

'Coming In' as Indigenous, Queer, and Urban – Utilising Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory as Methodology

Souksavanh T. Keovorabouth¹

¹ Northern Arizona University

Keywords: Indigenous, Queer, Trans, positionality, methodology, standpoint theory

<https://doi.org/10.54760/001c.133941>

Journal of Global Indigeneity

Vol. 9, Issue 3, 2025

This article outlines my positionality, a crucial aspect of Indigenous research, to explore two guiding questions: 1) How do Native American Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit individuals experience settler-colonial urbanization? and 2) How do their resilience, resistance, agency, and self-determination reshape urban spaces for Native American communities in Phoenix, Arizona? Utilizing Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory, I draw on theoretical insights from Torres Strait Islander scholar Martin Nakata (2008) Indigenous Standpoint Theory and the concept of “coming in” by Two-Spirit Cree scholar Alex Wilson (2015). This framework, informed by my Diné cultural practices, defines my standpoint, and examines the intersections of place and space in urban areas. My insider perspective, as a Queer, Trans, and urban Diné person, strengthens my connection to the participants and the community. The research underscores the complexities of multifaceted identities and the necessity for qualitative research to benefit the communities involved, aligning with Indigenous methodologies and self-determination principles.

Introduction

In conducting research involving Indigenous communities, it is crucial for the researcher to both account for their positionality and to be accountable to those communities. Further, qualitative research should always be of benefit to the communities where participants are located. Lincoln and Denzin (2008) state that “the researcher must consider how research benefits, as well as promotes, self-determination for research participants” (p. 3). When the researcher is Indigenous, there is additional accountability to their family and community (Blalock, 2015; Brown & Strega, 2015; Jolivet & Data Center Oakland, 2015; L. T. Smith, 2012; S. Wilson, 2008). This article outlines my positionality, an integral part of Indigenous research, to help answer my guiding research questions,

^a Diné
Assistant Professor
Northern Arizona University (NAU)
Women and Gender Studies & Applied Indigenous Studies
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

1. How do Native American Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit peoples experience settler-colonial urbanization? and
2. How does Native American Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit resilience, resistance, agency, and self-determination reconceptualize urban space for Native American peoples and futures in Phoenix, Arizona?

I answer these questions by detailing my theoretical position discussing Indigenous Standpoint Theory and its intellectual genealogies. Specifically, in this work Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory provides my theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the lives of Indigenous Queer peoples.

As Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit peoples, we must engage in the act of what Two-Spirit Cree scholar Alex Wilson calls “coming in” (A. Wilson, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2015). The concept of “coming in” refers to fully returning to ourselves and resuming our place as a valued part of our families, cultures, communities, lands, and connections with all relations (A. Wilson, 2015, p. 3). I draw on Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory and A. Wilson’s concept of “coming in” as my methodological framework that is also informed by my Diné cultural practices. I use this to define both my standpoint and intersections of place and space in urban areas to help understand Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit urban experiences. For me, the act of “coming in” specifically allows me to recognize salient features and characteristics found in Phoenix, where I was born and raised. These features and characteristics include Gila River Indian Community, Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community, Melrose which is our Queer District, and Phoenix as a central hub of the Southwest for Native American peoples and how we interact with each other. Lastly, I argue that Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit Peoples can “come in” to community in urban areas.

Positionality

I come to this study of Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit urban experiences as a Diné person who is also Queer, Trans, and raised in an urban location. My mother, who is an amazing Diné person, raised me. Throughout my life, she has shown me the influence Indigenous peoples, specifically Indigenous women, can give our community. My family, Nation, and ancestors shaped my worldview as an Indigenous person and my identity is deeply rooted in my Diné culture and traditions. In addition, my experience as a person who is also Laotian adds another layer to the complexities of who I am.

My father left our family when I was born. As a Laotian refugee, he faced his own struggles as an immigrant during and after the Vietnam War. When he moved to the U.S. in the 1970s, he changed his name from Souksavanh

to Tom in an attempt to fit in and detach himself from any hints of being Asian, including his name. This attempt to adapt to American culture was a common experience for Asian people at this time in the U.S. Racism and xenophobia were and still are rampant, and because of this, many immigrants regularly anglicize their names for employment opportunities (Lee, 2008). The Vietnam War sparked a new wave of anti-Asian racism that impacted the paternal side of my family. As a result, I am more connected to my Diné identity than my Laotian identity because my Diné mum, family, and community raised me. I do, however, have some fond memories of my Laotian family. As a young person, around six or seven, I distinctly remember having dinners and family gatherings with my Laotian side of the family. We would all sit around on the floor on top of floral Asian designed rugs that would leave imprints on our legs as we sat crisscross. We would be eating Laotian foods - rolling our sticky rice into balls to dip into our bright yellow sunny-side eggs - so delicious. Unfortunately, my relationship with my father's family was not ongoing. However, my mum continued to make Laotian foods that she learned from our father as she wanted us to connect to our Laotian culture, even if only through our meals. Through these teachings from my mother, I have been able to maintain my cultural connections to both Dinétah and Laos.

I find myself fortunate when coming out as Queer and Two-Spirit to have been met with open arms from my family. Their love and support have nourished my very existence. I know there is privilege in having an accepting family, and I know this is not always the case for others. Colonization and christianization have wreaked havoc on Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural norms, notably gender, sex, and sexuality (Day, 2021; Farrell, 2023; Keovorabouth, 2021; Miranda, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2021b). Colonization has enforced a gender binary as outlined by Wiradjuri Trans scholar Sandy O'Sullivan who argues that "gender roles are reformed through colonial restrictions as a tool to align family and kinship structures so that they mimic privileged European systems at the moment of invasion" (O'Sullivan, 2021a, p. 1). Because of colonization, the nuclear family is seen as right and godly in contemporary society. O'Sullivan (2021b) further notes that the challenge is to "work against the shackles of the colonial state in reinstating kinship systems that challenge these structures" (p. 2). In taking up such a challenge, A. Wilson (1996) claims that "Two-Spirit connects us to our past by offering a link that had previously been severed by government policies and actions" (p. 305). My family's ability to accept me is an offering that links me back to my identity and home, allowing me the opportunity of "coming in" as A. Wilson describes.

As a Diné, Queer, Trans, and urban person, I observe my position as an insider and, at times, an outsider in relation to this research (Collins, 1986; Farrell, 2022; Foley, 2003; Merton, 1996) with other Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit peoples who are also urban. I am an insider of this

work as I have built, established, and maintained healthy relationships with Queer, Indigenous, and urban identities that I hold, both within and outside the major cities of Arizona. On the other hand, having the opportunity to study at both Oregon State University, built on the lands of Kalapuya people; Macquarie University, built on the lands of Wallumattagal people of the Dharug Nation; and now an assistant professor at Northern Arizona University, built on the lands of fourteen tribal nations in the area, Diné included, positions me as an outsider/researcher connected to two western academic institutions. However, when you're an insider, participants are fully aware of your insider status and relationship to them.

Despite my positionality and identity as a Queer, Indigenous, and urban person who is also Laotian, dominant society and often times, due to settler colonialism even Indigenous communities, made me feel I could only identify as one or the other—either Diné or Asian instead of being both Diné and Asian. Aboriginal scholar Yin Paradies (2006) has faced similar demands and openly identifies as an “Aboriginal-Anglo-Asian Australian” and “refuses to ‘surrender [their] other identities’ in order to be Indigenous” (p. 3). Paradies speaks to the policing of our identities and suggests that such surveillance by settler colonial systems, even by our own relatives, confines us to a “‘prison-house’ of identity” (p. 2). Only choosing one or the other is an impossible choice for me and many other Indigenous people who hold multiple identities because our identities are now and have always been interconnected, meaning that our experiences are, have, and always will be interrelated (Duran et al., 1998; Hunt, 2012). This policing of identity has also been extended to my urban experience: I have been accused of not being Diné enough living away from our traditional homelands. This is an accusation that many urban Indigenous people experience. It is a complex lived reality, as there is no singular correct Indigenous experience or understanding of the world (Chang-Ross, 2010; Harris & Nicolazzo, 2020; Hochschild et al., 2012; Paradies, 2006). I thus outline the history of Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory to help position my experience within research.

Standpoint Theory

I draw on Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory (Farrell, 2022; C. Sullivan & Day, 2021) as theory informing my methodology. Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory has an intellectual history beginning with feminist scholars. It has been expanded upon by Indigenous thinkers who have drawn on this knowledge to make sense of the settler colonial world in which we survive. In this section, I emphasise the importance of Standpoint Theory in research, tracing the trajectory of Feminist Standpoint Theory (Harding, 1986), Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Nakata, 2007), Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2013), and draw on the foundational works of Indigenous Queer scholars as it relate to Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory (Farrell, 2022; C. Sullivan & Day, 2021).

Within western hegemonic systems, the establishment of social hierarchies benefited white cis-men and classified everyone else below (Wynter, 2003). Developed in the 1970s, Feminist Standpoint Theory aimed to elevate women's experiences and counter social, political, and cultural organizations supporting men's authority over women (D. E. Smith, 1987; C. T. Sullivan, 2020). Feminist Standpoint Theory is supposed to make visible the power dynamics of race, gender, sexuality, and the like which is more often than not obscured in dominant forms of knowledge production in the academy.

Standpoint Theory, coined by feminist scholar Sandra Harding (1986), addresses the limitations of traditional epistemologies, which have often ignored or disregarded the knowledge, perspectives, and experiences of women and other marginalized groups. Similarly, Nancy Hartsock (1985, 2019) argues that the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups (specifically women), are often most affected by social inequalities. She argues that these experiences should guide knowledge production in Standpoint Theory. The guiding premise of Standpoint Theory is the recognition that social relationships and interactions produce knowledge, as articulated by Ali and colleagues (2000): "standpoint theories assume that 'different social positions will produce different types of knowledge of the social world, because social positions produce different social experiences'" (p. 25). Additionally, Black feminist scholars bell hooks and Patricia Hill-Collins, argued for the positionality and standpoint of women of color to be critical in the analysis within Standpoint Theory (Collins, 1997; Hooks, 1981).

Understanding the limitations of Standpoint Theory and its application or provision for the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, Torres Strait Islander scholar Martin Nakata conceptualized Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Nakata, 2007). Nakata moves beyond feminist understandings of Standpoint Theory to examine the position of Indigenous peoples in society and offers three important principles for an Indigenous Standpoint Theory. The first principle concerns the researcher. Nakata argues that as an Indigenous researcher, our position is "discursively constituted within and of complex sets of social relations as expressed through social organization of.... [the] everyday" (2007, p. 216). Secondly, as a researcher, it is important to recognize "Indigenous agency as framed within the limits of possibilities" of what is knowable from a composed position (2007, p. 216). The third principle speaks to the tension that Nakata describes as a "tug-of-war" that informs and limits what is known or said in the everyday world. Nakata argues that Indigenous peoples are creative and have agency; even in the face of the most traumatic experiences, we also form communities of care and remain steadfastly Indigenous. Mapping Nakata's position, Aboriginal scholar Bronwyn Carlson (2011, 2016) suggests that Nakata's "conceptualization of a standpoint theory for Indigenous research and researchers provides a way for understanding the complexities of Indigenous experience and Indigenous struggles within contemporary times" (p. 155).

Indigenous Standpoint Theory proposes that the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous peoples provide a unique and valuable standpoint from which to analyze dominant society and construct knowledge (Foley, 2003; Nakata, 2007). This theory further posits that the experiences of Indigenous peoples provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of social phenomena than perspectives based solely on non-Indigenous peoples' experiences. It is the case that the experiences of privileged, typically white, settlers differ greatly from those impacted by the settler colonial nation-state. Indigenous Standpoint Theory offers a framework for Indigenous researchers to explore the actualities of the everyday and express them conceptually from within that experience (Bargallie, 2021; Carlson, 2011, 2016; Nakata, 2007). An important aspect of Indigenous Standpoint Theory is the recognition of the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of respecting and maintaining the relationships among them.

Aboriginal scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013) expands Nakata's work to consider the importance of gender in what she frames as "Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory." Moreton-Robinson argues:

Nakata acknowledges that bodies matter when he argues that physical experience and memory are part of the conglomerate of a priori elements servicing our responses to encounters at the cultural interface. However, physical experience and memories differ and gender is one of the analytical categories that assists us to explain why that is so. (pp. 338–339)

Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory thus offers a powerful framework of the historical and political role shaping our understandings of gender. As a core analysis of the contribution of Indigenous feminism(s), Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory positions the intersection of Indigeneity and gender in Indigenous Studies and research.

Indigenous feminist scholars argue that knowledge production should be guided by the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous peoples. We have historically been excluded from dominant systems of knowledge. A critical connection of Indigenous feminisms and Standpoint Theory is Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million's (2008, 2009) notion of "Felt Theory." Million describe Felt Theory as "actions informed by experience and analysis" (p. 268). Felt theory privileges the embodied, lived experiences and the "felt" knowledge of gendered colonialism. In related way, Moreton-Robinson's Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory "is where embodied knowledge provides the entry point for generating our problematics and research, conceptualized as a situated, critical practice of activity, articulation and relationality" (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 343). Moreton-Robinson and Million's work provides a deeper understanding of Indigenous Standpoint Theory as embodied knowledge and gender experiences that are personal. However, Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory falls short in that

Moreton-Robinson only focuses on the gender binary of male and female or women and men. The binary is a colonial tool that doesn't speak to the embodied experience and knowledge of Queer, Trans, and Non-Binary Indigenous peoples who may fall outside of the gender binary, excluding them from this standpoint.

Building on the works of other Indigenous scholars, particularly Indigenous feminist scholars, Indigenous Queer scholars have been writing about the experiences of being both Indigenous and Queer across Turtle Island (Chacaby, 2016; Jolivéte, 2016; Lezard et al., 2021; Miranda, 2010; Nixon, 2018; O'Hara, 2013; Twist, 2019; A. Wilson, 1996) and other settler colonial nations (Day, 2020; Farrell, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2021a, 2022; C. T. Sullivan, 2018; C. T. Sullivan & Day, 2019). Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory is a more recent expansion of Standpoint Theory. According to Aboriginal Queer scholars Corrinne Sullivan and Madi Day's (2021) analysis, although Indigenous Queer identities are diverse, there are some common experiences, including: "experiences of survival in a homophobic and transphobic settler state negotiating nuclear family structures, and navigating a colonial bureaucracy invested in erasing our relationships and identities" (p. 4). There is a shared reality of homophobia and transphobia within the settler state among Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit peoples. This is the common experience that Sullivan and Day articulate in positioning Indigenous Queer Standpoint.

Wodi Wodi Queer scholar Andrew Farrell (2022) defines Indigenous Queer Standpoint in their work, explaining that the diversity of Queer subjectivities and the emergence of Indigenous Queer scholarship provide the framework for Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory (pp. 33-34). Farrell is critical of both feminist and Queer theory, arguing that there is a "tendency to implicitly install a colonial and often cisgender, white queer perspective as the de-facto norm for queer theorizing" (2022, p. 36). Sullivan and Day (2019) similarly write, "Indigenous societies have, in some known cases, histories of acknowledging and celebrating gender diversity, recognizing that people may not exist as one of two genders, rather, there is a multiplicity of gender identities" (p. 2). The connections drawn by Sullivan and Day (2021) and Farrell (2022) shed light on the rooted and limiting cis heteronormativity that is found within academic research and theory. They highlight the fact that Indigenous peoples have ways of knowing, being, and doing that contradict western research and theory and celebrate diverse gender, sex, and sexualities prior to settler colonial contact.

Standpoint Theory can also be a starting point of global Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit networks. For example, Tuscarora (Haudenosaunee Confederacy) artist and curator Jolene Rickard states:

At a time when the fashions of contemporary discourse, and the world itself, seems to point towards the globalization of space and human experience, Native American and other Indigenous activists are advocating the importance of specific cultural enclaves, of choosing to remain together despite all the pressures – historical and contemporary – to give that up. We provide the opposite of the way the human condition is moving, floating, and migrating around the globe. Instead, we are strategizing to reconfirm a continuous relationship with a very particular part of the world. That's what we need to get – but we need to clarify that it is about decolonizing and sustaining our relationship to a particular space. (Ginsburg, 2000, pp. 34–35; Rickard, 1997)

I use Indigenous Queer scholarship including that of Sullivan and Day (2021), Farrell's (2022) Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory, and A. Wilson's (2015) notion of "coming in" to create conversations among Indigenous Queer peoples in a global context. Drawing on Rickard (1997), this is my way of "strategizing to reconfirm a continuous relationship" (p. 35) with Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and First Nations kin around the world. Through my relationship established within the Cotutelle, I have been afforded the opportunity to build these networks across so-called Australia and to learn and engage in ideas from Indigenous Queer scholars outside of Turtle Island. Much of this work aligns with Native American scholarship demonstrating a transnational community and resistance to settler colonialism. Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory and the process of "coming in" are the methodological foundations that ground this article, and future research for Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit scholarship and Peoples.

Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory

Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory centres the lived experiences of Indigenous Queer individuals, envisioning research beyond the hegemonic norms. In this section, I demonstrate the importance of Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory and the act of "coming in" through the works of Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit scholarship. In this context, the term "Queer" does not solely pertain to sexuality but instead recognizes diverse gender, sex, and sexuality. Thus, the terms Queer and Trans live outside the limiting factor of their attachment to only gender, sex, and sexuality (Morgensen, 2011; Spade, 2015). Ultimately, Queerness has a unique position where many of our communities have teachings and stories of our existence (C. Sullivan & Day, 2021). Due to homophobia and transphobia introduced by colonialism and christianization, Indigenous Queer, Trans and Two-Spirit peoples have been erased, creating forms of violence that were previously unknown to us and that have been leveled at

us from outside and inside our own communities, sometimes paradoxically making urban life a safer experience for many (Deer, 2015; Keovorabouth, 2021; O'Sullivan, 2022).¹

Joseph M. Pierce (2016a), a Queer Cherokee scholar, draws on works in relationality and kinship to emphasize the importance of imagining Trans history. They address the ability to allow for relationality across time, disciplines, bodies, and archives. Pierce argues that this is about “belonging and becoming, relating to and with, and relating as a self-implicated in the production of new imaginaries of Native life” (pp. 435–436). Relationality is an essential practice for Indigenous peoples and our ways of being. Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear and feminist science studies scholar Angela Willey (2019) introduce “Critical Relationality” as an anti-colonial form of relationship building. It is a way to (re)imagine our connections to human and more-than-human beings, such as our connections with each other and everything around us as a form of belonging to place and space. Additionally, Sqilx^W Two-Spirit scholar Percy Lezard (2022) utilizes relational methodologies as an Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit practice that draws from other Indigenous scholarship such as Wilson’s (2008) *Research is Ceremony* and Nêhiyaw, Saulteaux, Pasqua First Nation scholar Margaret Kovach’s (2009) *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. Lezard uses “Critical Relationality” to create a Sqilx^W protocol and ways of being for Two-Spirit peoples. Pierce (2016a), TallBear and Willey (2019), and Lezard (2022) emphasize the importance of relationality for Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit relationships with people, place, things, and self. They all highlight components of “coming in” and Indigenous Queer Standpoint that are vital within this work, including reciprocal relationship building.

Farrell states that “queer Indigenous research can speak from the margins to reveal settler colonial effects that seep into our intimate, gendered, sexual, and relational structures” (Farrell, 2022, p. 34). Farrell’s approach draws on the concept of intersectionality, a term widely understood as being coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), in the context of critical race and legal theory, which recognizes that various systems of oppression (for example gender, race, class) must be understood as both interlocking and compounding in their harms (or violences). Through intersectionality, Farrell’s work also includes how colonialism and heterosexism intersect and impact individuals differently, core mechanisms of Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory and “coming in.” Kwagiulth, Kwakwaka’wakw writer, Sarah Hunt’s (2012) “Summary of Themes: Dialogue on Intersectionality and Indigeneity” notes

¹ Within this article, I utilize Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit to encompass diverse gender, sex, and sexualities among Indigenous peoples prior to settler colonial contact (Keovorabouth, 2022). I also want to highlight contemporary terms such as “Indigiqueer” coined by Plains Cree filmmaker T.J. Cuthand in 2004 to describe the Indigenous program at the Vancouver Queer Film Festival (Cuthand, 2017).

the importance of centering Two-Spirit people and communities in this intersectional analysis, as they have historically been marginalized and excluded from Indigenous communities due to the violence of colonialism including christianization and forced heterosexuality (see also Day, 2020). Additionally, Lezard and colleagues (2021) emphasize the importance of intersectionality, noting that it “brings Two-Spirit relatives and kin back into the circle” (p. 23). Their “2SLGBTQQIA+² Sub-Working Group MMIWG2SLGBTQQIA+³ National Action Plan,” provides Two-Spirit kin and relatives the ability of “coming in” to their communities and cultures that A. Wilson (2015) describes. In combining Queerness and Indigeneity as critical approaches, Farrell (2022) argues for the recognition and agency of Queer Indigenous bodies, thinking, knowledge, and criticism found within Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory.

Additionally, Pierce’s (2017) examination of their own Queerness and Indigeneity in “Adopted: Trace, Blood, and Native Authenticity” highlights the issues of authenticity. They emphasize the importance of Queer storytelling as a practice to challenge the politics of identity. Pierce states:

The queerness of our stories is found in the very act of telling them, as well as in their silences, ruptures, and refusals. The Queerness that I am describing is reflected in the refusal of settler imaginaries of self, in the search for new forms of narration that challenge contemporary understandings of ‘authenticity’ and in the willingness to challenge normative demands for identitarian legibility. (p. 2)

By naming “identitarian legibility,” they explore the limits of what it means to be Indigenous with an “authentic approach to self-determination” to speak openly about incomplete genealogies and ambiguous identity disrupted by settler colonialism (p. 2). Pierce’s emphasis on Queerness, as reflected in the refusal of settler imaginaries of self and the search for new forms of narration that challenge contemporary understandings of authenticity, is significant in the context of Indigenous and Queer research. This approach recognizes the power of storytelling in disrupting dominant narratives and amplifying marginalized voices, especially in revealing settler colonial effects that seep into our intimate, gendered, sexual, and relational structures, as noted by both Farrell and Pierce. This connection speaks against dominant narratives and becomes challenged, revealing colonial effects, and centering marginalized voices in research and academia (Archibald et al., 2019; Simpson, 2017; Wesley, 2015).

2 Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual.

3 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual.

This “authentic approach” by Pierce resonates with Creole of Opelousa and Atakapa-Ishak scholar Andrew Jolivet’s (2016) discussion of the “mixed-race metronomic subject” in *Indian Blood: HIV and Colonial Trauma in San Francisco’s Two-Spirit Community*. The mixed-race metronomic subject, according to Jolivet is “an individual who is assumed to identify mechanically or unvaryingly with the same race just as a metronome is used by musicians to produce fixed beats” (p. 76). Indigenous individuals are often perceived in ways that do not accurately reflect their lived experiences such as Pierce and Jolivet explain, impacting the intersections of Queer and Indigenous. Incorporating the experiences of complex identities into Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory is significant because Indigenous identity has always been diverse and multi-layered, even before settler contact. The usual settler reading of Indigenous and Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit people is generally through a colonial lens that is often violent and sees us as non-conforming and something that needs to be rectified or eliminated (Miranda, 2010; Snorton & Haritaworn, 2013; A. Wilson, 2009).

This unification of Indigeneity and Queerness enables a more nuanced and intersectional understanding of how settler colonialism, heteronormativity, and other forms of oppression impact the lives of Queer Indigenous people. Pierce’s (2016b) work, “Our Queer Breath,” written after the Pulse Night Club⁴ shooting in Orlando, Florida, further emphasises the importance of recognising and engaging with the histories and memories of Queer spaces. They state, “I went to Stonewall because places have their history, their memory” (p. 132). By acknowledging the central role of urban physical spaces such as Stonewall and Pulse, in shaping Queer and Indigenous experiences, researchers can fully appreciate the complexity and richness of Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory and the actual act of “coming in.” They both can help us explain space and place wherever we ‘inhabit’ our Indigeneity. The concept of inhabiting, as Barnd (2010, 2017) suggests, “describes a frame used for establishing belonging or home, a relation to place” (2017, p. 5), facilitating self-determination and body sovereignty, even outside specific nation-land bases. Thus, the act of “coming in” claims attachment to lands and cultural practices to create full sovereignty regardless of my and others’ displacement to establish an Indigenous Queer Standpoint that allows our experiences to ring truth.

In her 2017 book, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, Mississauga Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson emphasizes spaces and places where Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit peoples have full autonomy and safety, such as “Indigenous nations that prioritize body sovereignty, self-determination, and freedom

⁴ (Content Warning): The Pulse Nightclub shooting occurred in 2016 at a gay club in Orlando, Florida where 43 people were killed and over 50+ were injured.

for queer individuals where homophobia, transphobia, heterosexisms, and heteronormativity are unacceptable” (p. 130). Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory and the process of “coming in” provide a methodological tool that recognizes and privileges Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit stories, providing a critical framework for understanding our lived realities by positioning our body sovereignty, self-determination, and freedom through our stories. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), argues that:

The process of colonization has resulted in the denial of our histories and languages, the denial of our epistemologies, and in extreme cases the denial of our existence as peoples. Colonization creates a context where the research interests of the West are privileged and control is removed from the community being studied. (p. 1)

It is within the context of such denials of Indigeneity by settler colonialism that Smith is talking about that we need to elevate stories from Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit individuals as a practice of “Coming In.” It is through this practice that we can tell our own histories and Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory helps us theorize these stories into existence, especially within research.

Conclusion

Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory provides an analytical tool and theoretical framework that privileges Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit lives. Homophobia and transphobia in our own communities often lead to some needing to relocate for safety (Balsam et al., 2004; Dwyer et al., 2015; Evans-Campbell et al., 2012; Gilley, 2006; Lewis, 2012; Wesley, 2015). These are some of the “tug-of-war” tensions and limitations of everyday life that Nakata (2007) describes Indigenous people are facing as they navigate the violence of settler colonialism. Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory exposes the limitations of western methodologies in fully comprehending the lived realities of Two-Spirit peoples and Queer and Trans people who are also Indigenous. We comprise of complex and intersecting identities that continue to be oppressed by settler colonial tactics, urbanisation being one of them. Thus, the use of the theoretical framework of Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory helps us imagine the experiences of Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit lives within research. It brings into existence the complexities of our lives to dismantle the gender binary, western gender norms, and roles that have been placed onto our bodies, peoples, and communities. This allows us to envision and (re)construct spaces of belonging and care. In doing so, Indigenous Queer Standpoint Theory and the act of “coming in” not only challenges the colonial constraints imposed upon our identities but also fosters a future where Indigenous Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit peoples can thrive in self-determined spaces of affirmation, resistance, and collective care.

Submitted: April 01, 2025 AEST. Accepted: April 01, 2025 AEST. Published: April 30, 2025 AEST.



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-NC-ND-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0> and legal code at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode> for more information.

REFERENCES

- Ali, S., Coate, K., & Wangūi wa Goro. (2000). *Global feminist politics: Identities in a changing world*. Routledge.
- Archibald, J.-A., Lee-Morgan, J., De Santolo, J., & Smith, L. T. (2019). *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology*. ZED Books Ltd.
- Balsam, K. F., Huang, B., Fieland, K. C., Simoni, J. M., & Walters, K. L. (2004). Culture, trauma, and wellness: A comparison of heterosexual and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and two-spirit native americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 10(3), 287.
- Bargallie, D. (2021). *Unmasking the Racial Contract: Indigenous Voices on Racism in the Australian Public Service*. Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Barnd, N. B. (2010). Inhabiting Indianness: Colonial Culs-de-Sac. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 34(3), 27–45. <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.34.3.u053732g3323w609>
- Barnd, N. B. (2017). *Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism*. Oregon State University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book56433>
- Blalock, N. (2015). More than me. In A. Jolivet & Data Center Oakland, California (Eds.), *Research Justice: Methodologies for Social Change* (pp. 57–62). Policy Press.
- Brown, L. A., & Strega, S. (2015). *Research as resistance: Revisiting critical, indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches* (2nd ed.). Canadian Scholars' Press: Women's Press.
- Carlson, B. (2011). *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts As Aboriginal Today?* The University of New South Wales.
- Carlson, B. (2016). *The politics of identity: Who counts as Aboriginal today?* Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Chacaby, M.-N. (2016). *A Two-Spirit journey: The autobiography of a lesbian Ojibwa-Cree Elder*. UMP, University of Manitoba Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780887555053>
- Chang-Ross, A. (2010). *Racial queer: Multiracial college students at the intersection of identity, education and agency* [Thesis]. <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/ETD-UT-2010-05-1091>
- Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought. *Social Problems (Berkeley, Calif.)*, 33(6), S14–S32. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.1986.33.6.03a00020>
- Collins, P. H. (1997). Comment on Hekman's "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited": Where's the Power? *Signs*, 22(2), 375–381. <https://doi.org/10.1086/495162>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*.
- Cuthand, T. J. (2017, May 12). *Indigequeer/Indigiqueer*. Theo Jean Cuthand. <https://www.tjcuthand.com/2017/05/12/indigequeerindigiqueer/>
- Day, M. (2020). Indigenist Origins: Institutionalizing Indigenous Queer and Trans Studies in Australia. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 7(3), 367–373. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-8553006>
- Day, M. (2021). Remembering Lugones: The Critical Potential of Heterosexuality for Studies of So-Called Australia. *Genealogy (Basel)*, 5(3), 71. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030071>
- Deer, S. (2015). *The beginning and end of rape: Confronting sexual violence in native America*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816696314.001.0001>

- Duran, E., Duran, B., Heart, M. Y. H. B., & Horse-Davis, S. Y. (1998). Healing the American Indian Soul Wound. In *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (pp. 341–354). Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4757-5567-1_22
- Dwyer, A., Ball, M., & Barker, E. (2015). Policing LGBTIQ people in rural spaces: Emerging issues and future concerns. *Rural Society*, 24(3), 227–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10371656.2015.1099264>
- Evans-Campbell, T., Walters, K. L., Pearson, C. R., & Campbell, C. D. (2012). Indian Boarding School Experience, Substance Use, and Mental Health among Urban Two-Spirit American Indian/Alaska Natives. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 38(5), 421–427. <https://doi.org/10.3109/00952990.2012.701358>
- Farrell, A. (2016). Lipstick claspsticks: A yarn and a Kiki with an Aboriginal drag queen. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 12(5), 574–585. <https://doi.org/10.20507/AlterNative.2016.12.5.10>
- Farrell, A. (2022). *Indigenous LGBTIQ+ Community Online*. Macquarie University.
- Farrell, A. (2023). Connecting back home: Globalising conversations on Indigenous LGBTIQ+ peoples, migration and social media. In B. Carlson, T. Kennedy, & M. Day (Eds.), *Global networks of Indigeneity: Peoples, sovereignty and futures* (pp. 46–69). Manchester University Press.
- Foley, D. (2003). Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous standpoint theory. *Social Alternatives*, 22(1), 44–52.
- Gilley, B. J. (2006). *Becoming two-spirit: Gay identity and social acceptance in Indian country*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Ginsburg, F. (2000). Resources of Hope: Learning from the local in a Transnational Era. In C. Smith & G. K. Ward (Eds.), *Indigenous cultures in an interconnected world* (pp. 27–48). UBC Press.
- Harding, S. G. (1986). *The science question in feminism*. Cornell University Press.
- Harris, J. C., & Nicolazzo, Z. (2020). Navigating the academic borderlands as multiracial and trans faculty members. *Critical Studies in Education*, 61(2), 229–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2017.1356340>
- Hartsock, N. C. M. (1985). *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*. Northeastern University Press.
- Hartsock, N. C. M. (2019). *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited, And Other Essays*. Routledge.
- Hochschild, J. L., Weaver, V. M., & Burch, T. R. (2012). *Creating a New Racial Order: How Immigration, Multiracialism, Genomics, and the Young Can Remake Race in America*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400841943>
- Hooks, B. (1981). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. South End Press.
- Hunt, S. (2012). *Summary of Themes: Dialogue on Intersectionality and Indigeneity*.
- Jolivet, A. (2016). *Indian blood: HIV and colonial trauma in San Francisco's two-spirit community*. University of Washington Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780295998497>
- Jolivet, A., & Data Center Oakland, C. (2015). *Research justice: Methodologies for social change*. Policy Press.
- Keovorabouth, S. T. (2021). Reaching Back to Traditional Teachings: Diné Knowledge and Gender Politics. *Genealogy*, 5(4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5040095>
- Keovorabouth, S. T. (2022). *What is the 2S in LGBTQ2S+?* <https://www.starobserver.com.au/opinion/what-is-the-2s-in-lgbtq2s/214881>
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.

- Lee, J. F. J. (2008). *Asian Americans in the twenty-first century: Oral histories of first- to fourth-generation Americans from China, Japan, India, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Laos*. New Press.
- Lewis, N. M. (2012). Remapping disclosure: Gay men's segmented journeys of moving out and coming out. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 13(3), 211–231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2012.677469>
- Lezard, P. (2022). *Sqilxw Educator Rising: Sqilxw Educator Rising: Relationality as Methodology in a Social Work Abolitionist Framework* [Thesis]. <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/110724>
- Lezard, P., Prefontaine, N., Cederwall, D.-M., Sparrow, C., Maracle, S., Beck, A., & McCleod, A. (2021). *2SLGBTQQA Sub-Working Group MMIWG2SLGBTQQA National Action Plan Final report*. Indigenous Studies Faculty Publications. https://scholars.wlu.ca/indg_faculty/1
- Lincoln, Y., & Denzin, N. (2008). Introduction: Critical Methodologies and Indigenous Inquiry. In L. T. Smith (Ed.), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483385686.n1>
- Merton, R. K. (1996). *On social structure and science*. University of Chicago Press.
- Million, D. (2008). Felt Theory. *American Quarterly*, 60(2), 267–272. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.0.0005>
- Million, D. (2009). Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History. *Wicazo Sa Review*, 24(2), 53–76. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.0.0043>
- Miranda, D. A. (2010). EXTERMINATION OF THE JOYAS: Gendercide in Spanish California. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16(1–2), 253–284. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2009-022>
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2013). Towards an Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory: A Methodological Tool. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 28(78), 331–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2013.876664>
- Morgensen, S. L. (2011). *Spaces between us: Queer settler colonialism and indigenous decolonization*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816656325.001.0001>
- Nakata, M. (2007). *Disciplining the Savages Savaging the Disciplines* (1st ed.). Aboriginal Studies Press. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.9780855755485>
- Nixon, L. (2018). *Nítisának* (1st ed.). Metonymy Press.
- O'Hara, J. E. (2013). *Two-spirit acts: Queer indigenous performances*. Playwrights Canada Press.
- O'Sullivan, S. (2021a). Saving Lives: Mapping the Power of LGBTIQ+ First Nations Creative Artists. *Social Inclusion*, 9(2), 61–64. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v9i2.4347>
- O'Sullivan, S. (2021b). The Colonial Project of Gender (and Everything Else). *Genealogy (Basel)*, 5(3), 67. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030067>
- O'Sullivan, S. (2022). Challenging the colonialities of symbolic annihilation. *Southerly*, 79(3), 16–22. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.586802496270810>
- Paradies, Y. C. (2006). Beyond black and white: Essentialism, hybridity and Indigeneity. *Journal of Sociology (Melbourne, Vic.)*, 42(4), 355–367. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783306069993>
- Pierce, J. M. (2016a). FEELING, DISRUPTING. *Biography (Honolulu)*, 39(3), 434–437. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2016.0052>
- Pierce, J. M. (2016b). Our Queer Breath. *QED (East Lansing, Mich.)*, 3(3), 132–134. <https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.3.3.0132>

- Pierce, J. M. (2017). Adopted: Trace, Blood, and Native Authenticity. *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 3(2), 57–76. <https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.3.2.0057>
- Rickard, J. (1997). *The Ostego Institute for Native American Art History*.
- Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt1pwt77c>
- Smith, D. E. (1987). *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Northeastern University Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10555787>
- Snorton, C. R., & Haritaworn, J. (2013). Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife. In *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (pp. 66–77).
- Spade, D. (2015). *Normal life: Administrative violence, critical trans politics, and the limits of law*. Duke University Press.
- Sullivan, C., & Day, M. (2021). Queer(y)ing Indigenous Australian higher education student spaces. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 50(1), 2–9. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2019.19>
- Sullivan, C. T. (2018). Majesty in the city: Experiences of an Aboriginal transgender sex worker in Sydney, Australia. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 25(12), 1681–1702. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1553853>
- Sullivan, C. T. (2020). Who holds the key? Negotiating gatekeepers, community politics, and the “right” to research in Indigenous spaces. *Geographical Research*, 58(4), 344–354. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12415>
- Sullivan, C. T., & Day, M. (2019). Indigenous transmasculine Australians & sex work. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 32, 100591. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2019.100591>
- Tallbear, K., & Willey, A. (2019). Critical Relationality: Queer, Indigenous, and Multispecies Belonging Beyond Settler Sex & Nature. *Imaginations (Edmonton, Alberta)*, 10(1), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.CR.10.1.1>
- Twist, A. (2019). *Disintegrate/dissociate: Poems*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Wesley, D. L. (2015). *Reimagining two-spirit community: Critically centering narratives of urban two-spirit youth* [PhD Thesis].
- Wilson, A. (1996). How We Find Ourselves: Identity Development and Two-Spirit People. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(2), 303–318. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.66.2.n551658577h927h4>
- Wilson, A. (2007). *N'tacimowin inna nah': Coming in to two-spirit identities* (Vol. 68, Issue 6). Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- Wilson, A. (2008). N'tacimowin inna nah': Our Coming In Stories. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 26(3–4), 193–199.
- Wilson, A. (2009). Two-spirit identity: Active resistance to multiple oppressions. *Directions: Research and Policy on Eliminating Racism*, 5(1).
- Wilson, A. (2015). Our Coming In Stories: Cree Identity, Body Sovereignty and Gender Self-Determination. *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, 1(1). <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jgi/vol1/iss1/4>
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Pub.
- Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>