Being 2SLGBTQ+ in Nunavut:

A conversation with Beth Sampson & Aedan Corey

NOTE: this transcript has been edited for greater clarity in this written format. This was done with the permission and approval of both parties.

Note on referencing: conventions of APA7 referencing have been altered. This was done with carefully considered intention. The following explains our rationale.

This novel referencing methodology was created in an attempt to *truly* preference Indigenous ways of knowing and sharing through story-telling by making engagement with the video "Two Soft Things, Two Hard Things"[i] and with the audio of our dialogue the **only** ways to *easily* engage with the material.

Instead of trying to make the human element of *interpretation* of this source material (which we see as the Indigenous/neurodivergent ways of knowing)[ii], and make it fit *within* the Western/mechanistic paradigm of written work, our goal was to "flip the script" and find a way to try and make the mechanistic/Western lens feel in **every possible way** *secondary* or "buried" within a framework where the Indigenous/neurodivergent lens was dominant

Recognizing that our goal in this was not to create a "balanced" perspective, as described by the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing[iii], but instead to try and replicate our experiences of what it often *feels* like to be an Indigenous/neurodivergent scholar in a world of education built *entirely* upon the Western/mechanistic lens. The ways in which we feel we construct and demonstrate our *authentic* learning as Indigenous/neurodivergent people too often "don't fit" into this mechanistic system built for *efficiency,* which asks us to take our knowing and break it into small, easily digestible fragments, fundamentally separated from *who* we are*,* and *how* we know[iv].

Our intention is to make getting the Western/mechanistic version of this information **take much longer,** and to *feel* more **tedious or "wrong"** than it usually would for someone accustomed to working from that lens.[v] We do this to mirror the fact that knowledge construction and sharing in ways we feel are *truly* relational (i.e. are based in Indigenous/neurodivergent/systems thinking) also take much longer, but create opportunities for engaging the heart and spirit that do not present themselves when you are simply reading words on a page. Our hope is that you choose to leave the dominant Western perspective behind with us in this work, and therefore take the time to *watch* the video, and *listen* to our dialogue instead as we welcome you into community with us is this way[vi]. We hope you can feel, as we both do, a greater connection to all of the parts of yourself, and to the sacredness[vii] of what we have to share in the way we *intended* to share it.

With love, from your friends on this shared path to gaining greater wisdom,

Beth Sampson and Aedan Corey

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Beth Sampson

My name is Beth. I live in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. I am non-Inuit; I'm a settler who's originally from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. I identify as white, and have lived in Cambridge Bay for… I guess this is our 14th year here! I'm in conversation with Aedan Corey, and I'm going to start by talking a little bit about my experiences. When I moved to Cambridge Bay, I would have identified myself as straight, but an ally of the queer community. That was how I was comfortable identifying. I moved to Cambridge Bay with my little triangle ally sticker to put on my classroom door because it was important to me [for kids to know I was an ally to the 2SLGBTQ+ community]. I had just moved from Halifax (where I was for school), and Halifax, Nova Scotia is like a fantastically gay city. Super gay. It's amazing. I think per capita, we've got so much pride stuff, (or not "we" because I don't live there anymore), but there was so much pride stuff there, and still is.

So, I'd come from this super queer friendly experience in university, which was refreshing because the hometown I grew up in was not very queer friendly. It was pretty homophobic. Then, I thought "Yes, this is what it should feel like" when I moved to Halifax. "Yes. You should just be cool to be whatever [meaning openly live however you want to in regard to gender and sexuality]. And I want to be part of helping change that in my little community" [thinking at the time I would move back to Cape Breton when I finished university]. Then I didn't move there….I moved to Cambridge Bay, with my little ally sticker. And kids would ask "what's that?" And I'd say, "it means I'm an ally of the LGBTQ+ community". And they would ask "what's that mean?". So I would respond, "okay! it means this; an ally is somebody who doesn't identify that way [as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer], but somebody who is supportive of the fact that people who *do* should not be discriminated against and should be able to live happy, healthy lives and do whatever the heck they want to." Not [whatever you want] like… murdering babies… just in a personal life choice sense. (laughter). I'm not saying queer people should be allowed to do anything they want, [just that they] should be allowed to live openly as themselves. And nobody really said too much of anything about it [the kids didn't say much back when I explained what an ally was].

But I kind of could tell right away moving to Cambridge Bay, it was very much like the community I was born and raised in and was a little bit homophobic. When I moved here there were not any openly gay or queer people that I can recall in the year 2008. Maybe, but none that I knew for sure. It just was something that people didn't even really talk about. Again, I would say "LGBTQ" and people were like, "Huh, what are those letters mean?". So, I thought, okay, this is different. This is a different experience [than I had been used to the previous 7 years in Halifax]. But then through my first and second year, kids started to talk to me more about all kinds of stuff because you just become close to each other, right? So all kinds of stuff. And I had already been working on my language of like, "Do you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend" with little people; I had already been working on changing around those things in my language to be more inclusive and I think that itself even… that different language choice people noticed because they commented on it. [Meaning: when I am speaking to anyone, I do not assume they are straight. If I were speaking to a young man, I would not ask if he had a girlfriend. I would ask if he had a boyfriend or girlfriend, or a partner. I am intentional with that language]. I think

that also was an indicator that “okay, this might be somebody who's okay to talk to about this type of stuff’ [being queer], even though I was still identifying as straight, and I'm married to a dude.

And kids started to disclose stuff to me, started to share, “Hey, I think I might be gay” or “I think I might like girls” or “I don't know what I might be but I don't think I'm straight”. And I would say, “okay, thank you for sharing that with me”. So, kids started to disclose stuff to me, and then share a little bit about their experiences living in our community. The experiences they had had just from people *thinking* that they might be gay and stuff. [These experiences were *always* very emotionally harmful, and sometimes even violent][viii]. And I was like, “Oh, this is… this is fucked up. This is not alright.”

Beth Sampson

And I can't remember how long I had lived here the first time that a young person died due to suicide in our community. But that was my first experience with that. I had never experienced a suicide before and that was *deeply* impactful. And then maybe my third year living here, I started to really turn my wheels on “I feel like I see a connection between our insanely high, suicide rates and this very homophobic atmosphere’[ix]. I didn't know that was a thing for sure, but I knew a lot of boys were talking to me about this stuff, and that our young men die at rates in some parts of Nunavut up to 40 times higher than their counterparts in the south[x]. So, you know, there's some connection there, even if there are a lot of other factors. I'm not saying I think every young, you know, Inuit person that dies by suicide does so because they're queer, but I was like, you know, I know the suicide rates for queer youth are like, astronomically higher than for non queer youth[xi]. You know, there's probably a piece of that at play is sort of where my brain went to. So, I was like, oh, no, we've got to do better. And I'm a grown up in our world. And “we” then means “me”, because, you know, I'm one of the grownups with the power to kind of help this be a safer place and it can't just be my classroom. That's not okay. I don't want to lose more kids[xii].

So I thought, “okay, what can I do?” and that started with this little, “can we do a rainbow day at the school”? It started really small and then that kind of grew and grew and grew, although there was resistance to it early on. The first event we had in school, it was just a day, and we didn't call it Pride Day because you know, that would not have been okay[xiii], so we thought “rainbow day? that should be ok”! And then we talked about [why we were doing it to the whole school] in assembly, but we still had parents express upset that first year that we were trying to “turn the kids gay”. Although we know that’s not how that [being queer] works. Our work grew and grew and grew until we had rainbow week, and then I was doing presentations in front of the whole school and watching some of the “Out in Schools” videos[xiv] and going into classes to have conversations with smaller groups (if teachers requested it) and that was wonderful.

And then we had kids in the school starting to come out! And then we had people in the community starting to come out. And it was just like, “okay, okay, okay, okay! This is this is awesome. This is happening, and I need to be part of this too!” [people being brave enough to come out as openly queer]. So, then I got a rainbow tattoo. I've got a super queer haircut now. Our school is covered in rainbow stuff [paintings, flags, posters, stickers, file folders, etc.]. I started to feel that our school had

become a much safer place to be queer, but then I thought, “Alright, the next step is I need to help educate better about queerness in general, not just about equality for queer people.

I felt this because I was learning so much more about the queer community than I had known before. And you know what? Although I had started that learning in order to try and be of greater service to a community I considered myself an ally to, in that process I realized, “You know what? I'm not straight. And I don't think I ever have been. I think I've just been socialized straight and made to feel like I had to pick between being gay or straight because I didn’t know anything else”. Because I'm older than you. I'm a 1983 baby, so I'm 38! Actually, how old are you? Somebody asked me that the other day.

Aedan Corey

I'm turning 23 this month, actually.

Beth Sampson

Oh, I aged you too old! I was like “I think they are 24, 25 maybe”… I knew you were tinier than Audla [Aedan's older cousin, who is also a former student of mine], but then I couldn't remember how old Audla was either! (laughter). So yeah, so I'm older than you. I'm from a different little bit of a different time period. Back then, [my understanding what that] there was just gay and straight. That was it. Those were the choices. So I felt, “Okay, if those are my only choices, then I'm straight. I guess that's it. I guess that's what I am”. But then through my own engagement… learning more to try and share more with my kids and our school community, and our community [outside of the school]... I was just like, “No. You know what? ‘Straight’ doesn't describe me”.

So it's been for me this really interesting, beautiful process of my own self exploration and discovery. And now I would most comfortably identify (at the point I’m at right on the journey of knowing-myself in terms of gender and sexuality), I would say right now I would identify as a cis-gendered female. Although I do have some complicated feelings around that, because I really feel like my brain is more “male” but then I also don't really hold to [the convention of] things being “male” *or* “female”, because those concepts don't make a lot of intuitive sense to my brain. But for right now, that's where I'm at in that journey [of gender].

As for the sexuality piece... I've got my beautiful earrings on… [Beth stops, and holds her head close to the camera so Aedan can see the earrings on their Zoom video]… so I've got some earrings on in the bi [bisexual]-pride colors. Made by Rolling Stone beads[xv] in Nunavut as a custom order, which was amazing. It feels like, “Okay, we now have [Inuit/Nunavut] beadwork being done in queer-friendly patterns, (they made rainbow ones!), you know, it's amazing”! I feel like it’s an amazing thing we're viewing right now across the North, but recognizing, I live in a bigger community. Cambridge Bay is a bigger community[xvi]. So it's a little bit safer for us now here than it would be if you lived in some smaller communities in Nunavut[xvii]. So yeah, kind of my journey of trying to be an advocate and make stuff better [for queer youth] … in trying to help other people I helped myself most of all, because I'm so much more closely connected now to who I *really* am. And who knows? Five years from now I might

identify as gender-queer. I might identify a totally different way in either of those realms [gender and sexuality]. I think probably I'm moving in the direction of pan [pansexual]. I think that's probably where I'll land, and I don't know about my gender… we'll see…. because gender is more fraught and conflicted for me. So that's where I'm situated right now. So how about you, my friend?

Aedan Corey

Okay. My name is Aedan Corey. I grew up in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut for most of my life, and then moved to Ottawa when I was about 19. My first coming out experience was when I was around 14, and I came to my mom and I said, “I think I like girls as well as guys”, and she said, “okay, well, I don't really care as a parent, you can love whoever you want”. But there was kind of like this unspoken agreement that that wouldn't become a public thing, that it wouldn't become public knowledge. Which I think was partially driven by the fact that we were involved in one of the churches in the community. One day [after coming out to my mom] I asked her, “how would they [our church community] feel about this [my being queer]?”, and my mum was kind of like “they would… they wouldn't be that cool with it”. So that was something that I ended up kind of keeping to myself for the majority of my life, and then I moved to Ottawa [for school].

For school reasons[xviii], I started to get into a lot more of my [Inuit] culture, because I felt like when I was deeply involved in the community (in the sense that I was just an Inuk kid living in my community) I had so much privilege that I wasn't necessarily aware of in being able to be involved in my culture, and I kind of didn't take the opportunities that I should have. But when I moved to Ottawa, I realized, “Hey, I had so many opportunities growing up to learn about my culture, to be involved in it”. And that kind of realization encouraged me to start learning more to start being more involved in my community and in my culture. But that also led to the realization that I am… at first I started out identifying just as non-binary, and then kind of further down the road, I've become comfortable with the term Two-Spirit because I felt like it denoted more of a connection to my culture [as an Indigenous person]. And then further down the road, I just decided I fell underneath the trans umbrella [as well].

However, there were also still complications. Because I felt like I had become very invested and very involved in my culture, I wanted the words to describe how I was feeling in a gendered way within my culture’s language [Inuktut], but that was… that proved to be very, very difficult, because a lot of our history surrounding these matters has been kind of rewritten, or not even written about at all. So, I found that trying to label myself in a way that connected to *both* my culture and to my gender was not something I could currently do, which was a very difficult realization, I found. So when I came out, I came out as non-binary in the summer of 2020. And I was… (cheering and clapping)

Beth Sampson

Ah, I’m sorry, I'm applauding. I'm applauding vigorously… Yes, you did! (Beth beams with pride, and makes the heart symbol with her hands, to Aedan).

Aedan Corey

Yeah. So that was that was a very quiet experience. I didn't get too much feedback on it. I made a post on Facebook and all the comments that I did get were very supportive. But I also didn't really enforce using gender neutral pronouns. I was going by 'they/them', but I didn't necessarily enforce that within the community [while they were home in Cambridge Bay that summer]. And then I came back to Ottawa and kind of had some more self-realizations and felt, "I am solely going by They/Them. And I'm going to change my name." So, I changed my name, not in a legal sense, but more of in a social sense. And that proved to be a little difficult when I came back home [to Cambridge Bay] because although people were supportive, most generally, they also didn't really understand the reasoning behind any of it [the name and pronoun changes], which I think made it difficult for them to realize, "Hey! Calling a trans person by the name that they choose is super, super important"[xix].

And I agree with what Beth was saying in the sense that care surrounding LGBTQ+ issues in our communities is so, so important because we don't realize the impact it can have if a trans kid or gay kid or lesbian kid (or any kind of queer kid) does not have the support that they need to move forward in life[xx]. And from firsthand experience, I can say that even though I did have an immense amount of support and privilege in my life (because of my family and my friends being so supportive), it was still very difficult at times (and still is), and I can't imagine what that would be like without the support that I received.

Beth Sampson

Yeah, I don't think I've said this to you privately, but I've had conversations with people that we both know, trying to prep people that I thought you might see in the summer when you were home, this summer past. I had conversations with some people that we know in common to say, "Okay, I'm gonna start to prep this. I'm gonna talk about the fact that *Aedan* is coming home and I'm going to use *Aedan* and I'm going to start to practice this terminology [they/them pronouns]". Not for me so much, because I think I flipped to [your new name/pronouns] pretty quickly. But you know, you really do have to practice when somebody goes through a transition process. You do have to practice, and you've got to practice a lot. And you should practice on your own when the person's not there. You should practice it with other people, and then that becomes part of [the work you do together as a community] so you don't "dead name" that person.

"Dead naming" I just realized… you and I know what that means. But (to explain it for anyone who may not know), would be calling somebody trans by the name that they *previously* went by. So, my name is Beth, but if I changed my gender identification and I felt like Beth was a pretty stereotypically female name… I mean, I don't know any dude Beth's (laughter)… but if I decide ever that non-binary is a more comfortable space to situate myself in and I wanted to change my name, if you then continued to call me "Beth", [after I had chosen a different name for myself and asked others to use it], that would be dead naming.

So I guess I *was* practicing a little bit for myself as well! I did a lot of that practice just in my own head because you can do that by yourself; you can just look at a picture of the person and say, "Aedan, Aedan, Aedan, Aedan, Aedan"! Or you can practice using it [new name/pronouns] on social media or

practice using it to own partner or your [group of common friends]. But I think that was important to me… or from my perspective, it was important to me (that everyone had practiced it a lot) for when you came home. So that when I saw you, I was not going to misgender or dead-name you, because I was aware that this might be a difficult situation for you. However, I was surprised by some of the pushback I got while trying to help people practice before you got home. But I felt like, “Okay, no. We're gonna talk about this now because I don't want you to do that with Aedan. I don't want this situation to happen with them”.

But I was kind of surprised because [some of the people who pushed back]… these are people we both know that I *know* care about you. But I think it's hard, and I think especially for people older than us. I'm kind of in between the age of you and your parents, right? I'm kind of perfectly situated in between y'all. But I think if you're much older than me in our community, that's where I feel the most pushback. So if you're kinda, 40-ish and younger, we're kind of “getting it” [the importance of names and pronouns] a little bit more probably because we're more exposed to it on social media, right? But I find generally your parent’s age [~55 years old] and older are the demographic that struggle the most to be pulled along with us (even though the younger people are like “come on, let's go! We're going this way)”. So, I didn't get to see you this summer while you were home, but I had been curious to ask you about that. Just what that experience was like, and were people generally pretty good about that, or was it pretty sticky?

Aedan Corey

It was interesting because some of the people I expected to have difficulty with it seemingly did not have difficulty with it, and then others [I didn’t expect] did. So for instance, I didn't really enforce my pronouns either way with people that I wasn't super familiar with. Although, for what I was doing over the summer (I'm a traditional tattoo artist, and I did tattoos for people while I was home), I was inviting a lot of people over [to my home] to receive their tattoos, and that was kind of a nerve wracking experience. Because I was like, “Okay, well if I'm doing this… this kind of *special* moment[xxi]… I don't want to be taken out of that by either being misgendered or misnamed”.

So that was kind of a sticky situation at some points because there were a lot of people who would refer to me by Aedan but would also say, “*she* said this” or, “*she* heard me”… but I understood that [was coming just from cultural context]. Obviously, this [understanding the importance of using a trans person’s chosen name and pronouns] is something that people need to learn in general, but I think it's difficult in our communities [in Nunavut], particularly because of the colonial context[xxii] where it was *so* enforced that there were only two genders. There was *only* straight sexuality. That was what was acceptable. And so I think there's gonna be a lot of an *unlearning* process when it comes to those kinds of things because we were very much in the heart of an assimilative system[xxiii]. And that really had an impact on how we view these things.

Beth Sampson

You and I had a long, really good conversation earlier this week, which was kind of the impetus for this [having this conversation, meant to be publicly shared]. After that conversation we felt, “hey, we

both really care really deeply about this [2SLGBTQ+ issues], and we both care really deeply about our community and the people who live in it". And I feel, especially for kids who live in smaller communities than ours (in Nunavut), because our community is *so* much safer now. Our school is covered in rainbows. We just raised the pride flag in our community for the first time ever this summer[xxiv]… the hamlet [of Cambridge Bay] raised the pride flag, and that came from one of my students! A young, queer person in our community who's is out as bi as well. We actually have, I would say probably eight or nine kids in the school right now who are openly identifying as bi; we've got little pins and we have a "rainbow army" club that meets twice a week in the school! We have an openly gay couple in town who has adopted babies [and got married here as well!][xxv]. But we recognize it's still *much* safer [to be out] if you're female, because every single kid that we have in the school that's openly out is female. Zero boys are out although we definitely have boys in our school that have made disclosures to myself or other teachers that they are queer, but it's not [comfortable for them to be out in the school or in our community]. It doesn't feel safe.

Aedan Corey

It's not a safe space for them.

Beth Sampson

No, it's not. You know, despite a *decade* of working hard to make it be. And I recognize the incredible privilege we have as a larger community as well, because in a lot of smaller communities that are… well it's confusing… you want to say that smaller communities [are typically] more "traditional". And yes, smaller communities *are* more traditional (and we mean that in many senses), but it's this colonial concept when we're talking about queerness and gender and sexuality… have you watched "Two hard things, Two soft things[xxvi] [sic]"?

Aedan Corey

Yes!

Beth Sampson

Yes. So if we decide to make this available publicly to people (this conversation), it will be on a page that also has that movie on it, because we watched it in our rainbow army club at school, and the kids and I were just like… (Beth mimes an explosion from her head, indicating it blew her mind. Aedan vigourously nods their head in agreement). I know, right? I know, right!

Traditional Inuit culture was super open from a gender and sexuality perspective, which I didn't know until I watched "Two Hard Things, Two Soft Things [sic]". I had only previously heard (and it's confusing because it comes from a lot of Elders who said), "this is not our traditional Inuit way". We had the president of NTI in the 2000s (in the 2010's even!) saying…. so, NTI our Inuit organization in Nunavut…. saying she didn't think they should be raising the rainbow flag in Iqaluit because Inuit haven't had enough time to decide how they feel about this whole gay thing[xxvii]. Absolute bullshit…

absolute colonial bullshit. But that's part of what residential school did[xxviii]. That's part of what missionary work did all over the world, right? Not just here, all over the world. So you look at communities [in Nunavut] where there's still the most homophobia and it's almost always connected to religion. You look at what kinds of places still have this strong, homophobic kind of feeling or messaging, and it's places pretty much that were colonized (or missionary-worked [sic]) later in the process of global colonization of European culture and religion.

It was fascinating to think about, “Well, shit… residential school happened in our lifetime. So these people who are saying a lot of this stuff[xxix], who are elders now were kids when they had that experience [of being sent to residential school and indoctrinated into religion]”. But that means, when we look at “what did residential school take away?”, there’s language, but this is a piece of culture [traditional Inuit views on gender, sexuality and relationships] that I would *never* have thought of, because I didn't even know! And like you just said, I went looking (for my literature review for the piece of my project I'm working on about this topic)… I went looking for lit review stuff [i.e. research] about traditional Inuit gender and sexuality and I couldn't find a lot.

I couldn't find a lot, so it was like, “Shit, this hasn't been super documented”. There's some stuff… so “Two soft things, two hard things” has clips a film[xxx] where you can see, “Yeah, this [being queer, not having strictly heterosexual or monogamous relationships] *was* friggin’ tradish [traditionally also part of Inuit culture in the past]. This *was* tradish. This was the way [to be accepting of queer people and replationships]”. But it's so hard because there's also this strong (Inuit Societal Value) that you are respectful to Elders; that you respect their experience, and that Elders are who pass on cultural traditions[xxxi].

But sometimes, because those elders have been through the residential school system and that process of indoctrination into Catholicism, Anglicanism….Christianity… things that our Elders now sometimes think are traditional or non-traditional are not seated in fact or reality[xxxii]. And that's difficult as younger people in the culture you're a part of, and I live in, where Elders are the transmitters of traditional, IQ and knowledge…. so that's a real... that's tough.

Aedan Corey

It is! And that's something that's been difficult to navigate in like my personal life as well. For example, my Nana, before she passed, because of the situation she was in wasn't fully aware of many things at the time, but was also not aware of how I was identifying or that I changed my name. And that goes further into the family… so, my great aunt (who is my grandmother’s sister), she also has basically no clue. And we're not entirely sure how to go about that [having that conversation with her] because it is something that is very much not talked about, but also is seen as almost shameful among a lot of our Elders. And it's… I've gotten a lot of the kind of response where it’s like, “this is okay, as long as it's not close to me”.

Beth Sampson

Like, as long as I don’t see it, you mean? Like Don't Ask, Don't Tell?[xxxiii]

Aedan Corey

Yeah, “As long as I can't tell that it exists. Basically, as long as it's not something that I see, as long as it's not something within my personal family or my personal friends, then it's okay”. A lot of conversations I've had with Elders concerning these kinds of things have basically been in a respectful way, trying to understand their point of view and also challenging that point of view because it's like, “Well, okay, gay people exist, queer people exist in Nunavut and in Inuit Nunangat”. But there are challenges to that because a lot of our elders are also very, very religious.

Beth Sampson

For sure, and I've thought a lot about how you… combat’s not the right word, but I've thought a lot about how to… I guess address that in a positive way. Because I think Inuit culture (and again, I have to say, I am white, I am not Inuk), but my understanding of Inuit culture is that it's *so* based on care and connection and mutual respect and, and just *love*. It's *such* a loving culture that, at its core I think, has a focus on connection and community and care that is *really* special. And I think more cultures used to be that way in the past. I think definitely, Eurocentric cultures moving away from those [foundations of connection and community] towards individualism… we really need to look to traditional Inuit (or other indigenous) cultures as models for how we reconnect in a disconnected world[xxxiv].

But, you know, that aside, it's hard to navigate that space [of how to approach those homophobic viewpoints of Elders with love and respect]. So I've thought a lot about, when people show up at the school yelling that I’m trying to turn all the kids gay or whatever, just how do you address that? I also did something called the “Certificate of Educational Leadership in Nunavut”[xxxv]. It's basically like the principal training program for Nunavut. I got to be in those classes with a bunch of Inuit educators, which was amazing, but also with a surprising bunch of non-Inuit educators. So I’ve been having these conversations (and it's been mostly Inuit women that I've been in the classes with, and they've been mostly older than me) where I have been sharing that we're doing this [2SLGBTQ+] work in Cambridge Bay because I feel the need to put this stuff on other people's radar screens as well.

Because I want *my* kids to be safe in *my* community, my kids I know and love, but I also want our *territory* to be safer. My kids go all over the place for sports. Kids I love go to other communities [in Nunavut] and I don't want them to just have the freedom to be who they are when they're with me, or in our community. I want that for them no matter where they go in our home territory outside of our community. So I feel the need to kind of proselytize the message that “we *need* to be doing this work in our schools” message to other teachers. So, I have brought this up in some of these courses, and I've had to think really carefully about, “how do I approach this? What's the best (which sounds kind of smarmy), but like, what's the best *selling point* for this”?

So, knowing that Inuit culture is so focused on care and connection and love for each other, but also knowing this [homophobic viewpoint] is kind of an issue, and understanding a little bit more why this is (it’s just religion that has beaten this into people) [through the residential school system]… and *also* understanding religion (I was raised in the Catholic system as well)… so how can I use my knowledge of *both* of those things to help? And the tack I have been taking for the last probably, five to seven years with other educators (or other people, especially Elders), is to try and make that I have lost

so many kids… and we have *all* lost so many people we love… if you live in Nunavut, you've lost so many people you love to suicide. I *know* some of those kids are queer. I *know* they are. And because we **all** can agree we need to do something about the suicide epidemic...

So I have tried to very clearly make that connection… that I have seen and felt that connection myself. And then I just say the statistics that queer kids are more likely to die by suicide for these reasons[xxxvi]. I see these two things as connected I think this is important because I think this is a piece of not losing so many youths to suicide. And my experience has been that when I explicitly draw that I have seen and felt that connection, and that I *know* that to be true for some young people I have loved that we've lost, I think that I have seen a "light bulb" [moment], even for Elders. I've been in the room and watched this happen with so many people where I feel like [I have observed their thinking or their heart start to shift a little, maybe].

That has been the most effective tool I have found to try and challenge that [homophobic] way of thinking, to just acknowledge that, "Yep, you might think that [being queer] is really wrong based on religion, and lots of people around the world do too. But you know what? I don't want to lose more kids. And if this [homophobia] is a reason that we're losing some people [to suicide], that's a thing that's easy for us to fix. Right? So, could that just be a personal belief that you hold, but could you try roll with the new testament of Jesus, which is 'Love everybody and don't judge anybody', right? Like could we come to *that* place for the sake of saving the lives of some of our young people"? And I found that to be effective. I don't know what strategies you've maybe tried, or if you haven't tried anything, but yeah, that's been [helpful for me].

Aedan Corey

Yeah, I definitely agree. Because I think what you're saying is very correct in the sense that a lot of our culture *is* about caring for one another. It's about a sense of community, and I think if we use that information [that can be healing] because I also think that a lot of that love for other people has been marred by fear. Those tactics used in residential schools to say, "Hey, this [being queer] is wrong. And if you don't do this [act straight and cis-gendered], *exactly* the way we say you are going to be punished". And I think that translates to a lot of the relationships we see now between youth and elders, where they don't necessarily know why it's [being queer is] wrong, *why* they think it's wrong, but they just don't want to see these youth live lives that they've been taught are not okay, and I think a lot of that is due to fear.

But obviously, if you come at it from a place that fosters that care, that fosters that love and that sense of community, I definitely think that could make a difference[xxxvii]. It's just, there's also the complication that not everyone has that space to be able to have those conversations, those difficult conversations. Because obviously it comes from a very personal space for a lot of queer and trans folks. So, to be able to like articulate, "Hey, this might be killing me[xxxviii]"… it is very difficult to have that conversation. So, I think it's very important also to have those conversations if you can, but also for allies in our communities to step in and have those conversations if they have the space for that because obviously, it would be a much more difficult conversation for queer folks to be having[xxxix].

Beth Sampson

And I think I also viewed that when I started to try and do work [2SLGBTQ+ social justice] when I was just identifying as an ally. It started [from a place] of, “We need to get better at this, the big people need to get better at this for the little people in our lives”. When I started to do that [social justice] work, that that was part of it too [for me]. It felt like, “no, this is the work of allies. *This* is the work of allies. There is some work that is, I think, the work of allies - like anti-racism work”. I think a *lot* about this just in my life as a white person living in Inuit Nunangat, trying to be the least harmful I can be, recognizing you're always gonna do harm. You are. I’m always gonna do harm, right?

But the goal of an ally is to do *less* harm, in my view. That's just my own personal view of allyship, but it’s to try to become better informed, so that you do less harm. But then I think the work of advocacy is also [part of being an ally] because it is a *safer* space to do it from when you can say, “I am like you, but I think this way, right? I'm like you, but I think this”… I think people [in the dominant/privileged] group are more likely to listen to that. I think that is the work of allyship in lots of spaces is you say, “I have relative safety because of my privilege in this position”. So, with that relative safety or privilege comes *responsibility* too. And that's I think, why I felt really like that was my job when I moved here. Like, “I'm not queer, and I'm not Inuk, so this is my job to do this” [because I was at much less risk for violence as a ‘heterosexual’ white woman].

But it becomes complicated when I'm doing that [work] with Elders, or across those cultural lines as well, because then you really don't want to…it's not appropriate for me to be in the position of saying, “this is not traditional Inuit culture” to Elders. Not cool[xi]. What I can say [to my kids in rainbow army, or to my queer friends in my community] is, “Maybe we could do a public screening of *Two Soft Things, Two Hard Things* and you could invite your Nona”. But I think you're right, this is the important work of ally spaces. You would be happy to know, (and it warmed my heart, too!) when I started to kind of passionately speak about this stuff at those CELN courses with Inuit educators and colonizer educators, and came at it from that viewpoint, there was huge, huge excitement from people saying, “Oh my God, what do you do in your school”?

And I have a folder… it's called ‘this folder is so gay’, on my computer, and it's got a ton of the resources I've used to do this stuff [2SLGBTQ+ advocacy work] over a decade in our school. So people asking “Do you have some resources you could share with us?”, and I'm like, “Oh, do I! I’ve got a whole folder, and it's got videos from the Out in Schools project, and it's got posters [and videos and all kinds of resources] from all over the place”! And people were so interested in it, I would say I've given that folder of information to…I don't know, 20 or 30 people over the years (who are also educators in Nunavut). Now, I haven't followed up with any of them to ask, “Did you use this? What did you do with it”? It was just sharing, but the fact that people were asking for it and taking [those resources], I really hope they're using some of it in their schools. But that was really hopeful to me! And like some of them were older Inuit ladies. So it feels like, “Ok.... we're doing it. We're doing it. I feel the push”.

It’s been an interesting space. And now that I do identify as queer, I know that I really only, I think, feel safe doing that [being openly queer] because of this work that we've all done *together.* Because it's the kids and I… and you… *they* give *me* courage, and I hope I helped create a safer space for them too. But I think that's a really beautiful piece of it too, the queer community, globally. It's such a

loving, giving, [social justice], action-oriented community, from my perspective. If something happens in town and I put a call out to my Facebook crew or my social media crew and I say, “We're looking for money for this [cause in Cambridge Bay], donate if you can”. And I've got, a cousin of mine and her wife in Halifax. And they're just like, “the gays are on it”! (laughter). And they're fundraising money within their network and sending it to us for stuff. And I [always think] “this is not even your community”, but [the queer community] is just so… I think *supportive* of each other. So I think that's a really positive thing. I don't know if you feel this, but I also find the Indigenous community globally, is so connected… or there's this sense of like… kinship between different Indigenous people. So whenever any Indigenous person is coming out as Two-Spirit or trans, or [is just being] more openly themselves, I feel like that helps all other queer Indigenous people, whether [they are from] your particular Indigenous group or not.

Aedan Corey

Very much so, and when I was speaking earlier about looking for resources on Inuit specific gender and sexuality stuff, it was often the case when I couldn't find that I would turn to other Indigenous groups, and not necessarily in an appropriative sense, but just saying, “I need the support”. Especially with the term Two-Spirit, I found that was a good filler… and I don't necessarily mean that in the sense that it isn't an important word, but it's what I feel for now, in the hopes that one day I will be able to have a term from Inuktitut to use for myself. But yeah, for sure. I 100% agree with that. I think as a whole, Indigeneity is about community, and about fostering safe spaces for that community. And I've definitely felt that in Nunavut, but also living outside of Nunavut close to other Indigenous communities as well.

Beth Sampson

Yeah, I think it’s a beautiful piece about being queer and Indigenous, or living in an Indigenous community, is you automatically… even though that might make you feel excluded from your home community [if you are queer], and that can be really dangerous…not to minimize that. Because there are still places in Nunavut where… I have some friends that taught in [a smaller community] that were teachers who were also queer and didn't feel like… it was *not* a safe community to be open {openly queer] in at all. Period. For threat of physical violence, and they had an instance of physical violence at their school because somebody *suspected* somebody else was gay. So, not to minimize the very real… there are real threats to physical safety and not just to mental health [as a queer person] in some of our communities[xli].

So not to minimize that, but I think [being Indigenous and queer] is one of the connecting pieces… one of the positive things [may be] although you might feel like you have to leave your small community and move to a bigger place (and that sucks), one of the positives I think [can be] that you do gain this network of other community support when start to identify that way. Suddenly, it's like, “Oh, okay, I might not have *these* people [people who do not accept you as a queer person], but I have this whole [queer] beautiful, supportive, wonderful community”. I just hope we can get to a place in Nunavut where that [supportive community] can be wherever you are.

Aedan Corey
Yeah.

Beth Sampson
Whether it's, a community of 150 people or 7700 like Iqaluit. Is there anything else you feel called to share about this general topic?

Aedan Corey
I did have one point that I was going to make and I think it's also important. We spoke about how being queer can lead to… especially in communities that aren't as safe that aren't as accepting… can lead to mental illness and mental health issues and eventually, in some cases, death by suicide. But I also think in some cases (and this was in my case in particular, because of intergenerational trauma, because of all these outside factors that come into play), growing up in Indigenous communities… I found that growing up there wasn't a lot of space for me to examine my identity in a gender and sexuality way. Because I was dealing with all these other factors like mental health; I already had mental illness and I didn't have a lot of resources to deal with that. And that severely impacted my ability to take a look at like… bigger picture me. So I think that while simultaneously, being more open and accepting is one way to help queer youth, I also believe that having the resources to better deal with some of the issues that we are facing in our communities, that another step into creating those safe spaces and allowing for people to be who they want to be.

Beth Sampson
Yeah, that's great. Yeah, great point! It's just so many intersectional things that can make stuff so difficult. I also have mental health issues. So, this is a point where Aedan and I, I think have connected [with one another] on for a long time. We have so many similarities between us, which I love. But yeah, I also have mental health issues and then, you almost think a little bit like, chicken and egg. It's mental health… we're learning so much all the time about how the brain works and, I know that I don't make dopamine or serotonin in a normal way, you know? But, you do kind of wonder, "If I had not been queer in a [homophobic] world… not even really even knowing myself [that I was queer] because I was in my 30's before I ever would have identified that way".

But same thing, I didn't really have time and space to play with those ideas [of gender or sexuality] in a way that felt safe to me. And I didn't know as much… I think that's part of it too. If you don't have the language then you don't have access even to the ideas. The idea that I could be Bi was not on my radar screen at all until I was in my mid-to-late 20's because I didn't see it and I didn't know it. So even if that might have been something that I *internally* felt, that was socialized out of me. So yeah, just that connection of socialization and [wondering] if I had grown up in a different way, would I have all these mental health issues[xlii]? And that stuff is the stuff we can't ever know.

But yeah, absolutely. We need better mental health access and structures to heal the intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools. You know, I was talking to somebody from our

community recently, and I was thinking about this stuff from a scholarship perspective, for my work I'm doing now, and just really taking a different, kind of more 'intellectual' or 'academic' look at it [the residential school system], then like a 'heart' look at it. And I just thought, if Canada could put this massive system in place to do this to people in the first place... we could put a massive system in place to try and heal the effects of this. If we had the money to like build all these buildings and take all these kids to these places… if we could come together with the institutional organization and structure to do *that*, we can come together with the institutional structure and organization to try and *heal* that.

Aedan Corey

Yeah.

Beth Sampson

But we're just not, right? And a component of that I think, as you and I have just discussed, a component of that [healing] work should be related to gender and sexuality. So maybe someday we'll have healing centers in *all* communities that were affected by the residential school system, where people can get in-community counseling and treatment, with some kind of coordinated programming. And a piece of that really needs to be looking at this gender and sexuality piece clearly. Because that's something that *has* to be undone. We could do that. What we're lacking is political will, which I think this generation of young people is pushing forward. [I see young people standing up and] saying, "Hey! We shouldn't be doing this on our own, piecemeal, person by person trying to heal, and then trying to heal our own families and our own... like we're *doing* it… we're *doing* that work, but like… help[xliii]".

Aedan Corey

Yeah, it's a a lot.

Beth Sampson

It's a lot and you know, we've got enough shit going on. Just help. You helped make the problem, so help us fix it, you know?

Aedan Corey

Yeah.

Beth Sampson

But this needs to be a part of fixing it. Or a part of healing it I guess, 'fixing' is not really the right word. So maybe someday you could be a counselor in a healing center in our community, or something. I don't know. But isn't that a beautiful thought?

Aedan Corey

It is. I like that.

Beth Sampson

And could be all like, "Hey, here's your Inuk, Two-Spirit [or however you identify in the future] counselor, to help our communities and ourselves heal". But yeah, it's a lot of stuff. Anyway, thanks for talking to me about it! We'll look at this and we'll see if we feel comfortable to share it with the world a little more broadly. But even if we don't… I thank you for this. I'm so thankful to talk to you anytime we get to talk! I think these are important conversations to be sharing, recognizing that, again, our home community, Cambridge Bay is much bigger and much safer than some. And every little piece that our kids, our young, queer Inuit, or our young, queer Indigenous people can see themselves reflected, or their own spirit or experience reflected, I think it helps. And queer kids need all the help we can get! (laughing). I'm happy you're doing the work of helping with me!

Aedan Corey

Yeah… yeah me too. Yes, of course.

EndNotes

[i] (Woods & Yerxa, 2016)

[ii] (Donald Trent Jacobs, 2008, p. 17) states:

> interpreting rather than explaining is important. It is about moving from intelligence to interpretation. From fragmentation to wholeness. From status-quo objectivity to radical/conscious subjectivity. This work helps lead us toward a different way to approach literacy, research, energy, ideas, data collection, sustainability, and all collaborations.

[iii] (Hatcher et al., 2009)

[iv] (Donald Trent Jacobs, 2008, p. 5) states:

> Indigenous ways of learning have always been about the inner journey that respects intuition, spirituality, artfulness, interconnectedness, Mother Earth, and situated experience as the ultimate "primary resources" for "data." Academic habits that fragment and isolate and measure things have, it seems, caused us to lose touch with what is really important (and authentic.)

[v] (Institute for Integrative Science and Health, n.d.-b) states:

> Our integrative approach for Integrative Science is a simple framework for educational curricular development, research practices and applications, and outreach efforts to youth and community. Our framework contains four key elements:
> 3. On-going effort to understand and deepen our understanding of our *differences* [emphasis added] (Indigenous and Western) and develop respect for them.

[vi] (Four Arrows, 2019, p. 3)

> The problem is that even scholars who talk about the importance of Indigenous worldview for human survival, continue focusing only on Indigenous students. For example, in her article "Making Space for Indigeneity: Decolonizing Education" Tiffany Smith writes that "decolonizing needs to begin within the mind and spirit of educators so that they can seek to accept that there are worldviews that exist other than the dominant Western perspective," however the goal of her work relates to the "impacts of deficit thinking on the education of Indigenous students." (2016, p 50).

[vii] (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2015)

> "Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations".

[viii] (Logie et al., 2018)

[ix] (McDermott et al., 2017, p. 157) states:

> Social hostility and stigma remain most strongly associated with the risk of suicide and self-harm in this group (King et al. 2008). Survey evidence from various countries (e.g. the USA, New Zealand, Canada, the UK, Belgium, Norway) has consistently highlighted that the key factors behind lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth suicide and self-harm are homophobic and transphobic abuse, social isolation, early identification of sexual or gender diversity, conflict with family or peers about sexual or gender identity, inability to disclose sexual or gender identity and common mental health problems (Haas et al. 2010).

[x] (Affleck et al., 2020, p. 6)

[xi] (The Trevor Project, 2020, p. 1) states:

> "As LGBTQ youth attempt suicide at more than four times the rate of their straight/cisgender peers (Johns et al., 2019; Johns et al., 2020), it is particularly important to examine suicide risk among AI/AN [American Indian/Alaskan Native] LGBTQ youth".

[xii] (Taylor et al., 2016)

[xiii] (Berman, 2016) states:

> filmmaker Alethea Arnaquq-Baril suggests traditional Inuit culture is at odds with the concept of "pride" itself. She explains how Inuit from a young age are conditioned to be humble, not boastful.

[xiv] https://outonscreen.com/out-in-schools/film-catalogue/

[xv] @rollingstonebeads on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/rollingstonebeads/?hl=en

[xvi] (Government of Canada, 2017)

[xvii] the breakdown of which MLA's voted for or against Nunavut's fist Human Rights Bill in 2003, as well as some of the conversation that occurred by MLA's in the discussion about the Bill reported by D'Souza, in 2003 clearly shows a correlation between homophobic sentiments expressed, and the size of the community the MLA represented.

[xviii] Aedan attended the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program in Ottawa: https://www.nunavutsivuniksavut.ca/

[xix] (Keating & Muller, 2019)

[xx] (Logie et al., 2018)

[xxi] (Angulalik, 2021)

[xxii] (Ristock et al., 2017)

[xxiii] (Truth And Reconciliation Commission Of Canada, 2015)

[xxiv] (Neary, 2021)

[xxv] (Nunavut News, 2018)

[xxvi] (Woods & Yerxa, 2016)

[xxvii] (Rogers, 2014)

[xxviii] (Ristock et al., 2017)

[xxix] (Varga, 2014)

[xxx] (Arnaquq-Baril, 2014)

[xxxi] Tagalik, S. (2012a)

[xxxii] (Anawak, 2005, p. 6) says:

> In the end we prevailed, but it showed how far some of the population has wholeheartedly taken the religious teachings of the churches in terms of it's [sic] biases and turned away from the Inuit culture that always taught acceptance of people different from yourself.

[xxxiii] (De La Garza, 2018)

[xxxiv] (Donald Trent Jacobs, 2008, p. 5) states:

> "Evo Morales, the first Indigenous president of Bolivia, has stated that he is convinced that Indigenous Peoples are the "moral reserve of humanity". I agree.

[xxxv] (University of Prince Edward Island, 2021)

[xxxvi] (Anawak, 2005, p. 12) shares:

> It is well known that there is a much higher incidence of suicide... among youth who are grappling with their own sexuality issues... Nunavut leads this entire continent in suicide... yet we can take harsh and cruel stands that place further pressures on a youth population that is already vulnerable.

[xxxvii] (Anawak, 2005, pp. 12-13) shares:

> In many cases, the people doing this do not even know that many of their own relatives, friends and co-workers are gay, bisexual or transgendered. They seem to have no idea that the group they have targeted are in fact their own sons, daughters, nephews and nieces, sisters and brothers, close friends and colleagues whose lives we made absolutely miserable through their judgement and total ignorance.

[xxxviii] (McDermott et al., 2017, p. 169) states:

> The stigma surrounding mental health is well documented in research as a barrier to young people seeking help and this was also evident in our study. Almost 40% of questionnaire respondents chose 'I felt ashamed of my self-harm/suicidal feelings' as a reason for non-help seeking. However, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth in our study, we found additional problems in asking for help that were connected to negotiating heteronormativity. Just under 25% of questionnaire participants selected 'I did not want anyone to know about my sexual orientation/gender identity' as a reason for non-help seeking. In the interviews, young people talked extensively about their fear of others' reactions to their gender and sexuality. Sometimes this was because they did not want to be judged, rejected or shamed themselves or they did not want others to feel disappointed. It was often also connected to previous negative and abusive experiences with adults, including those they had asked for help.

[xxxix] (Fanouria Giannaki, 2016)

[xl] (Woods, n.d.)

[xli] (Logie et al., 2018)

[xlii] (Keating & Muller, 2019)

[xliii] (CBC News, 2021b)

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