

Dreamed into Being: The Contested Presence, Resistance, and Sacred Origins of Two-Spirit Identity

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Abstract

Two-Spirit is a term introduced through the dream and vision of an Indigenous Elder and represents a sacred and recognized expression of Indigenous spirituality. Within many Indigenous knowledge systems, dreams and visions have long been regarded as messages from our Ancestors and the Creator. However, acceptance of the term Two-Spirit remains contested, and the term continues to face dismissal and rejection by some Elders, gatekeepers, and communities, alongside the continued marginalization of Two-Spirit people. This history is grounded in a sacred epistemological stance that recognizes dreams as a legitimate source of Indigenous knowledge. Although the term has been in use for approximately 35 years, it remains deeply rooted in advocacy, recognition, resistance, and the Indigenous fight for a right-fit, self-determining identity—the backbone of the Two-Spirit movement. The effort to be acknowledged and accepted as integral members of their communities has historically been challenging for Two-Spirit people. Yet a key to survival, both inside and outside the community, is recognizing the convergence of Two-Spirit histories with Indigenous epistemologies that have long affirmed dreaming, vision, and spiritual knowledge as traditional ways of knowing. This article argues that the dismissal and rejection of Two-Spirit identity, together with the continued severing of Two-Spirit people from community, culture, and belonging, constitute a contradiction within Indigenous epistemological foundations.

Indigenization Statement

Jac Nobiss is an Indigenous scholar and social worker and is a registered citizen of the Red River Métis.

Introduction

Several Indigenous Nations reject the term Two-Spirit as both an identifier and an identity for Indigenous gender-diverse people (Ansloos et al., 2021; Nobiss, 2025; Pruden et al., 2021; Sylliboy, 2019). Some critique the term for its pan-Indigenous implications as many First Nations have traditionally used names that describe the diversity within their specific nations.

This reasoning is supported by traditional teachers and storytellers (Pruden et al., 2021; Simpson, 2011) and numerous scholarly works dating back to the 1970s and 1980s (Brown, 1997; Lang, 1998; Medicine, 2002). I have used the terms gender variant and Multiple Gender Expressions (MGE) to situate the recognition of difference outside the heteronormative gender binary standard, while also recognizing identity as separate from sexual behaviours (Nobiss, 2023). Nation-specific naming was relatively unknown to the broader public, while ill-fitting, historical, and pejorative terminology, such as berdache and hermaphrodite, remained in use.

Colonizing racial and gender categories served the purpose of instilling both “physical and psychological terrorism” (Smithers, 2022, p. xxiv). At times, Nation-specific identification for gender diversity was kept secret for fear of colonizing attacks and persecution (Lang, 1997), viewed through a lens of non-interference (Wilson, 1996), or in some cases not discussed at all, as all community members were considered part of the whole (Simpson, 2011). In some cases, the use of Nation-specific language and terminology came to a grinding halt and moved underground as gendered colonial violence grew. Communities affected by assimilation also held onto outdated terminology, with berdache and hermaphrodite among the most common descriptors for gender variant people. The coerced adoption of colonial understandings of gender and sexuality also contributed to the ongoing oppressive heterosexism, transphobia, homophobia, and heteronormativity within some Indigenous communities.

At a surface level, there is an assumption that Nation-specific naming suggests a clear pathway for accepting sexual and gender diversity within Indigenous communities, but this was not always the case. Because of the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality (Cannon, 1998; Rifkin, 2011) and Christian moral regulation, many American Indians, Alaska Natives (AIAN), and Indigenous Peoples in Canada (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples) had to leave their

home communities in search of safer spaces (Gilley, 2006; Jacobs, 1997; Lang, 1997). Often, this meant relocating to larger urban centres, where gender and sexual variance were typically more welcome, though not always for Indigenous gender variant people (Gilley, 2006).

Historically, this relocation of Indigenous individuals from their home communities tells a different story. Urban migration in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s contributed to the need for an Indigenous-specific identifier, as many Indigenous Two-Spirit and gender/sexually diverse people encountered exclusion not only in some home-community contexts shaped by colonial and Christianized norms, but also within predominantly white LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus) communities/spaces in larger urban centres (Brown, 1997; Lang, 1997; Little Thunder, 1997). Non-Indigenous spaces were unwelcoming and often mirrored environments laced with racist fears of Indigenous and AIAN People (Anguksuar, 1997; Whitehead, 2023). From this place, the need for a safe space and an identity to call our own was born. The use of the name and identifier Two-Spirit emerged. Unfortunately, the emergence of this terminology did not automatically make life easier for Two-Spirit and gender/sexual variant Indigenous Peoples. The growing misinformation and stigma surrounding Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), identity politics, liberation rights, and the migration of Indigenous and AIAN Peoples to urban centres meant that these spaces were not always welcoming or safe (Lang, 1997). The stories connected to these social issues have a lengthy history that cannot be detailed here (see Brown, 1997; Gilley, 2006; Lang, 1998), but they certainly highlight the geographical limitations of relocating to urban and non-Indigenous spaces as environments where Indigenous and AIAN gender diversity was not welcome. The search for a sense of belonging was not found in several new urban sites of relocation. These collective histories set the conditions under which a new, self-

determined, Indigenous-specific identity became necessary, not just through the consensus of the Western colonial language, but through the dreamworld, when the Ancestors spoke.

Connecting History to Knowledge

Many Indigenous scholars identify Indigenous knowledge systems that recognize relationships with Ancestors, messages from relatives who have passed on, dreams, visions, and the spirit world as important sources of Indigenous knowledge, guidance, and responsibility (Ermine, 2000; Marsden, 2004; Rowe, 2014). Dreams and visions have historically been recognized as embedded values and strengths of Indigenous culture, spirituality, and epistemology (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2021) and are also recognized in the context of Indigenous research (Absolon, 2022; Ermine, 2000; Kovach, 2021; Marsden, 2004; Rowe, 2014). Two-Spirit is a term introduced, or should I say revealed, through a dream and vision of an Indigenous Elder. Dreams and visions from an Indigenous perspective are among the most sacred and widely accepted aspects of Indigenous spirituality and teachings. Anishinaabe Elder and educator Dr. Myra Laramée is identified as the dreamer who describes her vision and dream of Two-Spirits in her own words (City of Winnipeg, 2021; Deerchild, 2021).

One rendition of this sharing is described here, along with what I see as its importance and continued survivance. What is imperative to know is that the term Two-Spirit was dreamed into being—a critical revelation that must not be taken lightly, especially in Indigenous epistemological viewpoints. Since its revelation, a clear definition, as it is applied to those who self-define, has remained nebulous, has lacked clarity in a traditional or cultural sense, and has at times been contradictory (Whitehead, 2023). Despite these defining challenges, the term has been accepted and validated and is used regularly—sometimes as a landing pad for those transitioning through a community exodus, and for others as a way of ‘coming-in’ to their

identity (Wilson, 1996) as both Indigenous and non-conforming in gender and sexuality. The denial of this term is what I bring into the discussion in this paper—the space of resistance toward those who deny the existence of multiple gender identities, and specifically, the Two-Spirit moniker as a self-determined identity.

Within many Indigenous knowledge systems, dreams and visions are understood as meaningful sources of knowledge, guidance, and responsibility. In this context, Dr. Laramée's dream can be understood as more than symbolic or anecdotal; it holds significance as a source of knowledge within the emergence of the Two-Spirit movement (City of Winnipeg, 2021). The dream also carries histories of resistance, bringing Indigenous and AIAN gender-diverse people together in a collective moment of self-definition (City of Winnipeg, 2021; Deerchild, 2021). If dreams are recognized as legitimate epistemological foundations within Indigenous and AIAN Nations, then Dr. Laramée's dream (City of Winnipeg, 2021; Gilley, 2006) must also be recognized as a valid, legitimate source. This extends the dream and the vision beyond a merely symbolic representation and anecdotal storytelling. What lives in this dream are the spaces of resistance that, over decades, culminated in the bringing together of Indigenous and AIAN gender variants in a self-defining moment that changed the course of a people.

This resistance is discernible and clearly articulated in three specific spaces of the Two-Spirit journey and struggle. The first is my self-positioning statement as a Two-Spirit person, drawing on my lived experience to trace how the naming and terminology used to describe Indigenous and AIAN gender-variant people have evolved over time. The colonial naming and classification of Indigenous and AIAN gender-variant people functioned as an imposition on and an infiltration into Indigenous and AIAN communities, positioning Indigenous identities as subservient to the dominant Western worldview.

The second point of resistance is found in the words of Elder and Two-Spirit educator Dr. Myra Laramée, as she shares her vision and dream. Her closing words are an emphatic affirmation of Two-Spirit belonging and of the need to hold space for an identity that, as she states, “will never be taken away from us again” (City of Winnipeg, 2021). It is both a gift of the name and a prophetic revelation that inspired a movement of reclamation. The third concerns the importance of upholding Indigenous spiritual spaces, such as dreams and visions, as integral to knowledge-building within Indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous scholars already noted here, including Absolon (2022), Ermine (2000), and Kovach (2021), have emphasized that dreams and visions are the backbone of Indigenous ways of knowing. Dreams and visions are collectively legitimized, accepted, and approved by the community. These cultural teachings, especially those grounded in community epistemologies, are not subject to dismissal, rebuke, or external adjudication.

Resistance to Colonial Definitions

As an Indigenous scholar and a proud member of the Red River Métis Nation, I have spent years researching Two-Spirit knowledge, history, and experiences. I identify as a Two-Spirit person and have sought knowledge to deepen my understanding and inform my practice as a social worker, weaving it into support for others on a similar path. Both my master’s and doctoral manuscripts focus on this topic, demonstrating my growth from a new researcher to where I am now (Nobiss, 2015; Nobiss, 2023). My work experience spans direct service to Indigenous communities, particularly Métis and First Nations in the prairies, in health and wellness, and in education. These professional roles have informed my research on Indigenous identity and nation-specific pathways to understanding Two-Spirit ways of being, grounded in my direct witnessing of the effects on Indigenous Peoples. Much of my cultural foundation and

genealogy of knowledge comes from community Elders (Métis, Anishinaabe, and Cree), Two-Spirits, and non-Two-Spirits who have supported me on my journey to acceptance and belonging, and in my role as an educator. Elders who have embraced me as a student and a helper, for the most part, come from Treaty areas 1-5, with a few additional connections to teachers in eastern Ontario and the western provinces. That said, my journey has not always been easy, as pushback from several communities has shown me that my kind is not always welcome.

The exodus I describe in this paper is not just a hyperbolic expression of one-off storytelling anecdotes, but also a lived experience. My added impetus is rooted in this lived experience. In my opinion, the acceptance or rejection of Two-Spirit people, ways of knowing and being, as something communities may choose to accept or reject, is itself contradictory to Indigenous ways of being, including the uptake of dreams, visions, Elders' voices, and Two-Spirit ways of being as viable, legitimate sources of Indigenous knowledge. This contradiction emphasizes the position of Indigenous self-determination in what constitutes knowledge and in how knowledge is formed, shared, and transmitted at the community level.

There has been a fundamental challenge in understanding what the term Two-Spirit means since it first emerged in the early 1990s. From initial conversations about one body embracing both the masculine and the feminine spirits (Anguksuar, 1997) to a place where the term is "untranslatable and unknowable" (Whitehead, 2023, p. 18), there have been several renditions of what it means to be Two-Spirit or Two-Spirited. One definition I have always held onto is that of Alex Wilson, a Cree Two-Spirit scholar, whom I must credit for her long-standing work in this area (Wilson, 1996, 2004, 2008). I have leaned heavily on this work in the past and still do, as it remains the unwavering foundation on which to build. Wilson (1996) states, "Two-Spirit reconstitutes an identity that, although misstated by anthropologists, had been based on the

recognition of people with alternative genders and/or sexualities as contributing members of traditional communities” (p. 305).

Anthropologists and ethnographers alike misused terms such as berdache and hermaphrodite introduced earlier. The term berdache, or “kept boy” (Angelino & Shedd, 1955, p. 121), was mistakenly used to describe both male and female gender variants, mostly in a derogatory fashion. Jacobs (1997) noted that anthropologists translated the term to apply it to “ceremonial transvestism, institutionalized homosexuality, and gender variance/multiple genders” (p. 4). As noted earlier, I use the terms gender variant or Multiple Gender Expressions (MGE) as descriptors that better encapsulate the Indigenous spirit, without always attaching it to sexual behaviours (Nobiss, 2023). Gender variant and MGE are appropriate descriptors that align with a model by Lang (1998) separating gender, role, sex, and status. These terms provide a way to separate identity from behaviours. Simply put, “[s]exual orientation is based on physical sex characteristics. Gender orientation is not based on physical sex characteristics, but rather on the roles the person chooses to align with” (Cameron, 2005, p. 124). Further, these gender and/or sex roles may include status representations or multiple variations thereof held within Nation-specific communities.

The use of misplaced terminology since Columbus's arrival continued into the late 20th century. Even terms such as homosexuality, sexual inversion, transvestite, and transsexual did not emerge until the late 1800s and early 1900s. Sexual inversion was used as a descriptor before 1892 (Halperin, 1986) when the terminology became popularized in written form, including in the Bible. Roscoe (1991) dates the use of transvestite to 1910, while transsexual was coined in 1948 (Roscoe, 1991) or 1949 (Lang, 1998). At the same time, while new names were being identified for gender variant people, individuals continued to suffer under the colonial language

and the move toward Christianized sexual and gender bipolarization and institutionalized heteronormativity. The need for a self-determined expression of identity that recognized Indigeneity, gender variance, sexual variance, and role acknowledgement became urgent.

The migration of Indigenous and AIAN gender-variant peoples to urban centres, coupled with the dominant racist and homophobic ideologies of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, sparked activism for a new identity. Key advocates, including Northern Paiute member Randy Burns and Hunkpapa Lakota member Barbara Cameron, co-founded the liberatory group Gay American Indians (GAI) to counter the displacement and migration of American Indians (Gilley, 2006). At the time, gender-variant identities were primarily encapsulated under the gay umbrella. This early American Indian activist group set the stage for AIAN and Indigenous movements on Turtle Island that led to the annual gatherings in the late 1980s. Fast-forwarding to the *Third Annual Inter-tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference*, held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1990, the term Two-Spirit was dreamed into being. The heart of Turtle Island, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, will always be known as the birthplace of Two-Spirit. It is this pivotal moment in time that sparked animosity toward a nebulous term that was difficult, if not impossible, to translate directly into many AIAN and Indigenous languages.

Dreamed into Being

This point of resistance—the dreams, the vision, the retelling and recreation of identity—is grounded in story. I have chosen to keep the words of Elder and Two-Spirit educator Dr. Myra Laramee to reduce the risk of misinterpretation. Paraphrasing and disrupting the flow of her words have the potential to change what she stated. Her words are therefore included in their entirety as transcribed in the video captured in Winnipeg, Manitoba (City of Winnipeg, 2021). In the spirit of who we are as Indigenous Peoples, I want to bring forward the story from

Anishinaabe Elder Dr. Myra Laramee, who shares her dream and vision. This is not merely retelling a story. Relaying a dream and vision from the dreamer's mouth holds great value as a vision for all the people. I found it particularly important to relay the transcript as it was presented to the public as a direct point of reference to the epistemological positioning of dreams as knowledge. Although I have been privy to additional information surrounding the dream and vision, those pieces have been left out to honour the dreamer—not all pieces are appropriate for public sharing. The intent and purpose of sharing the transcript is also to authenticate both the origin story of Two-Spirit and the dreamer's words. After Dr. Laramee introduces herself, she begins sharing the dream. The video notes that some pieces were purposely edited out and not shared to protect the integrity of the dream.

The Niizho Manidook, as we say in Anishinaabemowin. That was how that name was given to me and, it's taken its own journey around, actually, around the world, and there are a number of us who want to slow down, come back, and to be able to bring an understanding and not a definition, because it cannot be defined.

The grandfathers came in a dream, the grandmothers showed all of us the gift and the greatness of Two-Spirit. One day, or one night actually, seven orbs of light, as I was standing out on the grass, it was like the tipi disappeared and everything that, except the tobacco in my hand and the way in which I could see them through those legislature lights. They came, one after the other, seven of them. And each time one came. There was a male face, and a female face that would transform back and forth and, the first time the grandpa came, the mooshum face came. He said, "You are as of us, you are one of us, and you have been here like us since the beginning of time, and you have come to know which way we, which way in how we travel the earth, and the sky world, and the spirit world. And he said, you will begin to know many different kinds of things about the Two-Spirit nation. It's a nation of many means and many gifts and many ways. But the easiest and the best way, is to see that your gift is to see the world always in two sights, with two feelings of the heart. It's neither male or female, but it's both. It's neither up or down, but it's in the middle. It's complex. It's a complex understanding. But it's a real understanding if you just let yourself simmer down, and not try to be something you are not. And so, in that engagement, in that engagement of spirit and heart, we will always know who we are. It will never be taken away from us again. Ever. Ever, ever, ever. (City of Winnipeg, 2021, 00:39-3:58)

Dr. Laramee's retelling of the dream and story invites readers to consider how dream knowledge is received when it affirms Two-Spirit identity. Within many Indigenous knowledge

systems, dreams and visions are understood as meaningful sources of guidance, responsibility, and relational knowledge (Absolon, 2022; Ermine, 2000; Shawanda, 2020). However, when this dream is connected to Two-Spirit identity, its legitimacy may be questioned by some individuals or communities whose understandings of gender and sexuality have been shaped by colonial and Christianized norms. This raises an important tension: the same forms of knowledge that are often honoured in Indigenous epistemological contexts may be dismissed when they affirm Two-Spirit belonging. If the Two-Spirit vision were framed as an Elder's dream and vision for her people, it would be welcomed and even honoured as a gift from the Creator. In this, it would be consistent with the cultural and epistemological grounding in Indigenous worldviews that are often discussed and taught in community circles. Because the dream and vision highlight the inclusion of Two-Spirit people, the tensions are exacerbated and become problematic. As Absolon (2022) noted, it is time to wake up from the "colonial coma" (p. xv) and realize that colonial influence and Christian dogma drive this comatose state. Borrowing from Tuck and Yang's (2012) statement that "decolonization is not a metaphor" (p. 3), I argue that culture and dreaming are not metaphorical either. Dreaming, particularly as a source of knowledge received from the spirit world, is accepted as a way of understanding Indigenous epistemologies. To rebuke or dispute this term or the way it was dreamed into being is an attack on Indigenous knowledges—an act of epistemicide. This is not to suggest that Nation-specific terminology or steps toward self-determining nationhood diminish this valued knowledge, but it is to acknowledge that an identity was necessary for Indigenous communities to find their way back to Nation-specific identities.

I want to present this vision and dream not as a one-off anecdote but as a credible source of revealed and sacred knowledge gifted to Dr. Laramee, who has then gifted it to the Two-Spirit

community. Over the years, I have heard firsthand that there is no such thing as Two-Spirits, an assertion also shared by several other self-identifying Two-Spirit people in the company of some First Nations Elders. Bringing forth the essence of this dream gives us insight into what this umbrella term meant in the moment it was dreamed and then shared. The dispute among naysayers has always been that we have only one spirit—hence the forceful argument that there is no such thing as Two-Spirit. To counter such statements, I suggest that we would not have needed a specific identifier if there had been acceptance in communities to begin with and if gender-variant individuals had not been excommunicated for being different. Two-Spirit, then, holds the same calibre of understanding as umbrella terms such as Aboriginal and Indigenous. As Dr. Laramée suggests, it was not meant to be defined. I would add that the definition is not the key element in this case; what is critical is that the term provided a guidepost for those excommunicated or forced to leave their communities. Two-Spirit gatherings gave back an identity, a place to feel welcomed, and an acknowledgement of being okay as an Indigenous person who also happened to be gender and/or sexually non-conforming. The Two-Spirit guidepost is the place to build a sense of belonging that has been severed for gender-variant individuals.

Dreaming as Knowing

Dreams and visions have long been regarded as voices of our Ancestors and as messages from the Creator. They are formally recognized as valid sources of knowledge within Indigenous epistemologies and ancestral knowledge systems (Absolon, 2022; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Goulet, 2014; Moreno Sandoval et al., 2016; Shawanda, 2020). Dreams can be catalysts for Indigenous knowledge seeking and re-searching (Absolon, 2022; Marsden, 2004; Rowe, 2014), thereby revealing the incitement of research pathways. The dreamer of dreams is a knower,

teacher, prophet, and preacher (Goulet, 2014; Ward, 2023). These gifts are relayed through experiential phenomena, memory, storytelling, and resistance, or as the giver of messages of sacred origin and inner knowing (Absolon, 2010; Ermine, 2000; Hampton, 1995; Hart, 2010; Rowe, 2014). Alongside teachings, cultural storying, songs, and ceremonies, the survivance of these ways of knowing has outlived the annihilative colonial policies of erasure (Marsden, 2004; Vizenor, 2008, 2019). At the heart of Indigenous knowledges, messages from Ancestors and the Creator hold great truth and validity, and Indigenous People have the authority to determine what constitutes legitimate Indigenous knowledge regardless of Western pressures to devalue or to minimize its importance.

Brant-Castellano (2000) offers a framework for understanding Indigenous or Aboriginal knowledge. This framework identifies three interconnected ways of knowing: traditional, empirical, and revealed. I have privileged revealed knowledge, or a way of knowing that is “acquired through dreams, visions, and intuitions that are understood to be spiritual in origin” (p. 24), in the past to position an Anishinaabe framework for *niizh-manitoag*¹, or Two-Spirit people (Nobiss, 2023). Ermine (2000) also situates dreams and visions as a way of knowing within a sacred origin: “Our progenitors knew and believed in the power of dreams; it is only through dreams that sacred undertakings are attempted” (p. 108). Additional scholars have recognized the power of this revealed knowledge through dreams and visions and have noted that it serves as a significant source for outlining a predestined pathway for personal knowledge (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2021; Marsden, 2004; Rowe, 2014). Several Indigenous scholars make clear declarations that dreams and visions are not to be taken lightly, as they are

¹ Translations of Two-Spirit in Anishinaabemowin are spelled differently throughout the literature as noted in the story from Dr. Laramée, *niizho manidook*, *niizh manitoag* (Anguksuar, 1997, p. 210), and *Niizh Manidoo* (Williams et al., 2025) as some examples.

sources of knowledge and relationships with the Creator and Ancestors (Kovach, 2021; Rowe, 2014; Shawanda & Manitowabi, 2023; Wilson, 2008). Dreams and visions connect to the Ancestors' inherent guidance. Two-Spirit people have been known as dreamers, seers, and visionaries, and have been identified as leaders in various ceremonial processes to bring these sacred teachings to light (Lang, 1998; Roscoe, 1988). These ceremonial roles are noted in the “Dance to the Berdashe (i-coo-coo-a)” (Catlin, 1973, p. 219), the “Stomp Dance” (Gilley, 2006, p. 141), and the Sundance (Roscoe, 1988). Any degree of dismissal of the legitimacy of the specific Two-Spirit teachings, ceremonies, and traditions by Indigenous communities reflects the lingering effect of the colonial coma (Absolon, 2022) and the uptake by gatekeepers to further diminish Two-Spirit People and their identities.

Conclusion: Dreams are Knowledge, Two-Spirit is Knowledge

The history and emergence of the Two-Spirit identity encompass not only a movement grounded in activism, migration, identity politics, misidentification, and resistance, but also a powerful revelation dreamed into being. The core of this argument is that resistance to the Two-Spirit term and the continued marginalization of Two-Spirit people are not merely semantic debates devoid of Nation-specific meaning. Rather, a resistance of this nature reflects a purposeful disconnection from a history infused with a Western compulsory heterosexist mentality and centuries of identifiers and identities that have never fit. This colonial measure of Indigenous gender and sexuality is what needs to be contested, rather than the term Two-Spirit itself.

Esteemed Anishinaabe Elder Dr. Myra Laramée (City of Winnipeg, 2021) offered a gift of a new identity that affirms the grounding of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Dreams and visions are recognized as epistemological pillars, legitimate sources of knowledge,

guidance from Ancestors, and prophetic revelations for Indigenous Peoples. Dismissal of these pillars is a denial of the foundations on which Indigenous knowledge systems exist—it is epistemicide, or the continuation and extension of coercion and colonial violence, often internalized and identified as lateral violence from within the community. When these knowledges are accepted, they can serve as starting points for reconnecting with Nation-specific language and identity. This process can support identities that are accepted, nurtured, and cultivated within communal structures, while revitalizing Two-Spirit knowledge as a cultural teaching. Simpson (2017) identifies this as “normalized queerness” (p. 122), a space that silences the colonial oversight of what is and what is not acceptable. Pushing back against the “colonial coma” (Absolon, 2022, p. xv) and resisting inherited language of degradation and annihilation can help restore tradition. Such colonial influences contradict the core Indigenous teachings of love, truth, respect, humility, honesty, courage, and wisdom. As one Elder has indicated to me, we would never reject our own people if we were to follow the teachings (Nobiss, 2023).

The dismissals and denials of cultural identity for Two-Spirit people within Indigenous communities have tangible consequences for Two-Spirit people who will continually migrate, by choice or by force, away from home, community, and culture. The exclusion only reinforces the exile that has been imposed on Indigenous Peoples for centuries and suggests that we do not belong. The deep and lasting persistence of gender and sexual diversity within Indigenous communities deserves recognition, along with the Two-Spirit people who have fought extensively throughout a shared colonial history for the right to belong. The dreaming of Two-Spirit identity into being is survivance, resistance, and a refusal to be eliminated and erased.

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