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To cite this article: Annie Pullen Sansfacon, Johnny Boivin, Pasha A. Partridge, Diane Labelle & Edward Ou Jin Lee (06 Feb 2024): Mamu: trans indigenous and two-spirit youth coming together to define their needs and to take action, Journal of LGBT Youth, DOI: [10.1080/19361653.2024.2309520](https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2024.2309520)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2024.2309520>



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Published online: 06 Feb 2024.



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Mamu: trans indigenous and two-spirit youth coming together to define their needs and to take action

Annie Pullen Sansfacon^a, Johnny Boivin^b, Pasha A. Partridge^c, Diane Labelle^d and Edward Ou Jin Lee^e

^aSchool of Social Work, Université de Montréal Ringgold Standard Institution, Montreal, QC, Canada; ^bCRC ReParE on Partnership Research and on the Empowerment of Vulnerable Youth, University of Montreal, Montreal, QC, Canada; ^cProject 10, Montreal, QC, CA, Canada; ^dFirst Nations Adult Education School Council, Kahnawake, QC, Canada; ^eCanada Research Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Migrations, University of Montreal, Montreal, QC, Canada

ABSTRACT

Youth who are both trans and Indigenous, whether or not they identify as Two-Spirit experience multiple forms of structural violence at the intersection of gender and Indigeneity. Whether these young people live on or off reserve, the studies have highlighted specific challenges experienced in particular in connection with self-identification, conditions of significant poverty, violence, and lack of access to health care. health. This paper presents the results of an action research project using Talking Circles co-facilitated by an Elder and two Two-Spirit young people. Developed in collaboration with a local community organization the Talking Circles took place over a period of 21 meetings held between September 2021 and April 2022, in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) and online. The participants of the Talking Circles discussed their most pressing issues, the underlying causes of these issues, and possible solutions to address them. This paper examines the themes uncovered during the projects as well as three main issues that emerged from the discussions: the lack of access to safe spaces, the lack of representation and the lack of education. The article also discusses their resilience and how they take action to change the world around them.

ARTICLE HISTORY



Received 30 June 2023
Revised 11 January 2024
Accepted 17 January 2024

KEYWORDS

Trans indigenous youth;
two-spirit youth; violence;
social action

Introduction

In many Indigenous cultures in North America, there has been recognition of Two-Spirit (2S) individuals who held spiritual roles and vital functions in their communities (Hunt, 2016; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Plaut & Kirk, 2012). This was so until the arrival of European and colonization that followed. From then on, 2S people has been slowly erased as colonization forced them to conform to the binary categories of male or female genders (Hunt, 2016).

CONTACT Annie Pullen Sansfacon  a.pullen.sansfacon@umontreal.ca  School of Social Work, University of Montreal, CP6128 succ. Centre-Ville, Montreal, QC H3C 3J7, Canada.
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The term 2S has diverse significations today. It can include both youth whose sexual orientations diverge from heterosexuality and youth who are transgender and gender non-conforming (Hunt, 2016). It can stress the interdependence between culture and spirituality and a gender or sexual orientation deeply rooted in Indigenous culture (First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC), n.d.) and can include a political standpoint that recognize the role of colonization in the contemporary experience of transphobia and homophobia present in many Indigenous communities (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004). Some Trans¹ Indigenous (TI) people will use the term 2S describe themselves, depending on how they understand and perceive their gender and their connection to their communities (Scheim et al., 2013), but 2S identity is not specific to TI people and may be used by LGB Indigenous people, or by Indigenous people who perceive the world from multiple gender perspectives, to self-identify or describe themselves (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004). As such, 2S has many meanings and is not easily defined (Laing, 2018). As well, it is not recognized by all Indigenous communities, nor is it uniformly defined by all communities (Ristock et al., 2010, 2019). This lack of recognition of 2S people may be the result of colonialism (e.g. the reserve system, forced relocation, residential schools, etc.), which is so profound that some communities may not yet have claimed the idea of 2S as having been, or as currently being, part of their culture. Some 2S people may also have difficulty claiming or recognizing this identity for themselves (First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC), n.d.; Plaut & Kirk, 2012; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2022). The many ways of understanding 2S identity highlight the importance of self-identification, with respect to both Indigenous and gender identity (Ristock et al., 2010).

Some research have delved into the experiences of 2S youth, encompassing both those with non-heterosexual sexual orientations and those who are trans or gender-nonconforming (Hunt, 2016). This makes it less evident how the intersections of indigeneity and gender influence their experiences.

This project aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of TI youth experiences, including how they define themselves, their unique challenges, factors contributing to their resilience, and social mechanisms of resistance promoting their well-being. Rooted in the belief that research should drive change, the project had two primary goals: first, to offer TI youth in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) a platform for discussing their experiences, identifying personal, social, and political issues, and empowering them to challenge oppressive structures and environments. Second, the project sought to enhance knowledge regarding the issues, challenges, and opportunities specific to this group of young individuals.

In keeping with Indigenous research and community practices, it is important to clarify the positions of team members who are also authors of this article. Two coresearchers led the project: [Name], a member of the Huron-Wendat Nation of Wendake, served as the Principal Investigator (PI), alongside coresearcher [Name], who is racialized. The team also included [Name], a two-spirit identifying Kahnawake community member collaborating on the project, and two youth research assistants who acted as co-facilitators for the group: [Name], both Innu and Atikamekw and a two-spirit youth, and [Name], also identifying as two-spirit, with both Inuk and Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk) heritage. Lastly, [Name] fulfilled the role of Talking Circle Elder, being Kanien'kehà:ka and actively engaged in her community.

Trans indigenous youth

TI youth navigate multiple layers of systemic oppression, necessitating a comprehensive exploration of their context (Hunt, 2016; Scheim et al., 2013). Yet, only a very small fraction of research on 2S youth specifically focuses on the experience of TI youth, pushing their experiences out of the view of healthcare professionals and policy makers (Scheim et al., 2013). A recent study suggests that Black, Indigenous and other People of Color (BIPOC) youth experience higher levels of suicide attempts and discrimination from their non-racialized peers (Chan et al., 2023). Another recent study underscores the unique experiences of TI youth residing outside Indigenous Quebec communities and reveals their encounters with various forms of structural violence, resulting from the intersection of their gender and indigeneity, both within and outside their Indigenous communities, and specific challenges related to self-identification (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2022). Other research has also illuminated the specific conditions faced by TI individuals, emphasizing elevated rates of poverty, homelessness, inadequate housing, unmet healthcare needs, experiences of trans-related violence, and increased suicide risk (Scheim et al., 2013).

Research that highlights resiliency is scarce and even more so on TI youth. Some research shows that 2S people have great levels of individual, social and cultural resiliency, and draw from various strategies to do so such as doing prayers and ceremonies (Elm et al., 2016) and gathering together (Indigenous Trans and Two Spirit Stories of Resilience 2023). However, to this day, little is known about the specific strategies of resistance TI youth use to address challenge they face.

Material and methods

The project was built in partnership with Project 10 (P10), a Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) based organization that meets the needs of lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, 2S (LGBT2S) and other sexual and gender minority youth aged 14 to 25. P10 suggested to conduct the project as their team had witnessed a growing need for services for TI/2S youth and wanted to ensure that they understood this population's need and were able to support them appropriately.

A combination of Indigenous methodology (IM) (Strega & Brown, 2015), and Social Action Research (SAR) methods (Fleming & Ward, 2004) was used to facilitate the emergence of knowledge and action. Because methodologies influence how we interpret findings and construct representations (Potts & Brown, 2015), the integration of IM was crucial so that both the process and the outcomes of this research would be culturally relevant and empowering for youth participants and for the process to be severed from its colonial academic roots (Hunt, 2016; Strega & Brown, 2015). IM methodologies are diverse but generally aim to challenge oppressive structures and status quo, and to respect Indigenous world views and empower Indigenous people in the process (Strega & Brown, 2015). This methodological combination was proposed to allow the project to be flexible, empowering and change-oriented at the same time as it draws on robust anti-colonial framework.

SAR was used to provide a structure for the project (Fleming & Ward, 2017; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2014). This method draws on group work to facilitate a reflexive process of information gathering, analysis, understanding, action and reflection that is mirrored in its practical application (Fleming & Ward, 2017). SAR is built to be *participatory, inductive, critical* of power dynamics and their relation to social change, *anti-oppressive, iterative, and cyclical* to assist people to attain collective power through coming together in groups (Fleming & Ward, 2004). Broadly, SAR facilitates a group process to investigate *what* issues they are facing, *why* those issues exist, and *how* to collectively take action to change those issues; the group then *takes action*, and finally *reflects* upon the results of that action.

Data was gathered through group sessions in the form of Talking Circles, which are deeply rooted in many Indigenous cultures (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014). In the context of Indigenous research, IM, including storytelling, should be seen as an appropriate way of knowing (Strega & Brown, 2015). In Talking Circles, participants talk, often passing a talking stick around, ensuring a culturally relevant approach to the study. One after the others, youth were invited to share about their experiences, looking at 'what, why and how' questions, as suggested by the SAR approach; apart from that initial framework, group participants were invited to take part in the decisions related to the research process (meeting modalities, how to disseminate data, etc). The Elders roles were to open and close the Talking Circle meetings and facilitate discussion

with the two RAs². The Elder was compensated to participate in the project³.

Participants were recruited by an online invitation circulated through the partner organization as well as the research Principal Investigator and RA's social medias. The invitation to participate included the dates, the location of the meeting, the objective of the project. Interested participant could either communicate with RAs prior the Talking Circle meeting, or just join without prior notice.

Talking Circle took place face to face, as well as online to adapt to the evolution of COVID 19 pandemics. To accommodate participant's needs, and to increase accessibility, two different times, on alternating Sundays and Thursdays were proposed for the meetings. The Elder was only available on Thursday because there weren't sufficient resources to cover her attendance at meetings that weren't originally included in the funding application. However, this didn't prevent the participants from gathering on Sunday. Open notes were taken during meetings, and participants were invited to comment and analyze content as the project was moving forward. Notes were recorded on FlipChart (face to face) and Jamboard (online). Meeting notes were transcribed. Twenty-one meetings took place, 17 of which were online, and four of which were in-person. Five different people aged under 25 (with one participant turning 26 during the course of data collection) participated in the meetings, in addition to two RAs sharing positionalities with the participants and the Elder. Because of the nature of Talking Circle which invite each person one after one to speak when it is their turn, interventions from RAs and the Elders were recorded in the data. In fact, Elder's participation is considered fundamental in Indigenous cultures, as they pass traditional knowledge and belief, and which is considered empowering for youth (Yang & Warburton, 2018). RAs Participants signed a consent form at the outset. Thematic analysis was conducted between meetings, and insights were shared and refined through participant feedback. The analysis was structured using an Excel spreadsheet. The iterative process of discussion with the participants and the team's reflection on the research material yielded data organized into 3 broad categories related to the *what*, the *why*, and the *how*: 2S identity (*what*), experiences of discrimination, violence and exclusion (*what* and *why*), and way forward (*how*). The project was approved by the PI university ethics committee.

Results

2S identity

Interpretations of 2S identity were diverse and covered multiple dimensions, ranging from spiritual to sexual identities. As described by one of the

participants, 2S identity is ‘*a web of identities, a fluid term to describe a person*’.

Sometimes described as a broad term used to name ways of being within a specific nation, it was also specific to gender and sexual minority Indigenous young people:

[2S is a] Placeholder identity to uncover nation-specific terminologies

[2S is an] Umbrella term to support Indigenous Queer* & Trans* People

The term was used to describe an experience of interconnectedness between sexuality and gender, as well as between different genders. Although gender is often understood in binary terms, that is men and women, and gender and sexuality are often described as separate dimensions, 2S, a term that is described as being ‘*exclusively reserved to Indigenous people*’ combines all aspects together and therefore rejects binary dichotomies:

Two-Spirit is a rope made from two strands that are intimately connected, gender and sexuality.

[2S is an] Embodiment of masculine & feminine.

Anchoring the term 2S in their indigeneity was seen as particularly important for participants because identifying as a sexual or gender diversity person was understood as being particularly challenging because of the colonial history that has greatly affected Indigenous people. For them, the difficulties faced today were all caused by colonialism and its organizational structures and systems that are grounded in heteronormativity and in patriarchy. Hence, youth felt that 2S, as an identity, allowed them to explore, understand and name their experience as gender and sexual minority youth in a way that directly challenges this colonialist view.

[2S identity] provides a space to explore gender and sexuality in a space [sic] to uncover our needs as Two-Spirit people, to uncover our most authentic Indigenous self in this colonial world.

The discussion around their 2S identity also allowed them to go beyond sexual and gender identity and put forward a spiritual component and healing. Participants explained that 2S is firmly grounded in who they are and their relationships to their ancestors:

Reconnection to truest self; roles & responsibilities in community

There seems to be finally a connection coming together. We know the how was colonization, now we have the generation of adoptees, and we can connect with Two-Spirit because we live in two worlds and continue to live in two worlds.

Participants discussed how they believed that before the arrival of the Europeans, 2S people were playing important roles in communities: they ‘[we were] medicine people.’ Thus, 2S connected them to their history, and help them challenge colonialism and re-anchor themselves in the important roles that were upheld by 2S people before colonization. In this sense, 2S identity was seen as a source of strenght.

Part of our gift is that we are healers – not just of others but also to ourself, when people come to us we feel it as 2S but we feel it as a different way.

However, being TI/2S also meant being identified by others as sexual/gender minority groups. This, combined to being Indigenous, and to the long history of colonialism, brought many challenges for young participants.

Experiences of violence, discrimination, and exclusion

Participants extensively discussed the challenges they faced as well the reason behind them. Participants felt that they experienced specific challenges as TI/2S youth, which were mainly related to violence, discrimination, and colonialism. Some of these types of violence were interpersonal while others are structural.

Experiences of interpersonal and lateral violence

Lateral violence was often reported and understood as being closely linked to intergenerational trauma experienced by many families, caused by colonialism which has erased much of their cultures, including TI/2S people. This type of violence manifested itself within families, within the TI/2S communities as well as within the broader Indigenous communities.

Colonial system is still enacting genocide upon our community.

In their families, lateral violence manifest itself through lack of support and denial of TI/2S identities, often after participants came out to their family members. One participant, for example, explained that their⁴ parents ‘took it really bad,’ while a second participant mentioned having to start hormone therapy without telling them. Additionally, a third participant was subjected to plain denial of their identity as one of the family members did not believe them.

I think that’s where a lot of trauma [manifest itself], understanding lateral violence, like when I went to my sisters and they would say no I don’t believe you [about gender identity].

Lateral violence was also flagrant within the broader Indigenous communities and was experienced by community members, including some

Elders, who were also impacted by colonialism which, consequently, affected their understanding of gender and acceptance of TI/2S youth. Discussions around precolonial knowledge systems lead participants to realize that their communities were previously inclusive of 2S people, who were rather celebrated. However, those roles were lost with the arrival of the Settlers:

Two-Spirit teachings went underground because a lot of our roles were ceremony roles. Two-Spirit people were the medicine people. It's because of Christianity that we lost all of this.

For participants, lateral violence against 2S people was therefore resulting from the long-lasting experience of colonialism and specifically the religious indoctrination of Indigenous people, which left many of them with experiences of intergenerational trauma. Participants felt colonialism had a devastating impact on 2S lives as it was responsible for the erasure of 2S identities and made it harder to find safe spaces for 2S Indigenous youth to connect, an important way to healing: *'Connection with other Indigenous people helps to ground us, and promote wellbeing'*. However, developing or maintaining those connections as 2S youth with the broader community was challenging because those in position to facilitate the healing process also lost their traditional understanding of gender, placing TI/2S in a potential situation of lateral violence.

In addition to being connected to the broader Indigenous community, connecting to other 2S youth was considered important, but also appeared to be a challenge. Again, lateral violence prevented 2S youth from offering and receiving support, both within and outside reserves, and therefore, prevented access or even development of safe spaces needed to heal.

There's a lot of gaslighting. It's harder to trust people because our safety systems don't exist.

Negative mindsets drive me down – too many sceptics/too many people cannot put their trauma down/how to be a leader and put down your need and trauma to be there for others.

This was particularly true for TI youth, who experienced specific challenges within the 2S community. The absence of TI Talking Circles resulted in them having to join non-mixed groups (e.g. groups of exclusively Indigenous cis women, or Indigenous cis men) but those did not meet their specific needs as TI/2S and was often deemed as unsafe.

Participants also felt the need to engage in traditional cultural practices but were often prevented from accessing spaces allowing them to do so. In fact, participants mentioned that access to these practices was essential to their healing process, and therefore to the improvement of their overall wellbeing. Additionally, if being 2S already presented its own challenges

due to the way colonialism shaped the understanding of gender and the resulting prejudice, other aspects of their identity and experiences, such as having an addiction or living with HIV, intersected with their ability to access these spaces: *'Some people are not allowed to ceremony if they have HIV'*. As a result, specific cultural spaces, such as sweat lodges and ceremonies, were considered unsafe due to experiences of prejudice and discrimination.

Participants also acknowledged that the difficulty of accessing safe spaces was particularly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic since many places had to shut down due to sanitary measures. Specifically, youth discussed how certain Indigenous cultural spaces, such as sweat lodges, were completely inaccessible during that time, which negatively impacted on their mental health and general wellbeing.

Not being able to go to sweat took a big toll on my health. I have been able to go to sweat since I was 3 years old but with Covid, I cannot. This has taken a toll on me.

In sum, experiences of intergenerational trauma caused by colonialism resulted in knowledge keepers, ceremonialists, and family members and broader community members lacking appropriate knowledge to support TI/2S youth. This was said to 'create disfunction for all parties'.

Experiences of structural violence

Experiences of structural violence were described as directly tied to a lack of culturally safe services for Indigenous people. Discrimination based on indigeneity prevented 2S youth from accessing services, such as emergency housing, financial supports, resources for food and other essentials, as well as Indigenous/2S-friendly healthcare providers. Participants felt that this further reduces already limited access to services, whether online or in physical spaces:

For like trans femme folk, there's a lot of prejudice. Because of the miseducation about queerness and transness, that stems from the residential schools and AIDS epidemic. It's harder to navigate these systems in Canada because of the anti-Indigenous racism that has been indoctrinated in everyone.

In the rare cases where safer services were available, they were not well adapted to the specific needs of 2S youth. As a result, experiences of structural violence had a cumulative effect: the intersection between Indigenous and 2S identities exacerbated the felt impact of these structures of oppression on participants.

An issue Two-Spirit folks deal with on top of Indigenous issues is multiple social issues in Indigenous communities.

For participants, having intersecting marginalized identities (i.e. TI/2S and disability)—meant that 2S youth experienced multiple layers of oppression, resulting in them being regularly discriminated against and prevented from accessing the services they need. Inevitably, these difficulties were said to be detrimental to 2S wellbeing.

In fact, finding and accessing services was especially challenging for youth who specifically identified as TI. A combination of scarcity of resources and lack of knowledge of service availability made it difficult for youth find services that met their needs, such as gender affirming care (e.g. hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries). Similarly, to participants who did not identify as trans, accessing health and mental health resources was just as much of a challenge since the structures and policies that surround them were not built with their needs in mind.

The presence of structural violence and discrimination was therefore attributed to systems being built following a '*cis-white-eurochristian-hetero-patriarchy*' model. These systems of oppression were described as preventing 2S people from being represented and visible within services and the structures that support them as Indigenous/2S people often face barriers to access to education and employment:

[...] another barrier is that people prevent us from joining those position of power. Indigenous spot at schools help Indigenous folks get to education. This should also be the same for 2S and queer folks. We need to empower those people to get higher position.

For participants, the presence and visibility of TI/2S people in various institutions was vital to increasing representation and creating opportunities to educate others about 2S lives—which in turn would make services more accessible and culturally safe.

Understanding the barriers that we face, acts of discrimination do happen, like when we experience physical assault and explaining it to local authorities. There's a lot of homophobic/transphobic people in there and they teach their subordinates to do the same. It's ciswomen and cismen. It's harder for us because we don't have people who have our backs, within the societies we live in. There's lack of support systems to navigate the cis hetero normative systems.

Moreover, the current lack of representation of 2S in positions of power and the invisibilization of 2S identities in all community and social spheres, including LGBTQ+ communities, impacts youth by making it difficult for them to understand and recognize who they truly are, in addition to exposing them to potential harm.

If we don't have 2S representation, people showing us how good it can be, how empowering it can be, then you can't relate to it and you can't have any positive

thoughts associated with it - even if you're told you're 2S, you might be in denial and not identify with it if all you hear and see is negative things.

In sum, 2S youth felt that being at the intersection of multiple marginalized social positions, such as being Indigenous, being TI/2S, living with disabilities and often in conditions of poverty, placed them in a precarious position with an array of needs to fulfill. Yet, the current system in which they have to navigate contributed to their erasure and does not provide culturally safe services to meet even their most basic needs.

Moving forward: the resilience and resistance of 2S youth

Through the process of discussing the *how*, participants also identified ways to move forward and enable significant change by challenging the barriers identified previously. Some strategies were individual, others were collective.

Drawing on individual traits of character, participants often mentioned the importance of 'being true to oneself'. Through introspection, some participants were able to develop self-awareness, identify their needs and boundaries, ground themselves in their authentic selves, and honor different aspects of themselves.

Recognize that you have complete control over yourself. You can't control what other people say/do but you can control how I react.

To (re)connect with culture and various cultural practices were said to contribute to increasing their resilience. Participant discussed different strategies such as boiling cedar, burning sage, burning sweetgrass, dancing, singing, drumming, regalia making and many others.

I have been surviving with my drum. When I feel disconnected, I just take my drum and I just start signing and reconnect with my drum.

When faced with absence of safe spaces, participants developed alternative ways to honor their cultural practices and to heal.

I just had to remember when Ceremonies were prohibited. I was thinking about how did they do? The grannies have never left the reserves. How did they do not to access ceremony? My kitchen is my ceremony space. As long as I have a stove and a little sink, I am my accessibility.

Reviving one's culture also meant creating connections with community, including Elders to ground oneself and find strength. Similarly, some participants mentioned the importance of reconnecting with the spirits of ancestors through prayer, which allowed them to find the guidance they were searching for.

One day, I needed guidance – I did not have any 2S teachers... and then I just felt that huge force came behind me... I did not want to look back. I don't have to look back because I know they are always behind my back. Felt like a thunderstorm. Just the cloud of a thunderstorm. Before it gets rough. It felt like that. That is the way I feel, the force, when I pray to my ancestor.

Developing a support network through supportive relationships and bonds with family, friends, and other 2S people was also described as essential to increasing resilience. Participants who specifically identified as TI, and did not have support from their immediate family, found strength and acceptance by pulling from the broadened definition of family in Indigenous cultures, allowing them to rely on the support of those with whom they do not share biological bonds.

One of the things to remember is family is not just biological and that's the beauty of Indigenous lives.

Creating a support network also required connecting with other TI/2S people. In fact, participating in this project and being able to be part of a Talking Circle with other TI/2S youth was significantly beneficial for all participants. Moreover, at the end of the project, youth expressed a clear need to continue with the Talking Circle, beyond the duration of the project.

This circle has provided me with stability.

The feeling of community that the Circle has allowed is incredible.

It was really good to gain a new perspective and it was really good to experience intergenerational discussion.

The circle is a gift to offer to others.

Through building self-awareness, honoring oneself, reconnecting with their spirituality, cultural practice and community, participants found strength in recognizing their healing energy and believing that one day, they will be the respected Elders supporting others.

The Talking Circle also offered participants the space to discuss ways to challenge and tackle issues that were hindering the wellbeing of 2S youth and their ability to thrive. One area of change that was discussed was the necessity to increase general knowledge on 2S lives. Whether it be for the general population, service providers, community members and Elders, or other TI/2S people, participants agreed that it was crucial to create more sensitization tools and spread the knowledge across all groups. More specifically, participants mentioned strategies such as creating children's books, integrating information on 2S identities and lives as well as 2S knowledge in various curriculums (from schools to professional

training), and sharing information on 2S identities and safe services to Indigenous youth.

Something that would reduce barriers would be to have more education and being talked about.

Additionally, participants mentioned that education should also include topics such as mental health, physical health and disabilities, as well as sexual health in order to destigmatize these topics and eradicate taboos.

In the absence of safe and accessible spaces, participants discussed the need to create physical and virtual spaces specifically for TI/2S youth for gathering, community-building, knowledge sharing, honoring traditional practices, and artmaking, especially in urban areas. Some examples of spaces included justice circles, cultural events, art galleries, mobile applications, beading circles, community centers, annual gatherings in Quebec, as well as intergenerational meeting spaces for youth to meet with Elders.

Increasing representation in all dimensions of society was also discussed among participants. Specific areas of representation mentioned included Indigenous communities and leadership, sports, cultural and artistic spheres (e.g. more 2S visual artists, actors, etc.), as well as mainstream media, with a specific focus on positive representation of 2S people and relationships.

Furthermore, participants discussed way to increase 2S representation in positions of power in various institutions (e.g. government, academia, etc.). Specific strategies to achieve this goal included facilitating access to education and professional training, removing colonial qualification requirements from job postings (e.g. university degrees), providing additional incentives for Indigenous recruitment and retention, providing support through various processes, and creating a network or Indigenous people in positions of power.

Talking circle: empowering TI/2S youth to create change

While the project did not directly enable the development of services, it supported youth to take a few actions. For example, participants created a podcast to increase education and knowledge about 2S experiences. In this podcast, they used the data collected during the research and spoke of the main issues they faced.

The podcast was entirely produced by youth participants and was made publicly accessible for others to listen to. Although it was held in the same context as the Talking Circle, the youth and co-facilitators had planned the different topics and the frame of the episode prior to recording. The podcast itself and all its elements were created by the group, exactly in the way they envisioned it. Participants decided on the title

Mamu—a Two-Spirit podcast ('mamu' means 'together/in a group' in Innu-aimun), and the art piece used for the logo was created by one of the group members. With that logo, stickers were created with a QR code linking directly to the podcast, which was posted on Spotify. The stickers were then distributed among participants for them to share with their kins, and to stick them around town for everyone to discover, just in time for Pride Montréal 2022.

Other ideas emerged from the group, some of which are still being pursued. For example, many of them mentioned the idea of a doula service specifically for trans people as they go through gender affirming surgeries. The lack of support from family members has been noted as an issue for some of the youth, who would have enjoyed, or would prefer to have the aid of someone understanding and safe to help them go through this change. It is also a reflection of the lack of culturally safe spaces for them, as the medical system does not seem to take into consideration just how much can be implicated in gender transitioning surgeries. From the mental to the physical aspect, 2S youth wish to receive culturally safe and appropriate support before, during and after these transitions from someone who understands the realities of 2S people specifically, not only of trans, non-Indigenous people. This type of service would meet all youth's needs, from transportation, to surgeries, to the recovery process.

In fact, at the time of writing this paper, discussions were initiated between a newly opened clinic for LGBTQI+ migrant and racialized folks and Indigenous organizations to explore how the clinic can be adapted to meet the needs of TI/2S youth. This collaboration has the potential of yielding significant results as one of the Talking Circle's co-facilitators works at the Indigenous organization, while two of this project's co-researchers work on the project supporting the new clinic.

Discussion

In traditional Indigenous culture, healing is possible through a holistic approach that stresses the importance of physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual well-being in a person, as well as the role they occupy in the community (Li, 2017). In fact, our research has shown that while 2S identity can expose youth to experiences both interpersonal and structural violence, it can also be a source of resilience and healing. Like the concept of healing, 2S identity is rich and multidimensional, reflecting the idea of circular thinking, a hallmark of Indigenous worldviews (Sioui, 2000). The interconnections between many identity dimensions including indigeneity and gender/sexuality, and embracing their 2S identity seems to help youth feel stronger when faced with adversity by grounding them in spirituality and by embodying survival (Vizenor, 1999). The link between the loss of

2S identity by community and colonialism was clearly emerging from the discussion (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004). As such, 2S identity far more complex than being a term to identify as a gender or sexual minority from Indigenous descent. Instead, as echoed in other research, 2S identity in the context of our project appears as a complex web of identities which should not be oversimplified (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004).

The project has also highlighted that TI/2S youth are often placed in precarious situations because of the intersection of a cultural and sex/gender identity discrimination, and even sometimes other forms of discrimination, such as ableism and health discrimination, both inside and outside community. Similar to observations reported by Meyer-Cook & Labelle (2004), our research shows that TI/2S youth can face discrimination both from non-Indigenous, as well as their own Elders for being openly LGBTQ+. Additionally, like non-Indigenous trans youth, TI/2S also face a lack of acceptance and support from their immediate families (Aparicio-García et al., 2018; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2021). In this sense, our project highlights the importance of adopting an intersectional lens when working with 2S youth.

The Talking Circle also brought the group to themselves theorize that many of the issues, as well as possible solutions to move forward, could be understood as being interconnected within three main pillars: lack of education/knowledge about 2S issues, lack of safe space, and lack of representation.

The lack of education about the realities of 2S people, both in Indigenous communities and in society at large, represents a barrier to the deconstruction of prejudices, behaviors of exclusion, and oppressive systems. This was seen a direct consequence from the ravages of colonialism and from religious indoctrination, which include the erasure of Indigenous cultures, knowledge, and identities, resulting in a lack of available, accessible, and reliable knowledge about the realities of 2S people. As such, an overall lack of education on queer, trans, and 2S realities breeds ignorance in society as a whole and enables the reproduction of systems of oppression. Within Indigenous communities, older generations were said to uphold Eurocolonial systems and views, whether intentionally or not, which resulted in a felt lack of understanding, acceptance, and support from Elders and immediate families of youth. Furthermore, the lack of available and accessible information on 2S identities is detrimental to youth's self-discovery, understanding, and self-acceptance, which greatly affected their ability to connect with their authentic selves and hindered their self-esteem.

Lack of education and knowledge also exacerbated the challenges faced by 2S youth to access to safe spaces. The lack of safe and accessible spaces for 2S youth is glaring in families, communities, recreational spaces,

services and institutions in general. As mentioned previously, TI/2S youth faced a specific lack of acceptance and support, even gaslighting, withing their families, which made the home feel unsafe. Within their communities, the intergenerational trauma and lateral violence caused by the ravages of colonialism, combined with a lack of knowledge, created hostile and exclusive healing, support, and cultural spaces (e.g. 2S support groups, ceremonies, sweat lodges, etc.). While some instances of exclusion were based on their trans/2S identity, others were attributed to prejudices toward aspect such as addiction and sexual health (e.g. living with HIV). When interacting with institutions, TI/2S youth experienced a lack of psychosocial and health services that are accessible, culturally safe, and adapted to the needs of TI/2S youth. For those who are trans, barriers to finding and accessing culturally safe gender affirming service was an additional layer of structural violence.

Finally, the combination of lack of education and safe spaces undermines the level of representation of TI/2S people in various spheres of society. In society at large, the glaring lack of representation (with an emphasis on *positive* representation) of TI/2S in media, films, etc. prevents youth from seeing their identities, experiences and strengths validated and recognized, which hinders their self-esteem and wellbeing. Lack of representation is also present within LGBTQ+ communities themselves, leaving youth with even less opportunities to receive appropriate support and find their place in community spaces. When it comes to institutional spaces, the lack of representation was attributed to barriers to access employment and education. A lack of opportunities mixed with equity policies that do not include nor protect Indigenous, trans and 2S people prevents them from entering institutional spheres and, particularly, positions of power. This, in turn, reduces not only opportunities for learning and adapting services to the needs of TI/2S youth, but also the production and sharing of Indigenous knowledge, potential improvement of living conditions, and the possibilities for sustainable systemic change.

Lack of safe space, lack of education and lack of representation are all interconnected, forming the three pillars that create experiences of adversities among TI/2S youth. Following the wise words of Mohawk thinker Taiaiake Alfred (2005), it is by challenging and redefining the way we think about our existence that we can change it. Those three pillars are therefore not only constituting the cause roots of the problems faced by TI/2S youth, but are also the precise dimensions that need to be challenged in order to move forward and improve TI/2S youth's lives. Anchored in circular thinking, the project shows how a challenge that at first sight appears to be a personal difficulty is deeply rooted in the colonial structures and culture. To move forward, we need to first develop this

understanding, then redefine it, and finally take action. Thus, those three pillars and their interconnectedness can be the basis for a long-lasting decolonization process.

Notes

1. In this text, we use the umbrella word “trans” as inclusive of diverse identities such as transgender, transexual, non-binary or gender fluid, as well as 2S people who identify as such.
2. Except on Sundays when the meeting moved online.
3. We offered a gift one the first meeting, as well as an honorarium for each meeting attended. We also insure transportation for her.
4. In this article, we use the pronoun they/them for all citation as the data was collected as a group and not individually.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This study was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Notes on contributors

Annie Pullen Sansfaçon is professor of Social Work and Canada Research Chair *under embargo * and previously Canada Research Chair on transgender children and their families. She is a member of the Huron-Wendat Nation and was the principal investigator on the project.

Johnny Boivin is a member of the Innu and Atikamekw nations, currently works for the Native Community NETWORK in Montreal. He was one of the research assistant on the project.

Pasha A. Partridge is an Inuk from Kuujuaq, Nunavik and Kanien'kehá:ka from Kahnawake, Mohawk territory. She was research assistant on the project and is the communications coordinator for Project 10.

Diane Labelle is a Two-Spirit Mohawk and Director of the First Nations Regional Adult Education Center. She has been active in the LGBTQ/Two-Spirit rights movement for over 40 years providing training and advocacy on issues of Two-Spirit and gender, decolonization and Indigenous pedagogy.

Edward Ou Jin Lee is Associate Professor at the School of Social Work at the University of Montreal and Canada Research Chair in Sexualities, Genders and Migrations. Prof. Lee's program addresses health care access, policy advocacy, movement building and producing knowledge with and about Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous and other People of Color (QTBIPOC) and migrant communities.

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