



Two Spirit! Let's Hear It!:  
An Introduction to Two-Spirit Health

# Webinar overview

- Introduction to the health of Two-Spirit people
  - Complement 2016 NCCAH research paper *An Introduction to the Health of Two-Spirit People: Historical, contemporary and emergent issues*
- Discuss array of meanings ascribed to 'Two-Spirit'
- Overview of the impacts of colonization as key to understanding Two-Spirit health
  - Decolonize assumptions about relationships, identities, sexual health
- Review framing of Two-Spirit people in health literature
- Tools to continue learning beyond the webinar
  - Practical tools to use in fostering Two-Spirit health
  - Synthesis questions and discussion
  - Suggested readings



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Dr. Sarah Hunt

- Kwagiulth (Kwakwaka'wakw)
- Research, teaching & activism in collaboration with youth, women & Two-Spirit people
- 15+ years of anti-violence research, education and policy development
- UBC assistant professor in First Nations & Indigenous Studies and Geography
- Published on issues of decolonization, justice, gender & sexuality



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# 'Coming In'

“Two-spirit identity is about circling back to where we belong, reclaiming, reinventing and redefining our beginnings, our roots, our communities, our support systems and our collective and individual selves.”

-- Alex Wilson (2008). N'tacimowin inna nah': Our coming in stories. *Indigenous Women in Canada: The Voices of First Nations, Inuit and Metis Women*, 26(3/4), p.198.



Two-Spirit camp at Standing Rock



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Embracing 'Two-Spirit'

1994: 'Two-Spirit' chosen at  
Winnipeg gathering

Today: Diversity of meanings &  
experiences

**Beyond the Gender Binary:** two-thirds of North American Indigenous languages contain terms to describe people who are neither men nor women (Tafoya, 1997).

**Sexuality:** Indigenous + LGBTQ  
(lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer)

**Gender:** Indigenous + Trans\*

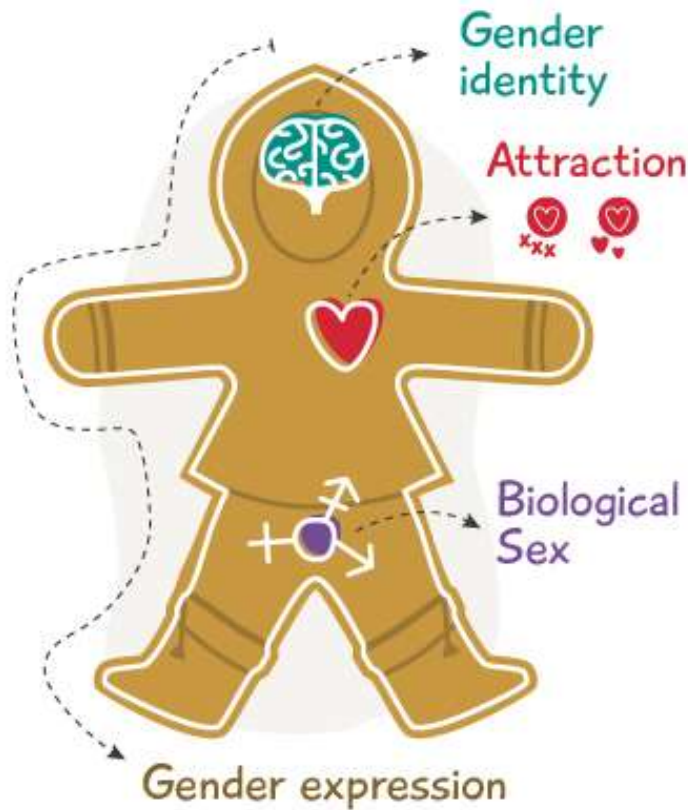
**Gender:** Culturally-specific non-binary gender identities

**Cultural role:** Beyond gender/sexuality, beyond the English language

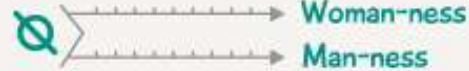


NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE



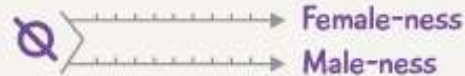
### Gender identity



### Gender expression



### Biological sex



### Attraction



Romantically attracted to



Sexually attracted to



# Primary health determinant: colonization

- Social determinants of health target underlying social causes of illness and disease (ie. Poverty, inadequate housing, social inequity)
- For Indigenous people, colonization is the primary health determinant out of which other determinants arise
- Colonization is ongoing, as well as historic



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Residential Schools and *Indian Act*: impact on Indigenous gender and sexuality



Artist: George Littlechild (Plains Cree)

*Residential schools racialized native children as ‘Indians’ while enforcing strict divisions between girls and boys through European dress and hairstyles, as well as physically separating them in different dorms (Hunt 2007).*



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE



# What is Heteronormativity?

**'Heteronormativity' is the belief that people fall into distinct and complementary genders (men and women) and that heterosexuality is the norm, if not the only option.**



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# What does health literature say about Two-Spirit people?

...Not much.



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Theme 1: Violence

An intersectional analysis of violence reveals that Two-Spirit people may experience targeted violence because of a combination of **racism, homophobia, transphobia and sexism**, depending on their individual gender and sexual identity.



Image from the annual women's memorial march in Winnipeg (Source: CBC).



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Theme 2: Mental Health & Substance Use

*Research in both Canada and the U.S. has found that Two-Spirit people are more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, as well as using substances such as drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms.*



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Theme 3: Suicide

*Research indicates that the suicide risk for Two-Spirit people is greater than among the heterosexual Indigenous population.*

*Research has found that homophobia, isolation, and rejection increase the risk of suicide for Two-Spirit people (NAHO, 2012).*

*Aboriginal transgender people in one study indicated that their distress was caused by the experience of being transgender in a transphobic society rather than by being transgender itself (Taylor, 2009).*



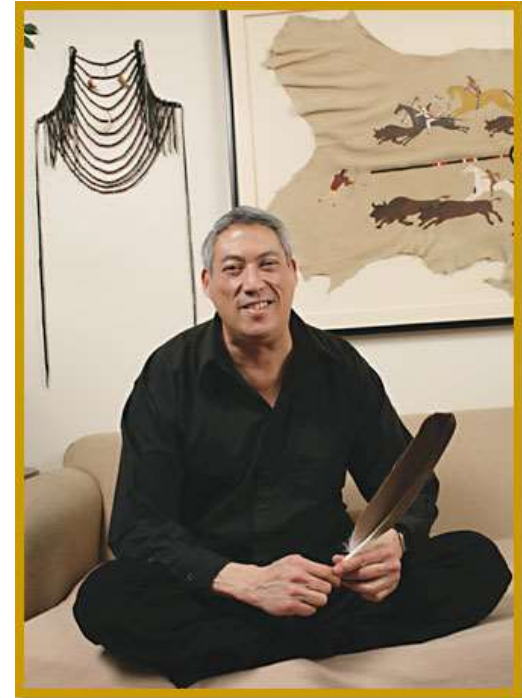
NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Theme 4: HIV/AIDS

*Due to the lack of acknowledgement of gender and sexual diversity in national health statistics, no data is currently available on rates of HIV/AIDS for Two-Spirit people.*

*Research and community initiatives indicate that HIV/AIDS has been a key health concern among Two-Spirit people, especially among individuals who are biologically male as is evident through their activism and leadership in addressing this health issue.*



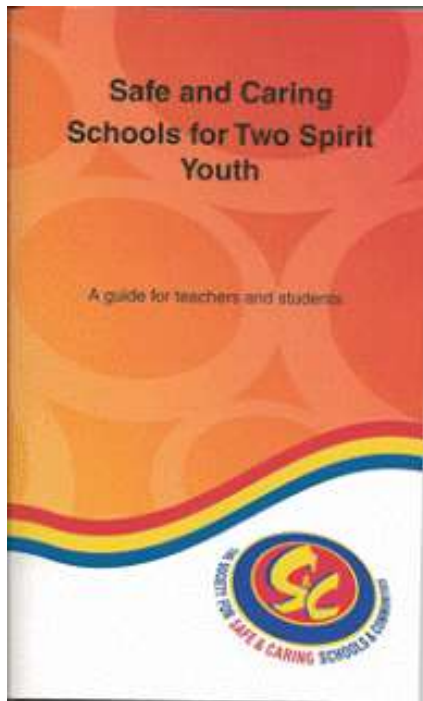
Two-Spirit leaders like Sandy Lambert, Aboriginal Community Research Associate with the Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Collaborative Centre, have led the way in HIV/AIDS education and advocacy.



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Two-Spirit Youth Health



## **Bullying, homophobia, racism**

Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are systemic and individual forms of discrimination facing many LGBTQ2S youth.

## **Street involvement, homelessness, exploitation**

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are highly over-represented among Indigenous street-involved and homeless youth (McCreary Centre Society, 2006).



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Troubling 'at risk' narratives

“If there is a single indicator of how a child will develop in British Columbia – that will define whether or not that child ends up belonging to the haves or the have-nots – it is the possession of an Indian status card.”

Indigenous youth (including Two-Spirit youth) are often ONLY talked about as being...

....at risk

...vulnerable

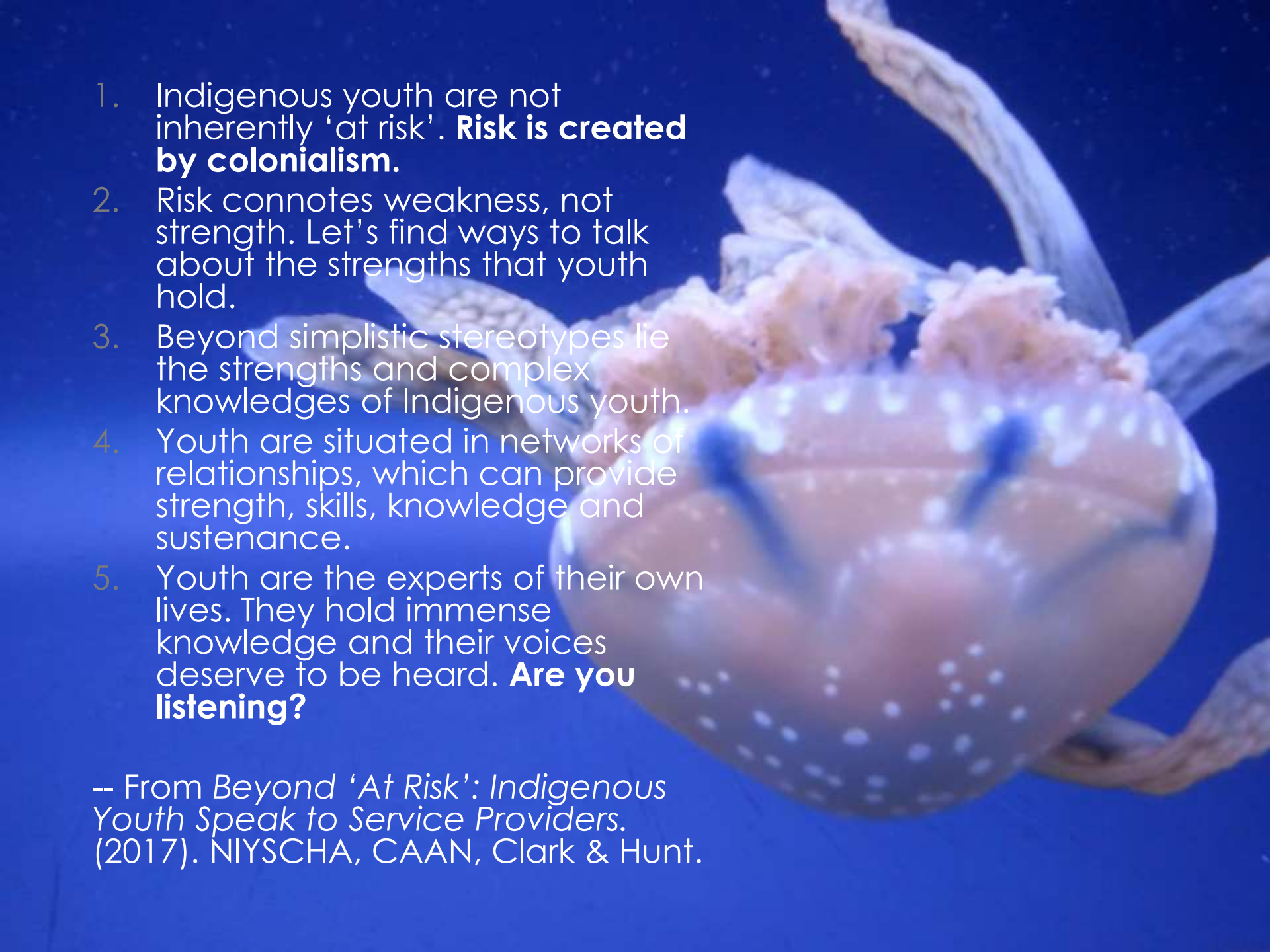
...marginalized.



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE



- 
1. Indigenous youth are not inherently 'at risk'. **Risk is created by colonialism.**
  2. Risk connotes weakness, not strength. Let's find ways to talk about the strengths that youth hold.
  3. Beyond simplistic stereotypes lie the strengths and complex knowledges of Indigenous youth.
  4. Youth are situated in networks of relationships, which can provide strength, skills, knowledge and sustenance.
  5. Youth are the experts of their own lives. They hold immense knowledge and their voices deserve to be heard. **Are you listening?**

-- From *Beyond 'At Risk': Indigenous Youth Speak to Service Providers*. (2017). NIYSCHA, CAAN, Clark & Hunt.

# Unlearning & decolonizing

- Don't make assumptions
- Meet people where they are at
- Ask questions
- Educate yourself
- Learn about local, culturally specific contexts
- Talk to Two-Spirit youth and elders in your community

**Decolonize**



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Self-Reflection Questions

- Growing up, what did I learn about sexuality that shapes my views of acceptable or 'right' sexual behavior?
- What teachings do I have about gender roles and gendered behavior?
- What stereotypes do I have about Indigenous people and/or LGBTQ2S people?
- How do these assumptions and beliefs shape my practice?
- How has my own thinking about gender and sexuality changed over the years?
- What resources are available in my community that I can use to educate myself?



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Community Assessment

## How welcoming is your organization/community to Two-Spirit people?

- Consider the exclusion of non-binary and trans Indigenous people through:
  - Gender-separate spaces (ie. girls and boys groups)
  - Gendered washrooms
  - Gendered ceremonial spaces
- Do Two-Spirit people have a voice in shaping policy?
- Do you have Two-Spirit representation in your organizational leadership?
- If not, what would need to change for your organization to be welcoming and safe for Two-Spirit people to get involved?



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

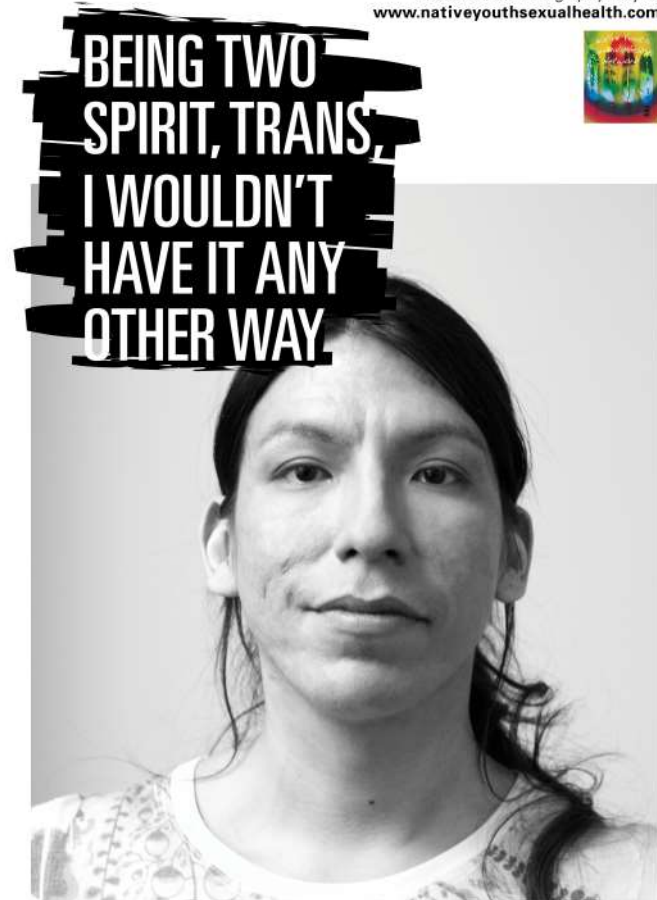
CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Celebrate gender & sexual diversity

*...we weren't "queer", we were normal. Many of our societies normalized gender variance, variance in sexual orientation and all different kinds of relationships as long as they were consistent with our basic values of consent, transparency, respect and reciprocity. We weren't "queer" until settlers came into our communities and positioned the "queer" parts of our relationships and societies as defiant, abnormal and sinful.*

-- Leanne Simpson, (2015) in 'Anger, Resentment & Love: Fuelling Resurgent Struggle'.

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network  
Healthy Sexuality and Fighting Homophobia  
Native Youth Photography Project  
[www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com](http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com)



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Two-Spirit! Let's Hear It!

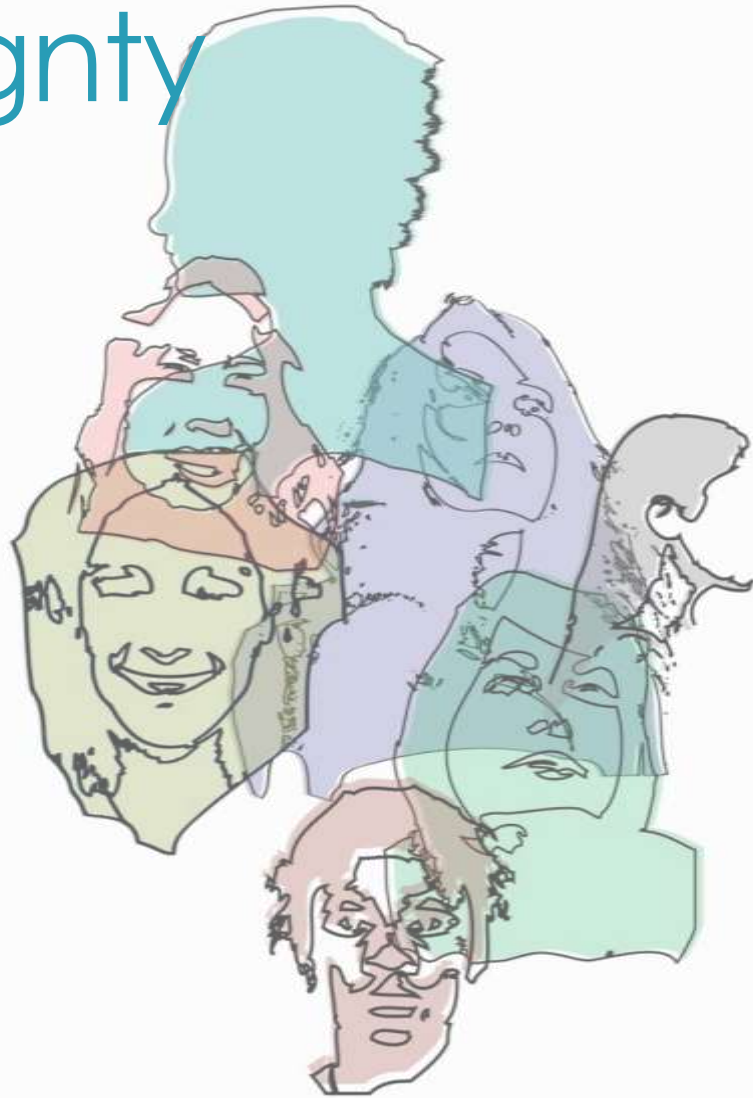
Celebrating the range of Indigenous expressions of gender and sexuality can help shed stigma and foster health.

*We need to see the body—the male body—as being a giver of pleasure, not just a recipient of somebody else's acts, but a source of pleasure for the self and others.*

--Daniel Heath Justice

# Body Sovereignty

**Indigenous  
sovereignty  
includes  
body  
sovereignty**



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

# Recommended readings

## Books & chapters

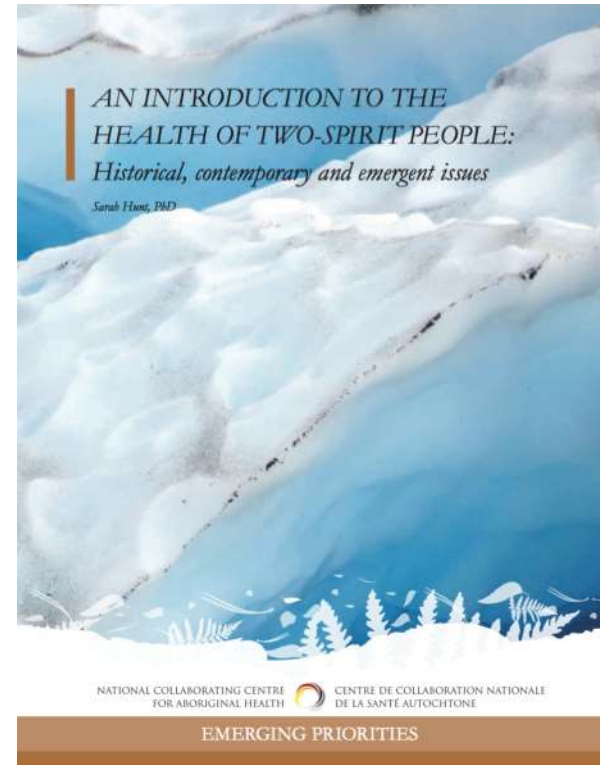
- Ma-Nee Chacaby & Mary Louisa Plummer. (2016). *A Two-Spirit Journey: The Autobiography of a Lesbian Ojibwa-Cree Elder*. Winnipeg, MN: U of Manitoba.
- Sarah Hunt. (2015). *Embodying Self-Determination: Beyond the gender binary*. In *Determinants of Indigenous peoples' health in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.

## Online Sources

- Two-Spirit Resource Directory:  
<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/two-spiritdirectory.html>

## Videos

- *Regalia: Pride in Two Spirits, A video of Love Intersections*.



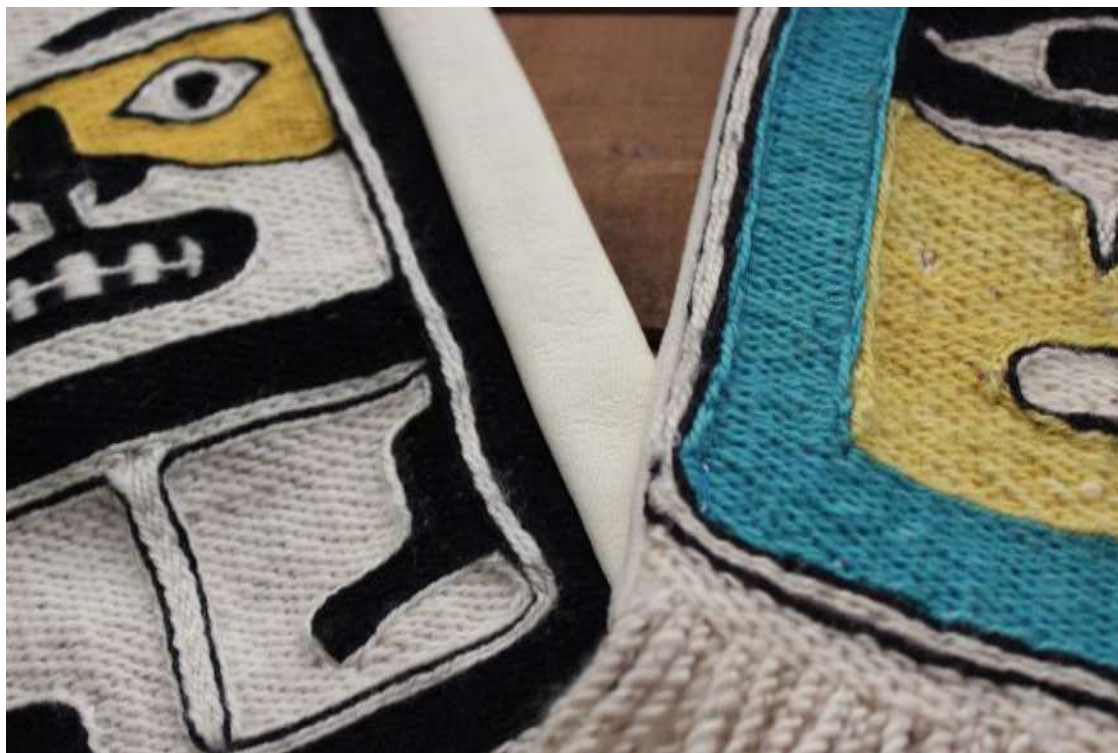
See bibliography and list of Two-Spirit authors & artists in NCCAH report.



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE





Gilakas'la!



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE  
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE  
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE