

# Challenging Settler Colonialism in Contemporary Queer Politics: Settler Homonationalism, Pride Toronto, and Two-Spirit Subjectivities

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## INTRODUCTION

Compelling evidence indicates that the eliminationist logic of White settler colonialism, which continues to shape settler-Indigenous relations more broadly, functions similarly to sustain White-normed same-sex politics and practices within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, Queer, questioning, and Two-Spirited (LGBTTIQQ2S) communities in North America.<sup>1</sup> According to Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism engages the logic of erasure, and thus differs from colonialism in terms of its understanding of conquest, whereby settlers lay claim to Indigenous lands as if they were their own.<sup>2</sup> In distinction, settler colonialism requires the violent elimination of Indigenous peoples and their cultures, as well as the expropriation of lands.<sup>3</sup> Sunera Thobani describes the extent to which Canada is produced

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as a settler society through exclusive citizenship regulations and immigration laws that announce and produce White settlers as proper national subjects.<sup>4</sup>

In Canada, few empirical investigations have examined the extent to which White settler colonialism impacts contemporary Queer politics<sup>5</sup> and the lives of Two-Spirited Indigenous peoples<sup>6</sup>—an English term coined to reflect Indigenous people’s gendered and sexual differences, as well as their connections to indigeneity.<sup>7</sup> The superficial inclusion of two-spiritedness within LGBTTIQQ2S culture and politics masks the ongoing settler-colonial violence required for modern Queer formations to exist. Scott Morgensen argues that if the scholarship and activism undertaken by Queer and Trans<sup>8</sup> settlers seek to decolonize—to invite radical change and possibility—they must “question the colonial origins and uses of sexual minority and Queer identities, displace desires for a history or future on stolen land, and challenge the colonial power of settler states and global institutions.”<sup>9</sup> The radical change Morgensen envisions remains obscured because White Queer and Trans settlers are reluctant to engage with these difficult and contentious questions surrounding settler colonialism.<sup>10</sup>

In this paper, the authors (one White and the other Black, both of whom self-identify as same-gender loving) take seriously Morgensen’s call to centralize the effects of settler colonialism within Queer theorizing and Queer politics.<sup>11</sup> We employ a decolonial qualitative methodological framework to engage with the subjective experiences of seven self-identified Two-Spirited Indigenous peoples in Toronto. The interview participants shared their complex experiences of attending/participating in Pride Toronto. By centering the experiences of Two-Spirited peoples, this paper addresses the manifestation of White settler sexuality within Pride Toronto’s Queer politics. The experiences of Two-Spirited peoples displace the imagined homogeneity of White settler sexuality, which continues to dominate Queer and Trans representations within Pride Toronto. This paper argues that seemingly progressive and inclusive Queer politics within Pride Toronto erases Indigenous activism, eroticizes indigeneity, and derides Indigenous peoples’ cultures and understandings of gender and sexuality.

Annual Pride celebrations in Canada—in Toronto, more specifically—provide a context for theorizing dominant White settler expressions of Queer and Trans politics.<sup>12</sup> The inclusive narrative couched in Pride Toronto’s slogans (e.g., “Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop” [2009], “30 Years in the Making” [2010], “You Belong” [2011], and “Celebrate and Demonstrate” [2012]) overlook the vast differences among LGBTTIQQ2S peoples and their experiences of multiple oppressions.<sup>13</sup> One way that White settler colonialism permeates Toronto’s Queer politics can be seen in 2009–2012, when Pride Toronto and the City of Toronto actively tried to exclude Queers Against the Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA), a Queer Palestinian solidarity group, from marching in the Pride parade.<sup>14</sup> The attempted exclusion of QuAIA, as Morgensen argues, calls attention to the ways that modern Queers are complicit in sustaining settler colonialism and how their actions (or lack thereof) obscure the decolonial activism mobilized by Queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples in Canada.<sup>15</sup>

This paper begins with an overview of the term and the identity *Two-Spirit*. We then theorize the differences between colonialism and settler colonialism before situating our research contribution within Morgensen’s settler homonationalism, as

embedded within Pride Toronto's contemporary Queer politics.<sup>16</sup> This discussion is followed by an outline of our methodological approach, analysis, and limitations. Then we present our findings and a discussion of their implications to reveal how contemporary gendered and sexual formations have collided with settler-colonial violence to exclude Indigenous peoples, and to deride their ongoing decolonial activism within contemporary Queer and Trans activism in Canada. Research findings disrupt the narrow focus attributed to sexuality scholarship and Queer studies by taking the imbricated logics of settler colonialism, race, and queerness seriously.

## UNDERSTANDING TWO-SPIRIT SUBJECTIVITIES

Predating contact, the meanings of two-spiritedness have a long etymological history in which gendered and sexually diverse Indigenous people were contributors to their communities as negotiators, warriors, healers or medicine people, and tricksters.<sup>17</sup> There are twenty-five spoken languages among off-reserve Indigenous communities in Canada,<sup>18</sup> each with its own understanding of two-spiritedness. *Two-Spirit* was first coined in Minnesota in 1988, and later in Winnipeg in 1990, at a gathering of the Native American/First Nation gay and lesbian conference.<sup>19</sup> *Two-Spirit* is "a generic term that was adopted in order to provide a modern means of regrouping Aboriginal people with other gender and sexuality identifications, as well as to reawaken the spiritual nature of the role [Two-Spirited] people are meant to play in their communities."<sup>20</sup>

Two-Spirited, as an individual and collective identity, was created partly as a response to the overwhelming homogeneity of White Queer settler communities and the lack of awareness of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and non-heteronormative gendered and sexual subjectivities in Canada. Two-Spirit is understood transnationally as a counter-hegemonic identity formation created for and by Indigenous people to recognize and represent indigeneity in a way that cannot be achieved within contemporary White Queer politics. Given that each Indigenous culture has its own language, which may not be accessible to every Two-Spirited person, the English term *Two-Spirit* allows different communities and peoples to come together.<sup>21</sup>

As umbrella terminology, however, *Two-Spirit* risks homogenizing Indigenous peoples with divergent gendered and sexual differences, much like the problematics embodied in the Queer label.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the representations of queerness and two-spiritedness alike can be reduced to tokenistic images of authenticity, legible only through their dominant representations. Gayatri Spivak coined the concept of strategic essentialism to express the utility for political consciousness-raising endeavors of placing a simplified and definable boundary around an identity category, thus rendering it recognizable and enabling mobilization around it.<sup>23</sup> The boundary elicits recognizability by homogenizing the identity group.<sup>24</sup> The legibility of Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples allows less visible groups to gain a form of recognition within larger Queer spaces that typically gloss over each group's political significance. The overall effect of reifying Indigenous identity is to "impose a single, drastically simplified group-identity [that] denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations."<sup>25</sup> Settler sexuality constrains gendered and sexual differences among settlers

and Indigenous peoples alike. In reawakening two-spiritedness in Indigenous people's lives, Two-Spirited people challenge the dominant representations and understandings of contemporary settler sexual and gendered subjectivities.

## DISTINGUISHING (SETTLER) COLONIALISM

To disrupt settler constructions of queerness, the theoretical differences between colonialism and settler colonialism must be spelled out. Colonialism is a consequence of imperialism, which is defined as "a political system in which an imperial centre governs colonised countries."<sup>26</sup> Colonialism can be defined as the state control and conquest of peoples, lands, and resources; its effects are experienced differently within divergent geographical spaces, and should not be understood as a homogenous encounter.<sup>27</sup> Common articulations of colonialism are typically produced through the Western Empire's violent projects of expansion and conquest. As Achille Mbembe argues, colonialism "helped produce an imaginary capacity converting the founding violence into authorizing authority."<sup>28</sup> Thus, colonialism, which is still in effect today, enables colonizers to exploit and violently subjugate racialized and colonized peoples through territorial expansion.<sup>29</sup>

Lorenzo Veracini distinguishes the theoretical differences between colonialism and settler colonialism, explaining that the former "reinforces the distinction between colony and metropole,"<sup>30</sup> whereas the latter erases the very distinction. Colonialism is inextricably linked to settler colonialism because settlers produce themselves as owners and conquerors of Indigenous territories.<sup>31</sup> Settler colonialism is premised on the erasure and destruction of Indigenous peoples and their lands.<sup>32</sup> The central tenet of settler colonialism is that land is "terra nullius—the territory is [assumed and produced to be] empty, vacant, deserted, uninhabited."<sup>33</sup> By designating land as *terra nullius*, settlers can understand themselves as the proper inhabitants and owners of Indigenous lands. As Wolfe so aptly puts it, "Settler colonialism destroys to replace."<sup>34</sup> Thus, the logic of settler colonialism is sustained through the elimination of Indigenous peoples as a consequence of historical processes that continue to inform the present—"invasion is a structure not an event."<sup>35</sup> Veracini has suggested that within settler colonial formations, events replace structures through ongoing invasion.<sup>36</sup>

Addressing the *McIvor vs. The Registrar* case, Martin Cannon imbricates issues of racism and sexism onto the scholarship theorizing settler colonialism.<sup>37</sup> Cannon suggests that the processes through which Indigenous peoples are *granted* Indian status in Canada rely on the Indian Act, a settler-colonial structure, and thus urges scholars to address how the logics of elimination and processes of racialization are enacted through sexism.<sup>38</sup> Correspondingly, we utilize Cannon's critique of the current settler-colonial scholarship by connecting the logics of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy as mechanisms of Indigenous elimination and erasure.<sup>39</sup> Settlers continue to construct Indigenous peoples as hypersexual, uncivilized, and premodern, requiring Indigenous peoples to suppress their gendered and sexual differences in order to be read as legitimate modern subjects.<sup>40</sup> By enforcing heteropatriarchal gender binaries and roles, and by assuming opposite-sex desire, settler institutions have violently displaced

Two-Spirit teachings. As Chris Finley articulates, “It is time to bring ‘sexy’ back . . . and quit pretending [Natives] are boring and pure and do not think or write about sex. We are alive, we are sexy, and some of us Natives are [Q]ueer.”<sup>41</sup> While Indigenous Queer, feminist, and Two-Spirit scholars and activists are speaking back at the settler-colonial constraints placed on Indigenous communities, Queer settlers continue to deny indigeneity within activist spaces through the reification of settler colonialism.

## MAPPING OUT THE THEORETICAL TERRAIN: SETTLER HOMONATIONALISM AND PRIDE TORONTO

Settler homonationalism offers a theoretical framework for unsettling the production of normalized citizen-subjects within disruptions of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is defined as the expectations, demands, and constraints produced when heterosexuality is taken for granted and normalized within a society or culture.<sup>42</sup> Typically, Queer and Trans peoples attend Pride Toronto to interrupt heteronormativity—with overt, highly sexual, and very political statements of Queer and Trans identities—by bringing awareness to LGBTTIQQ2S diversity. While diverse LGBTTIQQ2S communities in Toronto are showcased through the disruption of heteronormativity, they typically reinforce and normalize homonormativity. Lisa Duggan argues that homonormativity “upholds and sustains [heteronormativity] while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”<sup>43</sup> Under the guise of neoliberalism, homonormativity produces and reproduces White gay and lesbian subjectivities. Dismantling homonormativity brings attention to interlocking identities within queerness, where some (mostly White) LGBTTIQQ2S-identified peoples are afforded privilege (sexual, economic, racial, national, gendered, etc.).

In settler-colonial Australia, Mark Markwel engaged with the hegemonic gay-male participation in Mardi Gras festivals and argued that “full participation in the festival is an expensive undertaking, especially when coupled with the costs of outfits; body treatments such as waxing, tanning, gym training, hairstyling, and party drugs; and, for tourists, accommodation and transportation costs.”<sup>44</sup> This perception of a normalized Pride participant obscures LGBTTIQQ2S peoples who live in poverty, are homeless, or are unable to participate for economic reasons.<sup>45</sup> In this and other ways, Pride festivals produce homonormativity, masking and excluding already-marginalized representations of gendered and sexual difference. Pride festivals continue to be marketed as political, even as they are premised on the ability to consume. The normalized Queer identity marketed by and within Pride festivals can itself be understood as homonormative. Jasbir Puar pushes Duggan’s use of homonormativity as it connects to the biopolitics of queerness,<sup>46</sup> arguing that queerness is normalized within a neoliberal privatization of affect through its pandering for state and market recognition, its limited focus on rights, and its focus on same-but-different normalcy practices.<sup>47</sup> Puar further posits that homonormativity is essential to the development of homonationalism.<sup>48</sup>

Homonationalism requires Queers to be complicit in nationalistic projects that renounce and enact violence upon racialized and colonized peoples.<sup>49</sup> The normalization of sexual subjects evokes the biopolitics of homonationalism: racialized subjects

are excluded from White articulations of queerness and are simultaneously made Queer (monstrous, feminized, and abnormal).<sup>50</sup> Homonationalism becomes a theoretical and activist tool because Queer citizen-subjects are implicated and complicit in projects of nationalism that deploy Whiteness as normal and natural. Morgensen utilizes Puar's homonationalism to take into account the biopolitics of settler colonialism that erases Indigenous peoples from the contemporary landscape and from settler sexuality.<sup>51</sup>

Morgensen asserts that settler homonationalism is "an effect of U.S. [Q]ueer modernities forming amid the conquest of Native peoples and the settling of land."<sup>52</sup> The settler subject is entangled with the Queer subject, which typically pins queerness onto the bodies of non-Natives.<sup>53</sup> Settler homonationalism, moreover, is produced within contemporary Queer politics when Queer subjects are created "as agents of the violence of the settler state."<sup>54</sup> Morgensen implicates modern Queer politics in a US context as repudiating Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination through modalities of neoliberalism and Queer settler liberation.<sup>55</sup> Pride Toronto's Queer politics are typically entrenched in neoliberal consumption practices, in which modalities of Queer inclusion reify settler homonationalism by disavowing Indigenous gendered and sexual differences, divergent modalities of sovereignty, and Indigenous decolonization.

## DECOLONIAL QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

For this research project, a qualitative methodological approach reveals more than a quantitative one, because our goal is to highlight the subjective experiences and perceptions of Two-Spirited-identified interviewees. This qualitative approach troubles the positivist quantitative methodologies that are typically disconnected from a Queer ethos. Helen Hok-Sze Leung argues that a Queer theoretical perspective "theorize[s] what escapes, exceeds, and resists normative formations."<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Kath Browne and Catherine Nash suggest that Queer "can and should be redeployed, fucked with and used in resistant and transgressive ways."<sup>57</sup> In these pages, we use Queer as a disruption of the norm and simultaneously as a very real identity category.

Both qualitative and quantitative research function as tools of colonial oppression, producing Indigenous peoples as objects of inquiry.<sup>58</sup> To avoid reproducing this pattern of imperialist domination, we centralize an Indigenous decolonizing framework within a Queer focus—seeking to "put a human face to what is called a body of knowledge and in the process unmask[s] the presumably faceless body."<sup>59</sup> Margaret Kovach asserts, "A decolonizing approach, built upon critical theory, is particularly effective in analyzing power differences between groups [in] that it provides hope for transformation . . . there is a role for both structural change and personal agency in resistance . . . and [in] that Habermas' notions of finding victories in small struggles resists a purist tendency towards an all-or-nothing approach to social transformation."<sup>60</sup> Decolonization aims to center Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews, which are typically delegitimized in canonical social science methodological frameworks. An example of such negation can be found in the dominant social science qualitative interviewing model, in which researchers typically require research participants to physically sign an informed consent document, thus eschewing the value of Indigenous oral traditions.<sup>61</sup>

## PARTICIPANTS

A mixed approach of purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for the study.<sup>62</sup> The recruitment strategies included posting study information on the University of Toronto's *Aboriginal Studies* and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education's *Indigenous Education Network* listservs. We also connected with some research participants at the 2-Spirited People of the First Nations (2-Spirits), a social service agency that provides programming to Aboriginal HIV-positive and/or LGBTQ service users. Eligibility criteria for the study were that the participants (1) be over the age of eighteen, (2) self-identify as Two-Spirited with Indigenous ancestry, and (3) have attended Pride Toronto at least once.

Eligible participants were invited to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews, during which they were asked to share personal stories about their Pride Toronto experiences. The seven participants ranged in age from twenty-two to sixty years old; however, some participants were only willing to provide us with an age range. The study did not offer incentives for participation, and the participants' involvement was voluntary. Each participant provided either written and/or verbal informed consent, with the latter respecting Indigenous oral traditions.<sup>63</sup> Research participants were offered a gift of tobacco to foster trust and to show respect for the knowledge and experience they were bringing to the research project.<sup>64</sup>

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Seven self-identified, Two-Spirited, urban Indigenous people—representing divergent identities within the Two-Spirited community (e.g., Two-Spirited men or women, Two-Spirit-identified, and Two-Spirited Trans-identified)—were interviewed in the summer of 2009. Interviews were held in locations where each participant felt safest: workplaces, restaurants, bars, and coffee shops located close to Toronto's gay village (Toronto's Church and Wellesley streets). Interviews lasted from thirty minutes to approximately three hours. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, research participants were asked to pick pseudonyms so that no personal identifying information would be compromised. Some pseudonyms were chosen to represent the participant's clan or deep connection to an animal spirit.<sup>65</sup> To be respectful of divergent experiences of indigeneity, research participants were not asked questions pertaining to Indian status or blood quantum. Interviews were coded manually using cross-sectional indexing, with transcripts connected through common themes.<sup>66</sup> All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Any personal identifying information was deleted from the transcripts to ensure the protection of each participant's privacy and confidentiality. The authors interpreted the chosen interview passages collaboratively using Steiner Kvale's interpretive approaches to qualitative interview analysis.<sup>67</sup>

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Three major themes emerged from analysis of the research participants' interviews: (1) understanding Two-Spirit subjectivities, (2) Queer inclusion, and (3) Two-Spirit/

Indigenous exclusion. These findings reflected participants' understandings of two-spiritedness and the empirical vastness of Indigenous gendered and sexually diverse identities. Moreover, the discussion of Queer inclusion in Pride Toronto sheds light on the ways in which Indigenous peoples negotiate White settler Queer politics in Canada. Likewise, notwithstanding the decolonial activism of Two-Spirited peoples within Pride Toronto spaces, the findings suggested that they continue to experience oppression in the form of racism and settler colonialism.

### *Two-Spiritedness: A Contested Identity*

As participants in the study intimated, two-spiritedness is a contested identity among Indigenous peoples. While some call for its rejection—given the term's English origin—others believe its utility far outweighs its perceived shortcomings. Acceptance of the term is seen as offering a means of solace in the form of a supportive LGBTTIQQ2S community from which to tackle the pervasive cultural homophobia in Canadian society and within Indigenous communities. As Snow Owl reports, "In the Aboriginal community, Two-Spirit is debatable. There is still a lot of dialogue going on. Some people refuse Two-Spirit because it is an English term, [and] to the other extreme, people embrace the term because of homophobia within Canadian society. Because of ostracization from our families and our communities." Moreover, participants Muskrat and Eagle understand Two-Spirit as an inclusive identity—one that anyone, regardless of being Indigenous, can embody.

Similarly, the participants connected two-spiritedness to their sexual, erotic, and relational practices as Indigenous peoples. For them, the Two-Spirit identity transcends White settler sexuality to include a spiritual world unhinged from socially constructed labels. Collectively, they spoke of two-spiritedness as connected to Indigenous spirituality, indeed, as a way to recognize one's alterity. Wolf talked about Two-Spirit as a manner of conducting oneself: "It's a way of occupying space in the world. And it is not just who I have sex with and who my partners are—that is just one quarter of who I am. Taking into consideration not just physically what I do with another woman or emotionally how I feel towards other women, but intellectually and spiritually and a connection to the spiritual world." Eagle said, "There is a part of our female spirit, which we carry, which comes from our mothers, and then also the male spirit, which comes from our father, and we carry both of those identities within ourselves whether we are male or female. We know how to balance them out. Because in our minds I think we could work with both. Just balancing those two spirits is such a gift to carry, and I believe that everyone has that." Thus, adopting the identity Two-Spirit allows Indigenous peoples to connect their gendered and sexual diversity to their indigeneity, which is typically expunged by settler sexuality.

### *Queer Inclusion*

Participants spoke about Pride Toronto as a political event: one that promotes, fosters, and makes visible divergent gendered and sexualized subjectivities. Describing the LGBTTIQQ2S activism within Pride Toronto, Snow Owl stated, "The fight is not



over.” Indigenous peoples, regardless of their sexualities, gender identities, or desires, are encouraged to attend Pride Toronto to celebrate together as Two-Spirited people. Excited about Pride, Eagle spoke as follows about traveling to Toronto as a young person who wanted to be part of the celebration:

I have attended Pride Toronto ever since I have been in Toronto, and I have been here for fourteen years. [Before moving here,] I would come with some friends from Sudbury, Ontario. We would make a huge effort to pull together and put money together for a hotel room. I could not sleep the night before my first Pride, I was just too excited! We all supported each other, had a beer together, and went back together. . . . That same feeling that I had the first time, I still have that same feeling. . . . You see people that are happy, and people celebrating, and it’s a really amazing feeling.

Eagle grew up in a Christian family where queerness and non-normative gender representation were unacceptable. Thus, Eagle’s understanding of Pride Toronto includes the concept of inclusivity, which connects people who are experiencing similar oppression or marginalization due to their sexual or gendered minority status. Eagle continues to partake in Pride Toronto each year in order to build community, and to connect and celebrate with other LGBTTIQQ2S peoples.

Similarly, Raven had left his reserve community due to extreme experiences of homophobia. To connect with other Indigenous peoples of diverse gendered and sexual differences, Raven took part in the *2-Spirits* float during the Pride Parade. Raven explained, “I was asked to walk with the Two-Spirited people with Pride back in 1999. So I did! I showed up. Put on these red pants, and this green shirt, and wore this sailor hat, and put on some makeup and mascara—that was my pride outfit. That was my first Pride I ever walked in.” Being involved in the Pride Parade allowed Raven to connect with other Two-Spirited people and to celebrate his sexuality and indigeneity. For Raven, taking part in Pride was a celebration—yet, a celebration that required him to adopt dominant discourses of Queer recognizability in order to portray himself as gay. Both Eagle and Raven spoke about Two-Spirited peoples creating inclusive Indigenous-centered spaces, and having their diverse gendered and sexual subjectivities validated and valued within the contemporary Queer climate in Canada.

In speaking of engaging with the activism and radical politics of Pride Toronto, Wolf stated, “I’ve usually gone to the Pride Parade. When I first came to Toronto, I was on the *2-Spirits* float, and I always made sure to go to the dyke march. And then a couple of years ago they would have a Trans celebration at the local community center. This year [2009] was the first Trans Parade.” For Wolf, Pride Toronto had become a space in which Queer and Trans activism could occur. The Trans Parade thus became a political endeavor in which some Two-Spirited people engage with and disrupt the over-representation of White gay male sexual subjectivities in Pride Toronto.

While activist triumphs certainly occur within Pride spaces, participant Golden Hawk spoke also about the invisibility of Two-Spirited people and events in the Pride Toronto advertisements. Golden Hawk explains, “People that I know in Toronto are committed to organizing inclusive events for Queers. But I haven’t heard of any sort of

events specifically that are for Two-Spirit folks, or bisexual Two-Spirited folk. It's not an identity that is actively included." For Golden Hawk, moreover, Pride Toronto organizers and affiliates are not adequately addressing or including two-spiritedness—an omission that reinscribes the power of White gay and lesbian settler complicity. From Golden Hawk's standpoint, Two-Spirit representation in Pride Toronto remains invisible, unless included by Two-Spirited peoples and community members.

Regardless of the shortcomings of Pride Toronto, participant Snow Owl said, "I think that Pride needs to continue year after year because of homophobia, which is still at the root of a lot of our issues that we have in the gay and lesbian movement. People who are not part of the gay and lesbian community tend to think [that], with all of the rights gays and lesbians have, why bother with the festival. I think the gay and lesbian community needs to recognize and really know that there are a lot more issues that we need to tackle." For Snow Owl, a lot more social change needs to occur to eradicate homophobia; thus, not taking part in—or even eliminating—Pride Toronto is not an option. In particular, Snow Owl speaks to the ways in which Two-Spirited people continue to experience marginalization, exploitation, and oppression under the umbrella of Pride Toronto's inclusive LGBTTIQQ2S acronym.

Each research participant spoke about Pride Toronto as a political space for LGBTTIQQ2S peoples. Narratives of inclusion offer important justifications for Pride Toronto: to foster a collective Queer community, to encourage Indigenous belonging, and to provide opportunities for Indigenous activism. A central theme within all of the narratives of Queer inclusion is that for Two-Spirited peoples, a space, in fact, exists that recognizes and validates their gendered and sexual differences.

### *Two-Spirit/Indigenous Exclusion*

To varying degrees, each research participant shared experiences of racial oppression or colonization while attending Pride Toronto. For example, Raven readily recalled an experience of discrimination during Pride Toronto in which a bouncer tried to kick him out of a Pride event:

I am sitting in the VIP area, and this bouncer comes along, and he sees me sitting there. He looks at me, I am a Native guy, and he tries to kick me out! I was not drinking at the time. I was only twenty-three years old. I was only drinking water. I was not drunk. I was minding my own business and I was trying to enjoy myself. The bouncer came up to me and told me I had to leave. The bouncer was screaming at the manager of the bar, "I want him to get out! I don't want him to sit there, get him outta there!" The manager said I could stay. So there was still that racism. The bouncer was trying to kick me out because he [did] not think I [was] important enough to be in the VIP area. And this was like a major Pride Toronto event going on, in a major bar. And, they were trying to kick me out because I was not worth[y] [of being there].

Raven experienced extreme bigotry at a large-scale Pride Toronto event. The bouncer believed that Raven's body should not be present in the VIP area, let alone in the

bar. This preconception of who belongs or does not belong in a bar assumes that a customer like Raven (like all Indigenous peoples) is a social problem. To sanitize the bar and, indeed, to protect everyone present, Raven was asked to leave. This example of Indigenous exclusion from Queer spaces illustrates the degree to which settler colonialism impacts perceptions of who belongs at Pride Toronto events.

Similarly, exclusion manifested in Wolf's experience of sexual violence when attending Pride Toronto:

I experience discrimination based on being female-identified and because I am brown . . . based on my gender . . . People thought I was a gay man. How other gay men would grab [each other] . . . they would do that with me. And of course they would violate my space and the folks I am with. And those folks [were] usually White men—gay White men or heterosexual men . . . [they would say] “Oh I just need a gay man. I just need a good fuck” . . . you know things like that . . . What about me makes [them] think I want a good fuck? . . . the folks to my left, folks to my right can do that just fine, and they don't have a dick to do it, and if they do [want to] they can strap it on [*laughs*].

In Wolf's experience, Pride Toronto was diluted by White gay men's hypersexuality. Wolf was sexually assaulted. Due to her butch-gendered representation, Wolf's body was misrecognized, and gay men assumed the right to touch and grope her. Moreover, Wolf's story of sexual violence renders painfully clear the ways in which White gay male sexualities and desires are privileged and normalized.

In connection to Wolf's story of an intimate and violent sexual encounter, Raven talked about watching an underwear contest: “Some kind of contest was [happening] on Church Street, and it was right across from one of the local bars. Someone said to me, ‘Oh, they are having a competition.’ It was some competition where everybody had to wear a headdress. All of the competitors at one point, all had to wear a traditional headdress, and not one of them was Native. And everybody was cheering them on.” Raven's story exemplifies the phenomenon of indigeneity on display for the visual consumption of voyeurs watching the underwear contest. The headdress was presumably included in the contest to represent Indigenous culture; however, Raven addressed the ways that indigeneity is culturally appropriated in camp-like entertainment events, even when no Indigenous people are present.

Grizzly Bear spoke to another violent and racist encounter with a waiter at a local restaurant on Church Street after marching in the Pride Parade:

We were in a fancy restaurant and this waiter comes up and he was wearing really skimpy clothing and gave us awful service. He kept kicking our chairs and that, and the place started filling up. He clearly did not like us. I said something like, “You know, if you don't want women here, if you don't want people with a political analysis here, you should maybe advertise your restaurant sort of more like, we have nothing but self interest or something like that.” The guy was kinda snarky and I said before paying our bill, “You know, why don't you just read the paper on Saturday morning because there is an article coming out on genocide and First Nations people, and I

was the featured interview.” The waiter said to me, “The only thing I want to read in the paper Saturday morning is that you are dead like the rest of your people, and not soon enough.” I said, “Do you want to repeat that?” He said, “You heard me bitch.”

Grizzly Bear’s experience in the restaurant during Pride Toronto demonstrates the extent to which overt racist and sexist hate language becomes normalized at LGBTTIQQ2S events and festivals. In the interaction, Grizzly Bear suggested that the waiter read an article on Indigenous history, which would have allowed him to begin developing a critical consciousness of indigeneity in Canada; however, that opportunity was refused. As this story indicates, violence (genocide, racism, and sexism) at Pride Toronto is quintessential to the discussion of settler colonialism, and how it infiltrates contemporary Queer politics to solidify racial hierarchies and legitimate settler homonationalism.

## DISCUSSION

Results of this study on Two-Spirited people’s participation in and experiences attending Pride Toronto suggest that LGBTTIQQ2S peoples must be aware of how contemporary Queer and Trans subjectivities rely on settler colonialism to function. We make use of an interlocking analysis to dispel the idea that all Queer people experience similar oppression.<sup>68</sup> By taking account of the dis/connections among various and contradictory embodied identities, we move beyond an intersectional analysis to centralize the connection among queerness, race, and settler colonialism.<sup>69</sup> An interlocking analysis provokes the current settler-colonial scholarship and activism to account for the violence of/in contemporary Queer politics. From the research participants’ experiences, settler homonationalism seems to be produced within Pride Toronto when LGBTTIQQ2S people elide categorization of race, racialization, and (settler) colonialism through the activism and celebrations in which they participate. Simultaneously, Indigenous peoples participate in Pride Toronto as a way of subverting settler homonationalism through Indigenous decolonization.

The research participants’ experiences of attending and being active in Pride Toronto illumine the ways in which settler homonationalism permeates Pride Toronto’s vision and, indeed, the contemporary imaginations of Queer politics. To become intelligible as Queers, Two-Spirited people must assimilate themselves into contemporary Queer politics; however, when Two-Spirited people become intelligible as Indigenous, they become unintelligible as Queer and, thus, may experience considerable violence. Settler homonationalism manifests through participant experiences of being sexualized, eroticized, racialized, and invisibilized as Two-Spirited people. Within the context of Pride Toronto, Two-Spirited people—under the leadership of 2-Spirits—continue to create and sustain Indigenous activism by decolonizing contemporary Queer politics and unsettling settler homonationalism.

As a not-for-profit organization, Pride Toronto receives funding from the City of Toronto, private donors, and multinational corporations (TD Canada Trust, Trojan Condoms, Bud Light, Viagra, Barefoot Wine & Bubbly, etc.).<sup>70</sup> Thus, we suggest, the

annual event's multiplicity of investments clearly allow and prioritize certain notions of LGBTTIQQ2S identity. Due to Pride Toronto's neoliberal agenda, research participants insist that Two-Spirited people be included to offset and provide an alternative to settler homonationalist Queer politics.

### *Disrupting Inclusion*

Scholarship engaging with Pride festivals and parades on the land of Indigenous peoples continues to centralize White gay-male sexualities and desires.<sup>71</sup> The overrepresentation of gay-male sexuality within Pride spaces persistently marginalizes non-homonormative sexual and gendered identities.<sup>72</sup> In Toronto, the representations of LGBTTIQQ2S subjectivities continue to circulate and normalize Whiteness.<sup>73</sup> To combat the dominant representations of White gay and lesbian identities, antiracist and diasporic Queer and Trans scholars continue to trouble the idealization and normalization of White gay-male identities.<sup>74</sup> Contemporary Queer politics in North America are enduringly steeped in the project of settler colonialism.<sup>75</sup> In Canada, the experiences of Two-Spirited people attending Pride Toronto complicate hegemonic narratives of Queer inclusion within Queer and antiracist circles by troubling how—and under what settler colonial conditions—Pride festivals exist. Within Pride Toronto's inclusion practices, Two-Spirited is superficially appropriated into Queer identity, exclusive of cultural and communal contexts. Simultaneously, within the narrow confines of settler Queer legibility, Two-Spirited people who attend Pride Toronto are still trying to find safety in, and decolonize, Pride spaces.

Pride spaces are being decolonized by Two-Spirited people continually taking part in activist endeavors, marching in the Pride parade with 2-Spirits, and calling attention to the overt manifestations of settler sexuality. Ultimately, Two-Spirited people are included within Pride Toronto through their own volition and active avoidance of classist, racist, colonial, and alcohol-centric spaces. As the research participants indicated, Two-Spirited people and their divergent attachments to indigeneity must be respected. Within this contemporary moment, settler homonationalism continues to seep into contemporary Queer politics, enabling and normalizing racism, genocide, and sexism. Two-Spirited people *must* be able to enter into divergent Queer spaces without fear of sexism or racism on the part of other LGBTTIQQ2S peoples.

### *Indigenous Agency and Activism*

Currently, in settler colonial or Queer studies scholarship in North America, there is a paucity of work that theorizes the activism undertaken by Indigenous Queer, feminist, and Two-Spirited peoples.<sup>76</sup> Implications for this research project include calling attention to the activism and agency employed by Two-Spirited people to disrupt settler colonialism and settler homonationalism in Canada. Meyer-Cook and Labelle speak to the Two-Spirit activism (similar to 2-Spirits) that exists in Montreal, where support services serve to strengthen the Indigenous community.<sup>77</sup> As these authors argue, "With few Two-Spirit people knowing where and how to gain access to 'Two-Spirit friendly' Elders, role models, healthy lifestyles alternatives and inclusive cultural spaces, many

'fall through the cracks' and end up on city streets, living in poverty with poorer health and with greater risk of becoming lost and in pain."<sup>78</sup> Research participants in the current study suggested that 2-Spirits continues to be the only community agency that organizes the float and representations of two-spiritedness in Pride Toronto; however, they also spoke to feelings of connectedness and inclusion within the Two-Spirit community—even as dominant representations within the Pride parade are of White gays and lesbians.

Even with the inclusion created by 2-Spirits, representations of two-spiritedness become constrained by settler homonationalism. The prevalent representations of two-spiritedness become easily accessible identity markers that enable Pride Toronto voyeurs to understand Two-Spirited peoples as Indigenous. However, even as Two-Spirited people are making space for indigeneity, they have particular constraints as to what representations they can evoke. Thus, activist spaces exist, and Two-Spirited people have found a place to represent two-spiritedness within settler-colonial constraints.

### *Indigenous Eroticization and Erasure*

Within Pride Toronto, Indigenous gendered and sexual differences are Othered through their eroticization. As bell hooks argues, "One desires 'a bit of the Other' to enhance the blank landscape of Whiteness."<sup>79</sup> By adding cultural references of Indigenous peoples into camp-like or trivial displays of queerness, all differences among those who attend and participate in Pride Toronto become sexy. When settlers put Indigenous difference on display, such difference becomes racist and colonial in the nescient attempt to be inclusive. As Richard Fung states, "If we look at [the] commercial gay sexual representation, it appears that the antiracist movements have had little impact: the images of men and male beauty are still of *White* men and *White* male beauty."<sup>80</sup> Regardless of the intent behind the underwear contest, then—whether it was an attempt to emulate the campy nature of the Village People by representing the different characters, or whether the intent was to make indigeneity sexy—the outcome was a perpetual reenactment of racism, cultural appropriation, and settler colonialism.

Similarly, Thawer, a gay-identified racialized Muslim, spoke to the ways in which one of Toronto's White drag queens, Donnarama, reproduced hate, xenophobia, and racism in one of her drag performances.<sup>81</sup> Donnarama used Otherness and racism—"a burka, a bindi . . . and a set of bombs attached to her abdomen. . . . There was some actual fire on stage, coupled with gestures . . . that mirrored gun violence and recurring explosions"—within her drag performance to push the boundaries and get a laugh from the audience.<sup>82</sup> Although the contexts and histories of violence and (settler) colonialism are different for Indigenous peoples and Queer Muslims, this display offers another example of how White Queer and Trans community members in Toronto continue to reify racism and settler colonialism. When they do not question or consider the impact of their actions on racialized or colonized peoples, White Queers are complicit in sustaining settler colonialism. The inclusion of Indigenous or Muslim stereotypes in drag performances at a local bar on Church Street and an

underwear contest during Pride Toronto demands interrogation as incidents that reproduce and perpetuate settler-colonial dominance.

Correspondingly, Wolf experienced sexual violence while attending Pride Toronto. Wolf's body became eroticized as an object for White gay settlers to consume. Wolf experienced unwanted groping and touching from White gay settlers who believe they can engage with and be sexual toward whomever they want. As hooks articulates, "The commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization."<sup>83</sup> Within Pride Toronto, Indigenous peoples become sexualized objects for the consumptive pleasure of settlers; indeed, the pleasure experienced by settlers in contemporary Queer spaces is further manifested through Indigenous erasure.

Grizzly Bear's presence in a restaurant during Pride acted as a disruption to concepts of who should or should not be Queer. To correct this disruption, the waiter normalized genocide to ensure that Grizzly Bear would understand her rightful place in Canadian (Queer) culture. By bringing attention to settler colonialism and the violence that Indigenous peoples continue to experience, Grizzly Bear disturbed the dominant Queer settler narratives of belonging in Canada. Thus, the only natural correction to such a disturbance is to reproduce the violence of settler colonialism in the name of settler Queer solidarity. In this way, settler homonationalism requires eroticizing and simultaneously erasing Indigenous peoples in order to sustain settler colonialism.

## CONCLUSION

The lived experiences of seven self-identified Two-Spirited Indigenous people attending and participating in Pride Toronto make clear that settler colonialism exists to sustain and normalize contemporary Queer politics within Canada. Heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy—the logics of settler colonialism—continue to constrain the lives of Indigenous peoples.<sup>84</sup> This research has implicated contemporary Queer politics in perpetuating the conditions for settler colonialism to continue within Pride Toronto.

Implications for this research are fourfold. First, settler homonationalism clearly exists to sustain and normalize White-normed contemporary Queer politics. In doing so, Two-Spirited people mobilize Two-Spirit as a gendered and sexually diverse identity that centralizes connections to Indigenous culture. Second, contemporary Queer politics within Pride Toronto homogenize the vast differences among LGBTTIQQ2S peoples, creating a uniform image of who belongs in the Queer community. Third, regardless of the settler homonationalism invading Pride Toronto's contemporary Queer politics, Two-Spirited peoples are engaging in decolonial resistance and social change. These activist endeavors aim to unsettle the contemporary Queer settler politics that reify the violence Indigenous peoples continue to experience in Canada by normalizing state-sanctioned forms of queerness. Lastly, settler homonationalism exists within Pride Toronto's contemporary Queer politics to erase indigeneity from contemporary settler sexual and gendered identities. Within this erasure, Two-Spirited

people experience considerable oppression in the form of racism, sexism, and genocide. The experiences of the research participants provide another framework with which to engage with and trouble contemporary Queer settler politics steeped within White supremacy and settler colonialism.

Findings from this study call attention to the divergent layers of inclusion and exclusion experienced by Two-Spirited peoples attending Pride Toronto. No longer should the responsibility for decolonizing contemporary Queer politics be placed on the shoulders of Two-Spirited Indigenous peoples. Instead, non-Indigenous Queers must take seriously their settler privilege and/or complicity (albeit divergent, depending on one's social location) as reifying settler colonialism. Non-Indigenous Queers must engage with their complicity in settler colonialism and move beyond simple articulations of *who is* and *who is not a settler*. Only then will Pride Toronto become a site in which Queer solidarity activism can occur with Two-Spirit peoples (similar to QuAIA) and thus unsettle the normalization and privileging of settler homonationalism.

Findings suggest that Queer settlers must move beyond a place of guilt that is typically demobilizing; instead, Queer settlers must turn their settler complicity into action.<sup>85</sup> What better place from which to disrupt settler-colonial modalities of queerness than the confines of Pride Toronto? Queers can use the political and activist space of Pride Toronto to foster coalitions between non-Indigenous Queers (of color, diasporic, and White) and Indigenous peoples, in the hope that settler homonationalism can manifest and be scrutinized. Thus, we offer here some recommendations for Queer settler solidarity within Queer activist spaces by urging non-Indigenous peoples to (1) engage in dialogue surrounding Indigenous decolonization, settler responsibility, and the land in Canada, and (2) turn Queer settler complicity into action by understanding their own relationship to settler-colonial dominance and reparations of land in Canada. In doing so, non-Indigenous Queers can start to take responsibility for settler colonialism by addressing the longstanding injustices and broken treaties that have privileged settler colonialism in the ongoing eradication and assimilation of Indigenous gendered and sexual differences.

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