

Understanding Two-Spirit Identity

Decolonization and Indigenous Gender Theory

CREATED BY

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Content Disclaimer

- Gender Identity
- Colonialism
- Genocide
- “Residential School System”
- Religion/The Church
- Racism
- Healthcare
- Suicide
- Sexism/Heteropatriarchy
- Intergenerational Trauma

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Article 8

Indigenous Peoples have the Right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their cultures.

- a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;
- b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;
- c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;
- d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration;
- e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them

“On June 16, Canada’s Senate voted to pass Bill C-15, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (the UNDRIP Act or the Act), into law. The UNDRIP Act received Royal Assent on June 21, marking a historic milestone in Canada’s implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP or the Declaration).”

“UNDRIP is a non-binding international instrument that enunciates “the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.” A majority of the UN General Assembly voted to adopt UNDRIP in 2007, and Canada officially endorsed UNDRIP in 2016.”

- Duncanson, et al.

Two-Spirit Identity: Uniquely Indigenous

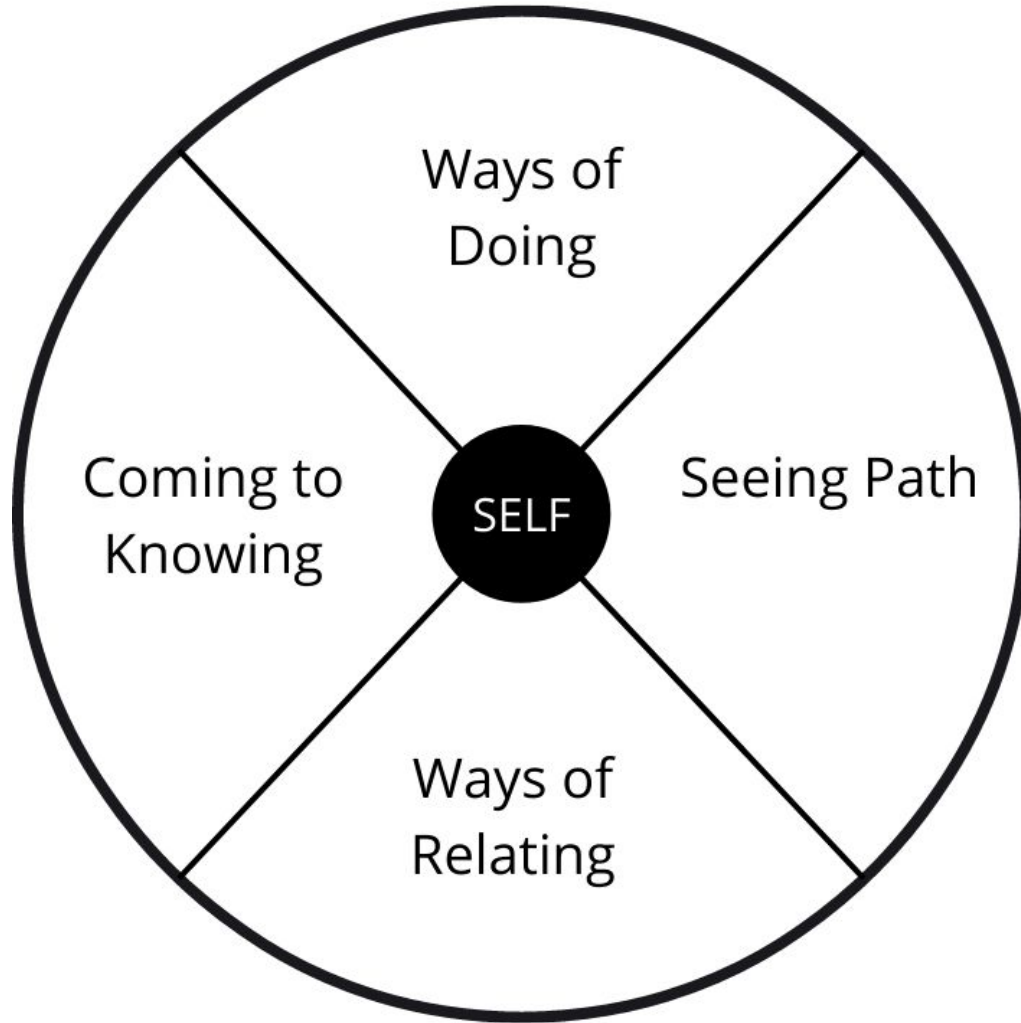
N'kinaganaa



What is Two-Spirit?

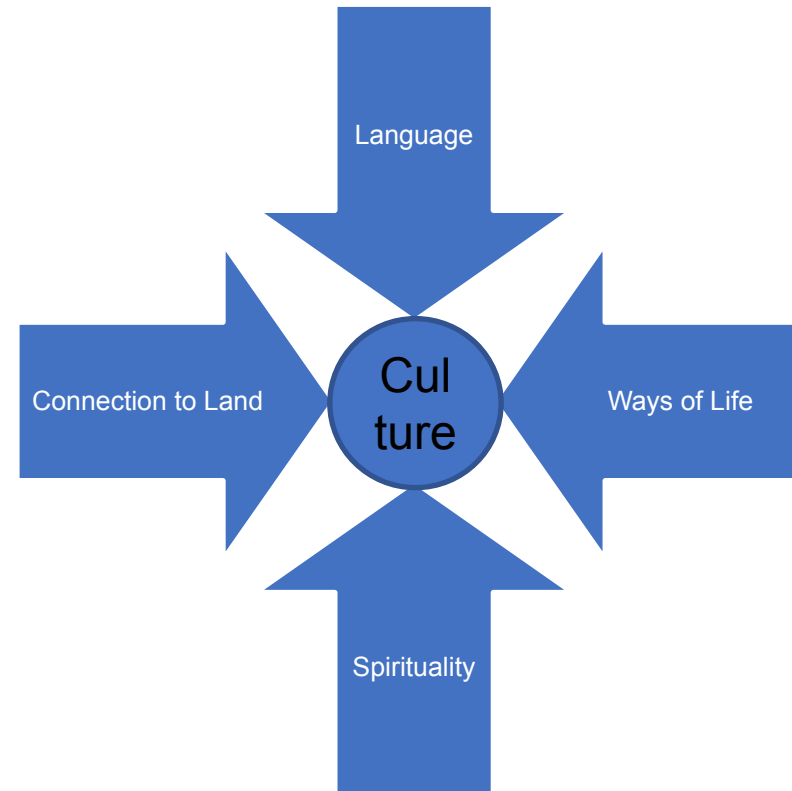
- A tool created for the purpose of organizing our communities
- Is a pan-Indigenous term that comes from *niizh manidoog*
- Used to represent the intersectionality of Indigenous and gender/sexual diverse identities
- Informed through an Indigenous Worldview (Cultural Context)
- Is distinct from LGBTQQIPA+ identities (mainstream/whitestream)

4 Basic Medicine Wheel Teachings



Source: Medicine Wheel teachings by Jim Dumont presented in *Seeing the World with Aboriginal Eyes*, by Brian Rice, Aboriginal Issues Press, 2005

What makes up a Worldview?



Utilizing Indigenous Methodology

The Petal Flower

Wholistic framework for
Indigenous methodologies
in search for knowledge

1. Roots

Foundational elements

2. Flower Centre

Self as central to the search

3. Leaves

The journey, process, transformation

4. Stem

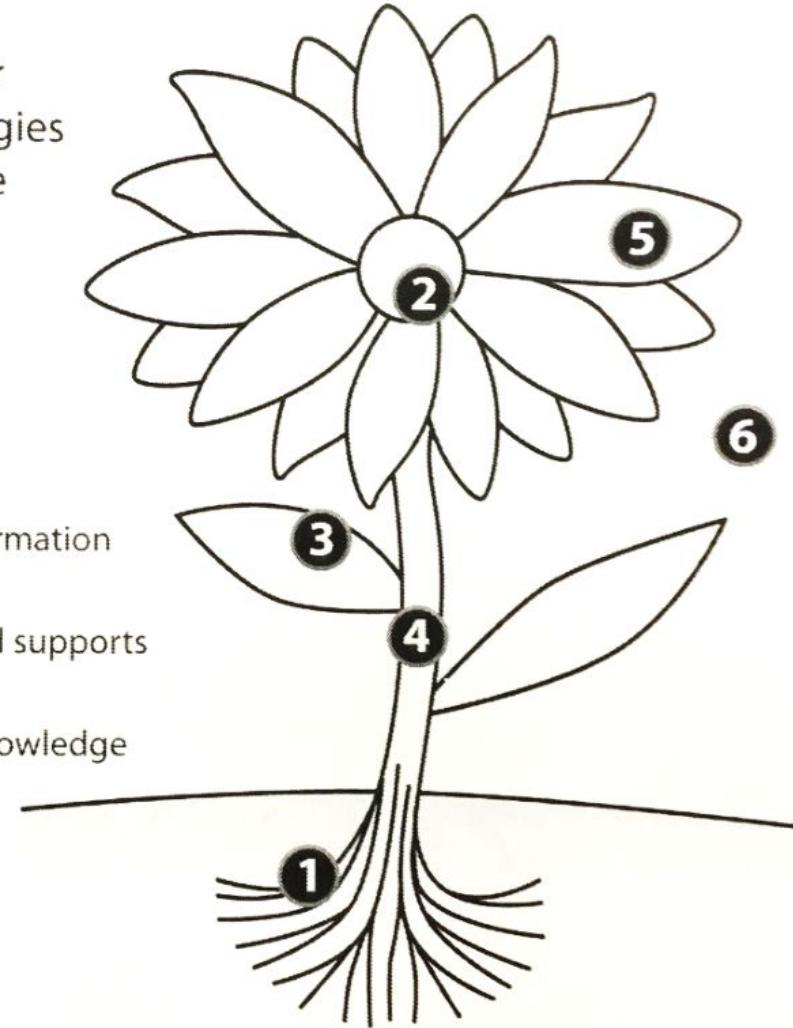
Methodological backbone and supports

5. Petals

Diverse ways of search for knowledge

6. Environment

Academic context



K. Absolon, 2007

Misrepresentations of Two-Spirits in Euro-Western Historical Traditions

- Use of the derogatory term *berdache*, which means “kept boy” or a male prostitute.
- Small samples size of historical records leads to speculation.
- Attitudes of Homophobia, Heteronormativity and Heteropatriarchy are presented in the historical records and have persisted in our societies and communities, today.
- Misrepresentation throughout the Euro-Western historical tradition contributes to the reinforcement and recreation of homophobic and transphobic attitudes and social relations that contribute to the negative economic, health and wellness outcomes for Two-Spirit folk.

Employment of the Hermaphrodites

- Painted of an eyewitness account by French colonizer Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in 1564
- The painting shows what Le Moyne and other European colonizers at the time called “hermaphrodites” fulfilling their duty of carrying the sick or deceased from the field of battle
- Though the European colonizers viewed these people’s roles as servil and degrading these other gendered people would have been revered and respected by their community for possessing gifts and had a place in traditional spiritual and ceremonial practices



Dance of the Berdache

- Painting by George Catlin sometime between 1835-37
- In the painting Catlin captured a ceremony while visiting the Sac and Fox tribe
- He later had this to say, “This is one of the most unacceptable and disgusting customs that I have ever met in Indian country.” And “I should wish it [the berdache] might be extinguished before it be more fully recorded.”



We-Wha of the Zuni Nation

- Live from 1849-1896.
- Most well documented Lha'mana (male-bodied individual who assumes more feminine roles in community).
- Participated in both female and male roles in economics, politics, and ceremony.
- Political and Cultural representative for their community. They were part of a Zuni delegation to Washington, D.C. to meet with President Grover Cleveland, 1886.
- Considered a master weaver and renowned artist.



Dr. James Makokis



Canada's
'Two-Spirit' Doctor

Language is the Key to Understanding Worldviews

•*“A language is not merely a set of grammatical rules or vocabulary. It is a flash of the human spirit, the vehicle by which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world. Every language is an old-growth forest of the mind, a watershed of thought, an ecosystem of the spiritual possibility.”*

-Wade Davis, The Wayfinders





Language Diversity Matters

- About 7000 Languages exist globally
- More than 50% are critically endangered
- More than 80% of global speakers use one of the 83 most used languages
- On average every 2 weeks a language goes extinct

Gender/Sexual diversity and variance in Anishinaabemowin

Relational words that denote elements of sexuality without judgment

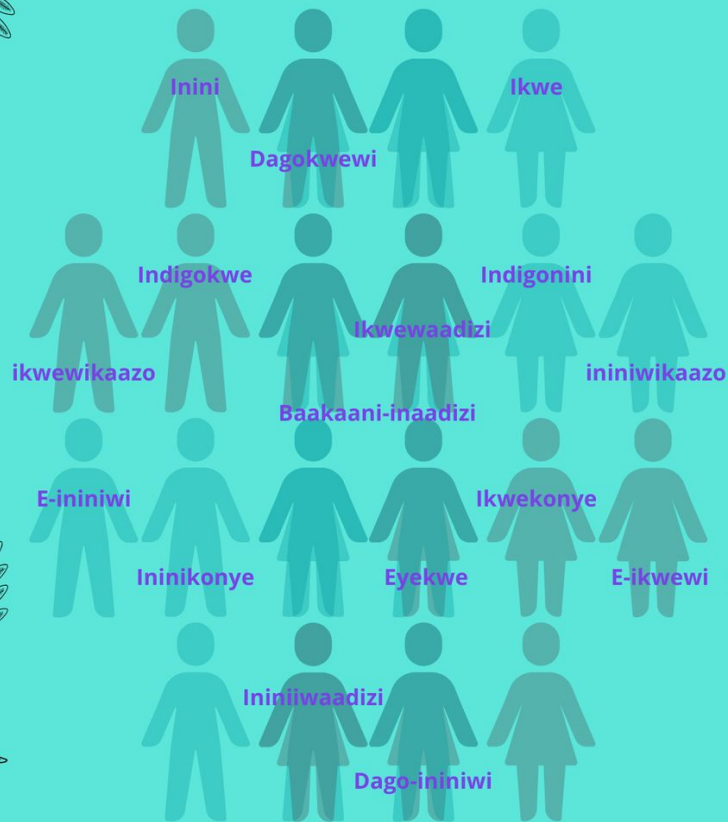
- **Wiijidaamaagan** – They co-habit with a person
- **Wiipemaagan** – They sleep with a person
- **Wiijiwaagan** – A friend or companion
- **Wiijkwemaagan** – A woman whose partner is another woman
- **Wiijiniimaagan** – A man whose partner is another man

Anishinabemowin concepts of Gender Variance

- *Ikwe*
- *Ikwekaazo*
- *Inini*
- *Ininiikaazo*
- *Agokwe/agokweininito*
- *Niizhin Ojiijaak (Oji-Cree)*
- *Gitchigokwe*

ANISHINAABE GENDER TERMS

Naabe ↔ Naazhe



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