Two Spirit Natives in the Drug Courts: An open door or another closet?

Sadé Heart of the Hawk Ali, First Nations Mi’kmaq, East Coast Two Spirit Society
“What works for us is who we are. It is empowering. We know our blood, we know our heritage.”

-- Carol J. Jorgensen, TLINGIT

“I am convinced that if we look deep into our respectful tribal pasts, we can identify those ideas, values, instructions, and institutions that enable our culture to thrive.”

-- David Wilkins, LUMBEE
Setting Group Agreements

All questions will be answered

Our reality may not be yours but we will respect each others’ points of view

It’s really all about providing helpful, respectful service in a good way
States with Native populations over 100,000

- Alaska
- Arizona
- California
- Florida
- New Mexico
- Texas
- NEW YORK
- North Carolina
- Michigan
- Oklahoma
- Washington
Diversity of Native Peoples

There are more than 5.6 million indigenous Americans in the United States and another 1.3 million in Canada divided into more than 1,162 recognized Native governments:

- Approximately 600 in Canada,
- 566 in the United States, and hundreds more in various stages of the recognition process.
- Approximately 225 Native languages are spoken in the United States and another 50 in Canada. A far greater number of North American indigenous languages are extinct or are no longer spoken fluently.
  - These languages are divided into fifty language families, many as different from each other as Romance (e.g. Italian) from Sino-Tibetan.
Gender vs. Sexual Orientation

• Sexual orientation refers to an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction toward others, usually conceived as classifiable according to the sex of the persons whom the individual finds sexually attractive.

• Gender is socially defined and dictates one’s place and role with one’s community.
Concept of Two Spirit

• The term/identity of Two Spirit does not make sense unless it is contextualized within a Native American/First Nations frame
• Two Spirit within a traditional setting was a gender analysis and not a sexual orientation
• Today, most people associate the term with LGBT Natives; however, the work of Two Spirit organizations is more akin with the traditional understanding
The story of Migizi
Roles

Held in Esteem...

Although Two Spirit people were historically respected in many Nations, they were also, at times, feared because many were said to be people of strong medicine. Despite the diversity in recognition of special or ritualized status across tribes, there are some common themes related to Two Spirit roles.

Roles of Two Spirit people within Tribal communities

Literally embodying two spirits, these community members were quite often imbued with abilities to walk in-between worlds. Specifically, they could walk in both male and female worlds, could “see” from multiple points of view, and communicate fluidly between the living and the spirit worlds.

- Two Spirit people named children, were mediators, counselors, interpreters of dreams, leaders, and healers.
Role Examples

• Two Spirit people performed specific funeral rites transitioning the person’s spirit to the other side or other ceremonial rites related to their ability to function with the in-between worlds.

• Two Spirit people taken to treaty meetings or war councils to observe and provide counsel to the leaders on the trustworthiness of the parties involved. Some Nations believed that Two Spirit brought luck and others thought that because of their keen powers of observation, they could “see” if people were lying.

• Brokered marriages, divorces, settled arguments and fostered lines of communication between the sexes, generations, and mediated disputes between Natives. In some tribes they were the ones that set up camp on the periphery of the encampment to ensure the safety of the community. Relatedly, another common role among Two Spirits was one of caretaker of the children and the family.

• Contemporary Two Spirit activists note that modern day Two Spirit continue to fulfill their ancestral roles as when they become counselors, therapists, healers, and mediators—particularly in the fields of social work, nursing, psychology, law, medicine, education, or other helping-oriented professions.
Other cultures outside of North America with Gender Diversity

ASIA
Korea
- mudang
Siberian Chukchis
- Male-bodied: Yirka'-la'ul ("soft man")
- Female-bodied: Qa'cikicheca ("similar to a man")
Thailand
- kathoey
Philippines
- bantut
India
- hijra

INDONESIA
Borneo
- basir (among the Ngaju of Kalimantan)
- manang bali (among the Iban)
Sulawesi
- basaja (among the Toradjas)
- bissu (among the Makasserese)

POLYNESIA
Hawaii
- mahu
Tahiti
- mahu
Samoa
- fa'afafine
Tonga
- fakafefine/fakaleiti
Tuvalu
- pinapinaaine

MALAYSIA
Singapore
- mak nyah

AFRICA
Lugbara
- okule (male-bodied)
- agule (female-bodied)
Zulu
- isangoma
Our young ones matter...
Ozaawindib ("Yellow Head"), Ojibwe
An Unidentified Navajo
Defining Characteristics of Two Spirit & Native Peoples

- Historical trauma;
- Intergenerational trauma;
- Band/Tribal membership;
- Half-truths, misconceptions, stereotypes pervade all aspects our Native life and history; and
- We are a small population – however it is precisely because our numbers are so small that our community should be declared a top priority – once we are gone – we are gone.
Our Elders say......

Our Culture is the Cure
What is being done today to bring back the old Two Spirit Role?

• Gay American Indians, San Francisco (#1, started in 1975)
• There are many Two Spirit Societies in the U.S. and Canada
• Two Spirit people are included in diversity celebrations, and other events such as major conferences, just like today’s
• Coming back into the Circle on the Reservations
• National and International Two Spirit gatherings in the U.S. and Canada
Some Two Spirit Orgs/Groups

UNITED STATES
Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits (San Francisco, CA)
Central Oklahoma Two Spirit Society (Oklahoma City, OK)
City of Angels Two Spirit Society (Los Angeles, CA)
East Coast Two Spirit Society (East Coast)
Indiana Two Spirit Society (Bloomington, IN)
Indigenous Peoples Task Force (Minneapolis, MN)
Montana Two Spirit Society (Browning, MT)
Navajo AIDS Network (Chinle, AZ)
NativeOUT (Phoenix, AZ)
Northwest Two Spirit Society (Seattle, WA)
Portland Two Spirit Society (Portland, OR)
Red Circle Project (Los Angeles, CA)
Texas Two Spirit Society (Dallas, TX)
Two-Spirit Society of Indian Canyon (Hollister, CA)
Tulsa Two-Spirit Society (Tulsa, OK)
Wichita Two-Spirit Society (Wichita, KS)

CANADA
2Spirits of Toronto (Toronto, Ont)
Edmonton Two-Spirit Society (Edmonton, AB)
Four Feathers Society (Vancouver, BC)
Regina Two-Spirited Society (Regina, Sask)
Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance (Halifax, NS)
Decolonization is simply the intentional, reflective, and communal self-examination undertaken by Native (and other formerly colonized) peoples in service to collective action that finds continuity with the “traditional” (pre-colonial) past even as it charts a purposeful, distinctive, and self-determined (post-colonial) future
N'tacimowin inna nah':
Our Coming In Stories

Dr. Alexandria Wilson,
Opaskwayak Cree Nation
Professor, College of Education
University of Saskatchewan.

http://www.usask.ca/education/people/wilson.htm
LGBT Coming Out Process

"coming out" is typically a declaration of an independent identity: an GLBT person musters their courage and, anticipating conflict, announces their sexuality to a friend or family member - at the risk of being met with anger, resistance, violence or flat-out rejection or abandonment…

Two Spirit Coming In Process

an Aboriginal person who is GLBT comes to understand their relationship to and place and value in their own family, community, culture, history and present-day world. "Coming in" is not a declaration or an announcement; it is simply presenting oneself and being fully present as an Aboriginal person who is GLBT…
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