity as

they are experienced in a context of colonization that keeps so many in lives saturated with violence.

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Note

1. To better contextualize the quotations, we provide some of the identity descriptors and demographic information as provided by our participants. We do not include all details in order to preserve their anonymity. For a few focus group participants we cannot directly link their demographic information to the quotations that we have pulled from the larger transcript.

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Janice Ristock PhD is Provost and Vice-President, (Academic) at the University of Manitoba and Professor in the Women's and Gender Studies Program. She has been researching violence in 2S LGBTQ relationships for over 20 years.

Art Zoccole is Anishinawbe Ogokwe from Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation in Ontario and currently resides in Toronto. Art has been involved in activism for the last three decades on issues relating to Indigenous people and HIV/AIDS. Art is currently a Board member of the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council. Art is the Executive Director of Two-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, a not-for-profit Indigenous social service agency with membership comprising Indigenous Two Spirit, gay lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex individuals.

Lisa Passante MSW works as a School Social Worker in the Pembina Trails School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Jonathon Potskin is a Doctoral Student in the School of Social and Political Science, University of Sydney. His main research is on Indigenous youth and rap music in Canada and Australia, using music to continue cultural knowledge systems. Jonathon is a Nehiyaw (Cree) and Apeetogason (Métis) and is a Member of the Sawridge First Nation in Alberta, Canada, and has a passion for sharing his cultural knowledge of the Cree and the Métis people of Western Canada.