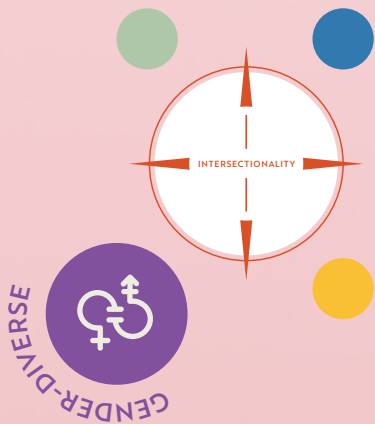




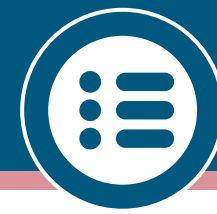
**INTERSECTIONS:**  
INDIGENOUS AND  
2SLGBTQQIA+  
IDENTITIES

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## INTRODUCTION: A MESSAGE OF HOPE FROM TWO-SPIRIT ELDERS

The relationship between Canada and Indigenous Peoples is not a positive story. It is filled with oppressive tactics: Indigenous Peoples being displaced from lands; the development of residential schools; children being taken away by governing bodies of Canada; the enactment of legislation that deprives and criminalizes Indigenous culture and language. We are only a few decades into a country where Indigenous Peoples are allowed to vote, practise their culture, and speak their original languages. With this legacy of horrible treatment has come the practice of homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination of our 2SLGBTQQIA+ People. Our original beliefs did not contain this discrimination and instead believed that 2SLGBTQQIA+ People in our communities were healers, counsellors, and

persons with certain ceremonial rights. This quickly changed with years of colonization taking away Indigenous identity, which has unfortunately taught many of us these new forms of discrimination. We are on a path of waking up our cultures again and using our Indigenous languages. Through this, we are healing with our 2SLGBTQQIA+ People.

Many Indigenous spiritual practices are based on inclusion and open to those who seek to connect to their spirit being. We have a new era of Two-Spirit Elders who also practise this belief in finding your path and expression as a 2SLGBTQQIA+ person. These teachings are slowly being developed and, although gender-based violence still exists, more healing is happening between communities and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People. There isn't a wrong way to practise culture, so long as it is practised respectfully. We are trying to transfer that teaching into supporting our 2SLGBTQQIA+ People.

Our 2SLGBTQQIA+ People go through several unforeseen barriers and direct non-acceptance. Young people hide who they are because they are afraid of losing family, being a "problem" to their community, or having to go through feelings of rejection alone. This has led to high suicide rates among our Indigenous youth. It also has made 2SLGBTQQIA+ youth believe there is something wrong with them.

As 2SLGBTQQIA+ People grow stronger, so do the ways in which we address ourselves. We need to honour how a person wants to be addressed. The term Two-Spirit saved and made many of us Elders feel more comfortable when it was adopted in the early 1990s. Many of us did not know how to refer to ourselves. Many of us hid and went along silently with mainstream terms of the two genders until Two-Spirit started being used. With the revitalization of our original ceremonies and languages, the usage of Two-

Spirit has cleared a path of change where some of our people are using their language to describe gender diversity. Hearing Indigenous language used for identity or names creates a positive connection to a person's Indigenous identity. This practice of returning to Indigenous culture also promotes those who still face barriers in seeking out their culture and language. Truly, healing is starting.

As Two-Spirit Elders, we hope this message reaches those that need to hear these words: You are not sick; you are not mentally ill. You are loved. You are blessed to be Two-Spirit (or however you wish to be addressed) and you have been given the gift of life.





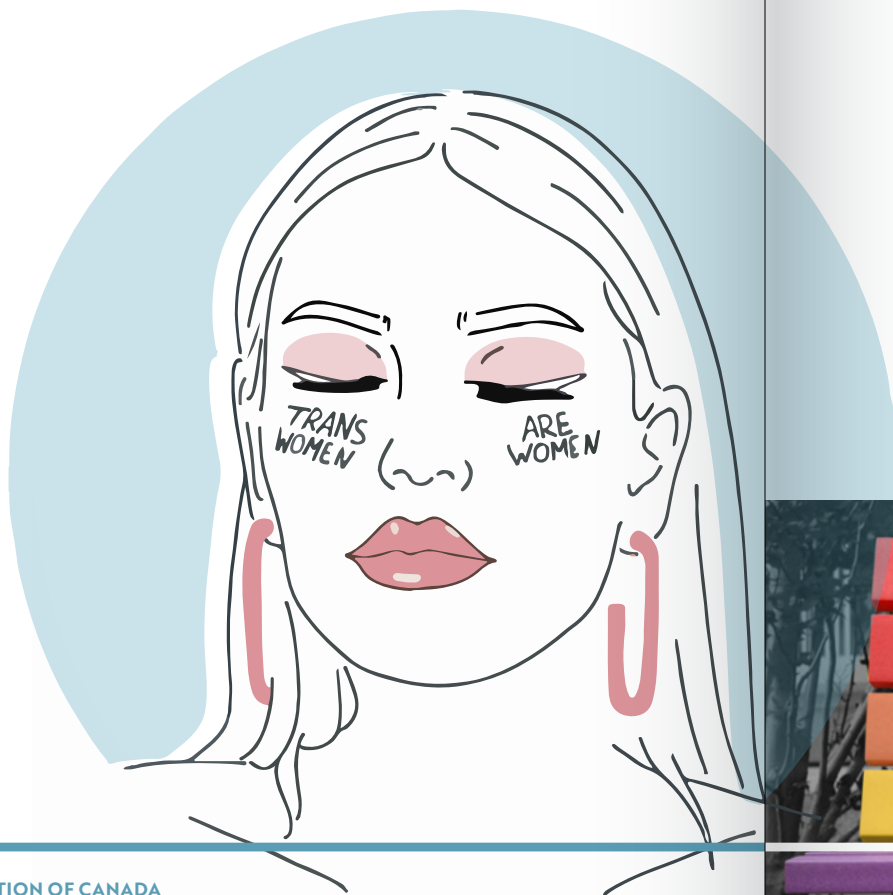
## ABOUT NWAC

The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) is a national Indigenous organization representing the political voices of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse (WG2STGD+) People across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat. For over 40 years, NWAC has worked to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous WG2STGD+ People within their respective communities. Since 1974, NWAC has drawn from an approach that is intersectional, trauma-informed, and culturally safe to support the needs of Indigenous WG2STGD+ People. Along with Indigenous women’s organizations nationwide, NWAC continues to advance their well-being and equality through advocacy, education, research, and policy.

NWAC has established strong and lasting governance structures, decision-making processes, financial policies and procedures, and networks to achieve its mission. As a result, NWAC is well-suited to support the preservation of Indigenous cultures and advance the well-being of Indigenous WG2STGD+ People, as well as their families and communities.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

NWAC acknowledges that its office headquarters are on the unceded and unsurrendered Territory of the Kitigan Zibi and Pikwàkanagàn Algonquin Nations, who have been the keepers and defenders of this land since time immemorial. NWAC honours and affirms the inherent rights of all Indigenous Peoples and Nations across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat and will continue to uphold the commitments made to self-determination and sovereignty. Further, NWAC acknowledges the systemic oppression of the lands and cultures of Indigenous Peoples and is dedicated to dismantling decolonization and facilitating healing.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NWAC is grateful to all the Knowledge Keepers and Elders who contributed to this project. Thank you for sharing your journey and words of wisdom for Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. NWAC would also like to thank the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage for supporting this project.

## CONTENT WARNING

This booklet discusses topics that may be distressing, such as trauma, colonial violence, and residential schools. Please reach out to the resources listed in this booklet if you need support.

## WHAT’S INCLUDED

This booklet was developed as a learning resource to enhance knowledge and understanding of Indigenous language and culture and the intersections with

2SLGBTQIA+ identities. The aim of this resource is to elevate the voices of Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ People across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat by sharing their experiences and knowledge. This resource was developed for Indigenous youth, who will guide the change needed for a better tomorrow.

Throughout the booklet, you will find the wisdom shared by our Knowledge Keepers about their thoughts and experiences with the intersections of Indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA+ identities. This booklet begins with a discussion of gender identity and how it relates to language and culture. Then, it explores the roles of Two-Spirit identities and gender diversity in Indigenous cultures. Also included in this booklet are activities to facilitate sharing and reflection on gender identity. Lastly, this booklet lists wellness resources of supports and programs that anyone experiencing distress or wanting more resources on mental health or the 2SLGBTQIA+ community may access.





## KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

### Davika Picody (she/her)

Davika is Ojibwa-Cree from Michipicoten First Nation and is a proud Indigenous lesbian. In her spare time, Davika makes ribbon skirts and practises Cree with her stepdaughter. She dreams of a utopian Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ community where everyone can live freely without shame or fear.

### KaKeesheeway (they/them)

KaKeesheeway's name was gifted by their Elders and means "loud voice" in Mohawk. They are an Indigiqueer advocate and proud Mohawk from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory.

### Martini Monkman (she/her)

Martini is a proud Two-Spirit Anishinaabe woman, lifegiver, and water carrier who also holds both a feminine and a masculine spirit.

### Daryle/Giselle Gardipy (he/she)

Daryle self-identifies as a transsexual Two-Spirit male and is from Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation (BOCN). He worked for years at both the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (SICC) and Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) and other non-governmental organizations in Ottawa. Daryle's alter-ego, Giselle, made her debut in the early 2000s in the Ottawa drag scene. In 2014, they moved back to their home community and was accepted for who they are. In 2019, BOCN became the first community to hold a Two-Spirit powwow on a First Nation. In doing this, **"the community was accepting and embracing a lost part of our culture which is in the early stages of being restored and revitalized. This can only be done by learning the new terminology that is accepted by the community and learning the language in each community when referring to Two-Spirit people. Language is our Identity—by losing our language we have lost our identity."**

Daryle/Giselle Gardipy (he/she)



## GENDER IDENTITIES

Gender refers to a combination of characteristics assigned to socioculturally constructed categories like women, men, girls, and boys. This includes the norms, behaviours, and roles associated with concepts of femininity and masculinity. Gender is central to our understanding of the world. It's used to explain everything—from hobbies to driving styles and colour preferences. Gender is so thoroughly embedded in our institutions, our laws, and our behaviours that it feels natural and often goes unquestioned. However, since gender is a sociocultural construct, it varies in each culture and community and changes over time.

Gender is also central to our identity, but it is not something we are born with or something we have; it is something we learn and something we do.<sup>1</sup> However, gender is not an individual practice, but a collaborative one that emerges in our day-to-day interactions, connecting individuals to the larger social order.<sup>2</sup> Gender is an integral aspect of a person's identity and is tied to well-being.

Heteronormativity and heterosexism are driving forces behind the discrimination that many experience due to their gender identity and expression. Knowledge Keeper Davika explains, "Two-Spirit people hide

their Identity on the rez. Some people know they are Two-Spirit but it is not in the open or ever talked about. I was in a room with other community members who were talking negatively about a Two-Spirit person and the attacks were about their identity and sexual behaviours. From that I learned to know when to hide myself and not share my identity. I had to gauge when it was safe to be my true self in different family, community, and personal settings."



1 West, Candace, and Don Zimmerman, "Doing Gender." In *Gender and Society* 1, (1987): 125–151.  
2 Hall, Kira, and Mary Bucholtz, "Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach." *Discourse Studies* 7, (2005): 585–614.  
3 Crenshaw, Kimberlé, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." In *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, (1989).





**Gender Identity**—Refers to how a person feels and thinks about their own gender based on interpretations of sociocultural constructs of gender identity categories. Gender identity is an ongoing process shaped by the individual and the community to which they belong. It is an active process that is taught, learned, and enforced through collaboration.

**Gender Expression**—Refers to the ways a person uses meaning-making resources to express their gender identity such as clothing, language, and behaviours based on a person's perceived gender roles and identities defined by their community and culture. While performances of gender expression are available to everyone, constraints dictate who can perform which personae through social sanctions.<sup>4</sup>

**Biological Sex**—Is a label assigned to a person before or at birth based on a combination of anatomical, endocrinal, and chromosomal features. It is a social decision based on preconceived beliefs about gender identity, which informs the designation of binary categories of male and female.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the selection of sex assignment is based on cultural beliefs of what makes someone male or female.

**Sexual Orientation**—Used to describe any combination of sexual, romantic, spiritual, or emotional attractions and interactions with others.



### WHAT DOES BEING TWO-SPIRIT OR INDIGIQUEER MEAN TO YOU?



*"It means being accepted no matter what you identify as; it means to be connected to your spirit, to not be ashamed of who you are or having to hide yourself. I am now in a loving relationship and my partner and I are happy. For the first time ever, I am comfortable in my body and comfortable in my sexuality and sex." – Davika*



*"To me it means being the original inhabitants of this land and being LGBTQ at the same time—embracing your Indigeneity and your spirit that lives within you and allowing it to be. The feeling of needing to define your sexuality or gender identity or put yourself in a certain category is a colonial concept. Prior to colonization Two-Spirit people were allowed to just be. We didn't have to explain ourselves or put a label on what we are. We were allowed to exist freely and were considered sacred. To me, that's sacred and special." – Martini*



*"I identify as Indigiqueer, which to me means being Indigenous and being queer and part of a spectrum. I do not prefer the basic labels of LGBTQ. I believe how one identifies is changing because we can choose to identify better than we could in the past. We are spiritual beings. The great spirit accepts us as who we are and who we identify as. I did not choose to be Two-Spirit; the spirits chose me." – KaKeesheeway*

### TWO-SPIRIT IDENTITIES

What is "Two-Spirit" or "Indigiqueer"? The creation of the term Two-Spirit (also referred to as 2-Spirit or Two-Spirited) is widely considered to have been birthed from the Third Annual Inter-Tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference in Winnipeg in 1990 and was proposed by Elder Myra Laramee. The term originates from a translation of the Anishinaabemowin phrase niizh manidoowag, meaning "two spirits" and is a pan-Indigenous term used throughout English-speaking communities on Turtle Island. Early literature used the derogatory term "berdache," derived from the Arabic word bardaj, which means "slave" or "kept boy," to refer to Two-Spirit individuals until the 1990s when Two-Spirit was coined. While Two-Spirit is widely used today, others may prefer a Nation-specific term, as many Indigenous languages contain words that capture the gender diversity traditionally found in their communities. Indigiqueer is another term sometimes used interchangeably with Two-Spirit identity and is credited to Thirza Cuthand.<sup>6</sup> Even though Two-Spirit can contain a wide range of meanings for different people and different communities, it is broadly understood to refer to a person who identifies as having both a feminine and masculine spirit.

<sup>4</sup> Eckert, Penelope, and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10.  
<sup>5</sup> Fausto-Sterling, Anne, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Scudeler, June, "Queer Indigenous Studies, or Thirza Cuthand's Indigiqueer Film." In *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 79–92.





"I feel blessed to be able to express myself freely and feel beautiful in my own skin. Even though I am a femme-presenting woman I have always felt a masculine spirit within me," - Martini

As an umbrella term, Two-Spirit captures a wide range of identities related to sexuality and spiritual and gender identity. In Western culture, these might be described as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or (gender)queer—among others—as well as a combination of these elements. Two-Spirit can also be used to refer to polyamorous relationships.

Although Two-Spirit is sometimes used as an umbrella term, it should be noted that not every Indigenous person who identifies as Two-Spirit also identifies as LGBTQIA+ and not every Indigenous person who identifies as LGBTQIA+ will identify as Two-Spirit. For some, the decision to use the term Two-Spirit means to reconnect with Indigenous understandings of sexual and gender identity; to move beyond Eurocentric binary categorizations of sexuality and gender, which was violently imposed upon Indigenous communities through Christianization and the residential school system.

Therefore, using the term Two-Spirit can be seen as a way of combatting the colonial

legacies of heterosexism and instead emphasize Indigenous cosmologies, such as the fluidity and non-linear nature of identity and the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity— including gender, sexuality, community, culture, and spirituality.<sup>7</sup> Current models of gender and sexuality in Western culture struggle to describe someone who, for example, was a woman, became a man, and then switched between the two. Labels such as "non-binary" or "genderfluid" might be used; however, that would "miss the bigger point: that the experiences of Two-Spirit people, both historically and in the present, transcend the categories of colonially defined gender and sexuality."<sup>8</sup>

### GENDER IN LANGUAGE

The ideologies of gender in culture manifest in language use. Language shares a bidirectional relationship with the beliefs and values of a society. Thus, language and cultural ideas of gender facilitate each other through a mutually reinforcing relationship. Language itself is a form of social practice, repeated throughout our lives and embedded in our culture.<sup>9</sup> The way in which gender is talked about reflects the beliefs we hold towards it as a society.

Language is not static, it is fluid and constantly evolving, as are the ideas reflected within its use. A central component to gender in Western culture is that it is binary. This means that gender is often seen as

having only two opposite categories—man and woman. The gender binary in Western culture is illustrated in English pronouns "he" and "she" to refer to a single person. Now, the growing use of the singular pronoun "they" reflects a societal change in which Western culture is acknowledging and accepting gender identities beyond the binary. The pattern towards gender-neutral language in English can be seen in phrases such as "humankind" and "firefighter" in place of "mankind" and "fireman," respectively. The use of masculine nouns and pronouns to refer to those whose gender is unclear or variable, or to groups that are not identified as men is referred to as masculine generics and is a form of gendered language.

Note that gendered language is different than grammatical gender. Languages that have a system of grammatical gender, where every noun is treated as either masculine, feminine, or neutral, have a strong tendency to treat the masculine form as default. However, in Iroquoian languages, women and the feminine are considered the default.<sup>10</sup> The use of pronouns is one of many ways that language illustrates cultural ideologies of gender. For instance, Ojibwe and Dakota have no gendered pronouns. Although they have words to describe men and women, language focuses on relations instead of gender when speaking about or to someone.<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes speakers modify nouns to refer to jobs to indicate the gender of that person. However, this happens when the gender of the person holding the position is seen as unusual. For example, many people assume that doctors are men. Phrases such as "female comedian," "lady doctor," or "male nurse" are examples of gendered language that serve to reinforce those assumptions. This further illustrates the position of men or masculinity as a default placeholder in language, thus reflecting the unmarked status men hold in Western culture, a position that serves to erase them as a distinct, marked category and be seen instead as default or "normal." "Erasure of the default as a category is part of what sustains marking the distinctiveness of the marked category: men become just ('normal') people, white people don't have a race (that matters), heterosexuals don't have a 'lifestyle' or a 'sexual preference.'"<sup>12</sup> These examples illustrate that language is alive in many ways—flexible, evolving, and reflective of social changes. It also points to the impact that colonization has had on Indigenous languages and cultures.



7 Walters, Karina, Tessa Evans-Campbell, Jane Simoni, Theresa Ronquillo, and Rupaleem Bhuyan, "My Spirit in my Heart": Identity Experiences and Challenges Among American Indian Two-Spirit Women." In *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 10, (2006): 125–49.

8 Pyle, Kai, "Folks Like Us: Anishinaabe Two-Spirit Kinship and Memory Across Time and Space." PhD Diss. University of Minnesota, 2021.

10 Corbett, Greville. *Gender*. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

11 Picq, Manuela L., and Josi Tikuna, "Indigenous Sexualities: Resisting Conquest and Translation." In *Sexuality and Translation in World Politics*, edited by Caroline Cottet and Manuela Lavinias, 57–71. –Bristol: E-International Relations, 2019).

12 Eckert, Penelope, and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*. (2003), 249.





The language of colonizers was another tool of oppression that contributed to the erasure of Indigenous cultural beliefs and ideologies of gender identity and expression. Before contact, many Indigenous communities regarded sexual and gender diversity as both common and well-respected. This is evident in language: Approximately two-thirds of 200 Indigenous languages recorded in Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat have terms for people who are neither men nor women.<sup>13</sup>

However, because language is always evolving, the future is hopeful for both recovering and reviving language that is dormant and for creating new words, which many Indigenous language revitalization efforts have already done for technological terms. The reclamation of using Indigenous language surrounding gender identity, expression, and sexuality is essential for revitalizing Indigenous cultures and healing from the damage of colonization. Creating and reviving words to refer to Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer People can provide a way for communities to reconnect with identities and participate in the decolonization movement. Not only is integrating Two-Spirit identities and gender variance an act of decolonization, but it is also a way to strengthen Indigenous communities, protect youth, and care for “all my relations.”<sup>14</sup>



## TWO-SPIRIT TERMS FROM INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

**qaigajuariit – Inuktitut** – “two soft things rubbing together,” word for lesbian

**angutauqatigiik – Inuktitut** – “two hard things rubbing together,” word for gay

**mnedokwé (plural: mnedokwék) – Potawatomi** – “spirit woman”

**aayahkwew – Cree** – “neither man nor woman”

**onón:wat – Mohawk** – “I have the pattern of two spirits inside my body”

**nádleehí – Navajo** – “one who transforms”

## TWO-SPIRIT TERMS FROM OUR KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

**Resbian or rezbian** – blending of “lesbian” and “reserve”

**Gaytive** – blending of “gay” and “native”

**Guncle** – blending of “gay” and “uncle”

**Gauntie** – blending of “gay” and “auntie”

While the term “Two-Spirit” may be recent, the concepts it encompasses have existed since time immemorial. Daryle/Giselle explains, “We must teach ourselves that Two-Spirit people existed prior to colonialism and this should be taught to our younger generation so they can be proud of who they are.”

Gender fluidity in Indigenous communities is detailed by multiple accounts taken by clergy and colonial explorers across North America. Indigenous cosmologies dictate that gender and sexual diversity are viewed holistically, where people of various genders and sexualities hold important roles in their communities. For instance, Two-Spirit People have long held specific and important roles in various Indigenous cultures. In many communities, they were viewed as sacred, as they were believed to have the gift of holding the views of both a man and woman. Before colonial contact, Two-Spirit was not necessarily related to an individual’s sexual and/or romantic relationships or practices but was instead tied to the role the person had in their community. In the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Two-Spirit People had specific roles in the community, which included childcare, care for the dead, and medicine.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hunt, Sarah, “An Introduction to the Health of Two-Spirit People: Historical, Contemporary, and Emergent Issues.” (Prince George, CA: National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Davis, Jenny L., “More than Just ‘Gay Indians.’” In *Queer Excursions: Rethorizing Binaries in Language, Gender, and Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62–80.

<sup>15</sup> Nagle, Rebecca. “The Healing History of Two-Spirit, A Term That Gives LGBTQ Natives a Voice.” *HuffPost*, June 30, 2018. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/two-spirit-identity\\_n\\_5b37cfbce4b007aa2f809af1](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/two-spirit-identity_n_5b37cfbce4b007aa2f809af1).







## INTERSECTIONS: INDIGENOUS AND 2SLGBTQQIA+ IDENTITIES

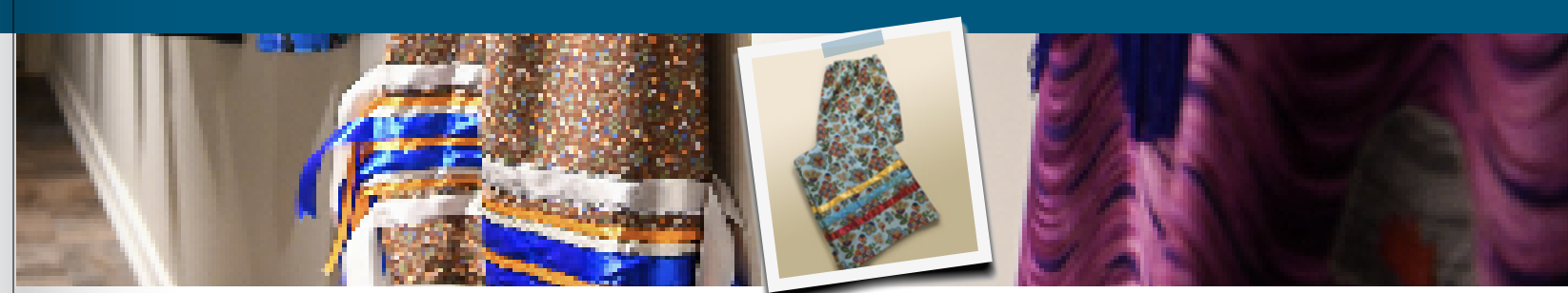
It's important to note that not all Nations had Two-Spirit traditions, or that the traditions are difficult to recover because of the disruption caused by Christian colonization. Gender and sexual variance were the norms for many Indigenous communities prior to contact, and pre-contact Indigenous communities did not regulate sexuality as Christian colonizers did. For example, some First Nations practised polygamy.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, a shared value in Cree and Métis teachings is to not interfere with identity and to allow individuals to discover and express themselves—including gender and sexuality—so long as the individual and community are not harmed.<sup>17</sup> Colonization resulted in the oppression of Two-Spirit People and gender diversity. This continued with residential schools and other Christian institutions, which imposed Western ideals of the gender binary and the inherent homophobia and transphobia it contains. The impact on Indigenous WG2STGD+ People is also evident in legislation such as the Indian Act. Indigenous Peoples—WG2STGD+ People in particular—still face barriers put in place by the legacy of colonization. Because of this, many Two-Spirit individuals feel that their sense of identity is “pulled between two worlds”: at one end, the lasting colonial effects of homophobia and transphobia cause a lack of safety in their communities and connection to their culture. At the other

end, the Western LGBTQQIA+ community often erases their Indigeneity and fails to account for the distinct traditions of gender and sexuality in their culture.<sup>18</sup> As a result, some Two-Spirit People have felt the need to suppress aspects of their identity to feel a sense of belonging in a community within settler culture. As Davika points out, “When I was young, I did not truly understand myself. I had a lot of questions that I could not ask anyone. I truly thought I was cursed. Why was I attracted to women? Why did I want to be more masculine? I did not share my internal thoughts and questions and went along with the mainstream in society and dated a man because that was what I was supposed to do. I don't know how, but I did manage to leave and I started a relationship with a woman, which began my journey as a lesbian. I became spiritually awakened. For the first time ever, I felt I was being true to myself.”

Colonization is often presented as a thing of the past. This mindset renders the concerns and interests of Indigenous Peoples as invisible or irrelevant, which also serves to enable colonization. However, settler colonization is a structure, not an event.<sup>19</sup>

Like gender identity, cultural identity is essential for health and well-being. Unfortunately, Two-Spirit People experience high rates of health-related

16 Scudeler, June, “Oskisihcikéwak/New Traditions in Cree Two-Spirit, Gay and Queer Narratives.” PhD Diss. University of British Columbia, 2016.  
17 Reder, Deanna, *Autobiography as Indigenous Intellectual Tradition: Cree and Métis Acimisowina*. (Waterloo, CA: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2022).  
18 Hunt, Sarah, *An Introduction to the Health of Two-Spirit People: Historical, Contemporary, and Emergent Issues*. (2016).  
19 Wolfe, Patrick, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” In *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4, (2006): 387.



issues including suicidality, depression, isolation, discrimination, and violence, and are underserved in health services.<sup>20</sup> These factors are compounded for youth, who are especially vulnerable. Many Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer People face discrimination in their homes and communities and are forced to cut ties with their culture, communities, and relocate. However, relocating may be necessary to access culturally safe and gender-affirming services and promote a sense of belonging, a sentiment that KaKeesheeway echoes in an experience they had: “It comes from what you see as a person. If gender identity is threatened, that person tends to hide from the greater community. I had to hide when I was young and that's why I kept leaving. I remember one time I was at a feast and a drum group. There was a person judging me and wondering why I was drumming in a men's drum group and told me to go back to my community. That is colonization: Those who do not accept spiritual non-gender-identifying people. I was angry at this cisgender man. He was in my community and he was out of order.”

Indigenous communities may be missing spaces and roles once held by Two-Spirit People, and so the reclamation of Two-Spirit identities and roles can be fulfilling for individuals and the community.<sup>21</sup> Nations that did not have Two-Spirit traditions or for those traditions that

were lost in colonization are creating new traditions to revitalize and maintain culture. Because gender diversity was the norm in Indigenous cultures pre-contact, the act of expressing Two-Spirit identities is a form of decolonization. Not only does this act recognize that these roles were forced out of existence by colonization, but it also serves as a way of recovering and reconnecting with culture.

Many Indigenous communities are creating new traditions to honour this transition. Davika explains,



“I have made ribbon skirts and given them away to important Indigenous women in my life. I never felt I could wear a ribbon skirt. Today, there is a new concept of making ribbon shorts for 2SLGBTQQIA+ persons. My next goal is to make ribbon shorts for myself to join my gender identity to my culture. It took me 12 years of my life to finally be comfortable in all communities to identify as a lesbian and not hide it anywhere anymore. I want to tell communities it's not the end of the world that there are 2SLGBTQQIA+ People and that personally my life does not affect yours if you are homophobic.”



20 Ristock, Janice, Art Zoccole, and Lisa Passante, *Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project: Winnipeg, Final Report*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2010).  
21 Hunt, Sarah, *An Introduction to the Health of Two-Spirit People: Historical, Contemporary, and Emergent Issues*. (2016).





### OUR WORDS TO YOU: MESSAGES FOR YOUTH AND YOUNGER SELVES

We asked our Knowledge Keepers if they had messages they wanted to share with youth and things they wanted to tell their younger selves. This is what they shared:



"Be yourself and look inside your spirit for answers. Don't listen to others who try to tell you otherwise or make you feel less than. Open your mind, open your spirit, and connect with your community; talk to a trusted Elder. You will know when you are facing homophobia; ignore them if you can and do your best to find allies." – KaKeesheeway



"Communication is key and you need to be open with your family. Your parents have unconditional love for you and they are there to help you understand that there is more than one gender. You alone have the freedom to choose your gender and it's not just a choice between male or female." – Daryle Gardipy/Giselle



"If you are happy with yourself don't be shy to share who you are as a 2SLGBTQQIA+ person. Let your spirit shine! It may be hard at times, but there are places to support you." – Davika



"You are more worthy than you think. You have always been." – KaKeesheeway



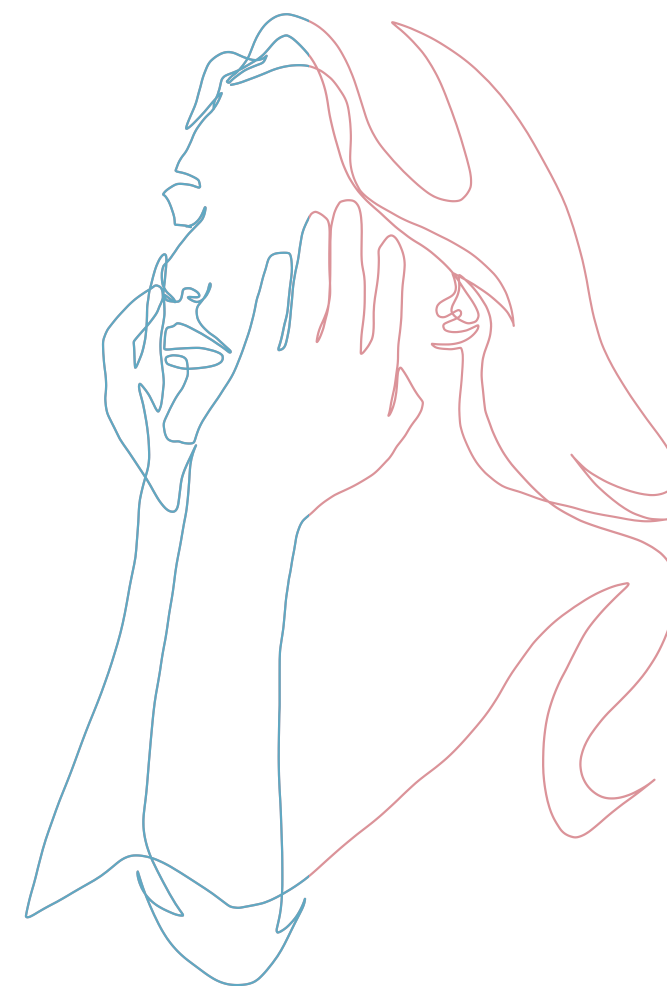
"Be strong and confident. There are people in this world that will not be as open-minded. There is nothing wrong with you. The Creator has put you on this earth for a purpose and only with time and experience will you learn who you are and to be proud of yourself." – Daryle Gardipy/Giselle



"YOU WERE NEVER CURSED!!! Always trust your gut. You will be better in being who you are as a lesbian. You will become unashamed and express yourself as being a 100% proud Indigenous full-blown LESBIAN!" – Davika



"I'm proud of her for being true to herself. Also proud of her for not giving up. Things do get better in life. I never thought I'd make it to this age (28). I had such a hard early life experience that I had no hope for the future and didn't even plan for it, but I kept on keeping on and things in life have improved significantly. I would also tell her that she is strong. It takes strength to be yourself. I'm proud of my younger self for staying true to who she is and persevering through life up until this point." – Martini Monkman





## TERMS FROM ENGLISH

**2SLGBTQQA+**—Stands for: Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans(gender), queer, questioning, intersex, asexual. The + acknowledges all other gender identities and sexualities not captured by the acronym.

**WG2STGD+**—Stands for: women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, gender-diverse. The + acknowledges all other gender identities not captured by the acronym.

**Heterosexism**—A type of homophobia that discriminates towards people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and/or asexual. It dictates that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual and is based on societal values and “norms” that privilege heterosexuality over all other sexual and/or romantic relationships and practices.

**Heteronormativity**—The belief that heterosexuality is the “normal” or only acceptable sexual orientation. It assumes that heterosexuality is ideal and superior to other sexual orientations and gives heterosexual relationships and practices privilege and naturalness.

**Trans or Transgender**—Used for an individual whose sex assigned at birth does not align with their gender identity. A person who is assigned female at birth and identifies as a man may refer to themselves as a trans woman, short for “transgender woman” (trans man is used for transgender man). The terms “transsexual” and

“transvestite” are widely considered derogatory and are not used unless this is how the individual self-identifies.

**Cisgender**—Used for an individual whose sex assigned at birth aligns with their gender identity. A person who is assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman is referred to as a ciswoman, short for “cisgender woman” (cisman is used for cisgender man).

**Transitioning**—The process of changing gender expression to align with one’s gender identity. These may include social transitions (e.g., presentation, relationships, employment, names, pronouns); medical transitions (e.g., hormones, surgery, mental health); and/or legal transitions (e.g., changing gender marker and name on legal documents and identification). Each person’s transition path is unique.

**Gender Affirming or Trans Affirming**—Any service, activity, or space done in a way that acknowledges transgender and gender-diverse people and prioritizes their safety and comfort.

**Gender Dysphoria**—Distress or discomfort a person might experience because of a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity.

**Intersex**—An umbrella term that refers to any combination of anatomical, endocrinal, or chromosomal features that do not fit the binary biological criterion for male or female sex. Some intersex traits

are present at birth while others don’t appear until puberty or later in life. The term “hermaphrodite” has been used to describe intersex individuals, and while some intersex people have reclaimed this word for themselves, it is widely considered a slur.

**Gender-diverse**—An umbrella term used to describe gender identities that are not within the gender binary.

**Queer**—An umbrella term used for people who are not heterosexual or cisgender. It originally meant “odd” or “unusual” and came into use as a slur for 2SLGBTQQA+ individuals but has since been reclaimed by some in the community.

**Questioning**—Someone’s sexual orientation, sexual identity, and/or gender being in a process of exploration and discovery.

**Bisexual**—A romantic or sexual attraction or behaviour toward multiple genders, commonly used to refer to someone who is attracted to both men and women.

**Asexual or “Ace”**—Someone who is asexual doesn’t experience sexual attraction and/or doesn’t desire sexual contact. Someone who is asexual may use hetero-, homo-, bi-, and pan- in front of the word romantic to describe to whom they experience romantic attraction. For example, a person who is hetero-romantic might be attracted to people of a different sex or gender, but not in a sexual way.

Unlike celibacy or sexual dysfunctions, asexuality is an intrinsic part of identity, just like other sexual orientations.

**Pansexual**—Sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction towards people regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

**Ethical Non-Monogamy (ENM) or Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM)**—An umbrella term for relationship approaches where people may have more than one romantic or sexual partner at the same time and all partners consent. Polyamory, open relationships, and swinging are all forms of ENM or CNM.

**Gender-fluid**—Someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression is not static.

**Non-binary/NB or “Enby”**—Used to describe individuals who do not identify as a man or woman. It can also be used as an umbrella term to refer to other identities such as genderqueer, agender, or genderfluid.

**Non-gendered, Agender, or Genderless**—Someone who does not identify as having a gender. Some folks who self-identify using these terms do so to critique heteronormativity and the gender binary.





## REFLECTION ACTIVITIES

In 2016, Daryle/Giselle's Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation made the decision to have a Pride parade, which they said "inspired many of the Queer band members from the Nation to come out and identify as trans or Two-Spirit." The Nation made headlines again in 2019 by being the first community to hold a Two-Spirit powwow on a First Nation.

### 2S Powwow Activity:

Imagine you have been assigned to organize the first Two-Spirit powwow in your community. How would you go about this? What would you need to prepare? Who would you involve? Where and when would it take place?

### Reflection questions:

1. How would you describe your gender without using words like "girl," "boy," "woman," "man," "feminine," or "masculine"? (Consider using colours, weather, places, things, sensations, etc.)
2. What do you think a world without gender would be like?
3. What ways do you see gender performed on a daily basis?



Lined writing area for reflection activities on page 23.





**INTERSECTIONS:  
INDIGENOUS AND 2SLGBTQIA+ IDENTITIES**



Lined writing area with horizontal red lines.





## WELLNESS RESOURCES

### Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS)

This 24-Hour crisis line is for anyone experiencing pain or distress related to their residential school experience.

☎ Phone: 1-800-721-0066

### Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program

This program provides residential school survivors and their families with access to support services and assistance for transportation when services are not locally available.

☎ Phone: 1-877-477-0775

### Hope for Wellness

Hope for Wellness provides culturally grounded assessment, referrals, crisis support, and suicide intervention. Services available in Ojibwe, Cree, and Inuktitut. Counsellors may be reached by telephone and online chat 24/7.

☎ Phone: 1-855-242-3310

💬 Online chat:  
<https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>

### Canadian Human Trafficking Helpline

This hotline is a confidential, multilingual service, operating 24/7 to connect survivors with services and to receive tips from the public.

☎ Phone: 1-833-900-1010

💬 Online chat:  
[www.canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca/chat/](http://www.canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca/chat/)

### Talk4Healing

Talk 4 Healing is a 24/7 helpline by Indigenous women for Indigenous women. It provides counselling and support services grounded in cultural knowledge and is available in several Indigenous languages.

☎ Phone or text: 1-855-554-4325

💬 Online chat: [www.talk4healing.com](http://www.talk4healing.com)

### Kid's Help Phone

Kid's Help Phone provides 24/7 counselling support to youth and teens and is available in several languages.

☎ Phone: 1-800-668-6868

📱 or text CONNECT to 686868

### Youth Services Bureau

YSB provides 24/7 counselling and crisis intervention for LGBTQ youth ages 12 to 18 in Ottawa and Eastern Ontario; will make referrals in other cities.

☎ Phone: 1-877-377-7775

💬 Online chat:  
<https://www.ysb.ca/services/ysb-mental-health/24-7-crisis-line/>

### Trans-Lifeline

Provided by trans and non-binary operators, features 24/7 support and resources to transgender or questioning people, as well as to their families and friends. NO non-consensual active rescue (calling emergency services without permission).

☎ Phone: 1-877-330-6366

### Talk Suicide

Talk Suicide Canada provides nationwide, 24/7, bilingual support to anyone who is facing suicide. Texting is also available 4 p.m. to 12 a.m. EST.

☎ Phone: 1-833-456-4566

☎ (Quebec 1-866-277-3553),

📱 text 45645

### MMIWG Crisis Line

MMIWG Crisis Line provides 24/7 support to individuals impacted by a missing or murdered Indigenous WG2STGD+ person.

☎ Phone: 1-844-413-6649

### Youthline

Youthline's peer support volunteers are aged 16–29 and come from a range of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and lived experiences. Chat and text services are available 4 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. EST.

📱 Text: 1-647-694-4275

💬 Online chat:  
<https://www.youthline.ca/>

### Assaulted Women's Helpline

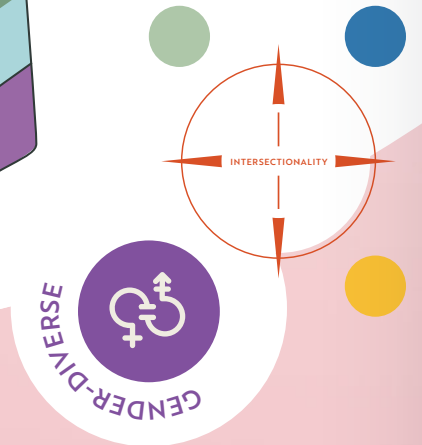
This helpline provides 24/7 support and referrals for women who have experienced any form of abuse. Online chat counselling service is available Monday to Friday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST for people in Ontario.

☎ Phone: 1-866-863-0511

☎ or TTY 1-866-863-7868

💬 Online chat:  
<https://www.awhl.org/online-chat>





**INTERSECTIONS:**  
INDIGENOUS AND 2SLGBTQQIA+ IDENTITIES



NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

Funded by the  
Government  
of Canada

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