

Decolonizing Gender



By Atticus Courtoreille

About the Facilitator

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- Two-Spirit Youth/Peer
- Plains Cree from Ahtakakoo Treaty 6 Territory and Anishanaabek from TallCree Treaty 8 Territory
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Objectives

1. Review some basic concepts about gender identity
2. Explore how race and imperialism influence the way we experience gender + identity
3. Discuss colonization from an indigenous context and culturally safe harm reduction practices
4. Build our own storytelling practice through a race + gender frame

Community Agreements

1. Speak from own experience
2. One person talk at a time
3. Confidentiality
4. Be mindful of impact and intent
(ouch, oops, educate)
5. Anti-Oppressive
6. Bodies will be bodies
7. Share the Air (take space, make space)



Introductions

- Name, Pronouns, nation/ancestry?
- What does decolonization mean for you?



*Nicholas Point, 1846
Kuilix battled the Crow wielding only
an axe which is illustrated by Point
above.*

Intro Definitions



George Catlin
Dance to the berdache 1830

Gender

- is the range of mental and behavioral characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between and across, “masculinity” and “femininity”. The accepted colonial perspective on gender, views women and men as naturally defined categories of being with distinctive psychological and behavioral propensities that can be predicted from their reproductive function.

Two-Spirit

- It's an umbrella term that bridges indigenous and western understandings of gender and sexuality.

Trans

- An umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth.

Cisgender

- A term used to describe people whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth.

Transphobia

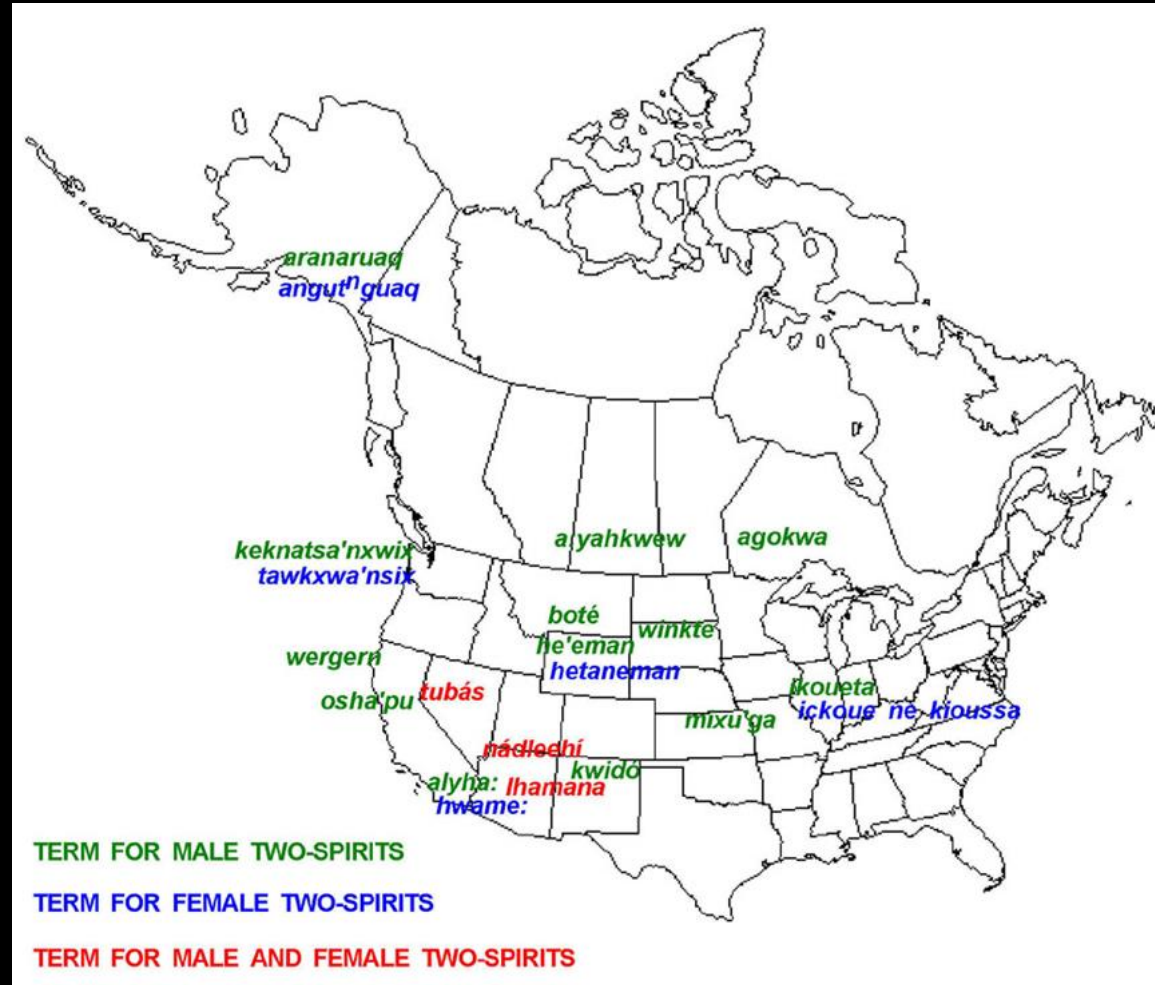
- Is hate towards trans people. Transphobia is more than a personal or moral failure. Transphobia is a systemic issue. And works as an institution and a structure of violence and exclusion.



Words That May Surface Today

- Gender Identity
- Genderqueer
- Agender
- Gender non-conforming
- Gender Fluid
- Queer
- Binary
- Transfeminine
- Transmasculine
- BIPOC (Black & Indigenous People of Color)
- Pronouns
- Indigiqueer
- Imperialism
- Colonialism
- Eurocentric
- Transmisogyny
- Transphobia

Inclusive Language Activity



History of Two-Spirit

- Encompassing term used is “two spirit” adopted in 1990 at the 3rd international native gay & lesbian gathering in so called Winnipeg, Canada. It replaced the offensive term “berdache” that was given by French colonizers for gender variant indigenous peoples during the American colonization. Popularized by the field of anthropology
- The term “two spirit” is used in rural and urban communities to describe the reclaiming of our traditional gender identities and roles
- It is a pan Indian term dreamt and gifted to us by an Anishinabek person; the cultural role of two spirit is not



1886, We'wha, a famous lhamana of the Zuni people of New Mexico

- The term “two spirit” refers to culturally prescribed spiritual and social roles; however, the term is not applicable to all tribes, and individual indigenous gender variant peoples
- Not all tribes held two spirits to great esteem. Some tribes traditionally would kill or simply leave two spirits alone to live their lives. It’s good to note that as indigenous people we have a right to realize what traditions are problematic, oppressive, ect and know not to practice it
- You can’t listen to one tribe over another. Listen to them all and then tell the story of this place. We are nations that moved across vast territories. The western way of making territories doesn’t always suite the complexities if our freedom of movement and how we used land as indigenous people

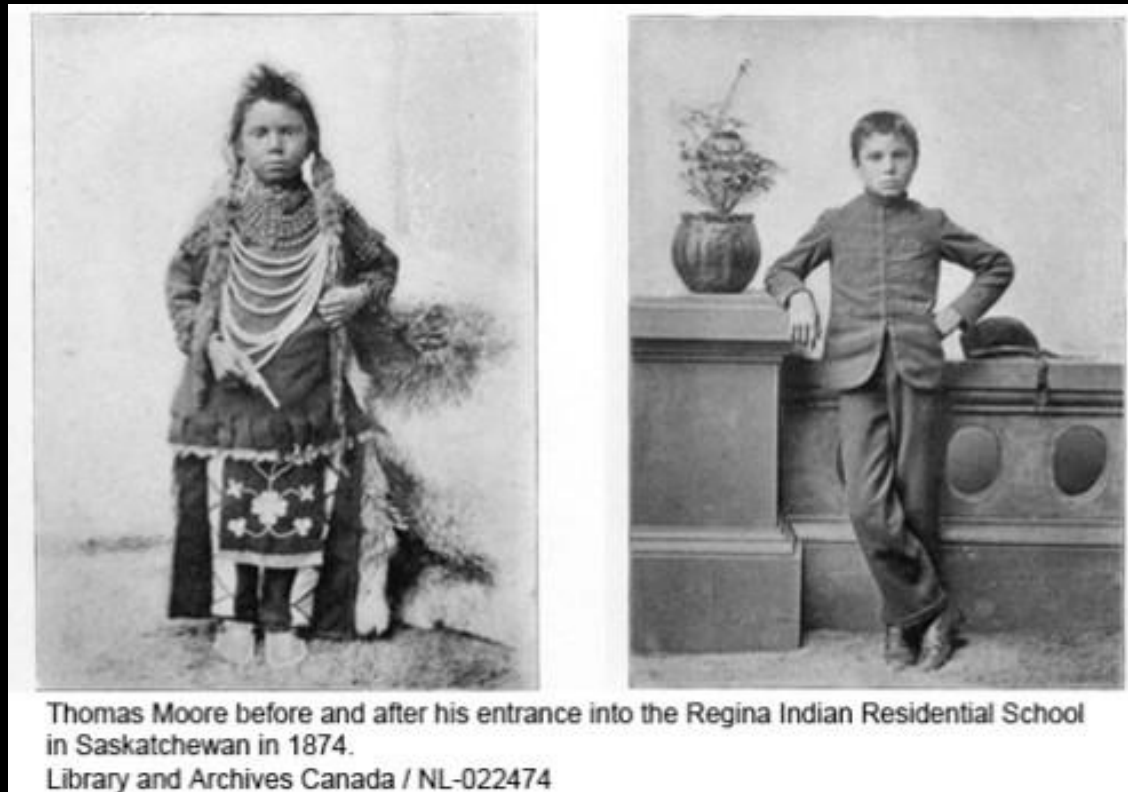
How the World Came to 2 Genders

What we will be doing in the next section is deconstruct the colonially imposed understanding of gender that is accepted as “normal”

- **Colonization**: is the practice of acquiring partial or full control over another country exploiting it economically



- **Imperialism**: is the unequal human and territorial relationship. Based on ideas of superiority and practices of dominance, and involving the extension of authority and control of one state or people over another through military force or diplomacy



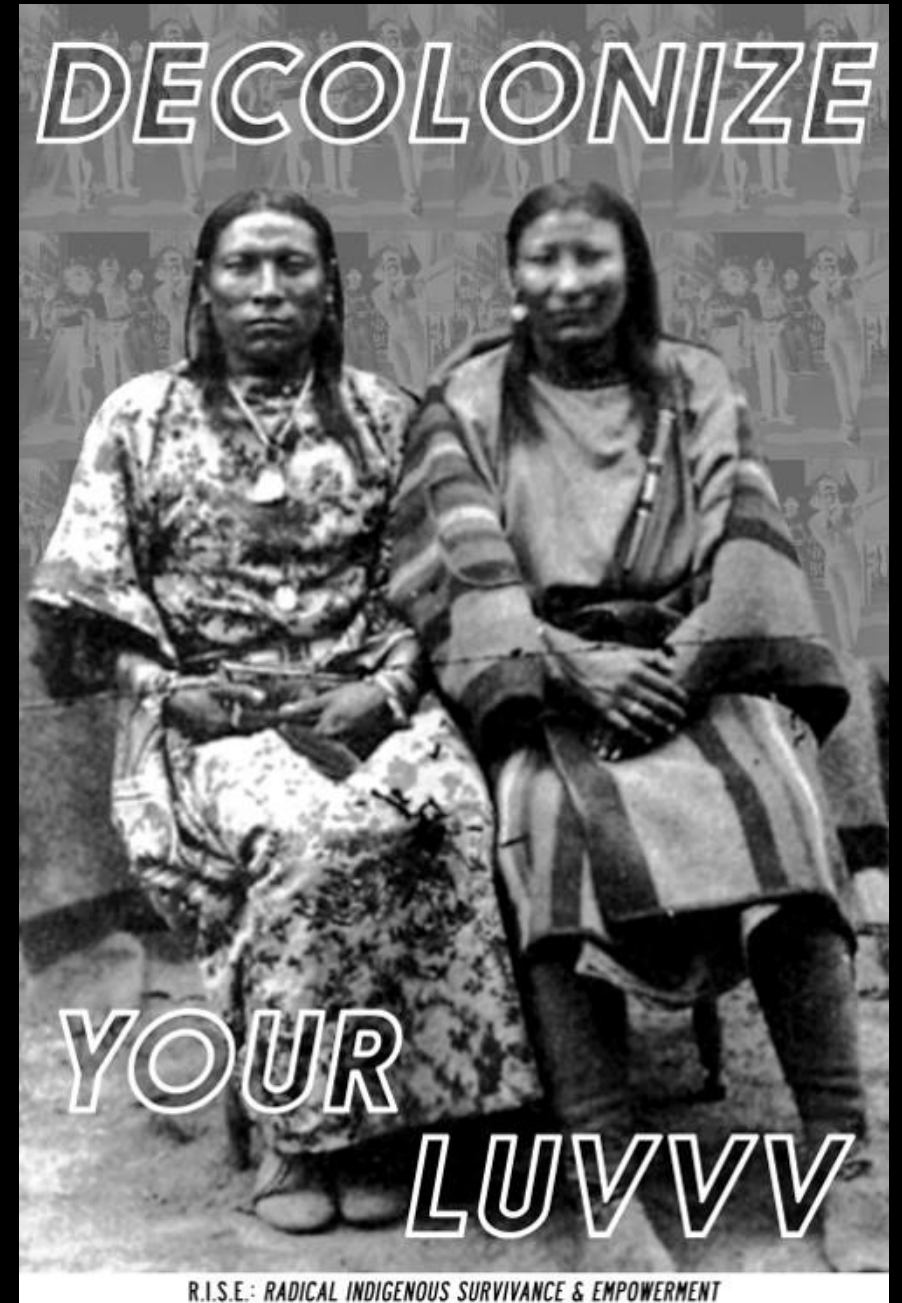
- More and more research has shown that a huge devastating impact of “contact” on indigenous women and two spirits was their impoverishment. Poverty led to more violence and dehumanization
- This happened when Jesuits and other Christian leaders ostracized and marginalized women and two spirits from trade prior to 1491. Women and twospirits held significant title in our communities and spiritual and cultural practices



Navajo 1866

- Some early settlers continued to include women and two spirits in the trade relationships but the church quickly saw an end to that
- Women and two spirits were omitted. Indigenous women and two spirits were viewed as “less than human” by faith leaders largely because of their “free” and “open” attitudes about sexuality and gender
- Indigenous women and two spirits were pushed aside and bullied by the church and indigenous men became the only trade partners. Indigenous women and two spirits were forced and co-opted out of their original rightful places

- Indigenous men were pressured and strong armed more and more by colonial politics of the missionaries
- Residential schools was used as another tactic by the church to reinforce the colonial perspective of the gender binary. E.g. “boy wards” and “girl wards”. When indigenous children and people were most vulnerable



- Over 500 years of government policy has reinforced these misogynistic and patriarchal attitudes; even in our own men, women and two spirits
- Non-binary gender variance was evidence of “savagery” or “sin” as well. Non-binary existence was criminalized and refigured as monstrosity and criminality
- Colonization has caused this disconnect between gender rights and indigenous sovereignty. As such any attempt to resolve this disconnect must address colonization

The effects of colonization in Health Care & Harm Reduction Services

- The cumulative impacts of colonization have negative effects on the health and well being of indigenous people throughout what is now known as “Canada”
- Indigenous people experience higher rates of personal trauma – such as assault, abuse, and systemic racism – as well as the intergenerational traumas of forced relocation (land trauma) and cultural genocide

- Isolation and discrimination have real effects on the health and well being of sexual and gender minority individuals in indigenous communities
- Research says that two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous people experience devastating levels of poverty. Especially in urban areas, indigenous trans, gay, lesbian, bisexual and two spirit people experience homelessness at rates far higher than their non-indigenous counterparts. Some report migrating to the city because of the discrimination and later violence in their home communities, only to find racism within the LGBTQA community and social services and high levels of poverty

- Indigenous people in what is now known as “Canada” are over-represented in the prison system, and sexual or gender minorities within this population are no exception
- One focus group conducted among 2spirits people in so called “Quebec” found that the staff of some indigenous health care centers were not welcoming of participants’ expression of two spirit identity. Participants also reported that LGBTQA specific services often have little to no knowledge of two spirit identity or the unique concerns of indigenous communities

- Participants in multiple studies report feeling unsafe in the health care system because of anti-indigenous and anti-LGBTQA bias. This can delay in seeking care and treatment. Research indicates that distrust of the medical care system could be mitigated by the presence of indigenous front line service providers
- Many two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous people in so called “Canada” note that fear of discrimination on the basis of HIV status, sexual orientation, or indigenous identity has stopped them from accessing health services



Art by Noah Grigni

- Both indigenous youth and sexual and gender minority youth are at higher risk of suicide than their peers. Further, the isolation felt by many two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous youth in rural and on reserve communities has been noted as a risk factor for suicide
- A lack of confidentiality in small rural and on-reserve community health care settings has been cited as a concern by some two spirit people. Further, in a study conducted among 24 two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous people living in so called “Manitoba” who recently migrated, one third of respondents indicated that they have been forced out of their communities because of their sexual or gender identity

- It is important to note that the indigenous communities are not homogenous; while some gender and sexual minority individuals may experience discrimination in indigenous communities, others may find support and acceptance there. For example, a participant in one so called “Canadian” study noted elders honored their two spirit identity by inviting them to participate in both the “men’s” and “women’s” sweat lodge ceremonies
- Research suggests that cultural continuity and affirmation of identity are key to preventing suicide for indigenous youth. One so called “Canadian” study found that, in those indigenous communities where the majority of members speak their traditional language, youth suicide was virtually non-existent



Ryan Young, 2018
The Creator is Two-Spirit

Two-Spirit, Queer & NB Indigenous people are disproportionately impacted by HIV

- Research suggests that indigenous LGBTQA and two spirit people experience higher rates of HIV than their non-indigenous peers. In 2006 assessment of trans and two spirit people in so called “Manitoba”, 15.3% of indigenous respondents reported being HIV positive (compared to the just 4% of non-indigenous respondents) with another 7.7% unsure of their HIV status
- Some two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous people who are HIV positive report experiences of racism in non-indigenous HIV and AIDS service organizations

- There is a great need, identified both by two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous people and researchers, for HIV prevention, substance use, mental health, and social support services tailored to the unique needs of this community
- Resources and outreach programs must be tailored to fit the needs of two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous youth, since strategies applied to the rest of the LGBTQA population may not be relevant or effective for them

Creating more culturally safe & gender affirming harm reduction care

- A challenge faced by many non-indigenous service providers is navigating their role as settlers, this includes settlers working in supposed indigenous service providers
- Research indicates that non-indigenous service providers adopting the principle of cultural safety can lead to more equitable health outcomes for indigenous communities. Some key tenets of cultural safety include education about so called “canada’s” history of colonization and the indigenous communities on whose land so called “Canada” exists, examination of ones own biases and addressing on the root causes of health disparities

- Recommended ways to put cultural safety into practice include recognizing one's own social location and how it shapes one's assumptions about and interactions with LGBTQA and indigenous people, and being mindful of the power imbalance that characterizes the relationship between service provider and client
- The effects of racism, sexism, and heterosexism discrimination and violence to which two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous people are disproportionately subject are linked to negative mental and physical health outcomes. The legacies of colonialism and residential schools, and their lasting impacts on the health of indigenous individuals and communities, must be taken into account when formulating treatment, outreach, and research plans

- Most published research on two spirit people was conducted in what is now called the “United States”, and does not necessarily reflect the experiences of two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous people in the context of “Canadian” colonialism. Virtually all existing research on two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous people living in what is now called “Canada” has been conducted among small samples, and does not provide a clear picture of the health of two spirit and LGBTQA indigenous populations suggest that it may be a significant cause of death. Research specifically measuring suicidal ideation, suicide attempts and suicide completion in two spirit communities is needed
- Research on indigenous community health must include data on sexual orientation and gender identity. Similarly, research taking place among LGBTQA populations must be attentive to the existence of indigenous members of these communities, and the unique types of marginalization they encounter



- Many indigenous scholars have proposed that the health of an indigenous community can only be measured within indigenous knowledge paradigm which emphasizes the interconnectivity of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social well-being. Community involvement in all stages of the research is crucial
- While best practices regarding research in indigenous communities are continually evolving, research suggests that communities ought to retain ownership, control, access, and possession of any findings. Additionally, many indigenous communities have their own guidelines and governing research in their communities

***WEHEE'AHIIKEN* *KUUYAT* *LHAMANA*
WINKTE NÁDLEEHI* *BOTÉ* DILBAA*
KOTOTSE *NAPÊW* *ISKWÊWISÊHOT*
ISKWÊW KA NAPÊWAYAT *MEXOGA*
IKWEKAAZO *ININIIKAAZO* *HEMANEH*
ELXA *KWERHAME* *AGI* *WIKOVAT*
HAXU'XAN *KUXA'T* *YAAWA* *NUDALE
ASGAYA* *NUDALE AGEHYA* *HE'EMAN*
HETANEMAN *ELHA* *WARRHAMEH*
ATHUTH *MAHU* *MIATI***

TWO SPIRIT

***HO'VA* *IWAP KUTI* *QUARIWARMI* *KWIT*
ALYHA *TUDAYAPI* *KU'SAAT* *FA'AFINE*
GATXAN *CLELE* WOS*ARANARUAQ* *MUXE*
TUWASAWITS *SHIANGE* *TUVA'SA*
KU'SAAT *OKITCITAKWE* *TAI'UP* *OSABU*
NDE'ISDZAN *ILYAXAI'* *GEENUMU
GESALLAGEE* *KOK'WE'MA* *MONAGUIA*
SIPINIQ *HATUKIKLANNA* *HATUKHOLBA*
AAKÍ'SKASSI *SAAHKÓMAAPI'AAKÍÍKOAN*
HATANE'MANE'O *HETANEMAN* *TAYAGIGUX'*
*BLOKA EGLA WA KE***

The Red Circle Project, 2019

Two Spirit is an umbrella term. Under that umbrella is our own tribal specific terms, in our own languages, defining our roles in our communities.

For more information on tribal specific terms for Two Spirit people visit

Redcircleproject.org/strengthening-spirit

Story Circle

- What was the first time you were told you or made to feel like you couldn't do something because of your gender?
- How did this make you feel in the moment?
- How did this effect the way you understand gender?
- How do you think colonialism affected the way you understand gender?

What are some steps you can take when you leave this room to be in solidarity with trans & gender nonconforming BIPOC?

- Remember that trans and gender expansive communities are very diverse. There's no one "trans experience" or "path"
- Be proactive than reactive
- Realize racism, sexism, homophobia, transmisogyny & transphobia in "Canadian" Society
- Educate ourselves and others on institutional and systemic racism against indigenous peoples

- Acknowledge our privileges and differences in power structure. Use our privileges and power to empower indigenous peoples, and two spirits, gender variant peoples to have their voices heard
- Create social service supports tailored for the unique needs indigenous LGBTQA peoples and two spirits need
- Have twospirits & gender variant indigenous peoples included in and involved in all stages of research for more gender affirming harm reduction care
- Hold police and politicians accountable on the unsolved cases of missing and murdered indigenous peoples

- Realize oppressions in the current political and economic systems and do our best not to contribute to these oppressions in our daily life
- Understand the history of colonization, treaties and the oppressive nature of the Indian Act
- Fulfill the responsibilities we have under the treaties and that have been made with indigenous peoples
- Know our roles and responsibilities, educate indigenous and non-indigenous people about their responsibility to protect one another

Closing Circle/Check in

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