

Article

Identity, Discrimination, and Resilience Among Two-Spirit Indigenous Emerging Adults

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that Two-Spirit Indigenous people may experience more trauma, interracial violence, and violent crimes than youth from other cultural backgrounds. This study aims to examine how identifying as Two-Spirit, an identity that integrates both non-cisgender and non-heterosexual identities, as well as Indigenous identities simultaneously and congruently, may allow one to feel more resilient and empowered. The sample consisted of Indigenous, sexual gender minority emerging adults ($N = 91$) with ages ranging from 18 to 29 with an average age of 24.78 ($SD = 2.35$). This sample reported perceived discrimination for being Indigenous, for their gender identity, and for their sexual orientation. The amount of discrimination for each of these categories was not significantly different, but the source was, and the predominant source for all three types was White individuals. The combined effects were related to lower self-esteem; more psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatization; and greater identity distress and higher scores on disturbed identity and lack of identity. In this study, Two-Spirit identification did not reduce the negative effects of discrimination by connecting with historical memory through this identity, but that does not necessarily mean that it cannot, only that its potential has yet to be fulfilled. Many participants did not have a full understanding of the label and its history. Further research into this idea is another area of study that might be fruitful.

Keywords: two-spirit; indigenous; gender identity; sexual orientation; emerging adults



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1. Introduction

Indigenous people face frequent discrimination in the US and Canada as do those in the LGBTQ+ community. Those at the intersection of these groups, sometimes referred to as “Two-Spirit”, may face additional discrimination (Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2024). The purpose of this study was to examine the sources and impact of discrimination on Two-Spirit Indigenous emerging adults in Canada. Previous research has shown that Two-Spirit Indigenous people may experience more trauma, interracial violence, and violent crimes than youth from other cultural backgrounds (Balsam et al. 2004). Because colonialism has placed sexual and gender minority (SGM) Indigenous people in a unique position, wherein the suppression of traditional gender roles acts in favor of the elimination of Indigenous ways of life, special attention must be paid to the experiences of those living at the intersections of colonialism and transphobia (Balestrery 2012; Haswell et al. 2016).

1.1. Two-Spirit Identity

First used in Minnesota in 1988 but officially accepted at the 1990 gathering of LGBT Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and accredited to Elder Myra Laramée (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004), the term Two-Spirit is generally thought of as an Indigenous person who is gender-nonconforming. However, some authors claim that this is an oversimplification (Medicine 2002; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004). Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004) claim that historically, within tribes and communities, the term “Two-Spirit” was more related to the role that one would play in ceremonies rather than their gender identity. Some Two-Spirit people would even present as cisgender and heterosexual day-to-day, but would cross-dress for ceremonies, especially shaman or medicine men (Wilson 1996). During colonization, traditional Christian beliefs were forced on Indigenous people, including a binary gendered social world, and they were pressured to conform. Some were sent to residential schools, or industrial working schools, where they were treated inhumanely and forced to assimilate, adopting these new beliefs whilst rejecting traditional views (Hawkins 2012). Instrumental to this was the Indian Act of 1896 in Canada, which nullified the role of women, established a gender hierarchy, and relegated women to the property of their father or husband (Gehl 2021).

In these residential schools, along with many other assimilating topics, they were taught traditional Christian gender roles. This education of gender roles was so strictly ingrained over multiple generations that today, some tribal elders may be reluctant to accept any modern Two-Spirit people because of the embedded gender views and homophobia associated with assimilating topics (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004). Many Indigenous people today face generational trauma, or trauma passed from generations of being displaced from their land, being forced to assimilate, and losing their culture and spiritual traditions (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004). Despite this, many are identifying as Two-Spirit to reclaim their stolen history and identity (Cameron 2005). Those who are Two-Spirit now tend to face a double dose of discrimination: both from non-natives for being native (Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2022), and from their elders for being openly SGM (Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2024). They are at high risk for many negative outcomes due to this discrimination including an increase in sexually risky behaviors, AIDS/HIV, drug use, alcoholism, and suicidality (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004).

Colonization had a detrimental effect on the term Two-Spirit as it was aligned with sin and was essentially erased from history and replaced with homophobic Christian values. Despite this, more Indigenous people are identifying as Two-Spirit as they are being educated about the long history of multiple-gender Indigenous societies prior to the arrival of Europeans to Turtle Island. They are reclaiming their stolen history and identity (Cameron 2005). In an account written by a Two-Spirit individual, the author states “we are not either/or we are neither/nor.” This quote highlights the fact that Two-Spirit people do not neatly fit into the Western LGBT+ frame; their two-spiritedness is complex (Cameron 2005). Cameron says, “I identify as a Carrier First Nation two-spirited [sic] woman when I am talking to other Aboriginals [sic]. When talking to non-Aboriginals [sic], I identify as a lesbian. . . . However, I do not feel the term lesbian adequately represents the whole reality of my experience.” Cameron discusses the inner conflict that comes from being both a lesbian and a Native American and deciding in which community to be more involved. In reality, the author argues, each of these pieces of identity are so intertwined that they cannot be separated.

Overall, identifying as Two-Spirit appears to be an important way of decolonizing SGM identity, and perhaps, even a source of resilience. For example, some research has illustrated how going to ceremony (Elm et al. 2016) or gathering together (Indigenous Trans and Two-Spirit Stories of Resilience 2023) are strategies for 2S people to develop

their resiliency. Other research has shown the importance of self-awareness in helping individuals stay true to themselves, recognize their needs and boundaries, and connect with their authentic identity (Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2024). Recent research has also shown that having a Two-Spirit identity, specifically, can help trans and Indigenous youth feel more resilient when faced with adversity (Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2022). Indeed, living as an Indigenous youth, in addition to being a sexual or gender minority, will place them in a more vulnerable situation because of the intersection of cultural and sex/gender identity discrimination. The Two-Spirit identity may help youth mobilize their spirituality in a deeply authentic way and rooted in a decolonial way. As such, their identification helps them make sense of situations through spirituality, and become able to embody survival (Vizenor 1999). As Two-Spirit youth were themselves expressing in a community-based research podcast, Two-Spirit identity is “Reconnection to truest self; roles & responsibilities in community”, and it is “Medicine people” (Mamu—A Two-Spirit Podcast 2022).

That said, there appears to be a gap in the literature involving quantitative data to support qualitative findings, as most previous studies are qualitative. Although the literature has examined identity issues and perceived discrimination among Indigenous and SGM populations, the intersection of these groups has received far less attention. Terms like SGM, LGBTQ+, and Two-Spirit tend to combine gender identity with sexual orientation, and many studies fail to examine possible differences between these identifications. More research is needed to better understand the identity issues and sources of discrimination among Indigenous people with non-cisgender and/or non-heterosexual identifications.

1.2. Rationale

In order for any avenue of intervention to benefit SGM Indigenous youth, it must address the challenges they face in a culturally relevant way, or else it simply ignores negative effects stemming from colonialism on their well-being (Balestrery 2012; Haswell et al. 2016). As such, there is a great need for research into the experiences of youth who live at the intersection of Indigenous and SGM identity, and what they need in order to be resilient and thrive in the face of compounded systemic oppression.

This study aimed to examine the effects of identity on experiences of discrimination, and on resilience of youth living at the intersection of being Indigenous in addition to being non-straight and/or non-cisgender. Specifically, the primary research question of this study was: How do Two-Spirit, Indigenous youth experience discrimination and what, if anything, helps them to cope with it?

Breaking down this question further, the following research questions were generated:

1. From where do they feel the most perceived discrimination (i.e., from non-Indigenous non-Whites, Indigenous people on the reserve, Indigenous people off the reserve, from other sources)?
2. Is there a difference between the amount of discrimination felt for being Indigenous versus SGM?
3. Are there differences in the experience of those that are non-cisgender versus non-heterosexual, and those that identify as both?
4. Is discrimination that comes from other Indigenous people a stronger predictor of psychological symptoms and identity distress than other sources of discrimination?
5. Do participants feel a sense of community/affiliation to their nation, race, sexual identity, and/or gender identity groups? Which tends to provide the best sense of connection, support, and group identity?
6. Does the term “Two-Spirit” help youth become more resilient from negative effects of discrimination through connecting to the historical memory of the Two-Spirit label?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of Indigenous, sexual gender minority emerging adults ($N = 91$) with ages ranging from 18 to 29 with an average age of 24.78 ($SD = 2.35$). A proportion of 41.8% of participants reported education levels of college graduate or higher, 49.5% reported obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent certificate, and 6.6% reported that they had not obtained a high school diploma or equivalent certificate. All participants identified as Indigenous and resided in Canada. Slightly less than half (48.4%) reported growing up and currently living in an Indigenous community. Approximately half of the participants (50.5%) were assigned a male gender at birth. Because gender and sexual orientation are often described beyond binary and can be fluid, participants could ‘rate’ the extent to which they identify to different terms and chose more than one answer. Frequencies of sexual orientation and Two-Spirit identification are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Sexual orientation frequency table.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	% Total
Sexual Orientation								
Heterosexual	25.3%	23.1%	5.5%	4.4%	11.0%	18.7%	12.1%	100.0%
Homosexual	13.2%	14.3%	11.0%	8.8%	8.8%	17.6%	26.4%	100.0%
Bisexual	18.9%	5.6%	0%	4.4%	16.7%	35.6%	18.9%	100.0%
Asexual	31.9%	19.8%	15.4%	5.5%	11.0%	11.0%	5.5%	100.0%
Pansexual	26.4%	12.1%	15.4%	7.7%	14.3%	16.5%	7.7%	100.0%
Indigiqueer	25.0%	10.2%	18.2%	9.1%	15.9%	12.5%	9.1%	100.0%
Two-Spirit	18.4%	3.4%	5.7%	9.2%	18.4%	25.3%	19.5%	100.0%

2.2. Measures

A demographic questionnaire included questions relating to age, education level, gender identity, sexual orientation, and a single open response question asking participants what the term Two-Spirit meant to them.

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney 1992) is an 8-item measure with 4 items assessing one’s primary ethnic identity and 4 items assessing one’s second ethnic identity. For the current study, this has been expanded to also include questions regarding gender and sexual identity. Statements such as “I have a strong sense of belonging to my gender identity community”, “I feel good about my Indigenous cultural background”, and “I am happy that I am Canadian or American” were used. These statements were ranked on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha for this measure was found to be 0.92 for Indigenous identity, 0.80 for gender, 0.87 for sexual orientation, and 0.89 for Canadian identity.

The Everyday Discrimination Scale Short Form (Williams et al. 2008) assesses how much discrimination participants face, for which features, and from whom. A sample question is “How often have you been treated with less courtesy or respect by the following people because of your gender identity?”. Items are ranked on a scale from 1 (none at all) to 5 (very severely). Following each question, participants are asked to select if the discrimination comes from members of their own ethnicity, from White people, or from another group. The Cronbach alpha for this measure was found to be 0.91.

The Self-Concept and Identity Measure (Kaufman et al. 2015) assesses identity functioning with 27 items across 3 subscales: consolidated identity, disturbed identity, and

lack of identity. Participants read statements from each subscale such as “When someone describes me, I know if they are right or wrong”, “I am so different with different people that I’m not sure which is the real me”, and “I feel lost when I think about who I am”, respectively. All statements relating to identity are rated on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In this study, the Cronbach alpha for the Consolidated, Lack, and Disturbed subscales were found to be 0.80, 0.84, and 0.84, respectively.

The Identity Distress Survey (Berman et al. 2004) measures levels of distress surrounding 7 domains of identity. There are a total of 10 items, with the first 7 questions measuring levels of distress across the 7 domains of the identity (religion, sexual orientation, goals, career choices, values, group affiliation, and friendships) on a Likert-like scale of 1 (none at all) to 5 (very severely). The Cronbach alpha for this study was found to be 0.89.

The Brief Symptom Inventory-18 (Derogatis and Melisaratos 1983) is an 18-item measure used to assess internalized symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatization. Participants responded to statements from each subscale such as “Spells of terror or panic”, “Feeling hopeless about the future”, and “Faintness or dizziness”. Items are assessed on a 5-point scale asking degrees of distress experienced during the past 7 days, from 1 (none at all) to 5 (extremely). The Cronbach alpha for this measure in the current study was found to be 0.97.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1989) is the most widely used scale for measuring global self-esteem, which has been translated into many languages with good psychometric properties (Cong and Cheong 2022). It has 10 statements that are rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 4 “strongly agree”. A sample item is “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”. The Cronbach alpha for this measure in the current study was found to be 0.71.

The Kanien’kehá:ka Growth and Empowerment Measure (Gomez Cardona et al. 2021) is a cultural adaptation of the Growth and Empowerment Measure (Haswell et al. 2016), which was developed to measure well-being and empowerment among Indigenous Australians. The adaptation, conducted in Quebec, Canada, followed a qualitative, collaborative, and participatory method that sought to benefit Indigenous participants and communities, while honoring their culture and philosophies. A thematic analysis of the data collected through an advisory group was used to establish the cultural and conceptual relevance of the tool and its content. The KGEM has 17 statements, each rated on a Likert type scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). A sample item is “I feel valued and respected for my contribution in my community”. The Cronbach alpha for this measure in the current study was found to be 0.93.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009) assesses an individual’s mental well-being. This test is a 14-item survey that asks participants to respond to statements about feelings and thoughts that they have some of their experiences over the past two weeks, such as “I’ve been dealing with problems well”. Questions are based on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = None of the above, 1 = Rarely, 2 = Some of the time, 3 = Often, 4 = All of the time) in regard to the degree that best describes their level of experience for each statement. The Cronbach alpha for this measure in the current study was found to be 0.91.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Hinz et al. 2018) is a 5-item measure assessing the degree of satisfaction someone feels about their life. Questions are based on a 7-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 5 = Slightly Agree, 6 = Agree, and 7 = Strongly Agree. A sample statement is “The conditions of my life are excellent.”. The Cronbach alpha for this measure in the current study was found to be 0.84.

2.3. Procedure

Organizations that work with Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, indigiqueer, intersexed, asexual, +) people were asked to send a recruitment email (with a link to the online survey) to their constituents. The candidates were referred by Two-Spirit organizations and were given the survey link directly. Because the survey relied on self-identification, and because the compensation could lead some people not meeting the criteria to complete the survey for monetary gains, only youth who were in contact with established Two-Spirit groups across Canada were recruited. Those who took the survey received a CAD 50 gift card for their participation. At the completion of the survey a random identification code was generated, which the respondent had to send back to the researcher contact to receive remuneration.

3. Results

3.1. Perceived Discrimination

An R-ANOVA suggested that perceived discrimination did significantly vary depending on the source. The most discrimination they felt came from White, then non-White, then Indigenous on the reserve, Indigenous off the reserve, and the lowest from other sources. This order was the same for all three types: discrimination for being Indigenous, ($F(2.04, 165.24) = 59.22, p < 0.001$); for being non-cisgender, ($F(2.10, 170.74) = 57.94, p < 0.001$); and for being non-heterosexual, ($F(2.16, 174.85) = 63.01, p < 0.001$). However, not all differences were statistically significant (see Table 2). A Least Squares Difference (LSD) post hoc analysis revealed that discrimination from White individuals was significantly higher than all other sources, and discrimination from other sources was significantly lower than all other types. However, there was no difference between discrimination from Indigenous people on or off the reserve, and discrimination from minorities was not significantly different than from Indigenous people on the reserve.

Table 2. ANOVA table of perceived discrimination.

Discrimination Type:	Source of Discrimination				
	Discrimination from White M (SD)	Discrimination from Minorities M (SD)	Discrimination from Indigenous On Reserve M (SD)	Discrimination from Indigenous Off Reserve M (SD)	Discrimination from Other Sources M (SD)
Gender Identity	2.58 (0.13) ^{1,2}	2.44 (0.12) ¹	2.34 (0.13) ²	2.23 (0.13) ¹	1.27 (0.09) ^{1,2}
Sexual Orientation	2.57 (0.13) ^{1,2}	2.42 (0.12) ¹	2.38 (0.13) ²	2.29 (0.13) ¹	1.24 (0.09) ^{1,2}
Indigenous	2.67 (0.13) ^{1,2}	2.45 (0.12) ¹	2.35 (0.14) ²	2.27 (0.13) ¹	1.29 (0.09) ^{1,2}

Note: Like superscripts across rows indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$).

3.2. Types of Intersecting Forms and Experiences of Discrimination

The analysis did not yield differences between amount of discrimination felt for being Indigenous versus SGM. A repeated measures analysis of variance (R-ANOVA), whereby discrimination type was treated as the repeated measure, revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in their scores for the amount of discrimination they felt for being Indigenous, non-heterosexual, nor non-cisgender.

Because of the small size, where 7 participants identified as heterosexual and non-cisgender and 84 participants identified as both a sexual minority and gender minority, it was not possible to test whether there were differences in the experience of those that are non-cisgender versus non-heterosexual, and those that identify as both. None identified as cisgender.

Regarding the source of discrimination and the impact on psychological symptoms and identity distress, two linear regression analyses were conducted with sources of discrimination as the predictor variables and psychological symptoms as the dependent measure in the first regression, and identity distress as the dependent measure in the second regression. These two regressions were repeated for each type of discrimination (gender identity discrimination, sexual orientation discrimination, and Indigenous identity discrimination). In each regression, the overall F was significant ($p < 0.001$); however, none of the individual sources were significant predictors, suggesting that the combined effect of discrimination did predict psychological symptoms and identity distress, but the separate sources of that discrimination were not differentially predictive.

3.3. Sense of Community and Two-Spirit Identity

To test whether participants feel a sense of community/affiliation to their nation, race, sexual identity, and/or gender identity groups and which tends to provide the best sense of connection, support, and group identity, an R-ANOVA was performed. It showed that they reported the strongest identification with their Canadian nationality ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 0.10$), then their gender identity ($M = 6.04$, $SD = 0.10$), next their sexual orientation ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 0.11$), followed by their Band ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 0.10$), and lowest with being Indigenous ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 0.10$). However, an LSD post hoc analysis found that none of the means were significantly different.

The team wanted to examine whether connecting with the historical and cultural meaning of the term Two-Spirit reduces the negative effect of discrimination. To answer this question, a series of stepwise hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to predict scores on the various identity and psychological adjustment measures. Three types of discrimination were entered in step 1: discrimination for being Indigenous, discrimination for their gender identity, and discrimination for their sexual orientation, with degree of identification with the Two-Spirit label entered in step 2. This model significantly predicted self-esteem, psychological symptoms (anxiety, depression, somatization), identity distress, disturbed identity, and lack of identity (see Table 3). As can be seen in the table, none of the individual predictors were significant for self-esteem nor psychological symptoms;; however, discrimination was a significant predictor for the three identity variables.

Table 3. Multiple regression analyses with discrimination and Two-Spirit identification predicting psychological and identity adjustment.

	Self-Esteem		Psychological Symptoms		Identity Distress		Disturbed Identity		Lack of Identity	
Model	$F_{(4,71)}$	p	$F_{(4,71)}$	p	$F_{(4,71)}$	p	$F_{(4,71)}$	p	$F_{(4,71)}$	p
	2.93	0.027	10.12	<0.001	9.24	<0.001	7.47	<0.001	11.19	<0.001
Predictor Variables	β	p	β	p	B	p	β	p	B	p
Indigenous Discrimination	−0.30	0.566	0.54	0.228	0.96	0.036	0.86	0.069	0.96	0.030
Gender Discrimination	−0.17	0.743	0.75	0.096	0.37	0.413	0.44	0.351	0.49	0.267
Sexual Orientation Discrimination	0.08	0.846	−0.71	0.060	−0.79	0.039	−0.83	0.037	−0.89	0.018
Two-Spirit Identity	0.04	0.758	−0.18	0.073	−0.08	0.450	−0.31	0.004	−0.27	0.007

Note: Significant findings in bold.

In addition, Two-Spirit identification negatively predicted two pathological identity types (pathological and lack), meaning that the more they identified with the Two-Spirit label, the lower they tended to score on pathological identity types. When looking at the types of discrimination, it can be seen that gender discrimination did not predict any of the outcomes, Indigenous discrimination positively predicted identity distress and lack of identity, and sexual orientation discrimination negatively predicted all three identity pathologies. The regressions were repeated with interaction variables (each type of discrimination multiplied by Two-Spirit identification) to test for moderation, but none of the interactions were significant in any of the regression models.

Lastly, the survey included a singular open response question that asked participants what Two-Spirit identity meant to them. Responses averaged five words or fewer, while a majority of the sample did not respond. This was originally included to gain a deeper understanding of how these emerging adults understood the term. Data on this open response question was severely lacking. Therefore, data cannot be analyzed to provide meaningful inferences. However, the lack of question engagement and the minimal words in responses may infer that participants do not have a clear understanding of the term Two-Spirit.

4. Discussion

This study is among the first to systematically and quantitatively examine the effects of identity on experiences of discrimination, and on resilience of youth living at the intersection of being Indigenous in addition to being non-straight and/or non-cisgender. Although exploratory in nature, a number of interesting findings suggest the need for further study.

The findings indicated that the sample identified most strongly with their Canadian nationality; however, this affiliation may be more reflective of assimilation practices, rather than genuine positive identification. Previous research of Two-Spirit youth uncovered a common theme that colonialism promoted and reinforced alienation from culture and community ([Ansloos et al. 2021](#); [Henninger and Marion 2025](#); [Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004](#)). This sample also reported perceived discrimination for being Indigenous, for their gender identity and for their sexual orientation. The amount of discrimination for each of these categories was not significantly different, but the source was, and the predominant source for all three types was White individuals. It has been suggested that discrimination young Indigenous people experience for being a sexual and/or gender minority might be stronger from fellow Indigenous people than from those of other ethnic/racial groups ([Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004](#)), but this was not the case for this sample of emerging adults. It is still possible that it hurts more when coming from their own group, but this study examined the amount of discrimination rather than the pain of discrimination. Future studies may want to further examine this construct.

The negative effects of discrimination were also evident in regard to psychological adjustment and identity development difficulties. The combined effects were related to lower self-esteem; more psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatization; and greater identity distress and higher scores on disturbed identity and lack of identity. However, the differential effects of discrimination type were unexpected. Although discrimination for being Indigenous was in line with the overall findings, discrimination for one's gender identity failed to reach statistical significance on its own, and discrimination for one's sexual orientation was related to less identity distress and lower scores on disturbed identity and lack of identity. It has been suggested that discrimination can sometimes encourage young people to further explore their connections to marginalized groups ([Brittian et al. 2015](#)). It should be noted that while the findings of this sample indicate that discrimination may reduce identity distress to some extent, it is important not

to overstate resilience while understating harm. While Two-Spirit Indigenous communities may develop resilience, discrimination has been found to equally contribute to a variety of negative mental and physical health outcomes, as previously stated such as trauma, interracial violence, substance use, and suicidality (Balsam et al. 2004; Meyer-Cook and Labelle, 2004; Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2024). Branscombe et al. (1999) proposed the rejection identification model which suggests that perceived discrimination can increase identification with a stigmatized group. These strengthened connections might facilitate greater identity exploration, commitment, and integration. However, the differential effects of types of discrimination in this study beg the question as to whether the effects of the rejection identification model might be related to the type of stigmatized group involved and the nature of the support that such groups might provide in relation to acceptance, fellowship, and empowerment. Further investigation into these questions appear warranted.

These findings speak to the potential impact of generational, historical trauma influencing the disconnect from culture that Two-Spirit emerging adults may be experiencing. For example, our findings show that Two-Spirit emerging adults reported lower self-esteem; more psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatization; and greater identity distress and higher scores on disturbed identity and lack of identity. Looking at how Two-Spirit identity can be a protective factor against discrimination among emerging adults is imperative as this generation of Two-Spirit, Indigenous young adults are rediscovering this identity that has been historically part of their culture and was taken from them. This aligns with research conducted by Arnett (2016), who theorizes that Indigenous cultures' adulthood stages are best explained through master narratives. A culture's master narratives inform values, beliefs, and social norms of how individuals navigate through each developmental phase of life (Arnett 2016). Two-Spirit Indigenous emerging adults may feel conflict as they experience colonized expectations of emerging adulthood. Meanwhile, they also experience the narratives of emerging adulthood within their Indigenous culture. Studying how marginalized identities might contribute to resilience during emerging adulthood may help indicate the importance of early reconnection to culture during key developmental periods.

This study, like all others, is not without its limitations. This study is correlational, so no causal assumptions among variables can be assumed. The sample, although national in scope, is still on the smaller side. Replication with larger and more diverse samples of SGM Indigenous youth would be useful. In particular, this sample was non-cisgender and 92% non-heterosexual, making comparisons between sexual orientation identity versus gender identity impossible. Finally, although quantitative measures can provide some advantages over qualitative data in regard to objectivity and generalizability, it does not allow for the nuance and deeper understanding that interviews might provide.

It is possible that some participants may have responded to the survey using the recruitment email that were not Indigenous SGM emerging adults. There is always the likelihood that the survey was given by participants to others who do not identify with the demographic. We did make every effort to ensure that we provided the email and link only to those who identified as Indigenous SGM emerging adults; however, they may have passed it on to friends who were not Indigenous, although they were cautioned not to.

5. Conclusions

The Two-Spirit label has been seen as a group identification that can help Indigenous SGM young people organize their lived experience and integrate their gender and sexuality with their heritage. As such, it has a potential to create meaning in their lives as well as community and social support. In this study, participants did not appear to understand the historical and deeply sacred roots of the term "Two-Spirit". A single open-ended question

on the survey suggested that many participants did not have a full understanding of the label and its history, as evidenced by the extremely short responses (five words or fewer), colonized responses, or the lack of engagement with the question. This disconnection from the historical memory, spirituality, and ceremonial significance of the Two-Spirit identity has implications for youth and developing resiliency. In this study, identifying as Two-Spirit did not appear to compensate for the negative effects of discrimination, but that does not necessarily mean that it cannot, only that its potential has yet to be fulfilled.

Additionally, the findings showing a stronger identification with Canadian identity can be related to the impact of colonization and disconnect from their cultural identity. Aligning with the decolonization literature by [Driskill \(2008\)](#), this lack of understanding of their cultural identity may indicate the historical trauma that Indigenous, Two-Spirit individuals carry. Many Indigenous youth are appearing to rediscover the cultural roots of the Two-Spirit identity, indicating a sense of reconnecting a part of their culture that was taken from them through colonization ([Cameron 2005](#); [Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2022](#)). It should be emphasized that the greatest source for discrimination for the various identities (Indigenous, gender identity, and sexual orientation) came from White people. Perhaps, with greater education and the use of a decolonialization framework, these approaches might provide community and a sense of connection to the spiritual practices and their heritage that can strengthen Two-Spirit identity development and healthy psychological well-being. Further research into this idea and how it may reduce negative outcomes of White oppression is another area of study that might be fruitful.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer +
SGM	Sexual Gender Minority

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