The Indigenous Sovereign Body: Gender, Sexuality and Performance.

Michelle S. McGeough
University of New Mexico

Michelle Susan McGeough
University of New Mexico

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/arth_etds

Part of the History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art & Art History ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.
Michelle S. A. McGeough
Candidate

Art
Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Joyce Szabo, Chairperson

Dr. Kency Cornejo

Dr. Carla Taunton

Aaron Fry, ABD
THE INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGN BODY:
GENDER, SEXUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

By

Michelle S.A. McGeough
B.Ed., University of Alberta, 1982
A.A., Institute of American Indian Art, 1996
B.F.A., Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design University, 1998
M.A., Carleton University, 2006

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Art History

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December, 2017
Dedication

I wish to dedicate these thoughts and words to the two women whose names I carry, my Grandmothers— Susanne Nugent McGeough and Mary Alice Berard Latham. I also write this for you, Diana.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to extend my gratitude and thanks to my committee members. I especially wish to thank Dr. Joyce Szabo for her guidance and wisdom throughout this process. I also wish to thank Dr. Kency Conejo for her insight and encouragement. A special thanks to Dr. Carla Taunton for sharing your expertise in Indigenous performance art. I especially appreciate how you made yourself so available even though you were thousands of miles away. I also wish to thank Aaron Fry for his perceptive contributions to this project. I also want extend a very heartfelt thank-you to Dr. Sherry Farrell Racette. Who knew that the conversation we had over coffee would lead to the chapter on Go-won-go Mohawk? The conversation was an example of her generosity and the breadth of her knowledge. Her words of wisdom have helped me stay the course. I also wish to thank Dr. Jolene Rickard, Ngahiraka Mason and Dr. Julie Nagam. The time I spent with all of you had a profound influence on my present as well as my future scholarship.

This project would not have existed if it was not for the artists who have generously shared with me their wisdom, their vision and their time: Rosalie Favell, Barry Ace, Adrian Simpson, Thirza Cuthand, Dayna Danger and Erin Konsmo. I really can never thank you enough. You are all so brave, even though we seem to accept those who do not conform to the heteronormative expectations, this is still not a safe world.

Throughout the process of researching, I was fortunate to come across a number of people who were so helpful. These include: Diane S. Tyink, Museum Archivist of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology; Marva Felchlin, Director, Libraries and Archives of the Autry Museum; Diana Purdue, Curator of Collections at the Heard Museum; Cheri
Falkenstein Doyle, Curator at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian. Thank you for answering my queries and being so responsive to my requests.

I also want to acknowledge the University of New Mexico’s Art Department for providing me with a number of teaching assistantships and graduate assistantships while I was enrolled in the program, and for awarding me the David Craven Scholarship. I was also the recipient of a Graduate Studies Travel Award, which I used to attend the Indigenous Knowledges and Methods Symposium in Montreal. I also wish to thank the Peabody Essex Museum Fellowship for helping me fund my trip to Montreal. During the final stage of writing my dissertation I was awarded a month-long residency at the Banff Center for the Arts. During that time I was provided space and the companionship of brilliant Indigenous minds and the conversations we had were so inspiring. To my cohorts, Joi Arcand, Jason Baerg, Lisa Boivin, Sarah Biscarra Dilley, Léuli Mazyar Luna’l Eshraghi, Tanya Harnett, Lindsay Nixon, Ahilapalapa Rands, and Kayla Schubert, thank you.

To family, Diana, what a journey this has been. Little did either of us know what doing a Ph.D. would entail, but I thank you for sticking with me throughout this process. To my siblings, thank you for asking, Are you done yet? To answer your question, I think I am done. Thank you for all your support.
THE INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGN BODY:
GENDER, SEXUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

by

Michelle S.A. McGeough

B.Ed., Secondary Education, University of Alberta, 1982
A.A., Institute of American Indian Art, 1996
B.F.A., Photography, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design University, 1998
M.A., Canadian Art History, Carleton University, 2006
Ph.D., Art History, University of New Mexico, 2017

ABSTRACT

Gender variance and artist production are not topics that are often discussed within the discipline of art history. In fact gender variance and in particular its relationship to sexual orientation was not a topic studied, much less discussed outside of the medical community until the mid-twentieth century. It was generally thought that sexuality and gender were “biologically determined” and deviation from the heterosexual norm was considered pathological. In contrast, Indigenous nations in Canada and the United States had a very different understanding regarding the relationship between gender, biology, and sexual object of choice. One area that provides us with a glimpse into how Indigenous people construct knowledge regarding gender and sexual identity is through the study of their artistic production.

Before the 1990s, much of the discourse and research on Indigenous gender and sexual expressions written by explorers, medical professionals, and anthropologists
dominated the field of research. This discourse reflected non-Native concerns and ideas and beliefs regarding gender and sexuality. In these contemporary times we have seemingly witnessed an increasing acceptance of gender variance, but nonetheless acts of violence against those who do not conform to a binary construction of gender and sexuality are a constant reminder of the vulnerability of those who do not conform to expectations.

The stories of individuals contained in this dissertation not only show how Indigenous nations constructed knowledge regarding gender differently, but also that binary gender and sexual categories are not perdurable. My claims are informed by the retelling of actual historic and contemporary experiences of individuals who did not conform to settler nation state constructions of gender. This knowledge demonstrates that the binary construction of gender is a construction and we must ask ourselves, what are the consequences for Indigenous nation building and sovereignty if we maintain constructions of gender that perpetuate heteronormativity, and heteropatriarchy?
# Table of Contents

List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... ix

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... xii

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1

Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................................ 19

  Feminism ............................................................................................................................... 20

  Art History and Anthropology ............................................................................................ 21

Chapter Three: Hosteen Klah: The Embodied Synthesis of Hózhó ....................................... 35

  What’s in a Word: Acknowledging Indigenous Gender Constructions and Ontology 38

  Dynamic Symmetry and Holism Asymmetry and the Expression of Hózhó ............. 47

Chapter Four: Go-won-go: Troubling Settler Colonial Constructions of Gender and

  Performativity ...................................................................................................................... 68

  The Cult of Domesticity ....................................................................................................... 73

  Life on the Vaudeville Stage ............................................................................................... 81

  The Wild West Craze .......................................................................................................... 86

  The Society of American Indians ....................................................................................... 101

Chapter Five: Rupture, Renewal, Reclamation: Contemporary Expressions of Indigenous

  Gender and Sexual Identities ............................................................................................... 106

  Rupture ............................................................................................................................... 112

  Renewal ............................................................................................................................... 130

  Reclamation ....................................................................................................................... 145

Chapter Six: Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 167

Works Cited ............................................................................................................................ 177
List of Figures

Fig. 1. “Two Row Wampum – Gusweñta” ........................................................................................................... 5
Fig. 2. Three-level View of Contemporary Sovereignty Model................................................................. 9
Fig. 3. George Littlechild and Aaron Rice, Since you have gone away ...................................................... 30
Fig. 4. Norval Morrisseau, Indian Erotic Fantasy ......................................................................................... 32
Fig. 5. Victoria Johnson, Diné Nation Map .................................................................................................. 37
Fig. 6. Franc Newcomb, Klah creating sand painting ................................................................................. 51
Fig. 7. Franc Newcomb, Klah by unfinished sand painting textile ........................................................... 52
Fig. 8. Franc Newcomb, Hosteen Klah and Ahkenabah at Chicago World’s Fair .............................. 54
Fig. 9. Hosteen Klah, Whirling Logs .............................................................................................................. 56
Fig. 10. Hosteen Klah, Whirling Logs ........................................................................................................... 57
Fig. 11. Hosteen Klah, Whirling Logs ........................................................................................................... 58
Fig. 12. Hosteen Klah, Whirling Logs ........................................................................................................... 58
Fig. 13. Hosteen Klah, Whirling Logs ........................................................................................................... 58
Fig. 14. Harold Carey Jr., Color in Navajo Life and Beliefs ....................................................................... 59
Fig. 15. Hosteen Klah, The Skies from the Shooting Way Chant .............................................................. 61
Fig. 16. Franc Newcomb, Klah, his sister Ahdesbah, Her three daughters Gladys, Irene, Daisy and her son and Klah's niece Lucy Hapaha .............................................................. 63
Fig. 17. Aboriginally Yours, Go-won-go Mohawk .................................................................................... 69
Fig. 18. John Wood, Go-won-go, the Indian Mail Carrier ........................................................................ 75
Fig. 19. The Only Indian Actress, Go-won-go Mohawk ......................................................................... 76
Fig. 20. Illustrated Circular of Lake Erie Female Seminary, Painesville, Ohio .................................. 79
Fig. 21. Daily Mail Toronto, August 23, 1887 ......................................................................................... 82
Fig. 22. “Stock Poster for Concert Salon” .............................................................................. 83
Fig. 23. William F. Cody on a Horse .......................................................................................... 89
Fig. 24. “Go-wan-go on Horse” .............................................................................................. 89
Fig. 25. Ingraham, Colonel Prentiss, Go-Won-Go, the Red Skin Rider ................................. 97
Fig. 26. Poster for Flaming Arrow .......................................................................................... 98
Fig. 27. Poster for Flaming Arrow .......................................................................................... 99
Fig. 28. Rosalie Favell, I was her shadow now she is mine ................................................... 114
Fig. 29. Rosalie Favell, I lost my center when I found you ................................................... 115
Fig. 30. Rosalie Favell, Maybe I did love her in that way ..................................................... 117
Fig. 31. Frida Kahlo in suit ...................................................................................................... 120
Fig. 32. Kahlo Family Portrait ............................................................................................... 120
Fig. 33. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair ........................................................... 122
Fig. 34. Rosalie Favell, If only you could love me for the way I am ........................................ 124
Fig. 35. Thirza Cuthand, 2-Spirit Introductory Offer $19.99 ................................................. 126
Fig. 36. Thirza Cuthand, Alice Through the Looking Glass .................................................. 129
Fig. 37. Barry Ace, Women’s Woodland Jingle Leggings ....................................................... 133
Fig. 38. Barry Ace, Bandolier for Alain Brosseau .................................................................. 135
Fig. 39. Barry Ace, Erased .................................................................................................... 137
Fig. 40. Jeff Thomas, Buffalo Boy (Adrian Stimson) at Samuel de Champlain Monument 141
Fig. 41. Dayna Danger, Masks 01 Georgia .......................................................................... 147
Fig. 42. Dayna Danger, Masks 01 Adrienne ....................................................................... 147
Fig. 43. Dayna Danger, Masks 01 Sasha ............................................................................. 148
Fig. 44. Dayna Danger, Big ’Uns ........................................................................................... 150
Fig. 45. Erin Konsmo, *Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius* ................................................... 156

Fig. 46. Erin Konsmo, *Walking With Our Sisters Vamps* ..................................................... 159

Fig. 47. Erin Konsmo, *Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius* ..................................................... 161

Fig. 48. Erin Konsmo, *Beaded condom medallion with beaver fur and silver chain* .......... 165
List of Tables

Table 1 The Navajo Gender System ....................................................................................... 41
Table 2 Navajo Gender Terminology for Select Age Groups ................................................ 44
Chapter One: Introduction

Difference, not hierarchy, is normalized. This turn creates gender variance that fostered fluidity around the responsibilities and obligations of family and community life based on an individual’s gifts, aspirations, abilities and desires. Similarly, it created variations around sexual orientations and relationship orientations. These practices resulted in fluidity around gender that was normalized within non nuclear families and provided space for all genders and a variety of expressions of gender, and sexual orientations. It generates a society of individuals who are living as their best selves, creating a society that continually reproduces Indigeneity, bringing forth more of every kind of life, bringing forth continuous rebirth. (L. Simpson, *Anger* par. 22)

You can’t not talk about our rights as Indigenous people and the right to self-determination over our bodies ... We represent leadership and vision for our communities and sovereignty over our bodies. We know that it is intimately linked to sovereignty over our lands, territories and all aspects of our culture. (E. Konsmo, *Tribal Same* par. 15)

Gender variance and artist production are not topics that are often discussed within the discipline of art history. In fact gender variance and in particular its relationship to sexual orientation was not a topic studied, much less discussed outside the medical community until the mid-twentieth century. It was generally thought that sexuality and gender were “biologically determined” and deviation from the heterosexual norm was considered pathological. In contrast, Indigenous nations in Canada and the United States had a very different understanding regarding the relationship between gender, biology, and sexual object of choice. One area that provides us with a glimpse into how Indigenous people construct knowledge regarding gender and sexual identity is through the study of their artistic production.

Historically, Western disciplines have often examined how a society divides labour among its member through gender roles. More often than not, explorations into the study of how non-Western societies divide labour and artistic production have been
explored by other disciplines such as anthropology, feminism and, more recently, gender studies. However, these disciplines, born out of Western epistemological and ontological concerns, tend to reinforce the centrality of settler colonial logics. This includes the reification of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity, which is manifested in the division of art production into “fine art” and “craft,” this is not just a symptom of our time. John Fisher writes, “the ranking of the arts was a common activity of thinkers from the renaissance through to the eighteenth century. He notes that for instance, “Leonardo, argued that painting was the supreme art, superior to poetry, music or sculpture” (Kemp qtd in Fisher 530). All of these are examples of what is often referred to as “fine art;” forms of artistic production that have predominately been the domain of cisgendered males.1 If we are asked to name five famous artists how many of those artists would be women? How many of them would be painters or sculptures, how many of them would be beaders or basketmakers? Linda Nochlin, in her canonical essay “Why Have There Been No Great Female Artists?,” speaks about the systemic barriers that have limited women’s participation in the arts. Art history’s gender bias is revealed as she concludes that it is, “institutionally made impossible for women to achieve artistic excellence, or success, on the same footing as men, no matter what the potency of their so called talent or genius” (par. 61). Nochlin’s critique does not discuss the hierarchical bias which places “crafts arts” that are produced primarily by women as being less than “fine art.” For Non-western artists their artistic production is to this day often categorized as craft, or ethnographic material culture. Sherry Farrell Racette points out “the historical construction of the “professional artist” is also problematic, since the term “professional”

1 Cis-gendered is a term that describes someone whose gender identity corresponds with the biological sex they were assigned at birth.
is tightly bound to European economic and social structures and “artist” is a deeply
gendered occupational category. This problem identified by Farrell Racette is an
indication of the inability of a western art discipline to fully contain Non-western arts.
Unfortunately this has often resulted in the “Native” subject as always seen as lacking or
“Other.” Yet, what happens if Indigenous concerns and worldviews become central to an
inquiry? What possibilities does this manner of examination offer to the ongoing process
of decolonization and the assertion of the Indigenous sovereign body?

As Robert Warrior wrote, decolonial gestures are not so much ideological as they
are methodological in that if we make Indigenous knowledge central to our inquiry we
are able to disrupt the settler colonial authority over the construction of knowledge (195).
These gestures are responses to our colonial state and, as such, present a different way of
knowing. It is for this reason that this dissertation consists of both historical and
contemporary case studies of Indigenous artists to demonstrate that the resistance to
colonial subjectivity is ongoing. The intent of this methodology is not only to examine
how Native American 2 people construct knowledge regarding gender but how these
understandings are embodied in their artistic production. I use artistic production for this
undertaking as it is one of the means used to express a worldview and understanding of
our place and relationship to place. For Indigenous artists, art has many functions, most
importantly as Art Historian Heather Igloliorte writes “... it is through our arts that we
demonstrate the inconvertible continuity of Indigenous cultures, and our ability to survive
and thrive despite centuries of colonization, oppression and imperialism. It is by dynamic

---

2 I use the terms Indigenous and Native American and Native to refer to the First People of the United
States and Canada, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit. I also utilize the term gender variance to
denote and recognize a spectrum of gender identity as opposed to a binary construction that maintains
heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy.
engagement and with presentation of Indigenous arts and cultural practices that we contradict colonial narratives of our eminent disappearance or inevitable assimilation, otherness, stasis, and acculturation” (21)

What remains true about the various individual expressions of gender and sexuality discussed throughout this dissertation is that each artist through the medium of his/her artistic production expresses the individual’s right to self-determination. Within an Indigenous context this notion of self-determination is expressed in the ethic of non-interference. Alex Wilson describes this as following “the expectation that Indigenous Americans should not interfere in any way with another person” (How We Find Ourselves 307). This is the same ethic that is also expressed in the Two Row Wampum or Gusweñta, which visually represents the expectations of the Haudenosaunee regarding their relationship between their confederacy of nations and the newcomers who wanted to settle in their territories.

The Two-Row Wampum belt depicts two rows of purple wampum shells on a background of white wampum shells. The three rows of white shells signify peace, friendship and respect. The purple wampum beads are strung in straight lines parallel to each other, along the length of the belt. One row of the purple wampum represents the settler colonial nation state, while the other purple row represents the Haudenosaunee people (see fig. 1).
The belt represents one of the earliest treaties between these sovereign entities and the settler colonialists. The parallel lines represent the separate but equal status of these two nations and their rights as sovereign nations to determine what is best for their citizens, free from interference from the other party in their foreign and domestic affairs.  

The term sovereignty is contentious and is largely misunderstood in terms of its meaning. This is due, in part, to the genesis of the term as Vine Deloria Jr. explains, “sovereignty is an ancient idea, once used to describe both the power and arbitrary nature of the deity by peoples in the Near East. Although, originally a theological term it was appropriated by European political thinkers in the centuries following the Reformation to characterize the person of the king as head of the state” (22). Sovereignty, he explains further, had to do with the right of the king to rule over the people: that authority was a divine right bestowed by God. This power, according to Deloria, was expressed in the king’s power to declare war and direct domestic affairs (22).

---

3 Recently, non-Native scholars question the validity of the Two-Row wampum. For information on the response please see Dr. Scott Stevens’, presentation at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duxZTM9_3vl Dr. Jon Parmenter’s presentation at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zdfqje11N0 and Dr. Jolene Rickard’s presentation at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLu_u8ioOtc.
At the end of World War II, Joanne Barker wrote that much of the discussion regarding sovereignty and Indigenous peoples was focused on legitimizing the nation-to-nation relationship as part of the desire to position Indigenous people as different from “one among many minority groups” (Sovereignty Matters 1). In order to accomplish this positioning the emphasis was on asserting that Indigenous people have rights to self-government, territorial integrity, and cultural autonomy under international customary law. She explains that the contemporary use of the term has evolved “to signify a multiplicity of legal and social rights to political, economic, and cultural self-determination” (Ibid 1). It would seem that sovereignty and self-determination are two separate concepts, as one refers to the state’s ability to act in the best interests of its citizens and to be free of outside foreign influence, while the other is often interpreted as an individual’s right to act in his/her best interests. However, as Julie Nagam points out, these two terms are often conflated, as when we assume that if a nation has the right to conduct its affairs without foreign interference, this same right is extended to its citizens. Within a contemporary Indigenous context this notion is not so much about defining boundaries and borders as it is about our relationships and our interconnections to all beings and the responsibilities that we have to all of our relations (85). As many indigenists have noted this is manifested in concept of “being in good relations.” (L. Simpson 2011; Tallbear 2017)

As Joanne Barker notes, sovereignty has also become an integral part of social movements and political agendas for decolonization and social justice at local and global levels (Sovereignty Matters 1). This has resulted in a number of articulations of the term that voice the specificities that reflect the discipline of the author, such as Robert
Warrior’s intellectual sovereignty, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith’s artistic sovereignty, Beverly Singer’s cultural sovereignty and Jolene Rickard’s interpretation which she terms visual sovereignty. At the heart of each of these iterations is the notion that we must maintain our worldviews, our languages, our ways of being in the world. Although writing specifically about the cultural component of sovereignty, Lawrence Gross relates why it is important to maintain Indigenous cultures:

Sovereignty is an issue that works on many different levels. On the one hand, issues of land and politics must figure greatly into any discussion of self-determination. On the other hand, issues of cultural sovereignty must be taken into account as well. In a scenario in which Native Americans achieved sovereignty over their land and politics, would that accomplishment have any functional meaning if, at the same time, Native Americans were fully assimilated into the culture of the dominant society? The importance of cultural sovereignty can thus be accepted as a given (127).

These assertions clearly underscore the importance of sovereignty and how it is understood as a concept in relation to a number of academic lenses. What these scholars are asking us to consider are possibilities Indigenous sovereignty can offer us, if we truly had control over our lands, lives, relationships and futures. Having worked within Canada’s reservation system in the 1980s, I have witnessed the ways in which Indigenous Nations have had to recreate their systems of governance to reflect the settler nation states. The intent here is not to judge this, but rather to point to the ways in which Indigenous institutions, since contact, slowly eroded to reflect non-Native concerns rather than Indigenous ones. Recently, we have witnessed an increase in scholarship examining
the effect that the politics of recognition has had on Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination (Alfred 1999; Coulthard 2014; A. Simpson 2014; L. Simpson 2014).

What does any of this have to with artistic production, gender, sexuality, and performance? The simplistic answer is that it has everything to do with it. It is important to point out that judicial policy and the legitimization of Indigenous nation status is only one component of Indigenous sovereignty. At the heart of Indigenous sovereignty are the people and their inherent right to self-determination, whether at national level and/or as individuals expressing an Indigenous way of being in the world.

As P’urhépecha scholar Michael Lerma explains, contemporary Indigenous sovereignty is complex. In his model of contemporary Indigenous sovereignty, which he acknowledges is based on the work of Kevin Bruyneel, Lerma expresses the notion that Indigenous sovereignty consists of five components (see fig. 2).
The first component is that it is ‘bound in place.’ This is expressed through the relationship Indigenous people have to each other and their traditional territories or land base. The second component is having a ‘power base’ that is expressed in the establishment of norms for behaviors as well as sanctions for the violation of these norms. Norms are often conveyed in kinship and clan responsibilities. These relationships and expectations are related to the third component, which Lerma identifies as ‘supreme authority.’ This authority is founded in the original instructions or oral traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. These original instructions have been instrumental in settling disagreements and have informed both decisions and
behavior. The fourth component is Indigenous institutions that were not always permanent, but were activated in times of need, as when confederacies were formed to repel common enemies or to combat famine. Once the situation normalized, these Indigenous institutions were no longer needed. The fifth and final component is legitimacy, both domestic and international. As I indicated previously, this is where most of the discussion regarding Indigenous sovereignty has focused, and it has more or less traced the erosion of the independence of Indigenous nations as sovereign nations to a status of being interdependent nation states.

This model of Indigenous sovereignty is used to guide this dissertation and serves as its main methodology. Even though all five components are equally important, I focus on demonstrating how the Indigenous sovereign body asserts sovereignty that is intimately tied to and legitimized through “sacred histories, ceremonies, traditional home lands and our languages” (Lerma 4). It is these histories, ceremonies and languages that provide evidence of how knowledge regarding gender and sexuality is constructed from an Indigenous perspective. It also demonstrates that when the Indigenous body embodies or performs from this place, it is capable of revealing the binary construction of gender and its conflation with biological sex as part of the colonial mechanisms that serves to regulate the sovereignty of Indigenous bodies.

As demonstrated by Lerma’s model, contemporary Indigenous sovereignty is enacted through the development of theory, using new foci in our research and the generation of data. I, too, set out to examine the development of theory regarding Indigenous genders and sexuality, while also bringing into the discussion recent Indigenous interventions that have occurred within the disciplines of gender studies,
feminism and queer theory. New theory linking reclaiming Indigenous constructions of
gender and sexuality and Indigenous sovereignty has been generated from the academic
disciplines of Indigenous feminism, Indigenous Studies and what Qwo-Li Driskill (2011)
has identified as a Two-Spirit critique. Driskill writes that,

while our traditional understandings of gender and sexuality are as diverse as our
nations, Native Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people share experiences under
heteropatriarchal, gender polarized colonial regimes, which attempt to control
Native nations. These experiences give rise to critiques that position Native Two-
Spirit LGBTQ genders and sexualities as oppositional to colonial powers (69).

Within the last decade these fields of study have produced research that deals specifically
with examining the ways in which gender and Indigenous sovereignty are intertwined.
(Driskill et al. 2011; Rifken 2011; Morgansen 2011; Byrd 2017).

Throughout this dissertation I intentionally do not emphasize what has been
written about gender variance by scholars of the past. Rather the focus here on examining
Indigenous constructions of gender from an Indigenous perspective and/or where
Indigenous concerns are the central focus in the research. However, in the review of the
literature I will examine some of earlier research and discourse regarding Indigenous
constructions of gender and sexuality to illustrate how they reflect non-Indigenous
concerns.

We cannot ignore not only how settler colonialism has shaped contemporary
Indigenous gender and sexual identities but also how Indigenous artists have asserted an
understanding of gender and sexual variance in spite of the attempts to eradicate them. In
keeping with the model of contemporary sovereignty as outlined by Lerma my research
focuses not so much on refuting what has been written concerning gender fluidity, but emphasizing and examining how artists’ gender and sexualities perform these identities to affirm the fluidity of Indigenous constructions of gender and sexuality.

Before the 1990s, much of the discourse and research on Indigenous gender and sexual expressions written by explorers, medical professionals, and anthropologists dominated the field of research. This discourse reflected non-Native concerns and ideas and beliefs regarding gender and sexuality (outhistory.com). In these contemporary times we have seemingly witnessed an increasing acceptance of gender variance, but nonetheless acts of violence against those who do not conform to a binary construction of gender and sexuality are a constant reminder of the vulnerability of those who do not conform to expectations.

The stories of individuals contained in this dissertation not only show how Indigenous nations constructed knowledge regarding gender differently, but also that binary gender and sexual categories are not perdurable. My claims are informed by the retelling of actual historic and contemporary experiences of individuals who did not conform to settler nation state constructions of gender. This knowledge demonstrates that the binary construction of gender is a construction and we must ask ourselves, what are the consequences for Indigenous nation building and sovereignty if we maintain constructions of gender that perpetuates heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy?

The first two chapters discuss the lives of two individuals who lived and were artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In using a transhistorical and transcultural approach, the intent is not to reify Western gender or sexuality constructions
but rather to demonstrate the evolution and survivance of Indigenous gender and sexual identities from the past into contemporary times.

Any historical approach reveals that there are always gaps in the information and records kept in institutions, if there even are records. As such it is not possible to provide a full account of someone’s life. Over time, attitudes and values change. Details about the lives of those who did not reflect a heteronormative lifestyle may have been kept out of the record or researchers were given limited access to this information. This may have been a factor in accounts of the lives of Hosteen Klah and Go-won-go Mohawk. However, today it is a topic that has become part of daily discourse. Information about the historical figures in this dissertation comes from a variety of sources, including museum archival collections, newspaper clippings, immigration records, and databases, as well as the published research conducted by others. These sources are very different from the research that was conducted with living artists.

Hosteen Klah was a weaver while Go-won-go was a vaudeville actress. Both of these individuals challenged Western gender and sexual identities in a time when settler colonial governments asserted some of their most violent policies of assimilation that continue to resonate throughout Indigenous communities. I also present these stories with a specific purpose in mind, in that these individual lives are demonstrative of what Gerald Vizenor has described as “survivance.” This term is defined as both the survival and resistance to the violence of settler colonial logics. I do this as a means of grounding Indigenous gender constructions within an Indigenous history that until very recently has remained unspoken.
Hosteen Klah was born in 1867, just prior to the signing of the Treaty of Bosque Redondo. This treaty facilitated the return of the Diné people to their homelands after four years of being held as political prisoners by the United States government. My inquiry examines the ways in which Klah’s roles, as a nádleehí, weaver and hatáałii are expressions of a very specific ontology and epistemology. Although Klah has been the subject of a number of scholarly inquiries (Roscoe 1988, 2000; Lang 1998; Garcia 2005; Reed 2011; St. Sukie de la Croix 2012), I engage a Diné specific ontology to examine how Hosteen Klah’s gender and artistic production are a synthesis of the Diné concept of Hózhó, which is a very specific construction of gender unique to the Diné people. This reading of the work is influenced by Aaron Fry’s enthnotheoretical approach (Local Knowledge 4).

In the second chapter I examine the performative nature of gender through the vaudeville career of Go-won-go Mohawk. Unlike Klah, Go-won-go did not grow up on the reservation, but rather in the rural communities of New York state and Ohio. She would find her way to New York’s vaudeville stage and fashion for herself a career performing as the Indigenous male lead in two plays. One of the plays she wrote herself and the playwright Lincoln J. Carter wrote the other for her. Although she was popular during her lifetime, after her death she faded into relative obscurity. The fact that very little has been written about her until recently is indicative of how those who question the hegemony of heteronormativity and the patriarchy are silenced. In this chapter I also propose that Go-won-go’s performances were part of a movement that sought the advancement of Native Americans in American society.
Close to one hundred years have passed since Hosteen Klah and Go-won-go asserted their right to self-determination. Since the 1960s we have witnessed the desire within our communities to reclaim these knowledges. However, the ability to do this has been thwarted by the missionization and assimilation of settler colonial values by many Indigenous peoples. Although we lament this loss, there are constant reminders that there are still knowledge keepers among us. Many of our contemporary acts of decolonization are concerned with what Lee Anne Simpson describes as “picking up the things we were forced to leave behind, such as songs, dances, values or philosophies and bringing them into existence in the future” (Dancing 50). I contend that these artists bring forward our knowledge regarding gender and sexual identities that manifest our Indigenous processes, values and philosophies.

In the third chapter I examine the ways in which contemporary Indigenous artists mediate their gender identity and how this is expressed in their artistic production. How each artist does this is in keeping with the Indigenous notion of self-determination. This chapter consists of interviews with six Indigenous artists who are at various stages of their artistic careers. It provides the reader with insight into the complexities of Indigenous sexual and gender identities. These artists, like Hosteen Klah and Go-won-go Mohawk, express the notion of Indigenous sovereignty by articulating their gender and sexual identities in their artistic practice. My discussions are in no way an attempt to delineate a definitive answer regarding Indigenous construction of gender and sexual identities. I reveal the negotiations individuals have undertaken in the pursuit of disrupting heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy through creative expression and in some instances political activism.
Over the course of an eight-month period of interviews with eight Indigenous artists who identify as LGBTQQ2 or Two-Spirited were conducted. Six of the interviews are included in the final chapter. These six artists were chosen because of their tribal affiliation and generation they represent. For example there are three Metis artists and three First Nations. The ages of the artists span from those in their late fifties to younger artists in their early thirties. The process of interviewing subjects for this project demanded that ethic approval had to be obtained. However, after completing the documentation and review process, I was informed by the University of New Mexico’s Ethics Committee that these interviews were not considered research and therefore formal approval by the committee was not needed. Originally, I attempted unsuccessfully to recruit participants through a post on a social media site. This initial effort did not yield any results. Consequently, I approached artists within the Indigenous community whom I knew identified as being LGBTQQ2 or Two-Spirited. I also asked those whom I interviewed for referrals. In other instances I was given the names of individuals who “I should talk to,” once my dissertation topic was disclosed in academic and social settings.

Two of the artists were interviewed in person, while the others were interviewed via the Internet. Requests for permission to record the interviews were sought and granted for all the interviews conducted. Each was asked the same set of questions. Any deviation from the original list of questions was to solicit or clarify interviewees’ responses. The intent of these questions was to determine how and if the artists perceive their gender and sexual identities as having an impact on their artistic production in terms of the media in which the artist works, the subject matter and their preception of the reception of their

---

4 LGBTQQ2 is the acronym for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transsexual, queer and questioning.
work. Overall, even with this small sample a pattern began to emerge. In particular was the generational divide among the artists. Established artists who came out prior to the AIDS pandemic tended to identify as Gay or Lesbian, whereas mid-career artists used both terms in relation to their identity. Younger artists either referred to themselves as Two-Spirited, by the tribally specific term used in his/her language, queer or refused any label at all. These findings are not surprising, but the generational shift is also transformed and informed by an increasing awareness and activism within the Indigenous community that seeks to renew and privilege Indigenous knowledge over Western.

Although this model of collecting data reflects a Western scientific approach, my access and knowledge of the Indigenous arts community afforded me the opportunity to draw upon my connections within the Indigenous art community. I was humbly reminded of the importance of reciprocity and exchange. As Indigenous researchers we must always be reminded to respect our relationships and do no harm, but rather work towards strengthening our communities for future generations.

In the interests of full disclosure and my relation to this topic, I identify as being Two-Spirit. In doing so, I situate my gender and sexual identity within an Indigenous understanding that gender identity is fluid, as are my sexual relationships. My family is a combination of both Indigenous and settler. My identity is traced through my mother and grandmother. My grandmother, Alice Berard, was from the Beaver Lake, a Métis community in Alberta. She was the daughter of Louise Moreaux and Roger Berard. I did not grow up within a Métis settlement but have lived in mostly urban centers in Canada and the United States. My father was from Northern Ireland and, along with his parents
and siblings, he immigrated to Canada as a young child. I am of Métis and settler
descent.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The intent of this literature review is to trace the trajectory of the movement away from the centering of Western models of inquiry to ones where Indigenous knowledge and methodologies are employed to understand Indigenous constructions of gender and sexuality. This is a recognition of the movement within the contemporary Indigenous community to reclaim Indigenous understandings while recognizing the role mistranslation occupies whenever etic knowledge overwrites emic cultural concepts with its etic meanings (McChesney 133). These types of mistranslations can and often do occur when the interpretation of Indigenous cultural concepts are made through a Western theoretical perspective. As Robert Fulton and Steven Anderson point out, until recently these Western perspectives have gone unchallenged (603). Many Western disciplines fail to acknowledge the role mistranslation has played in effectively silencing Native American epistemological and ontological constructions of gender. As Bagele Chilisa, an African scholar and advocate for Indigenous Research methodologies, notes in her critique of Euro-Western research paradigms, they ignore the role that imperialism and colonization play in the construction of knowledge (8). That is not to say that these contributions should be ignored, but we must always examine how they can contribute to the dismantling of the epistemic regimes that maintain colonial structures.

Disciplines such as Anthropology, Gender Studies, Feminism, Critical Theory and Queer Studies have contributed greatly to understanding Indigenous gender and sexuality. However, Indigenous methodologies and knowledge enable us to address the specificities of the Indigenous experience. These Indigenous interventions play an important role in revealing the ways in which we participate in or are constructed in
relation to settler colonial ideologies. These specific theoretical lenses not only offer us an understanding of how the process of interpellation attempts to and in some instances succeeds in constructing Indigenous sexual and gender identities that maintain heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy. However, in using Indigenous methodologies and knowledge as a way of re-centering our research we are able to reveal the gendered violence of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy.

Lana Ray identifies two types of Indigenous methodologies: strategic and convergent. Strategic Indigenous methodologies use Indigenous knowledge as a means to counteract oppressive states and advocate for the continuance of Traditional ways. These methodologies are strategic because they are used to promote an Indigenous agenda and work towards creating a space for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, thinking, acting, living and speaking (89). Convergent Indigenous methodologies work to create a space for traditional knowledge systems within the academy through the employment of Indigenous principals, such as relational accountability. As Indigenous researchers we are accountable to our communities. This dissertation employs both strategic and convergent methodologies, which positions and centers Indigenous concerns and knowledge that support the notion that gender and sexual identities are much more fluid.

**Feminism**

According to Carol Vance, “Feminist scholarship and activism undertook the project of rethinking gender, which had a revolutionary impact on notions of what is natural” (876). She states that this critique led to a rethinking of biological determinism. It was through studying human sexuality and the diversity of gender roles found throughout history and across cultures that science and its objectivity came into question.
Other important contributions that have led to rethinking gender came about with the publication of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* in 1990. Butler’s assertion and discussion of the performative nature of gender was groundbreaking. This volume was one of the first to question the stability of gender categories and would become one of the foundational texts in queer studies (vii). Within feminist scholarly circles it opened up a realm of possibilities that would “trouble” Western constructions of gender and explore the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentrism are reified.

Indigenous feminist inventions have been instrumental in terms of examining the ways in which the Indigenous body is constructed and regulated by the logics of the settler colonial state (Barker 2017; Denetdale 2017; Lawrence 2003).

**Art History and Anthropology**

Specific discussions regarding the intersectionality of sexuality, gender and artistic production within the discipline of Art History have focused on second and third-wave feminist concerns, which basically excluded the concerns of people of color. Consequently, much that has been written about Indigenous genders, sexuality and artistic production has come from the field of Cultural Anthropology and the study of the “other” or non-Western cultures. Until recently the worldviews and concerns of those being studied were not part of the equation.

According to Scott Laura Morgansen, the trajectory of the study of these concerns within the discipline of Anthropology had four distinct stages. These stages can be differentiated or identified by the desired outcome of those conducting the research. It is made very evident that historically the concerns and worldviews of the Indigenous people being studied were not at the forefront of these inquiries (56).
The first phase was heavily influenced by Franz Boaz’s theory of cultural relativity. Morgansen writes that this was especially evident in the field of Ethnography and the research conducted by Boaz’s students, Margaret Mead, Alfred Kroeber and Ruth Benedict. In the work of Mead and her contemporaries on Native American cultures, discussions regarding gender and sexuality in the work of Margaret Mead and her contemporaries, Morgensen explains, were utilized as “an application of primitivity to the self fashioning of modern subjects of a settler society” (56). As Aaron Fry has pointed out Boaz’s ideas regarding gender construction and artistic production reflected Victorian sensibilities (Fry). According to Boas there were two styles of artistic production in the decorative arts of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast of North America. These were delineated by gender. He wrote that the man’s style or symbolic art was expressed in the art of wood craving and painting. In comparison the woman’s style expressed in weaving and basketry, which he classified as formal. According to Boaz, the symbolic art was full of meaning, while the formal art had no especially marked significance (Boaz 183).

The second phase occurred in the late 1970s to the late 1980s. This period was marked by a renewed interest in Indigenous gender constructions (Whitehead 1981; Callender and Cochems 1983; Blackwood 1984; Medicine 1983; Williams 1986; Roscoe 1987). It is a generally held belief that this interest resulted from the increase in GLBT activism following Stonewall and the onset of the AIDS pandemic (Faiman-Silva 5). Morgensen characterizes the scholarship produced at this time as being facilitated by a desire to present the berdache as “…an ideal object to inspire accommodating variation in modern societies” (57). Much of the research was not focused on the contemporary reality of Indigenous people but was more geared towards what can be interpreted as the
emancipation of the non-Native homosexual. Morgansen writes, “...the berdache was employed to justify sexual rights for U.S. citizens” (48). It also, “reflects the desire of white sexual minorities to absorb Native American roots as their own in order to claim—even critically—the right of settler citizenship” (Ibid).

The scholarship during this phase is characterized by a mining of the archives of early ethnographers, explorers and missionaries. Bringing together the observations and evidence of the “berdache” tradition among Native Nations in North America, the focus was on recuperating these traditions through the historical record5 (Williams 1989; Lang 1998; Roscoe 1987, 1998). The urban, Native American LGBT community criticized this research because its focus was on the past and not the present reality of the community, which at the time was devastated by HIV and AIDS.6 Even within the discipline, Kath Weston has remarked that the story is a familiar one in the annals of the discipline:

well-meaning ethnographers rush out to record ‘traditional’ practices and rituals before the latter change or disappear. At their worst, these efforts repackage colonialist discourse (e.g. "primitive" societies) for consumption by Anglo-European audiences. At their best, they resurrect the vision of the Noble Savage living in a Noble Society that provides an honored place for at least some form transgendering or same-sex activity (154).

---

5 In 1987 Will Roscoe published the Bibliography of Berdache and Alternative Gender Roles Among North American Indians, which brought together the known research on Indigenous constructions of sexual and gender identities to that point in time.

6 In The United States the Indian Health Service reports that HIV is a public health issue among the approximately 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. https://www.ihs.gov/hivaid/stats/ In Canada the Public Health Agency reports a total of 22,702 AIDS cases had been reported to the Agency up to December 31, 2012, the first case having been identified retrospectively as occurring in 1979. Of these cases, 17,466 (76.9%) included information on ethnicity, of which 888 (5.1%) were identified as Aboriginal people. http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/publication/epi/2010/8-eng.php#a12
What was missing in the proliferation of scholarly articles and books was the Indigenous voice. An exception is the work of Beatrice Medicine, a Lakota and an academically trained anthropologist, and Wesley Thomas, a Diné scholar who was, at the time, a graduate student. Both Thomas and Medicine would become advocates for the contemporary Native LGBT community within the discipline of Anthropology. Both were instrumental in the Wenner-Gren Foundation Conference that occurred at the American Anthropological Association in 1992, a pivotal moment in the study of Native American gender studies. Sue-Ellen Jacobs writes that the intent of the conference was to bring members of “...both Native American LGBT community and non-Native academic and community scholars of gender studies and sexuality together to discuss Native American constructions of gender, gender diversity, and sexualities” (Ibid 9). What was at stake was the assertion and right of the contemporary Native American LGBT community to both name and claim their identities. In particular what was being contested was the use of the word “berdache,” seen not only as a pejorative term but one that was laden with imperialist and colonial notions. The term according to Walter Williams originates from the Arabic word (bardash) meaning "kept boy" or "male prostitute" (Ibid 9).

Two years earlier, at the annual Native American LGBT gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba, those in attendance sought to identify a term that expressed the multiple gender identities within a Native America context. From this gathering the term ‘Two-

---

7 There were a number of Native individuals from the community that are cited in “Introduction.” Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality and Spirituality, as participating in the discussions that occurred at the Wenner-Gren conference and in the book that followed. This included Beverly Little Thunder, Michael Red Earth, Anguksuar, Carrie House, Doyle Robertson, Claire R. Farrer, Clyde Hall and Terry Tofoya.
“Two-Spirit” emerged (Jacobs et al 2005). This new term was defined, a pan-Native North American term that Jacobs explains:

Originating as a term for contemporary Native American gays and lesbians as well as people who have been referred to as berdache by anthropologists and other scholars, it has come to refer to a number of Native American roles and identities past and present, including Contemporary Native American /First Nations individuals who are gay or lesbian; Contemporary Native Americans/First Nations gender categories; The traditions wherein multiple genders categories and sexualities are Institutionalized in Native American /First Nations tribal cultures; Traditions of gender diversity in other, non-Native American cultures; Transvestites, transsexuals, and transgendered people; and drag queens and butches (2).

The use of the term Two-Spirit has itself been the subject of much debate. Today, the term is often used interchangeably with berdache, especially evident in the on-line LGBTQ2 community. However, Katina Walters et al. wrote that the term was employed as a placeholder and was never intended to be the definitive term (135). Its use was first and foremost to ground contemporary Indigenous gender and sexual identities within a very specific historical and cultural context that differed from mainstream constructions of gender and sexuality. It was also one of the first steps in the process of decolonization and reclaiming these identities that had become almost unspoken through attempts of

---

8 In her article *Recovering a Sovereign Erotic: Two-Spirit Writers “Reclaim a Name for Ourselves.”* Alicia Cox writes that the term Two-Spirit was coined by Albert McLeod during the Third Annual Inter-tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference held in Winnipeg in 1990. Page 87.
assimilation, missionization and adoption of Judeo-Christian beliefs by Native Americans.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a fundamental shift within academia, as more Native American scholars who identify as Two-Spirit have spoken back from within the academy (Driskill et al 2005; Justice et al 2010). Although the editors of both of these volumes speak to the ways in which critical Indigenous GLBTQ2 impact the practices of scholars, activists and artists, it is only the literary arts that are discussed in both volumes. There is some recognition of studio arts, as the artwork by Swampy Cree artist Kent Monkman, graces the covers of these books. Monkman is an artist well known for the gender performances of his alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. These interventions within the academy are relatively recent in comparison to the long history of interventions produced by the Native American visual arts community. Indigenous Feminist, Indigenous Queer Theory or Two-Spirit critiques have been used and continue to be used as tools to examine the mechanisms of the settler nation states in the ongoing subjugation of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies regarding gender and sexuality. Recently, the employment of Indigenous epistemologies that had and continue to have influence on Native queer activism, and Indigenous feminist critiques that have been very instrumental in exposing the ways that heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy are maintained within settler colonial structures (Rifken 2011; Sunseri 2011; Driskell 2010; Suzack 2010; Smith 2005, 2010; St. Denis 2007; Lawerence 2003).

The histories and stories of gender variant Native-American people demonstrate how Indigenous people have resisted and continue to resist the authority of settler
colonial constructions of gender even today. That is not to say that Western methodologies and critical theory cannot provide us with an understanding of gender variance. However, without the insertion of what is being called Indigenous interventions into critical theory, whether it is feminist, queer or gender theory, there is a limit to what mainstream theoretical constructs are able to articulate regarding how gender variance is understood within Native American cultures. For example, scholar Andrea Smith points out that although queer of color critiques such as Esteban Muñoz’s model of oppositional politics can be productive, there is a limit in what they have to offer. Smith asserts its failure to recognize or critique colonialism is problematic, as it does not question the normalizing logics of settler colonialism. This, according to Smith, is also a limitation inherent in queer theory’s subjectless critique, as both disguise the fact that the queer, postcolonial subject is simultaneously a settler subject and has an investment in maintaining the logics of settler colonialism. Like whiteness, the subject position of the settler colonialist is never questioned in terms of its subjectivity. This absence reveals the failure of queer theory and queer color critique to examine the normalizing logics of settler colonialism (*Queer Theory* 43).

In view of this limitation, it is important to note that mainstream expressions of critical theory are very useful in understanding and mapping out the minefield that Indigenous people, in the past as well as in contemporary times, have had to continually navigate. Mark Rifkin describes an example of this in his analysis of the ways in which the discourse regarding sexuality was utilized to insert Native American people in the settler framework (25). While Rifkin examines how heteronormativity has been used to regulate native self-determination and sovereignty, he also reveals how the deployment of
sexuality, in particular the notion of compulsory heterosexuality, has functioned and continues to function in the on-going colonization of Native American people. Similar to the European context as theorized by the late Michel Foucault in the *History of Sexuality*, Rifkin argues that it was through the deployment of sexuality that the emerging settler colonial society marked and maintained its distinctiveness from North America’s original inhabitants. Sex was not only a secular concern, but a state concern as well. Sex and sexual relations now required regulation and control. Rifkin’s analysis demonstrates how settler ideologies that formed both Canadian and U.S. Indian policy were and continue to be shaped by heteronormativity (7).

Beginning in the 1960s, Indigenous artists have lobbied and have spoken out against the systemic barriers they have encountered, which often saw their art relegated to anthropological museums where it was treated as a specimen rather than “art” (Phillips 1988, 2011; Berlo 1992; Berlo and Phillips 1995, 1998). This absence of representation in contemporary Canadian and American gallery spaces did not go unquestioned. In Canada, this resulted in a series of Native Artists’ associations formed to address this absence throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This same advocacy spilled over into other areas as artists began to organize in spite of a lack of institutional support and recognition.

One of the early Montreal-based collectives, Nation2Nation, curated a series of exhibitions from 1995 to 1997 entitled *Native Love*. Their exhibitions organized by curators Ryan Rice, Skawennati and Eric Robertson were inclusive of the spectrum of sexual desire and gender. Artists worked in collaboration with each other producing responses that expressed their response to the theme of Native love (see fig. 3). Audra
Simpson’s online essay relates that the intent of the exhibitions was to push back against popular culture stereotypes of Indigenous people as being without passion.

If we were to trust popular and scholarly representations of Native People we would have to conclude that they, unlike any other peoples in the world, are without love. Native people are represented in mechanistic and ultimately loveless terms: as hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists of yesterday and cultural revivalists of today. They are written in popular press as activists (troublemakers), as artists-with-a-mission, as cigarette smugglers. In new age journals as naturally in tune with the earth, in movies of the seventies as shape-changers. They are Indian Princesses, savage squaws, brave hearted men and guerilla warriors. Rarely however, are they in love (the tragedy of Pocahontas aside), rarely are they contemplating love, acting out of love or simply being, as they are -- their Native selves in love or out of love, in the funk out of the Funk, How can this be? (Love).

Two very important statements were made by the collective and its’ “Native Love” exhibitions. The language the collective employed in naming itself Nation 2 Nation recalls the sovereignty of Indigenous nations and in doing so asserts a status equal to, but separate from the settler colonial nation state and the power to name and claim identities that might otherwise be censored by mainstream institutions. The curators did not back away from displaying art works that questioned the hegemony of heteronormative sexual identities. They included artwork and text produced by Indigenous artists who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and queer. The exhibitions occurred at Das Media, Montreal, QC 1995, Artspace, Peterborough, ON

![Image of an open book with text on the pages.](image)

Fig. 3. George Littlechild and Aaron Rice, *Since you have gone away*, 1995, *Canadian Art Magazine*. 42.2 (Summer 2017) 54.

One may conclude that the absence of mainstream institutional support was one of the reasons why they were able to do this. No institutional support meant no institutional restrictions. However, the same inclusivity in terms of gender and sexual identities was modeled in the exhibition *Exposed: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art*, curated by Lee Anne Martin and Morgan Wood. The exhibition opened in September 1999 in Regina’s McKenzie Art Gallery and travelled to the Woodland Cultural Center and the Ottawa Art Gallery. In the catalogue, the curators Martin and Wood wrote that the purpose of the exhibition was to “celebrate and begin to reclaim aspects of sexuality and the erotic, rendering visible Aboriginal images and stories that have been hidden for too long” (35). It is well documented that artists such as Norval Morrisseau (1931-2007)
produced homoerotic images throughout his career, but these paintings, as Martin points out, were often locked away in gallery vaults or in the hands of private collectors (34) (see fig. 4).

The common thread that runs through these exhibitions was the support and consultation that took place within Indigenous communities. This played a major role in the realization of these exhibitions. Instead of turning to mainstream institutions for permission and legitimacy these Indigenous curators turned to their own community. Rather than segregate or exclude the artwork that expressed same sex desire, they recognized the artwork as an expression of the spectrum of the gender and sexuality identities of contemporary Indigenous people. I think this is indicative of an Indigenous methodology in that gender variance was not addressed under a separate exhibition, but was included as an expression of Indigenous understanding that sexual and gender identities are not binary but fluid.
Preliminary research into a similar movement within the United States indicates that comparable exhibitions of Indigenous erotica have included Two-Spirit artists, although they have only occurred in the last ten years. Importantly, these exhibitions like those in Canada portrayed genders and sexual identities that were not heteronormative. In terms of the United States and Two-Spirit artists, Crisosto Apache writes that, “there are many artist collectives that represent Native American artists…but none focusing on Native American LGBTQ2 / ‘Two-Spirit’ artists” (Apache). He explains that, “Many of the artists really do not talk about their gender identity or sexuality but rather focus on their art …Another contributing factor is, that many of the
artists are not ‘out of the closet’ and do not want to be identified because of the negative stigmas still associated with the Native LGBTQI / ‘two spirit’ in tribal communities due to organized religious affiliation from family members and friends” (Apache). These observations are applicable to Canada as well.

This homophobia and the violence of settler colonialism continue to inform many of the beliefs and actions within Indigenous communities. Brian Gilley wrote about the homophobia encountered by Two-Spirit men in Colorado and Oklahoma in 2006, where there remains a very noticeable rejection of gender variance and same sex desire in Indian country. The most recent manifestation of this has been witnessed by the debate regarding same-sex marriages.9 In the United States, Congress has legal authority over the 566 federally recognized tribes. Therefore, if Congress does not pass a law regarding same-sex marriage, each of the tribes has the right to do so. Presently, nine tribal governments do not recognize same-sex marriage. In 2005, the Diné Nation passed The Diné Marriage Act, which states “marriage between persons of the same sex is void and prohibited.” (Diné Marriage Act, Section 2) The act passed following a very impassioned debate on both sides of the issue. Those that supported the Act stated that its rejection of same sex marriage was in defense of Diné family values, whereas other Diné community members and scholars such as Jennifer Nez Denetdale see the Act as an indication of the ways in which settler colonialism has “reconfigured tribal nations and societies as heterosexual patriarchies” (72).

---

For those of us concerned with nation building, Indigenous feminist critiques have been very instrumental in exposing the ways that heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy are maintained within settler colonial structures. The emerging generation is aware and its stance is illustrated by Erin Konsmo (b.1986), who in a newspaper interview is quoted as stating, “You can not talk about our rights as Indigenous people and the right to self-determination over our bodies ... We represent leadership and vision for our communities and sovereignty over our bodies. We know that is intimately linked to sovereignty over our lands, territories and all aspects of our culture” (Konsmo 2013).

Recently, the reactivation of these Indigenous ways of knowing has influenced and continues to influence Native queer/Two-Spirit activism. The histories and stories of gender variant Indigenous people demonstrate how Native Americans have in the past and continue today to resist the authority of settler colonial constructions of gender and sexual identity.

This dissertation is a part of these conversations and asserts the belief that artists have never forgotten the idea that if we are to realize the potential of self-determination and sovereignty, we must also realize the potential of what all Indigenous bodies bring forward towards this effort.
Chapter Three: Hosteen Klah: The Embodied Synthesis of Hózhó

First Man then asked them to send the hermaphrodite to him. When he came First Man asked him if the metate and brush were his. He said they were. First Man asked him if he could cook and prepare food like a woman, if he could weave, and brush the hair. And when he assured First Man that he could do all manner of woman’s work, First Man said: ‘Go and prepare food and bring it to me.’

(O’Bryan 7)

In the 1990s when anthropologists revisited the notion of gender variation among the Indigenous peoples of North America, Hosteen Klah became one of the celebrated examples of how Indigenous peoples accepted and accommodated gender variance within their communities. Along with many of his contemporaries he is viewed as an example of resistance to settler colonial heteronormative constructions of gender.

While the writing of the 1990s and earlier focused on the historical evidence of gender variance among Indigenous people, recorded by non-Native observers and later anthropologists, very little attention has been given to how gender variance among Indigenous peoples was expressed within Indigenous epistemologies. This chapter will explore how gender and knowledge regarding gender are constructed within a Diné worldview and how this knowledge is expressed in Klah’s textiles depicting ceremonial sand paintings. Finally, it will examine Hosteen Klah’s textiles Whirling Logs and The Skies from what Native American art historian Aaron Fry refers to as an ethnotheoretical or Indigenous epistemological approach (4). By engaging a Diné specific ontology, it will demonstrate how Hosteen Klah’s gender and artistic production are a synthesis of the Diné concept of Hózhó and will examine a very specific construction of gender that is unique to the Diné people. Unlike other interpretations that state he transgressed the gender roles of his culture, I argue that he embodied a very specific Diné ontology.
regarding gender and it is from this understanding that he produced the sand painting textiles.

Klah’s life has been the subject of many scholars, such as Will Roscoe and Sabine Lang, whose work will not be replicated here. What the reader should consider is how framing an investigation of gender and artistic production using etic knowledge provides us with a much richer and culturally nuanced understanding of Klah’s weavings. Within this narrative of Klah’s life and his art lies the story of an individual’s sovereignty to proclaim his gender and sexuality based on the traditional teachings of the Diné people, a sovereignty which continues to defy the aggressive assimilation policies of the settler colonial society. Hosteen Klah was born in December of 1867, seven months before the signing of the Treaty of Bosque Redondo, which allowed the Navajo to return to their homeland after six years of forced imprisonment at Bosque Redondo (see fig. 5).

It had been a time of great upheaval and change for the Navajo. The living conditions for those forced to make the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo were deplorable, and many of the promises made by the United States government upon the signing of the Treaty of Bosque Redondo were never realized. Upon returning to the Navajo homeland Klah’s family settled in the Tunicha area. The treaty was intended to stop the raids initiated by the Diné, but the Utes continued to encroach on the Diné, kidnapping women and children. Fearing for her son, Slim Woman took young Klah to live with his aunt and her Apache husband in the Lukachukai Mountains. Accompanying and assisting his uncle who held the rights to perform the Apache Wind Chant, Klah was introduced to some of
the expectations of a chanter or *hatáałii*, as he learned the details of the ceremony’s rites.\(^{10}\)

---

![Diné Nation Map](http://www.theawl.com/2011/06/fun-with-maps-seven-peculiar-u-s-borders/)

**Fig. 5.** Victoria Johnson, *Diné Nation Map*. 2011. www.theawl.com

It was in the Lukachukai Mountains that the course his life would take was revealed. Klah’s biographer, France Newcomb, related that during his convalescence following a riding accident that resulted in a broken collarbone, cracked ribs and a severely injured hip, it was revealed that Klah was a hermaphrodite (*Hosteen Klah*, 97).

It is not certain if Newcomb uses the term hermaphrodite as it is defined by Western medical conventions. McGreevy writes that Klah was a cross dresser (20).

Others who knew Klah and lived in the Navajo community, such as anthropologist

---

\(^{10}\) The term *hatáałii*, chanter and singer are used this context to refer to someone who holds specialized knowledge that is used in the healing ceremonies of the Diné people.
Gladys Reichard, describe Klah as a transvestite (97). What is apparent from this lack of consistency are the ways in which non-Native scholars attempted to position Klah and his identity as a *Nádlééhí* within Western constructions of gender.

**What’s in a Word: Acknowledging Indigenous Gender Constructions and Ontology**

Newcomb’s use of the term hermaphrodite is indicative of the ways in which nineteenth and twentieth-century social scientists have written about gender identities that did not conform to a Western binary construction. Written records and illustrations of encounters between settlers and Indigenous peoples of North America named these identities using a terminology that naturalizes the settler colonial sexual and gender identities along with the assumptions, attitudes and beliefs that are reflected in the deployment of terms such as *hermaphrodite, berdache* and *transvestite*. The terminology also illustrates how settler colonialists attempted to accommodate and understand these gender identities through the lens of a Western worldview in which gender, biological sex and sexual orientation are often conflated. As Diné scholar Wesley Thomas points out, the term hermaphrodite tends to focus on one’s physical biological attributes and describes an individual as being intersexed (*Gendering Navajo Bodies* 17). *Berdache* and transvestite were other terms that were frequently employed to describe Native Americans whose behavior did not conform to Western notions of biological sex and gendered behavior. These terms like those used by Indigenous cultures to describe culturally specific notions of gender reflect a particular epistemology.
The etymology of the term *berdache* is an American alteration of the French term *bardache*.\(^{11}\) In literature written about Diné genders, Western anthropologists often favored these terms of European origin over the Diné word *Nádlééhi*. This was a common practice utilized by Western scholars until the late 1990s (Williams 1986; Roscoe 1991; Jacobs et al. 1997). Although Roscoe has acknowledged the term *berdache* is problematic, he argues against the use of tribally specific terms, saying it “creates more problems than it solves” (*Changing Ones* 17). However, anthropologist Bea Medicine argues that “*berdache* is a label which obscures tribal variation of Native linguistic terms...By examining this term in each unique cultural context one can see how the various gender roles were played out and privileged” (*Directions in Gender* 3).

Carolyn Epple, in her work among contemporary Diné, has noted that *Nádlééhi* is not just a term to describe someone’s enactment of a specific set of gender traits or occupations; rather terms like *Nádlééhi* describe specific social and spiritual roles that are unique to the cultural group in which they are found (268). Epple argues that the continued employment of terms such as *berdache*, gay, alternative genders and Two-Spirit are indicative of the ways in which Western knowledge systems continue to trump Indigenous epistemologies within the academy. The application of Western terminology to Native American knowledge systems is a further act of colonization.

Anthropologist Lea McChesney refers to this as “mistranslation” where etic knowledge overwrites emic cultural concepts with its etic meanings (133). These types of mistranslations occur when Western academic interpretations of Native American

---

\(^{11}\) The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives the following etymology for the word: “American French, alteration of French *bardache* catamite, from Italian dialect (southern Italy) *bardascio*, from Arabic *bardaj* slave, from Persian *bardag* prisoner, from Middle Persian *vartak*.”
ontologies are examined using Western theoretical frameworks. These Western mistranslations are then circulated within academia, and as a result they inform the work of successive generations of academics and lay scholars. Although since 1998 these terms have fallen out of favor and Two-Spirit is the term that is presently being used, Epple points out that this term, too, is problematic. She notes that the use of one word cannot encompass the numerous configurations of gender and sexual expression that existed in Native North America prior to contact. The generic term Two-Spirit is illustrative of how Indigenous peoples have been forced to construct their reality in a manner that reflects Western constructions of gender and sexuality, rather than deploying culturally specific terminologies that affirm the diversity of gender that was once known in Indigenous communities. However, the employment of the term Two-Spirit demarcates the beginning of a movement in Native North America to reclaim the Indigenous sovereign body and the knowledge associated with it. This will be discussed in more detail in succeeding chapters that examine contemporary gender identities and artistic production.

What does become evident is that Western terms such as “hermaphrodite,” “berdache” and “transvestite” do not fully articulate Diné concepts of gender, let alone express how knowledge regarding gender is constructed and understood within the context of the Diné worldview. The Diné Bizaad or Diné language embodies and expresses an ontology in which four genders are possible. In the chart below, Diné scholar Wesley Thomas explains how genders are differentiated. Here, he explains that differences are determined by gender features, one’s sexual object of choice, demeanor, dress, occupation and sex category. (See Table 1.)
### Table 1

The Navajo Gender System\(^{\text{12}}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender status</th>
<th>Woman 'Asdzāān</th>
<th>Female Nádleehí (Dilbaa')</th>
<th>Hermaphrodite Nádleehí</th>
<th>Male Nádleehí (Nadleehe)</th>
<th>Male Hastiin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender features</td>
<td>men and &quot;Nádleehí&quot;</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>women and Nádleehí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sexual object of choice</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>androgynous</td>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demeanor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>varies</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress</td>
<td>Weaver</td>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>varies</td>
<td>weaver</td>
<td>hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>female body</td>
<td>female body</td>
<td>mixed genitalia</td>
<td>male body</td>
<td>male body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender/sex category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This complex construction of gender is directly related to the way in which the Diné worldview is constructed and expresses an ontology that is specific to the Navajo people. Though there are five genders listed here, the hermaphrodite was added by Thomas to recognize those individuals who are born intersexed. Through his analysis of the Diné

\(^{\text{12}}\) Thomas uses the term Navajo in the original publication of this table.
creation stories gathered over an eight-year period, as well as linguistic analysis and conversations with traditional medicine women and men, Thomas writes that the Nádleehí is one of the original entities in the Diné origin stories:

The creation stories state that there are three underworlds. The nádleehí were created toward the end of the second underworld and their roles were clearly defined by the spiritual leaders who created them. The living holy beings, Dîyîn Diné’e, in the underworlds, were not human forms, but spirits. The nádleehí’s existence in the underworlds was that of a gendered, not sexed, being who conducted herself by doing the work of women. Biological beings were not created until the spirits evolved into the fourth world (the present world, where we are living today), when the physical aspects of the spirits were reincarnated into physically sexed entities. At first in the fourth underworld, the spiritual beings of women and men were created in physical forms as female and male persons. After the creation of human beings, the Dîyîn Diné’e, descended or ascended into other worlds. Only a small number of them were transformed in other earthly entities. The Nádlééhí was created in the form of a male-bodied woman, and the dilbaa’ was created in the form of a female-bodied man. This is the basic construction of four genders in traditional Navajo culture. Until the early part of this century, this classification was the normal designation, according to the stories I heard from my great-grandfather who died in 1972, and from my great-grandmother and grandmother who still reside in the Navajo Nation (155).

The Diné origin stories relate events of historical significance that eventually lead to the emergence of the Diné into this world in their present form. These narratives
establish customs and define the boundaries of the Diné homelands. According to Thomas, it is these stories that describe the foundation of Diné culture and define and acknowledge the role of the Nádlééhi.

Thomas explains because, “as such they assisted in the maintaining traditional cultural knowledge through religious ceremonies, sharing in child rearing and teaching pottery making and weaving... Some of the stories are sacred, others are not, but it is clearly understood that the Nádlééhi gender was intended to have at least a spiritual place within the culture” (154).

As the creation story shared here by Thomas indicates, biological sex was only bestowed upon the emergence into the fourth world or this world, “when the physical aspects of the spirits were reincarnated into physically sexed entities” (139). The predetermination of one’s gender based on biological sex is not a reified configuration, as it is in Western cultures. From a Navajo perspective, Thomas explains, gender is more fluid: “Gender identification and classification are ongoing processes. Gender identity can change with time and events” (13). This is evident in the fact that the terminology used to refer to one’s gender will change over the course of one’s life. (See Table 2.) The absence of a gender-specific term for the first year of a child’s life indicates one’s biological sex is not the sole determining factor of one’s gender. This notion is expressed in the Diné oral traditions or creation stories as explained by Thomas who indicates that the gender of the Díyin Diné’e (Holy People) was expressed by their role and function, not by the presence or absence of genitalia (17).
Table 2

Navajo Gender Terminology for Select Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Female(s)</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Male(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-12 months</td>
<td></td>
<td>'awéé</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>'at’ée yázhi</td>
<td>'atchíí</td>
<td>'askii yázhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-13</td>
<td>'at’ééd at’ééké (girls)</td>
<td>chaqma’ii (youngster)</td>
<td>‘askíí ‘askííké (boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-30</td>
<td>Ch'kééh (young woman) Ch’ikéí (young women)</td>
<td>tsilkééh (youth) Diné</td>
<td>Dinééh (young man) tsilkééh (young men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-70</td>
<td>Asdzáni (woman) Sáanii (women)</td>
<td>Diné (people)</td>
<td>Hastíín (man) Hastóí (men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>'Asdzáá’sáni (old woman)</td>
<td>Diné</td>
<td>Hastiín sání (old man)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As it is expressed in the oral traditions of the Diné, these original instructions given to them by the Holy People acknowledge that gender is not conflated with biological sex and that gender is not binary. The examples of the *Diné Bizaad* given here
illustrate the interrelationship between language and cognition, a concept that has been with us for some time.

The Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis ignited the debate about the degree to which language influences how we perceive and think about the world and how we express ourselves (Lee 85). At one end of the spectrum are the proponents of linguistic determinism, who posit that language not only structures our cognitions of the world we live in but defines it. At the other end are proponents of linguistic relativity, who, while they do not question that language does influence our cognitions, believe it is not the sole determining factor.

What has evolved from this debate is recognition that language and culture do influence the way we construct our reality. The term that addresses the interplay between language and culture in shaping our realities is referred to as linguaculture. It is this interconnection between language and culture that underlies Thomas’s statement that nádleehí is a term, “only understood and only valid within the Diné tribal world within the four sacred mountains” (124). The term nádleehi describes a gender identity that expresses an epistemology and ontology that is uniquely and specifically Diné.

The nádleehi had many roles within the community. Many were weavers. The textiles created by the Diné have in the past and in contemporary times been prized for their beauty and as expressions of fine art. Considered as craft production within a Western art historical context, Diné textiles have consistently contributed to the economic status and wealth of the Diné people. They were first traded with other tribal groups, and then as they grew in popularity among non-Native collectors, they became a means for Diné women to participate in a market economy.
It was not unusual that Klah was a weaver, but he was also a hatáalii or singer. The textiles he and his family produced merged the cultural knowledge of these two roles. As a singer Klah possessed the ceremonial knowledge that is used by a hatáalii to restore and maintain hózhó, the central concept in the Navajo epistemology. Witherspoon and Peterson’s analysis of Navajo artistic production explains the centrality of this concept as the “grand metaphor by which the Navajo understand the world and their place in it” (15). Hózhó is translated as meaning “beauty” or “beautiful conditions.” According to Witherspoon, hózhó is not only the most important word in the Diné language, but it expresses the most important concept found in the arts and culture of the Diné people, whether in sand painting, weaving, poetry or dance, all of which are preformed to maintain, celebrate or restore Hózhó (16).

In this context, unlike textiles produced by other weavers, those attributed to Klah were permanent representations of sand paintings. The controversy surrounding the representation of sand paintings that were always created to be destroyed versus his representing them in permanent forms such as textiles is as active today as it was in Klah’s time. It is impossible to know definitively why he chose to ignore this taboo and weave these oral traditions into textiles. However, one cannot ignore the role and significant impact of forced acculturation through the establishment of residential schools and the continual assault on traditional lifeways by missionaries and government policy when assessing the impact of Western pressure on Indigenous cultures. This no doubt had an impact of Klah’s decisions to do what he could to preserve the knowledge he thought would be lost upon his death. To this end he encouraged Franc Newcomb to create over five hundred watercolor replicas of the sand paintings she witnessed attending numerous
ceremonies among the Navajo people. His relationship with Mary Wheelwright resulted in the establishment of the House of Navajo Religion, which became a repository for watercolors and a number of his and his family’s sand painting textiles, as well as a collection of wax cylinder recordings of the chant ways known by Klah.

As I stated earlier, an ethnotheoretical approach as described by Aaron Fry not only provides broader understanding of the iconographical/iconological content and meaning of Klah’s artist production, but highlights how the concept of hózhó is embodied in every aspect of a Diné person’s life. Although it is important to visually present the iconographical/iconological content, the figures shown here of the textiles, Whirling Logs and The Skies, are presented partially in order to recognize the sensitivity and controversy that surrounds the permanent representation of sand paintings in their entirety.

I am not Diné nor do I come from an Athabaskan-speaking tradition, and thus I rely upon the writings of Gary Witherspoon and Glen Peterson to assist me in this analysis. Witherspoon and Peterson have a professional interest as anthropologists but also have familial ties to the Diné community. Witherspoon, writing of his experience of living on the Diné Nation for over fifteen year, says he “learned about Navajo art and philosophy not as an isolated phenomena but instead have learned about them in the context of the whole culture” (4).

**Dynamic Symmetry and Holism Asymmetry and the Expression of Hózhó**

Witherspoon explains that the concept of hózhó is expressed through dynamic symmetry and holism asymmetry. Holism asymmetry is described as things that are complementary but opposite, for example male and female. Maleness is associated with static reality, femaleness with active aspect of reality. The realm of the female is defined
as anything that is active, productive and reproductive, and as a consequence women dominate social and economic affairs. Maleness is associated with all that is unchanging or static in nature; therefore ceremony and ritual are considered to be male. Rather than binary opposites male and female are seen as bipolar, “opposed aspects of a single phenomenon, …much like what is visually depicted in the Chinese symbol of yin and yang” (25). According to Witherspoon and Peterson, together the balance between these bi-polar complementary opposites creates a “fertile and dynamic ebb and flow” which is dynamic and symmetric (24). This symmetry is first explained in the emergence stories of the Diné and is found in the concept of the supreme alternate pair of the male Holy Person  Są’ ah Naaghái (thought), who is described as being the source of beautiful and powerful thought, and female Holy Person Bik’eh Hózhó, who is the source of beautiful and powerful speech, song, prayer and action. They are the inner and outer form of each other and are complementary opposites. One is static and the other active; the movement from one state to the other is constant (49).

Witherspoon and Peterson write that it is this creative synthesis that underlies Navajo history, culture and language. When Są’ah Naaghái and Bik’eh Hózhó are in balance, it is said that a state of hózhó exists. This is reflected in Diné oral traditions in which the union between Są’ah Naaghái and Bik’eh Hózhó resulted in the birth of a daughter Hózhó. She is the Holy person known as Changing Woman, the mother of the Diné people and of the Twins who made the world safe for the people. Hózhó, or Changing Women, is metaphorically and symbolically represented by a diamond shape or spatial configuration, which appears in many of examples of Diné artistic production including sand paintings (41).
Maladies in the Diné worldview are thought to be the result of disharmony or hochó. Navajo ceremonial practices are enacted in an attempt to restore harmony. It is through the performance of Chantways by a Hatáałii and his/her apprentices that one can regain the favor of Holy People, who, if pleased by the ceremony, will restore balance and hózhó. James Faris explains that,

Holy People do not themselves ‘cause’ illness. It is a violation by humans of the prescribed order and of the proper ceremonial observances and attitudes, the conditions of balance, beauty, harmony and peace that brings about illness. This order, these ceremonial observances, these proper social relations have been set down by the Holy people in Diné history (14).

According to Witherspoon, the Diné oral history recounts the journey of their ancestors or Holy People through four underworlds or previous stages of existence (26). As they travelled through each world, they acquired knowledge and ritual power that they used to bring the present stage of existence or Fourth World into being. This history is recalled in the Chantways performed by a hatáałii and his apprentices. It is through creating visual representations of the Holy People, and reciting these oral histories represented in the sand paintings, that the Holy People will bless the ceremony and that hózhó can be restored. The type of malady defines the chantway that must be sung. Klah knew and conducted the Nightway, the Blessingway, the Hailway, the Navajo Windway, the Mountainway, the Big Star Way, the Apache Windway, and the Beautyway (Faris 87). Most written accounts of Klah’s life remark upon his exceptional ability to memorize these ceremonial practices of the Diné people. For example, the Nightway ceremony occurs over nine days and nights and “incorporates detailed songs, prayers and sand
paintings and the use of sacred material objects” (Faris 237). Klah’s apprenticeship took 26 years; in 1917, at the age of forty-nine, he presided over his first Nightway ceremony. (Newcomb 1964 117) It was a feat not to be taken lightly. There is no room for error, which would risk not pleasing the Holy People and placing the patient’s life in peril.

Being a Nádlééhi, Klah embodied both the static and active dimensions of Navajo reality. Newcomb writes, “He was expected to master all the knowledge, skill, and leadership of a man and also all the skills, ability and intuition of a woman” (97). Although Newcomb’s statement reveals more about Western assumptions regarding the binary construction of gender roles, it gives us a sense of how Klah’s gender was seen outside the Diné community. Klah not only undertook and performed the tasks normally ascribed to female members of his clan, he also apprenticed and became a hatáałii or singer which is a function primarily undertaken by a biological and gendered male (see figs. 6 and 7). One’s position as a nádlééhi does not necessarily preclude becoming a hatáałii and it appears that Klah was an exception to the rule in this manner. Roscoe writes that “…many Nádlééhi consistently received religious training,” although he does not state that the “religious” training was that of a Hatáałii or singer (Changing Ones 44).
As a nádlééhí, Klah performed many of the gendered activities as defined by Diné ontology, such as weaving. These activities within the Diné context were viewed as complimentary to roles of men, but, as indicated earlier, Diné women wielded a lot of influence within Diné society and often held an amazing amount of power compared to their Anglo sisters. Marsha Weisiger notes that for the Diné, “Women stood at the center of almost all aspects of Diné life and thought: spiritual beliefs, kinship, residence patterns, land-use traditions, and economy” (167). She also states that the role women played in economic production was central because they controlled the means of their own production through their ownership of both the livestock and the land. Diné women
also produced one of the most valued commodities: woven textiles fashioned from the wool of their sheep, a tradition believed to have been learned from the Pueblos. Prized for both their beauty and utilitarian purposes, Diné textiles were highly valued first by their trading partners and then by non-Native collectors. Will Roscoe wrote that by the 1890s two-thirds of the items woven by Navajo women were for non-tribal use (*We’wha and Klah* 137). The women in Klah’s family were especially adept at weaving and as a result textiles were one of the family’s main sources of income (Newcomb 67).

![Figure 7](image.png)

*Fig. 7. Franc Newcomb, Klah by unfinished sand painting textile. N.d. Photograph. The Morton H. Sachs Collection of Franc Newcomb. Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, Albuquerque.*

Getra J Murphy notes that designs employed by the Navajo in crafting their textiles demonstrate their ability to adapt to new cultural influences and the economic demands of their patrons. However, this was never done to the detriment of the Diné aesthetic (259).

As Fry states, underlying the weaving process, including design choices, is the Navajo concept of *hózhó* (Fry 2013). Witherspoon’s description of *hózhó* is “the positive
or ideal environment” (Language and Art 24). In the context of weaving, hózhó is reflected not only in the choices regarding the design elements, but also in the balance of asymmetry and symmetries that ultimately reflects the weaver’s thought, desire and ability to create beauty. Robert S Drake writes

In Navajo weaving and sand painting compositions, integration of techniques utilizing holistic asymmetry is one of the highest priorities in the correct composition of the work. The structural elements incorporated in Navajo art, parts, symmetries, asymmetries, bipolarities, color, energy, texture and symbolism all go to form a rendering of the universe in microcosm. Navajo art utilized and continues to utilize bilateral symmetry (the symmetry of left and right), symmetry of movement and space (activity in space), and symmetry of color (with balance from the color wheel hue and lightness/darkness (par.39).

According to Susan McGreevy, Klah learned to weave as a young boy and had woven ordinary rugs most of his life (20). He attended a number of World Fairs, beginning with the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1892-1893 (Parezo 46). It is interesting to note that in the promotional material for the Chicago fair, he is not identified as a weaver. Newcomb writes that his attendance at this exposition was to demonstrate the creation of sand paintings. Perhaps because the organizers are likely to have viewed weaving as an activity only undertaken by biological females, Klah’s participation on this world stage was in keeping with Western gendered expectations (see fig. 8).
In 1916 he defied tradition by weaving a textile depicting two Yeibichai dancers which he sold for several sheep to a Mr. Ed Davis. There was backlash from the community and especially from other hatáałíi, demanding that it be destroyed, but Newcomb writes that once it left the reservation the controversy dissipated (Hosteen Klah 115). It is interesting that, following the outcry that resulted from this transgression of Navajo protocol and at the urging of Newcomb, Klah would begin to work with her and direct her efforts in creating watercolors of the sand paintings.13

Sand paintings are meant to be ephemeral. They are only to be created within the context of healing; once the ceremony is finished the sand painting is to be destroyed. Witherspoon explains that, “To the Navajo the artistic or aesthetic value of the sand

---

13 Newcomb reports that over a twenty-year period almost five hundred of the watercolor replicas of the sand paintings were created. These are in the collection of a museum. They are not accessible to the general public. Permission to consult these visual documents is only granted by the Navajo Nation’s cultural affairs office.
painting is found in its creation, not in its preservation. Its ritual value is in its symbolic or representational power and its use as a vehicle of conception. Once it has served that purpose, it no longer has any ritual value” (Witherspoon 1977: 152).

However, several scholars have reported that textiles replicating sand paintings were made as early 1896 (Kent 1981; McGreevy 1989; Rodee 1989). Anthropologist Kate Peck Kent attributes these textiles to Naltha Chu. After consultation with his family, Klah wove his first textile replicating a sand painting from the Nightway Chant in 1919 (Parezo 1983 47).

According to Campbell, Klah’s textiles are based primarily on sand paintings from the Nightway or Hailway with a few exceptions being from the Shooting Way chant (55). McGreevy writes that Klah was careful to weave sand paintings that were based on the chants he was qualified to sing (21).

Klah’s first sand painting textile is said to be Whirling Logs, named from the sand painting that recalls the story of the Whirling Sticks or the Whirlpool from the Nightway chant. Using Washington Matthews’ description from the text The Night Chant: A Navaho Ceremony as a guide, one can see how closely the textile woven by Klah replicates the sand painting Matthews witnessed. According to Washington Matthews, this design represents the vision of Bithatini, a visionary at the lake of Tonihiln or place of emergence, often represented by the blue square in the middle of the textile. In this example the textile does not have the reference to the place of emergence (see fig. 9).
Matthews’ description of the sand painting and explanation shows us what part of the young visionary’s journey the textile is illustrating. He explains that the four black rectangles radiate from the center forming a cross that is outlined in fine lines of white, yellow, blue and red. These colors represent the white foam of the water, the yellow water-pollen and the blue and red rainbow tints. Centered in each quadrant of the logs are four sacred corn plants: the white corn plant represents the east, the blue, the south, the yellow, the west, and the black the north. Eight Holy People or Yéi are depicted sitting on the floating logs: the four outer Yéi are male, differentiated from female Yéi by the round shapes of their heads, and their two eagle plumes. Female Yeis are indicated by the square shape of the head and by the yellow color on their arms and chest. This yellow color indicates they were created of yellow corn (see fig. 10).
In the north and south of this sand painting are the humpbacks or Mountain Sheep, which are also referred to as the Bighorn Gods; they are male, as indicated by the round shape of their heads. Radiating from their heads are scarlet feathers, which are meant to represent sunbeams, while the horn shapes mimic the horns of the mountain sheep (see fig. 11).

To the east is the Talking God, which is identified by a squirrel pouch that hangs from his wrist. His head is adorned with eagle plumes (see fig. 12). To the west is the Hastséhogan, who wears a black garment, eagle plume and owl feathers (see fig. 13). Both the Talking God and Hastséhogan hit the logs and cause them to create a whirlpool. All of the Holy People’s bodies are outlined in red, which represents sunlight. On the outside edge, enclosing the Holy People on three sides, is a female guardian figure.14

---

14 The description of this textile is based on Washington Matthews’ account of the sand painting from the text Night Chant: A Navaho Ceremony. The fact that the description of the sand painting can be used to
Every element and the manner in which it is executed in both the sand painting and the textile relates to the concept of hózhó. The pairing of opposites such as the female and male Holy People is one example of how the concept of hózhó is visually presented.
in this textile. This figure, by Harold Carey Jr., demonstrates the ways in which color is used symbolically to signify Diné life and spiritual beliefs. The colors are shown to represent times of day, geographical formations, rivers, and specific Holy People from the creation story (see fig. 14).

Fig. 14. Harold Carey Jr., *Color in Navajo Life and Beliefs*. www.navajopeople.org/blog/thenavajo-four-sacred-colors/.

The textile entitled *The Skies* is based on a sand painting from the Male Shootingway Chant. According to Mary Wheelwright *The Skies* is the last sand painting

---

15 Details of the textile have been digitally altered to observe Diné protocol
of a Mountain-Shootingway ceremony. Diné oral tradition indicates it was given to the Sun’s children, otherwise known as the Slayer Twins, Holy Man and Boy.

This textile, like the sand painting, uses color and shape as metaphors to express the passage of the sun and qualities of light throughout the day. It is a radial style sand painting. The textile features four large keystone shapes (see fig. 15). Utilizing the diagram by Carey, the color of these four shapes symbolizing the four directions depicts the quality of light from dawn to the night. Here the white color or east symbolizes the white dawn, followed by the blue sky of midday in the north. To the west yellow is used to represent twilight and finally black to signify night and the south. The keystone shapes and rectangle signify the place where something lives and all the clouds that move across the sky (Hosteen Klah 24). At the base of each of the keystone shapes are twelve tail feathers.

In the upper portion of the keystones are depictions of messenger birds used by Yeis or Holy People to communicate with each other and the earth people (Ibid 24). The eastern keystone representation illustrates the dawn’s messenger birds: a yellow-headed black bird, and a blue bird, along with a mountain goat. The southern blue sky has two wild canaries, while the western evening sky has two blue birds. The evening sky differs in that it contains a depiction of the Milky Way, stars and constellations (Wyman 34). On each of the keystones are four Yéi figures. On the left side of the textile flanking the white keystone on either side are two guardian figures, the sun’s tobacco pouch and the black bat. The day, evening and night skies are joined together by rainbow bands. The four circles with horns located in the middle of the textile represent the sun, the moon and the winds. Wyman writes that hatáalí, Judge Yellowhair, identifies the Celestial Beings
depicted in the sand painting as the four beings who emerged from the underworld to drain the new earth, which was still covered with water. After giving their calls to the four directions they went to the four corners of the world, where they remain to this day (Ibid 34).

This version of *The Skies* by Klah was his last textile and Newcomb writes that it was the largest on which he had worked. It measures 123” x 110”. It was unfinished at the time of his death in 1937 and was completed by his nieces, Gladys and Irene Manuelito. From many accounts it is reported that Klah worked together with the other weavers in the family (see fig. 16). Newcomb writes that Klah’s sister Ahdesbah dyed the wool for his first textile, while his mother spun and carded it. She also reports that there was a constant demand for these weavings from non-Native collectors and institutions. McGreevy has been able to attribute thirty-one sand painting textiles to Klah and his family.\(^6\) It appears from Newcomb’s written narrative that many were sold to museums and collectors before they were completed. No doubt the family prospered economically during the time of great change and economic instability that marked the 1930s.

Having said that, Newcomb points out that Klah was not one to tempt the fates. He took the precaution of performing a full nine-day Nightway Chant to protect his nieces once they began to assist him with his weavings and to create their own sand painting textiles. He did the same for Franc Newcomb, who helped him by making watercolor copies of sand paintings and for Mary Wheelwright, who sponsored the recording of the chantways on wax cylinders and who would eventually build a museum to house Klah’s ceremonial objects. Newcomb reports Klah was also very diligent in following weaving protocols and preforming the appropriate prayers and songs throughout the weaving process.

According to Coolidge, a contemporary of Klah’s, the prohibition regarding the creation of a permanent form of the sand painting comes from a time,

When Pretends to See People, the Navajo Prophet, was taught sand-painting by the Yeibitchai, he was shown pictures painted on clouds. That was the gods' way, forbidden to earthly people, who could not be trusted with permanent pictures. For mortals only sand could be used, and the painting must be wiped out the same day. The same rule was laid down by the War Eagle, when he showed Picks up Scraps his many paintings made on buckskin and taught him to reproduce them in colored sands. To the Navajo mind it is, therefore, extremely hazardous to make a permanent copy of a sand-painting, and there are disquieting stories (Coolidge and Coolidge 105).
Stories of the wrath visited upon those who broke this taboo are mentioned in much of the literature about the sand painting textiles. Washington Matthews, whose text is mentioned in this essay, is said to have died as a result of encouraging the replication of sand paintings in watercolor drawings. Other weavers are said to have met similar fates. Perhaps, as anthropologist Nancy Parezo suggests, most weavers rationalized breaking the taboo of replicating the sand paintings by altering details of the sand paintings, believing that if the details of the sand painting were altered, the Holy People would not consecrate it and therefore it would “remain a secular object” (75).

In view of this taboo it seems curious that Klah would defy protocol and weave sand paintings in a permanent form. Comparing Klah’s weaving Whirling Logs and the description of the sand paintings in the fieldwork of anthropologists such as Matthews, Klah’s weavings do not deviate from the sand painting. According to McGreevy, among the Diné Hatáałii collectively, there was concern regarding the decrease in the number of ceremonies actively being performed, as well as a decline in the willingness of young men to make the commitment needed to apprentice (21). Times were changing and Klah may have wondered whether the knowledge he had acquired would be lost. All around him he saw signs of the increasing acculturation of the Navajo youth, as students were being shipped off to residential schools and missionaries attempted to eradicate Navajo religious practices. It is possible that creating a permanent record outweighed the risks of completely losing the ceremonies.

This appears to be the most likely explanation when it is considered in light of Klah’s encouragement of Franc Newcomb’s watercolor illustrations of the sand paintings and his participation in the production of wax cylinder recordings of the chantways he
knew. However, I would like to consider another possible explanation for this change in protocol. It takes into account the fact the Klah was a Nádlééhí. As such he embodied both femaleness that is associated with the active aspect of reality, and maleness, associated with the static aspect. His maleness allowed him to learn ceremony and ritual, but his femaleness, which is marked by the active, vital, creative and productive, was realized in his weaving (Language and Art 196).

Weaving is considered female because it continually changes, as the weaver must always think of new forms and designs. As previously stated maleness and femaleness are seen as complementary opposites, but this does not imply equal status in the Navajo worldview, for the female of these complementary pairings is given more emphasis. This dynamic balance plays out in Klah’s negotiations with the changes he saw occurring around him. Klah’s weavings of the sand paintings expressed a new way to respond to the changes that he saw occurring, which threatened the continuation of the very ceremonies and rituals that were so important to him and the Navajo people. To break taboo and give permanent form to the sand paintings was a way of ensuring that the static nature of sand paintings as dictated by cultural protocol would be preserved. A record of the Chantways he knew could thus be passed on to the successive generations of Diné Hatáálii. In bringing together these dualistic modes of creation, weaving and sand painting, the active and the static created a balance between their two modes in a time where life was anything but for the Navajo people.

17 While I was an assistant curator at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, there were several visits made by Navajo Hatáálii to consult the materials created by Klah and those that were made under his direction. These visits were arranged by the Navajo Cultural Preservation Society office, which determines who can consult these records.
In 1935 W.W. Hill, an anthropologist, wrote that according to his informants there were six Nádlééhí living on the Diné reservation. He notes in his article that the concept of the Nádlééhí was “well formulated and his cultural role well substantiated in the mythology. In the tales dealing with creation emergence of the Navajo the pursuits and the activities of the Nádlééhí are outlined” (Hill 274). The stigma associated with gender variance in Western cultures was not present in how Nádlééhí were thought of within the Diné community. In fact, according to Hill, it was quite the opposite: “The outlook of Navajo society towards the Nádlééhí is very favorable. They are believed to have been given charge of the wealth in the beginning and control it to the present day” (Hill 274). He continues, “The family which counted a transvestite (sic) among its members or had a hermaphrodite (sic) child born to them was considered by themselves and everyone else as very fortunate” (274).

It is important to note that the same article shows evidence of the assimilation of Western attitudes towards gender diversity. Quoting one of his informants Albert Sandoval, Hill wrote that the respect once given to Nádlééhí had given away to ridicule and that any child who showed a tendency towards being a Nádlééhí was discouraged (274).

Since Klah’s death, we have witnessed a decline in the number of people within the Diné community who self-identify as Nádlééhí. Thomas questions whether the Nádlééhí, actually exists today (Gendering Navajo Bodies, 38). This is an important question especially in light of the violent acts of assimilation and the government policies that have attempted to erase Indigenous languages and worldviews. In these contemporary times the acceptance and presence of those who identity as being Nádlééhí
have given way to intolerance. In some instances it has led to violence and to the deaths of individuals who, like Klah, declare their sovereignty to proclaim their gender and sexuality in defiance of the aggressive assimilation policies of the settler colonial society. Klah’s life and art are evidence of the how the Diné constructed gender, and of how he embodied Diné ontology in his day-to-day life as a Nádlééhi, as a weaver, and as a Diné person.
Chapter Four: Go-won-go: Troubling Settler Colonial Constructions of Gender and Performativity

Now that certain medical men have shown, to their own satisfaction that Spiritualism is a disease of which peripatetic furniture, discordant guitar-playing, and ungrammatical revelation are the symptoms, it is time they should carefully investigate that curious nervous disorder particular to women, which is vulgarly called “dress reform,” and which is characterized by an abnormal and unconquerable thirst for trousers.

*New York Times*, May 27, 1876, p.6

Miss Mohawk impersonates in her play the hero, and her acting is so realistic that it is often hard to believe that she is a woman...Miss Mohawk is among other things, an expert horsewoman, a clever shot, an able fencer, an excellent archer, and very skillful in using the lariat. She captures the wild Indian ponies, and with her own hands breaks them to the saddle.

*Alice W. Eyre, Metropolitan Magazine*, 1898

A recent online search in the National Museum of Australia photo archives uncovered a black and white image of an attractive or even handsome Native American. Accompanying the image was a description, presumably written by a member of the museum staff, that read, "Postcard featuring a black and white photograph of a studio portrait of a seated man wearing a velvet suit and knee boots, labeled, Aboriginally Yours, Go-won-go Mohawk" (National Museum of Australia). Go-won-go, by all accounts, had a larger than life persona(s) that seemed to defy labels of any kind. Her "troubling gender" performances were, for the most part, confined to the vaudeville stages in the United States and Europe. However, the existence of this image quite possibly reflects Oscar Wilde's assertion that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (see fig. 17).
As the first Native American playwright, Go-won-go’s life and the retailing of it is an example of what Scott Lyons refers to as “rhetorical sovereignty,” “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in
this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (241). In plying her craft, Go-won-go Mohawk brought into the realm of public discourse a construction of Native American masculinity that differed from popular stereotypes. While her on- and off-stage performances revealed the unstable nature of gender, there is some speculation that she was in the modern sense of the word Two-Spirited.

Considering the Victorian era's prescribed roles and behaviors for women as outlined by what would become known as the cult of domesticity, Go-won-go not only embodied Judith Butler's assertion that one performs one's gender, but also "troubled" the heteronormativity of settler colonial constructions of gender and its propensity to conflate gender with biological sex. This image of Go-won-go in a velvet suit and leather boots is a reminder of the way in which Native Americans embraced different constructions of gender that rejected heteronormativity. As a visual representation, this photograph suggests how Go-won-go deflected the politics of recognition for her own ends as well as the ongoing struggle for recognition and justice by Native Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Go-won-go performed an Indigenous understanding of gender fluidity as a means to subvert the construction of the Native American as uncivilized. Her performances were a physical embodiment of Gerald Vizenor's notion of survivance, as is the telling of her story. In her stage performances as the Native American male protagonist in the plays *Wep-Ton-No Mah; The Indian Mail Carrier* and *The Flaming Arrow*, she did not portray Native Americans as victims but as the heroes. Based upon the reviews and popularity of her stage
productions, Victorian society appeared to be in awe of both her on-stage and off-stage personas.

As Michel Foucault points out, the Victorian era that in contemporary times we associate with decorum and sexual repression was actually preoccupied with sex and sexuality. Foucault writes, "There was a steady proliferation of discourses, concerned with sex—specific discourses, different from one another both by their form and by their object: a discursive ferment that gathered momentum from the eighteenth century onward" (18). This, according to Foucault, was a result of what he identifies as a shift from the deployment of alliances to a deployment of sexuality. The system of power where the aristocratic lord held power over life and death was supplanted by the middle class with a system of power over life, based on self affirmation and preservation. According to Laura Ann Stoler, it was through the deployment of sexuality that the emerging bourgeoisie marked and maintained its distinctiveness from those it had colonized (133). Although Stoler’s research focuses on European imperialistic endeavors in other colonies, her insights can be applied to the Native American experience in North America, particularly concerning miscegenation. Mark Rifkin's analysis addresses the specificities of deployment of sexuality within a North American context. He explains this was one of the ways in which the settler colonial emerging middle class marked its distinctiveness from North America's first peoples (33). Sex was no longer just a secular concern, but a state concern as well (Foucault 116). Sex became something to be approached calmly and with control, to be studied rationally, and to be analyzed and classified. Foucault writes, "The society that emerged in the nineteenth century… put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourse concerning it [and] also set
out to formulate the uniform truth of sex” (Ibid 69). It is this discourse that produced knowledge regarding gender and sexuality that defined the prescriptive delineations between genders and the sexes that continue into contemporary times. As Rifkin points out, Foucault informs us about the dynamics and interplay between the construction of knowledge/power and truth. Foucault's writings demonstrate how our understanding of what is ‘normative’ is a social construction, naturalized and maintained by the hegemony of heteropatriarchy. Those that did not conform to these prescriptive expressions were often silenced and/or punished in the criminal justice system. This is particularly the case with women who did not conform to societal expectations. These concerns regarding sex and sexuality ultimately found expression in the government policies of both Canada and the United States. Rifkin speaks to the ways in which government policies such as the Dawes Act (1887) and the residential school system were employed as two mechanisms used by the settler nation states to regulate and enforce heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity. Foucault’s and Rifkin’s works are integral to understanding the context in which Native American people’s lives have been and continued to be lived.

The degree to which government Indian policy impacted Go-won-go's life can be debated; she did not grow up on a reservation. Although her father returned to the reservation from time to time there is no indication that young Caroline, later known as Go-wan-go, ever spent time in the community. As the name she used suggests, she obviously identified as being Seneca, having been born on the Cattaraugus reservation, as her father was. She would become known internationally and nationally only by her Seneca name. Go-won-go's life is in many ways indicative of how settler nation-state government policies impacted the lives of Native American people, policies such as
removing children and sending them to residential schools and the removal and relocation of Native Americans from their traditional territories. This destructive impact is also evident in the dismantling of traditional forms of government, which had a profound impact on Native American communities, especially for those Nations, who, like the Seneca, were matrilineal.

**The Cult of Domesticity**

Go-won-go's life indicates how heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity enforced not only within the Native American experience but also in how the settler nation states maintained the colonial order among non-Native people. Louis Althusser identified this as interpellation, a socialization process in which dominant ideologies are spread and maintained through and by public and private institutions such as the family/church and the education systems. Examples of intellpellation in the North American colonial context include how North American settler societies, like their European counterparts, delineated the gender roles of men and women. More specifically I am referring to the cult of domesticity, which describes the way in which life was divided between the public sphere and private sphere. Those activities that occurred outside the home or in the public sphere were dominated by men, whereas the care of children and home were the exclave of women. That is not to say women did not venture out into the public sphere. During the late-nineteenth century women did work outside the home, but there were still very rigid societal and class expectations regarding what were considered proper occupations for both women and men. Cindy Aron writes, "The domestic ideology elaborated in the early-nineteenth century instructed proper ladies to remain in a separate,
domestic sphere and to refrain, unless absolutely necessary, from entering the labor force” (3). If a woman needed to work the options were very limited.

By the time Go-won-go had entered the labor force a new age was dawning. The American Bureau of Labor reports that in 1900 nineteen percent of women eligible to work were employed (Fisk 1). However, the opportunities for women entering the workforce were limited and many women at the turn-of-the-century found employment within the burgeoning manufacturing industries. Go-won-go fashioned for herself a very different career that embraced an entrepreneurial spirit that was unusual for a woman of her time.

Go-won-go promoted herself as the only Native American actress and in many ways, this was a true assessment. Native American women did take to the stage. The most famous of Go-won-go’s contemporaries was the poet E. Pauline Johnson. Others would succumb to the allure of the stage and follow in her footsteps; among these were Molly Spotted Eagle, Princess Deer Horn, Tsianna Redfeather (actually Florence Evans) and Princess White Deer (Vigil 195).18 However, no one performed their indigeneity quite like Go-won-go (see fig. 18). It might be argued that performers of this generation were more often than not performing a form of “Indianness” that conformed to non-Native expectations and stereotypes. However, as Indigenous scholar Phillip Deloria notes these performative acts were,

[p]roducts of a cultural encounter laced with colonial intent, these people were at the same time producers — of images and ideas ripe for white consumption.

Even as they tried to fend off attacks on Indian cultures, a number also used white

anxieties to launch their own attacks—constrained, we must always admit—on white culture itself (230).

Fig. 18. John Wood, *Go-won-go, the Indian Mail Carrier*. 1885, Photographic postcard. British Museum Collection. London.

Kiara Vigil offers a more nuanced perspective than Deloria. She writes that by the turn-of-the-twentieth century the stakes for Native public figures had shifted so their performances of “Indianess” were used “...to claim their rights as modern, American citizens who wanted to use citizenship to intervene in the affairs of a government that had already been intervening in Native peoples’ affairs for far too long” (139). Go-won-go’s performances were a part of this desire to prove that Indigenous people were more than capable of participating in American society.
The narrative Go-won-go created with her gender performances both on and off the stage complicated non-Native audiences’ expectations regarding gender and notions of masculinity and femininity, revealing them as social constructions. In the stage productions she starred in, the Native American was the protagonist, a hero who had a non-Native love interest, and, in a very melodramatic fashion, challenged American societal expectations at the beginning of the twentieth century (see fig. 19).

Fig. 19. *The Only Indian Actress, Go-won-go Mohawk*, USA. N.d. Photograph. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

For non-Native audiences Go-won-go’s portrayal as a male protagonist may have been a novelty, but the oral traditions of many Native American cultures present gender fluidity in what are known as coyote or trickster stories. According to First Nations’ oral tradition the trickster is known by such names as Nanbush, Nanabozho, Weesakeechak
and so on. In the Seneca oral traditions s/he was known by the name of Skunny Wundy or the Mischief Maker (Parker 1994). Although, the trickster is often portrayed as male, the sexual ambiguity of the trickster is well documented. They frequently transform themselves into women and are sometimes represented as hermaphrodites (Babcock and Cox 100). This ambiguity, according to Wiget, reveals the critical function of the trickster, which “is not so much to call cultural categories into question as to demonstrate the artificiality of culture itself” (94).

Amethyst First Rider explains that the trickster is not so much a character as he/she is an energy. In Indigenous oral tradition there is little concern about how the trickster figure came into being and the scope and limits of his nature and power. “He or she just is …. The only constancy is non-constancy. Anything and everything is possible. This is the trickster. He or she is the culture-hero, an ignoble, stupid character, a transformer, a gift-giver, and an enemy of boundaries. He is a creator, and a teacher (18).

Go-won-go was born in 1860 in Gowanda, Cattaraugus, New York, during an era of change, marked by rapid industrialization and the rise of a middle class. Caroline, Carolina, or Carrie as she was known in her formative years, was the only child of Allen and Lydia Mohawk. At the outbreak of the Civil War, her father Allen Mohawk, a medical doctor, packed up his family and opened his medical practice in the small but vibrant town of Greene, New York. Accounts in the local newspaper attest that Allen Mohawk was a well-respected doctor, horseman and community member. The young family was integrated into the social fabric of the small town (Folsom 17). According to Greene's historian, Mildred English Cochrane, Go-won-go was cut from the same cloth as her father. One thing he imparted to his daughter was his love of horses and his
horsemanship, which furthered what appears to have been his larger-than-life presence in the town of Greene. Unfortunately, Allen Mohawk died suddenly at the age of forty-six. The young widow and child continued to reside in Greene for a year following his death. Lydia then packed up nine-year-old Caroline and moved to Painesville Lake, Ohio. In 1870, Carrie and her mother were listed in the United States Federal Census as living with the Erven family in Painesville. Lydia Mohawk returned to the community that held some comfort for her and Carrie after the untimely death of her husband leaving her with the sole responsibility of raising young Caroline (Folsom 168).

According to Go-won-go's recollections of her childhood relayed in an interview, raising Carrie was a daunting task. Lydia rejected the role of a single parent. Consequently, shortly after their arrival in Ohio at the age of eleven, Caroline was sent off to boarding school. Three years later, Lydia would remarry a widower named Robert Killey, who was the town blacksmith. Their marriage produced a son whom they named William or Will Killey in 1874. That following year, Lydia's untimely death resulted in a legal intervention by Lydia’s brother Judge Hale that resulted in naming young Caroline the sole heir of her mother’s estate holdings. Lydia left nothing to her young son William or to her husband (Ancestory.com). These assets may have enabled young Caroline to attend the Lake Erie Female Seminary in Painesville, Ohio.
Ohio's Lake Erie Female Seminary was incorporated in 1856 (see fig. 20). The Seminary offered an advanced curriculum that was more extensive than high school, although it was not a preparatory school for college; its focus was primarily teacher training.

However, the Commission of Education report describes the Seminary curriculum in the following manner:

...special students may pursue its courses in mathematics and the languages embracing more than is required for entrance to college, while the completed seminary course, by its breadth and thoroughness, lays the foundation for
advanced special training according to university methods. The seminary course gives time for the use of the library, for essay writing, music, training in household duties, and other means of culture necessary for the complete development of a woman, whether the student is to enter a profession or take her place in a home. The seminary is to its students not only a school, but a safe and pleasant home, with regular hours for sleep, exercise, and study, together with the helpful influence of a large number of resident teachers, amid the companionship of young ladies of kindred tastes from different parts of the country (601).

Young women seeking admission to the Lake Erie Seminary had to be at least fifteen years of age and pass an entrance exam testing grammar, geography and arithmetic. The academic year was divided into three terms. Those who completed the three years of study received a well-rounded education in the sciences that included anatomy, botany, and physiology. Students studied English composition, literature, and rhetoric as well as Latin. The curriculum included philosophy and the history of arts of Greece and Rome, as well as instruction in music, drawing, and French (Gross Lake Erie 245). Each student performed one hour of household chores daily to offset the tuition cost of ninety dollars per year. This, according to the administrators, provided training for the students in their future roles as housewives and mothers. Education was viewed as a means for "women to achieve their fullest potential in an era in which the domestic ideal raised the visibility and significance of women's roles as wives and mothers" (Moroney 26). There was no expectation that all students entering the seminary would complete their course of study. On the contrary, it was expected that at some point they would end their studies to enter the conjugal contract.
By the mid-nineteenth century, female seminaries, as well as women's colleges, were becoming commonplace. The establishment of these institutional homosocial spaces did cause concern and were often viewed as promoting homosexuality among the student body (Faderman 13). For young middle-class women, education offered them opportunities to participate in the market economy and become wage earners. Capable of supporting themselves, many of these young educated women chose not to marry and some did enter what became known on the East Coast as a "Boston Marriage." Although, Go-won-go did marry at the age of twenty, she soon abandoned her husband and made her way to New York City. She was a part of a new generation of women whose education provided them with opportunities to be financially independent and reject gendered expectations of previous generations or even their own generation. Go Won Go's education and independent nature afforded her opportunities that eventually led to her forming a performance troupe that toured the United States and Europe.

*Life on the Vaudeville Stage*

Nothing is known about Go Won Go's life from the time she left Ohio and her appearance on New York City's vaudeville circuit. It is apparent that by 1887 she was using the name Go-won-go. *The Toronto Daily Mail* identified her as playing the role of Sangarra, a gipsy [sic] woman in the Charles L. Andrews Minuet Carnival Company's production of *Michael Strogoff* (see fig. 21).
Her soon-to-be second husband, Charles Charles, played the role of the Landlord of the Post Relay. The five-scene production was well received by the Toronto Opera House, with reportedly standing room only for the audience on opening night. In true vaudeville fashion, the Toronto audience was also treated to the pantomimic contortions of the Majiltons, a group of tumblers and contortionists known for their comedic dancing.

It is rather curious why Go-won-go was drawn to the stage as a career. Professional acting had a history in the imagination of the American public as being associated with illegal activity and vice. Much of its unsavory reputation of vaudeville and its actors was due to its precursor, the concert saloons (see fig. 22).
Restricted to male patrons, this form of entertainment became popular during the Civil War. The concert saloons in New York City offered food, entertainment and drink served by "waiter girls" (McNamara 16). The entertainment not only consisted of musical acts but also "...acts as a pole exercise, ladder groupings, acrobatic feats, a pantomime, a dramatic sketch, dances..." (Ibid 16). The mix of alcohol, single women and location of the concert saloons in New York's Bowery district contributed to the notion that they were unsavory places and dens of vice. Those who performed in the concert saloons, writes McNamara, "...were already tainted, and the places where they entertained—which obviously catered to all sorts of nameless horrors—hardly helped their image" (17). The association of concert saloons with the city's criminal element led New York's
Superintendent of Police to lobby for the introduction of the Concert Bill which was supported by public opinion and businesses in competition for the New York patrons’ entertainment dollars. Parker Zellers writes that the bill had three stipulations:

(1) All places of amusement had to be properly licensed, (2) no "wine, beer, or spirituous liquor" could be sold or furnished in these places of amusement, and (3) no "female" was to be employed to furnish "refreshments to the audiences or spectators or any of them, at any of the exhibitions or performances" at any place of amusement (583).

The bill did not result in the immediate demise of the concert saloon, but it regulated the types of activities that could occur there; as a result, only a few establishments could be profitable. Eventually the variety of entertainment once offered in the concert saloons moved into the theater, providing an attraction that was thought to be more suitable for all family members. By the time Go-won-go appeared in New York, the concert saloons were a thing of the past and vaudeville was coming into its own.

The years following the Civil War were marked by the mass migration of wage earners to urban centers to find employment in factories, while immigrants landed on America's shores in search of the dreams of the Promised Land. The popular culture of its time, vaudeville was created largely by people from immigrant and working-class backgrounds. Its allure was not only the fact that it could accommodate and reward many different performers but it also" ...challenged and subverted the genteel Victorianism of the middle class" (Synder 43).

Vaudeville was very much a man’s world and even though women performed in the acts, Go-won-go had no counterpart. She was quite possibly the only woman who
was the head of a vaudeville production company. Being the only woman in a male
-dominated field might also explain why at age thirty she married Charles Charles, a man
who was twice her age.

As Aron points out, the Industrial Revolution gave rise to a wage-earning
economy (184). In true entrepreneurial spirit, businessmen seeking their fortune began
providing ways and means for this new urban population to spend its leisure time and
money. These businessmen also had to invest money in their stage productions. There
were costumes and scenery and set decorations that had to be made and transported to
various venues. Company members and actors had to be paid. By 1916 there was a
national circuit of 906 vaudeville theaters and 20,000 performers. However, at any given
time, there were jobs for only about 9000 of those performers. The wages earned on the
circuit varied with top acts receiving as much $2500 per week (Friedman 91). Given
these conditions, keeping a company afloat was a daunting task and many companies
folded. The Charles L. Andrew Minuet Carnival Company went broke in February 1889.
*The Daily News* from Athens, Pennsylvania, reports that the "Charles L. Andrews's
Minuet Carnival company, playing ‘Michael Strogoff’ at the Lyceum in Rochester, was
disbanded Saturday night with the manager in debt to everybody in the company. Nine
young women who composed the ‘grand ball troupe’ are left destitute" (1). Without jobs,
Go-won-go and Charles Charles joined forces both figuratively and literally. They were
married May 20th of that year and six months later their production company presented
the play written by Go-won-go, entitled *Wep-ton-no-mah, The Indian Mail Carrier* for a
New York audience at the Jacob Third Avenue Theater (*New York Clipper* 680).
The Wild West Craze

Since initial contact, non-Natives have been fascinated by Native Americans. There is a long history of performative acts on domestic and foreign shores by Native Americans on diplomatic missions, in addition to more exploitive displays of Native peoples for the amusement and curiosity of audiences on North American soil as well as abroad. From the nineteenth century until now, Native American participation in what scholar Laura Mielke identifies as “performative acts” has generally served the formation of settler nation states’ national identities. Public acts for the settler society's entertainment were "...used to reinforce European ideologies of racial-ethnic essentialism and ascendant nationalism"(6). It is no coincidence that the most popular stage performances from the 1880s to the 1930s in North America and abroad were the Wild West shows with over one hundred Wild West shows touring North America (Adams). The most famous of these staged performances was Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

Buffalo Bill Cody's presentation of the settling of the Western frontier was hugely popular among homegrown audiences as well as those overseas. It was also instrumental in the construction of American manhood, writes Vigil. In these performances “whitemen represented the promise of a new, young and virile nation that defined itself against the primitive savagery of its Indian past” (254). American audiences were first introduced to Cody and his exploits as a frontiersman, buffalo hunter, Pony Express rider and army scout in the dime store novels written by Edward Zane Carroll Judson under the pen name Ned Buntline (Gallop 9). Buntline's novels presented Bill Cody to audiences in both America and abroad. The Wild West show brought these adventures to life.
The popularity of Wild West-themed entertainment was due largely to it allowing audiences, who had no other means to experience the western frontier firsthand, to live this adventure vicariously through the melodramas that were being produced for the stage (McNenly 24). The narratives presented in the Wild West spectacles were very predictable. In *Wild West Shows and the Images of Native Americans 1883 -1933*, L.G. Moses writes that the program offered in the first season of Cody’s version of the Wild West consisted of nine acts which included a Grand Introductory March, a bareback pony race, an attack on the Deadwood Mail Coach, a race between an Indian on foot and an Indian on horseback, shooting exhibitions, a race between cowboys, cowboy fun, riding wild Texas steers, roping and riding a bison and a hunt scene that included a battle with the Indians (23). Whether it was Buffalo Bill's version of the West or not, one thing that remained consistent was that Native Americans were presented in a manner that affirmed the settler colonial ideology of Manifest Destiny. These narratives would shape and refine the stereotypes of the Native American and American masculinity that to this day continue to be a part of the collective imagination and psyche of contemporary settler nation states in North America and Europe (McNenly 9).

The exploits of Buffalo Bill captured the imagination of the American public. In particular, the stories of his life both influenced and inspired Go-won-go. Popular accounts of her life speak of both her and her husband’s association with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. There is no evidence that supports this claim, but the real or imagined association is indicative of the influence and popularity of the Wild West spectacles. This is not only evident in Go-won-go's stage production of the play, *Wep-ton-no-mah, the Indian Mail Carrier*, but also the narrative she created about herself. Postcards,
popular among the Wild West and stage performers as seen here, immortalize their
dramatic personas (see fig. 23 and fig. 24). Seen side by side, the images of Buffalo Bill
and Go-won-go side by side indicate their similarity. In this image she mimics one of
Buffalo Bill Cody’s signature poses. Go-wan-go replicates Cody’s hand on the hip, his
buckskin beaded jacket and the rakish angle of his hat. Even her horse takes a similar
stance to that of Buffalo Bill’s horse. Like Buffalo Bill, Go-won-go captured the
imagination of the American public. *The New York Clipper* wrote of her in the following
manner:

> When a child she was taught woodcraft and horsemanship, and she is not only an
> excellent rider, using no saddle, but she is an expert in the use of the bow and
> arrow, in throwing the lariat and running and jumping. ... And in addition to other
> accomplishments, she plays the piano, banjo, and guitar, and sings with a rich
> tenor voice. Miss Mohawk inherited from her forefathers the spirit of adventure,
> and, finding no field or action better suited to her taste and ability, she decided to
> enter upon a stage career. She, therefore, wrote the play, "Wep-ton-no-mah, the
> Indian Mail Carrier," in which she assumes a male role, which she plays so ably
> that her sex is often doubted (471).
In his analysis of American frontier dramas, Roger Hall observes that parts for Native Americans on the stage were almost nonexistent and were played by non-Natives, especially the male lead roles. Go-won-go created a different image of the Native American that not only challenged assumptions regarding gender but also the stereotypes of Native American masculinity. According to Hall, the portrayal of Native Americans in frontier melodramas was very formulaic. In his discussion of the production of American plays from 1870 to 1906, he writes that even though the American public was fascinated by Native Americans, the roles and narratives created around Native American characters were very prescriptive. He notes that "[m]ost commonly they were the attackers, often abducting white women...Frontier dramas utilized the capture-pursuit-rescue scenario..."
over and over several times within the same play. The scripts usually furnished the natives with some rationale for their attacks, most often a general statement of defending their lands” (7). He explains that in the plots of the dramas in which Native Americans lived among non-Natives, the Native American was depicted as either a drunk or as a character who evoked pity or contempt.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the narrative changed somewhat and the plots attempted to examine the complexity and challenge of assimilation and the retention of a Native American identity (Ibid 7). The roles for Native American women in these melodramas were even more restrictive because as their roles were confined to portraying "[y]oung Indian maidens who loved and assisted whites" (Ibid). To this day these stereotypic roles are reproduced in popular culture such as Pocahontas. However, it is not just the Native American stereotypes that Go-won-go challenged; in true mischief maker fashion, she also played with American constructions of masculinity in the roles she wrote for herself and her fellow actors.

According to Michael Kimmel, the dramatic roles that early twentieth-century playwrights wrote for their male actors were very prescriptive in that they replicated and reified three stereotypic versions of American masculinity: ‘Genteel Patriarch,’ the ‘Hero Artisan’ and the ‘Self-Made Man.’ These roles were formulated after the Civil War, and in many ways reflective of European manifestations of manhood, inherited by Americans. Kimmel writes that each archetype was differentiated by its relationship to work, to family and to nation (2). He describes the Genteel Patriarch as a benevolent father figure, whose masculinity is defined by his ownership of property and his exquisite taste, manners, and sensibilities. Presented as a Christian gentleman, he is the
embodiment of love, kindness, duty and compassion. The Heroic Artisan differs in that he is independent, virtuous and honest. He is formal in his manners towards women, stalwart and loyal to his male companions. The Self-Made Man’s masculinity is measured by his wealth and he derives his identity solely from men’s activities in the public sphere. His acquired wealth provides him with the means to be both geographically and socially mobile (13).

In comparison to the archetypes of Native American males, Lacey Cotton writes that the Stoic Indian or Noble Savage, the Bloodthirsty Savage and the Halfbreed were the three stereotypical ways Native American males were portrayed in the popular culture of the time. She writes that although the Noble Savage was portrayed as morally superior compared to his non-Native counterpart, the “Noble Savage” was still considered to be less intelligent, less human and therefore expendable (2). In true trickster fashion, the tale Go-won-go weaves in *Wept Ton No Mah* not only riffs off these stereotypes, but also departs from these archetypes to disrupt the audiences’ expectations.

The five-act play is a musical drama of deception, murder, and greed of epic proportions. In all instances, Go-won-go's narrative offers the audience a very different view of Indigenous people in comparison to that of her contemporary playwrights. Go-won-go revealed her motivation for writing the plot of *Wep-ton-no-mah* in an interview where she said that her work was the desire, "above all things to prove the native Indian is capable of the highest civilization" (Hall 159). Although Go-won-go's desire to use the theater to prove that the Native American was capable of the highest civilization, that same desire did not extend to other minorities. Her depictions of Mexicans and Afro-Americans in the characters of Spanish Joe and Sam, the help, rely heavily on racialized
stereotypes. Spanish Joe is seen as the villain in both his greed and the licentious pursuit of the virginal Nellie, and he pays for his miscreant behavior with this life. Franklin, the Colonel's nephew, on the other hand, whose money troubles lead him to enter a criminal partnership with the villain, is forgiven for his errant ways by the end of the play.

The story begins with Franklin, a young army lieutenant, being framed by a ruthless criminal and cattle rustler, Spanish Joe. After forging a banknote to cover his gambling debts, the lieutenant goes to his uncle, the Colonel, to request funds to make good on the banknote and to pay Spanish Joe for his silence in the matter. The Colonel at first denies his nephew's request. In an attempt to secure his uncle's estate, Franklin and Spanish Joe plot to kidnap the Colonel's daughter and sole heir, Nellie. Disguising himself as a man of letters, Spanish Joe attempts to steal away with Nellie but is thwarted by Wep-ton-no-mah, a young Native American man. Wep-ton-no-mah, grew up in the Native American village near the Fort; he is the son of the Chief Ga Ne Qua. Unlike his father, Wep-ton-no-mah is well educated. He can read and write and continually proves his bravery through acts of daring and in subtle ways shows his attraction to the young Nellie, which include risking his own life to rescue her from a cattle stampede. This attraction is mutual. As the villain attempts to flatter the young Nellie, she rejects his advances by declaring, “I have romantic love for the Indian youth who saved my life at the risk of his own, and I can't help loving him" (Mohawk and Charles 32).

In a case of mistaken identity, Spanish Joe shoots and kills Chief Ga Ne Qua instead of Wep-ton-no-mah. Consequently, Wep-ton-no-mah rejects the Colonel's offer to be the fort's mail carrier so that he can be free to hunt down the man responsible for his father's death. However, Spanish Joe eludes capture and Wep-ton-no-mah returns to the
Wep-ton-no-mah once again becomes a target for Spanish Joe's and the young Lieutenant’s greed, as Spanish Joe is informed by a member of his gang that Wep-ton-no-mah will be carrying a large sum of money on his pony express run. Others faithful to Wep-ton-no-mah overhear the plot and rush to inform him, arriving only in time to see Wep-ton-no-mah succumb to the doctored drink he was given. The audience soon learns that Wep-ton-no-mah knew that he was walking into a trap, but it is Spanish Joe and his compatriots that end up surrounded by the army. A fire flushes Wep-ton-no-mah’s mortal enemy out into the open, where a knife fight ensues, and, as the final curtain drops, Wep-ton-no-mah emerges the victor, having successfully avenged the death of his father by killing Spanish Joe in self-defense.

The main character, Wep-ton-no-mah is socially mobile, educated and formal in his interactions with the leading lady. Although Nellie the female lead professes her love for him, he in turn expresses his affections through his deeds, which include rescuing her from a stampede. Throughout the play he is described by others as virtuous, loyal, and honest. Go-won-go departs from the conventions of her time by creating a narrative portraying the Native American as a hero and, while avenging the death of his father, he not only saves the day but also attracts the affections of a childhood friend.

Curiously, the ending of the play does not close with declarations of love and the happily-ever-after scene between the hero and his love interest. But would the predictable ending have violated turn-of-the-century decorum? Nevertheless, the plot of the play still manages to disrupt the audiences’ expectations in two very important ways. The first is the creation of the love interest between a Native American “man” and a non-Native
woman. It is the female character of Nellie who declares her love for Wep-ton-no-mah, a very different development than the usual captivity narrative, where a non-Native woman or female child is kidnapped and forced to enter a conjugal relationship with her captor. This love interest between Wep-ton-no-mah and Nellie was probably based on Go-won-go’s own marriage to a non-Native and the interracial marriage of her parents. However, intermarriage between Native Americans and non-Natives was by no means commonplace.

A number of state anti-miscegenation laws that prevented marriages between White and African Americans also forbade marriages between non-Natives and Native Americans. As late as 1928, politicians unsuccessfully attempted to revise the U.S. Constitution to ban interracial marriage.19 Demonstrating Stoler’s and Rifkin’s assertions it was through the deployment of sexuality and regulation of desire that the emerging bourgeoisie marked and maintained its distinctiveness from other classes.

The second way the narrative complicates expectations is the male lead role being performed by a woman. This was rather risky. Despite the fact that in the theatrical world there is a long tradition of gender-bending roles for male actors, according to Roger Hall, it was a very rare exception for women to perform as the opposite gender on the stage (159). He offers Go-won-go's physical stature and athleticism as a possible explanation for theatergoers’ seemingly unquestioned acceptance of this role reversal. It is true that many of the articles written by the popular media of the day mentioned her stature and physical presence. However, Hall explains that Go-won-go's desire to perform as a male

19 For more information on Anti Miscegenation Laws in the United States see J.R Browning’s article, “Anti- Miscegenation Laws in the United States.”
was "possibly due to her desire to do something ‘wild and free’ and thought that playing a male role would allow her greater opportunities for riding and wrestling” (159).

It is rather difficult to attribute the acceptance of Go-won-go’s fluid gendered performances solely to her desire to participate in roles that offered her more freedom to “ride and wrestle.” Other famous female vaudeville performers found their real and perceived physical strength as grounds for questioning their gender, sexuality and moral conduct, especially women who were employed in acrobatic troupes. Although there were clearly defined roles in terms of gender expectations, Alison Kibler writes that many acrobatic acts engaged in a long-standing tradition of “…gender reversals in which women undertook masculine feats of muscle and men dressed in women’s clothes” (145). While acts where women demonstrated their athleticism were considered a novelty and often shocking to the audience, Kibler reports that there was a very fine line, and if female performers were seen as too masculine they faced criticism (146).

The young acrobatic team of Ruth and Giles Budd, also known as the Aerial Budds, was a popular brother and sister act from 1900 to 1915. Kibler writes that the main feature of their act was their gender reversals (147). Ruth performed the daring acts of strength, while her brother was the assistant holding the props. Ruth was the older of the two and therefore physically more developed than her younger brother. Their role reversals did not come under any real scrutiny, but, as they matured, a controversy was fueled by Giles’ departure from the act and Ruth’s engagement to a female impersonator, Karyl Norman (147).

There does not appear to be a record of Go-won-go encountering this same degree of censure during her lifetime from her audience, but there are other ways in which
women like Go-won-go were reined in by the hegemony of heteronormativity. In 1891, Go-won-go’s gender-bending persona was fictionalized in a series of store novels by Prentiss Ingraham (see fig. 25). The narrative he created is illustrative of the ways in which women who dare to push boundaries are contained and brought back into the heteronormative fold. With his creative license, the storyline that Ingraham crafted is indicative of the anxieties Go-won-go’s gender performances presented for a settler colonial audience. Under his pen, these anxieties are laid to rest; Go-won-go is presented as a fictional character, Red Butterfly, unlike the real Buffalo Bill or Calamity Jane. Ingraham’s storyline is based on the play Wep-ton-no-mah, however as the series ends, Red Butterfly’s true gender is revealed and she is married to the fictional character Velvet Bill. Christine Bold, writing about early twentieth-century popular culture, sees these plot turns as evidence of Ingraham attempting to contain Go-won-go’s race, gender, and sexuality. However, she does not believe that it had a negative impact, citing that Go-won-go’s stage career continued well over twenty years after the series was first published (141). It is important to note how the popular culture of the period was deployed to rein in someone who did not conform to expectations of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy. Curiously, women like Calamity Jane and Annie Oakley were immortalized by the dime store novel. Perhaps it is the degree in which they strayed from the patriarchal order and their association with “strong” male contemporaries that ensured their place in the annals of history. Although Go-won-go was married to fellow actor Charles Charles, he did not have the same presence, at least publicly (Ibid 141).
What is of interest here is the popularity of Go-won-go and how she was viewed within the vaudeville circuit. The success of Go-won-go’s play *Wep-ton-no-mah* did not go unnoticed; playwright Lincoln J Carter penned *The Flaming Arrow* with Go-won-go in mind. Carter was known for his rather epic stage productions of blood and thunder melodramas and *The Flaming Arrow* was promoted as a departure from Carter's usual oeuvre; the advertisements describe the play as no blood and thunder, but a beautiful story of Western life (see fig. 26). The drama’s plot was eerily similar to the drama Go-won-go had written. A staff writer for the *Indianapolis News* describes the play in the following manner.

“Flaming Arrow” is woven about a Mexican, who is at a military post in the west. He becomes infatuated with the colonel's daughter, deserts the army post and
seeks refuge in an Indian camp. He endeavors to stir the red men to go to war with the pale face. The Indians of more peaceful disposition refuse to take up the tomahawk against the whites but go to the fort to fight for them. The deserter succeeds in abducting his sweetheart, but she is finally rescued by her Indian lover, White Eagle, impersonated by Go-Won-Go Mohawk (8).


What the melodrama lacked in dramatic flair was made up by the number of Aboriginal people in the cast and production company. The advertisements for the play described Go-won-go as the only Native American actress, accompanied by a cast consisting of Indian Chief Moon Dog and his family, "eighteen full bloodied Indians" and a "genuine Indian band" (see fig. 27).
The advert boldly asserts that *The Flaming Arrow* is "[t]he only Western play that is not an absurd travesty full of lucid impossibilities calculated to weary and disgust an audience of intelligence." It also offers the audience the opportunity to witness an Indian pow wow, a buffalo dance, a scalp dance, and a ghost dance. These are all traditions of the Plains tribes, not the Seneca, but with the cast of Native Americans and the lead actor, Go-won-go, the language used here in the playbill indicates a desire to distinguish this production from usual the Wild West spectacle.

The reenactments of Plains Indian dances such as the scalp dance and ghost dance may seem gratuitous and to pander to the expectations of non-Native audiences, but the
context in which these dances occurred permits a different interpretation. It raises some questions in terms of the performance of these public displays of Indigeneity within a much larger context of settler colonial government policies that forbade Native people from performing these dances within a ceremonial context. A different reading of the inclusion of these dances in the performances is possible when one considers that settler nation-state governments in both Canada and the United States had outlawed these forms of cultural practice on the reservations of Indigenous nations. The banning of these dances in ceremonial contexts made the performance of these dances in public spaces a subversive act.

Was the casting of Go-won-go a way to capitalize on Go-won-go's fame? Carter’s decision can be examined in a number of ways. Go-won-go's appearance in Lincoln's play demonstrates the acceptance of Go-won-go’s gender role reversal not only in the vaudeville circuit but also by the general public. As mentioned previously, her company extensively toured the United States, Canada, and Europe, so casting her as the lead was not a financial risk given her previous success. There is also recognition that the stage is a space in which reality of everyday living can be suspended. Judith Butler's work on the performativity of gender informs this reading of Go-won-go's onstage and off-stage personas. Interviews with Go-won-go emphasized this distinction; on one hand, they spoke of her presence, athleticism and stature on stage, while her off-stage persona was described in terms of her feminine charms and abilities. It appears that the divisions between these two personas were not that rigidly differentiated as evidenced by the photograph of Go-won-go in a velvet suit. Gold has written that Go-won-go was Two-Spirited (Bold 141).
Until recently, no one has really examined Go-won-go's stage career. The silence is very indicative of the lack of information about Indigenous women who did challenge heteronormativity. The silence is a means of disappearing these women and is indicative of ways in which colonialism is revealed as a structure.

**The Society of American Indians**

Go-won-go’s enactment of gender fluidity may also be seen as a response to a much larger social movement that eventually resulted in the formation of the Society of American Indians (SAI). The SAI's membership included both Native Americans and non-Natives, but the executive offices were filled by well-educated Native Americans, many holding advanced degrees. The founding members included: Marie Louise Bottineau Baldwin (Ojibwa/French), Gertrude Bonnin/Zitkala-Ša (Yankton Sioux), Henry Roe Cloud (Winnebago), Sherman Coolidge (Arapaho), Charles Dagenett (Peoria), Angel DeCora (Winnebago), Philip J. Deloria (Lakota), Dr. Charles Eastman (Dakota), Laura Cornelius Kellogg (Oneida), Francis LaFlesche (Omaha), Dr. Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai Apache), John M. Oskison (Cherokee), Arthur C. Parker (Seneca), Thomas Sloan (Osage), and Henry Standing Bear (Lakota) (Lomawaima 2). All of these individuals were emerging Indigenous intellectuals educated within the Western academy.

Although the society did not become incorporated until 1911, the philosophical premise that formed the basis of this organization was beginning to take shape during the decade leading up to the twentieth century. The Society of American Indians was an organization whose members were concerned with the advancement of Native Americans in American society. According to, Tsianina Lomawaima, "They championed disparate
visions of Indian peoples' place within U.S. society and of Indigenous self-determination”
(2).

Seen by some as primary a pan-Indian movement, the organization's goal was primarily to lobby for the recognition of Native Americans’ right to vote and to hold the government accountable for its Indian policies. They were an Indigenous voice that sought to address injustices and lobby for Indian policy reform. There was no unanimous opinion among the organization members as to how this would be achieved. Some felt it was important to maintain traditional beliefs and practices, while others took the stance that complete assimilation was the only way Indigenous people would be considered equals and thereby afforded the same rights and privileges as other Americans. These irreconcilable differences played a major role in the disbandment of the organization in 1924.

At least philosophically, Go-won-go and the SAI were aligned in their quest for Native Americans to be seen as dignified people, capable of upholding the same values as the settler colonial society. The membership of SAI criticized Wild West shows and similar exhibition of Native Americans as a major hindrance to their goals and, as a result, the Wild West shows and their supporters came under heavy criticism. The following impassioned speech, given by Chauncey Yellowrobe at the SAI conference held in Denver in 1913, provides some insight to this point of view:

At every celebration upon the reservation borders, the Indian is in demand for show exhibitions. I have had the privilege of witnessing some of these occasions where the Indian is induced by pay to perform the naked war dance before the intelligent people who call themselves Christians. Under these circumstances is it
any wonder that sometimes it is considered that the Indian does not possess the adaptability for Anglo-Saxon civilization?

The fact is here demonstrated that the Indian is truly a man and that he can become adapted to the highest state of development and achievement. Every effort should be made to lead him through the paths of education and Christianity to self-supporting and independent American citizenship. It is for us who feel more deeply and trust in our God to consider our own difficult questions, to hope that the day is not far distant when the reservation system and all these hindrances that concern us will be removed, and that all of our people will enjoy the same privilege of citizenship that you and I do (40).

Here, Yellowrobe not only criticized the Wild West show promoters but also the audience associating participation in these displays of "Indianness" with an inability to integrate into the dominant society. It is important to see these comments, especially the Christian moral overtones, within their historical context. Yellowrobe's speech does provide insight into how deeply the notions of assimilation and accommodation were seen as the only viable means of survival for Native American people. It is this context that makes Go-won-go’s performances so subversive. In the play Wep-ton-no-mah, she embodies an Indigenous version of the epitome of American masculinity. In her Indigenous trickster performance of Buffalo Bill, she creates an alternative to the conquest narrative where the Native American ways of life are destined to vanish as a result of the encroachment of settler colonialism fueled by the ideology of Manifest Destiny. In Go-won-go’s plays, the theme is clearly the antithesis of the sentiment of assimilation. The Native American protagonist is already civilized. His deeds, words,
and action portray him as being civilized, and his desire to revenge his father’s death, i.e. justice for the treatment of his people, appeals to the universal desire for justice.

In many ways, Go-won-go’s plays and performances were interventions that offered an alternative to the Wild West and vaudeville entertainment that typically reinforced European ideologies of racial-ethnic essentialism. Perhaps Go-won-go saw no other way to participate in her chosen profession other than in portraying Native American people as being both equal to but distinct from mainstream American society. She is quoted in an interview as saying,

People used to want me to dance—to play the banjo and do fancy steps. I said, No—that is no fit thing for an Indian. It is beneath his dignity—dancing like a common street player. I saw an Indian dancing in variety once, and it looked a shameful sight ...He looked so out of his element. I said, Look at that. Is that pretty or natural? Ah! It was ugly and pitiful (Hall 159).

Within a larger context defined by the era in which she practiced her craft, what she accomplished is really very remarkable. Her gender-bending performances, even if they were confined to the stage, are important stories in terms that symbolize a resistance to heteronormativity. Go-won-go literally used her body and performance as an intervention to a political end. While her main goal was to present Native Americans as being just as civilized as their settler-colonial brethren, her performances as the male protagonist contributed to the notion of gender fluidity. Her performances are a reminder that gender is performed. Perhaps she was able to do this because as a Native American she was not held to the same standards of propriety as those of a non-Native Victorian
woman. She created a niche for herself that enabled her to practice her craft while also advocating for the political rights of Indigenous people.
Chapter Five: Rupture, Renewal, Reclamation: Contemporary Expressions of Indigenous Gender and Sexual Identities

The basic premise of Indigenous decolonizing theories is that we bring the knowledge of the ancient ones back to contemporary relevance by capturing the revolutionary nature of those teachings. (L. Simpson 2008 76)

Ideas about tradition-specific approaches to those now called Two-Spirit have been emerging for some time and are becoming the subjects of Indigenous scholarship. What inspires me about this scholarship is the empowering fact that our traditional approaches to gender, sexuality and spirituality are not rooted in the very recently formed Western liberal notions of “equality.” We do not need to learn from settler cultures how to respect our women and our Two-Spirited relations…we already have those teachings. Reclaiming them and redefining them for the 21st century is a difficult, but beautiful undertaking. (Chelsea Vowel 2012)

Settler colonialism has had a profound effect on the transmission of Indigenous knowledge. As it is enacted within contemporary Indigenous communities, activism has sought to retain and renew the knowledge and its systems of acquiring knowledge regarding our gender and sexual identities. Rather than situating Indigenous knowledge in the past, the notion of renewal takes into account the continual evolution of knowledge. I began this chapter with quotes from Anishinaabe scholar Lee Anne Simpson and a Métis writer and lawyer, Chelsea Vowel, to ground this inquiry in the present and future. In the previous two chapters, I spoke about historical figures and examined the ways in which they activated and performed an Indigenous knowledge that refutes the naturalization of binary constructions of gender and sexuality. The work of contemporary artists brings this knowledge forward to the present. The intent of this chapter is to examine how, in spite of the disruptions caused by colonialism, contemporary Indigenous artists continue to express their sexual and gender identities in their artistic practices. I focus my discussion in this chapter on how artists’ engage with
this knowledge in terms of rupture, renewal, or reclamation of Indigenous constructions of gender and sexuality.

Earlier I spoke about the importance of naming and in particular the ways in which the Native American LGBTQQ2 community confronted the academic community and its use of the term *berache*. Another issue was how the way in which the academic community situated its attention on the study of the occurrence of gender variance in the past, while very little research was being conducted on the contemporary reality of the Native American LGBTQQ2 communities. This omission was especially egregious during the height of the AIDS pandemic. As a way of distinguishing itself from the mainstream LGBT community, the Native American LGBT communities across Canada and the United States adopted the term “Two-Spirit.”

Fundamental to the mythology of the term “Two-Spirit” is the claim that it was coined during the annual Native American LGBT gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1990. However, the story of the actual genesis of this word is rarely, if ever, presented, nor is there any acknowledgement that it was gifted through a vision to a woman by the name of Myra Laramee. Its original utterance, *niizh manitoag* in the Northern Algonquin dialect, translates into the English words Two-Spirit (La Fortune 221). The coining of the term marks an important milestone because, following the gathering in Winnipeg, the Native American LBGT community chose “Two-Spirit” to identify a construction of gender based on Indigenous traditional knowledge. Although some are

---

20 By the end of 1990, over 307,000 AIDS cases had been officially reported. However, the actual number estimated to be closer to a million. Between 8 and 10 million people were thought to be living with HIV worldwide (Chin J).

21 The acknowledgement that the words *niizh manitoag* was given to a woman through a vision was disclosed at a meeting in Winnipeg by Albert McCleod in his opening remarks at the Museum Queeries workshop in Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 02. 2017.
critical of the pan-Indian term, it is a recognition of the desire to ground contemporary sexual and gender identities within an Indigenous context.

Two-Spirit describes someone who possesses both male and female energy, as opposed to the general non-Native understanding where the physical body determines one’s gender and sexual identity. These different ways of understanding gender and sexual identities are indicative of the difference between Native and non-Native worldviews. In an Indigenous context, an individual’s energy (spirit) is what defines a person as male or female. To explain how Two-Spirit is an expression of an Indigenous ontology, I relate the teachings of Blackfoot elder Leroy Little Bear. Little Bear describes the Blackfoot concept of the cosmos as a world that is constantly in motion or in a state of flux and constant transformation. This energy is found in many things and is why, among the Blackfoot, the world is defined by animate and inanimate. All entities that are imbued with energy are considered animate, and, as such, their condition can never be fixed. These include humans, animals, birds, trees, rocks and the land, all of which change over time. Little Bear writes, “Anthropomorphic aspects of the manifestations of energy combinations are not important factors in the Blackfoot mind. But the spirit, which is the common denominator, is” (xi). These statements provide a greater understanding as to why Indigenous worldviews were able to accommodate individuals who did not conform to heteronormative gender and sexuality identities that are fixed.

The use of the term Two-Spirit also assists in the discussion of Indigenous sovereignty and the relationship between the inclusion of gender variant bodies in the contemporary nation building, sovereignty and self-determination movement. The context in which the word came into being speaks for the continuity and the
acknowledgement of queer activism and the assertion of an Indigenous sovereign erotic.\footnote{Qwo-Li Driskill describes the sovereign erotic as a tactic for healing historical trauma and as a tool for decolonial struggles as they are capable of disrupting colonial power over Indigenous bodies and sexuality.}

In Lerma’s model of contemporary Indigenous sovereignty, the notion of peoplehood is most pertinent to my discussion. He explains that all people are tied to their lands through ceremony, sacred histories and specific languages. He claims that without these we would not be able to sustain ourselves on this earth (50). However, as a result of colonialism, Lee Anne Simpson writes,

We need to examine how the internalized heteropatriarchy of colonialism serves to disconnect some of our most vital people from the land and our knowledge systems, and we need to continue to vision and build strong Indigenous nations based on a celebration of diversity, a fluidity around gender, individual self-determination and the Indigenous philosophies that allowed our Ancestors to do just that (\textit{Queer Resurgence} par. 8).

The notion of self-determination in this context is what Cree scholar Alex Wilson identifies as non-interference, the basic tenet of Cree philosophy. In other words, there is a recognition that each person is responsible for his/her body and, if they chose not to conform to the expectations of heteronormativity it is their decision. However, the hegemony of heteronormality continues to have a profound impact in both urban and rural Indigenous communities. Through the process of missionization many non-Native beliefs regarding gender and sexuality have been internalized. As a result Alex Wilson notes:
Two-spirit people are frequently subject to interconnected homophobia, transphobia and misogyny, and in the larger society they are additionally subject to structural and individual racism and classism. This has had devastating impacts on the two-spirit community. The suicide rate for LGBTQ Indigenous youth is ten times higher than that of any other group. Thirty-nine percent of two-spirit women and 21% of two-spirit men have attempted suicide. In a recent study of transgendered and gender non-conforming Indigenous people, nearly one-quarter lived in extreme poverty, elevated rates of HIV were found, and more than half of respondents (56%) had attempted suicide” (How We Find Ourselves par. 4).

How one identifies his/her gender and sexual preference in these contemporary times has altered and continues to change. The LGBT acronym has slowly evolved to include Queer or Questioning and more recently Two-Spirit. These changes are reflected in the Native American community. While many Native Americans have chosen to identify as Two-Spirit, others identify as Gay, Lesbian, Transgendered, Queer, etc. Alex Wilson writes that, “as a self-identifier, two-spirit acknowledges and affirms our identity as Indigenous peoples, our connection to the land, and values in our ancient cultures that recognize and accept gender and sexual diversity” (Our Coming In 2). The usage of the term is usually generational; younger artists chose to use this term or a term that is specific to their Indigenous language and community. Those who came out before the 1990s often refer to themselves as Gay or Lesbian. How one chooses to identify themselves is important, but, like the terms Indian, Native, Aboriginal and Indigenous that have been used to refer to Native American people, these terms reflect a very specific moment in time and are often associated with political, social and economic concerns.
However, I have chosen to examine the work of six contemporary artists using the terms “rupture,” “renewal” and “reclamation” to demonstrate how their artistic productions engage with Indigenous construction of gender and sexuality, and, differently, bring it into a contemporary context.

When I began to look at the artistic production of these artists, I unexpectedly recognized three very distinct patterns as to how the artists engage with their sexual and gender identities and how this engagement is reflected in their artistic practice and production. The first pattern was rupture. These artists often dealt with the impact of internalized and external homophobia, a result in the rupture in transmission of indigenous knowledge due to colonization. The second pattern was renewal. Artwork that can be described in this manner employs indigenous understandings of gender being more fluid and reproduces this knowledge in both the artists’ process and production. The final category is reclamation. These artworks explore the reclaiming of Indigenous knowledge regarding gender and sexuality, while also examining other spaces that can be activited through the processes the artist engages. These categories were informed through my discussions with the artists and, in particular, his/her response to the question whether or not they had grown up with traditional teachings about Indigenous gender and sexuality. By listening to their stories and looking at their artwork, I saw these three patterns emerging and they became the taxonomy I use to discuss their work. I do think it is important to point out that categories in general are never self-contained and there is always overlap. By organizing these artists’ work in this manner, no one’s art fits neatly into a box; it can never be fully contained by classifications. In keeping with early discussions regarding the continuing flux of the universe as explained by Leroy Little
Bear, these categories bear witness to the artists’ production at a given time. The questions and concerns of an artist change over time, reflecting the role that many Indigenous artists fill as messengers.

**Rupture**

In my discussions with each of the artists, it became apparent that the access to information concerning Indigenous constructions of gender and sexuality varied. Those artists whose work reflects or deals with an absence of this knowledge as a consistent or underlying theme in their work is indicative before the rupture that occurred as a result of colonization and missionization of Indigenous bodies. Both Metis artist Rosalie Favell and Cree artist Thirza Cuthand explore interruption of the transmission of this knowledge in their artistic practice.

Rosalie Favell (b.1958) came into her gender and sexual identity in the late 1970s. Growing up in the urban center of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Favell talks about coming out: “It was scary, it was difficult, it was turning yourself inside out, trying to figure out what’s going on. But it was rewarding as I felt like I found a part of myself. I found that little group of people to hang out with.”

In her late twenties she became involved with Winnipeg’s Indigenous women’s community as she worked on creating a series of portraits of Aboriginal women. She states that although the Indigenous women were not part of the lesbian community, they were accepting of her sexual and gender identity. It was through this network of

---

23 I use Alex Wilson’s term of “come in” to one’s sexual identity as opposed to coming out. She writes, “Coming in does not centre on the declaration of independence that characterizes ‘coming out’ in mainstream depictions of the lives of LGBTQI people. Rather, coming in is an act of returning, fully present in our selves, to resume our place as a valued part of our families, cultures, communities, and lands, in connection with all our relations.” [http://redrisingmagazine.ca/user/alexandria-wilson/](http://redrisingmagazine.ca/user/alexandria-wilson/) accessed June 27.
relationships that she met and began an intimate relationship with another Indigenous woman. The relationship became the subject of the photographic series *Living Evidence*.

*Living Evidence* consists of thirty photographic portraits of Favell and her lover. The original photographs were taken using a Polaroid SX-70 camera, a popular camera with instant self-developing film that produced a 3.5” x 4.2” image. These private interludes between lovers take on a larger-than-life presence as the original images are photographed and enlarged to 25” x 27” for presentation in the gallery. The size of the images confronts the viewer by making public the normally private and intimate. Excerpts from personal dairies, sharing Favell’s private thoughts written in white ink on the photographs, reinforce the tension created by this act.

In the image entitled *I was her shadow now she is mine*, she captures the two women in a very intimate moment. Standing in the foreground, Favell is embraced by her lover. Their damp hair and implied nude bodies against the backdrop of a tiled wall make implicit the sexual intimacy captured by this photograph. The text, however, adds another layer of meaning and speaks to the complicated dynamics of their relationship (see fig. 28).
Though most of the photographs are not sexually explicit, the handwritten text taken from Favell’s diaries documents the range of emotions experienced in an intimate relationship that eventually ended. The image entitled *I lost my center when I found you* is perhaps the most provocative in the series. It shows a woman facing the camera; her long hair is positioned to cover her unclothed body. It is an intimate photograph, one that might have been exchanged between lovers, and was never intended to be shown publically. We can imagine her gazing back at the photographer behind the camera, but that can only be an assumption, as her eyes are covered with duct tape (see fig. 29).
Exhibiting *Living Evidence* put into motion the mechanism utilized by settler colonial institutions to reify heteronormativity when the institution demanded that Favell obtain written permission from her ex-lover to show the images or the exhibition would be cancelled. The duct tape was added to the photographs to mask her ex-lover’s identity when Favell was unable to obtain her permission. It was an act that was both acquiescence to and a defiance of the silencing of Indigenous queer identities. The curator of the exhibition, Ingrid Jenker, points out that by having to conceal her ex-lover’s identity, Favell reveals the homophobia that pervades settler colonial nation states (Jenker n.p.). Favell states that this series had a profound effect on her artistic practice.
She stepped out from behind the camera to be in front of it and became her own subject in the work that followed (Favell).

As a graduate student at the University of New Mexico, Favell explored her lesbian identity through popular culture icons. In the digital photo image *Maybe I did love her in that way* from the series *Plains Warrior Artist*, Favell appropriates imagery from the film *The Children’s Hour* and television popular television series “*Xena the Warrior Princess.*” (1995-2001) (see fig. 30).

Favell juxtaposes imagery from popular culture to explore the changing attitudes regarding lesbianism as it portrayed in film and in television. The black and white imagery is a film still from *The Children’s Hour*, which was based on a true story, written first as a play by Lillian Hellman in 1934. It recounts the tale of two women who open a private school for girls. After disciplining a student, the student retaliates by spreading a rumor that the two women were lesbians. Although they are eventually cleared and it is revealed that the student lied, the pernicious effect of the accusation of lesbianism has tragic consequences. In a very dramatic scene the character Karen Wright (played by Shirley MacLaine) questions her feelings for Martha (Audrey Hepburn). The imagery Favell uses from the film in this digital photo college captures the dramatic interplay between the two women when Karen comes to the realization that her feelings for Martha are “not natural.” In confessing her love for Martha, Karen is unable to deal with the possibility that she is not sexually “normal” and consequently commits suicide.
The tragic ending was in keeping with the Hays Code, which delineated what could and could not be portrayed in Hollywood film. The wording of the code provides insight into how homosexuality was censored within settler colonial nation states and how, through cultural institutes, the hegemony of heteropatriarchy is confirmed and maintained:

In the case of impure love, the love which society has always regarded as wrong and which has been banned by divine law, the following are important: 1. Impure
love must not be presented as attractive and beautiful. 2. It must not be the subject of comedy or farce or treated as material for laughter. 3. It must not be presented in such a way as to arouse passion or morbid curiosity on the part of the audience. 4. It must not be made to seem right and permissible. 5. In general, it must not be detailed in method and manner. (qtd. in Bernsmier 31)

The Children’s Hour became an iconic film among lesbians. Its tragic ending was indicative of how lesbianism was often dealt with because of the prevailing attitudes in the 1960s as reflected in the Hays Code: lesbianism was viewed as a fate worse than death.

Above the unfolding dramatic scene of Karen’s confessions of “unnatural love” for her friend, Favell has strategically placed an image of Xena and Gabrielle from the popular television series Xena: the Warrior Princess. The series tells the story of an ex-warlord, Xena, who realizes the error of her ways and seeks to redeem herself with her sidekick and implied lesbian lover, Gabrielle. Together they journey through ancient worlds fighting ruthless gods and other warlords for the greater good of mankind.

Though the implied lesbian relationship between the two was never consummated onscreen, the series was considered revolutionary. As Helford points out, “it seriously challenged the problematic aspects of gender essentialism...And it escapes static notions of sexuality and representations of homosexuality on television by offering characters who can be read as lesbian or bisexual and non-monogamous without critique of their lifestyles within the narrative” (158). Yet, Xena, like Karen, would die at the end of the series.
Fans took to the Internet creating a subculture where homoerotic pairings that the small screen was unable to depict could be realized. These narratives, written by fans of the series, created alternate universes whereby the characters Xena and Gabrielle became lesbian lovers. Favell suggests that the relationship between the women was sexual which is indicated by enclosing the image of the embracing women with a hand-drawn heart pierced by an arrow— a symbol of romantic love.

Popular culture has a significant impact on how we understand and see ourselves. It reifies and seldom challenges stereotypes. For people who did not conform to heteronormative expectations, popular culture tells us that same-sex love and relationships are not normal, that death is better than being a lesbian. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth take this message to heart. Favell reminds us of this by depicting herself as young child seated on the arm of an overstuffed chair, located in the bottom right-hand corner of the collage. It is reminiscent of the chairs our parents sat in as families gathered to watch TV.

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s role models were hard to find. One of Favell’s role models was Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). She states, “I love how she chronicled her life, I really admire that…she was a admirable character and had a fascinating tormented life.” Kahlo was also bisexual and her affairs with men and women are well documented (Souter 2011; Lindauer 1999). Kahlo’s gender and sexual identities were never fixed as images of a young Frida from the family album attest (see fig. 31 and fig. 32).

At the age of six Kahlo was stricken with polio resulting in a permanent weakness in her right leg. As part of her convalescence, encouraged by her father, Kahlo learned to swim, box and wrestle, which was considered unusual at the time (Stechler 7:59-8:53). As seen in these family photographs, Kahlo often dressed in men’s clothing, sporting a tie, suit jacket, shirt, pants and vest. It is not out of character for Kahlo to create a self-portrait in a man’s suit, as seen in the painting in entitled *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (see fig. 33). The painting is seen as a response to her divorce from Diego Rivera in 1940. Art historian Ankori Gannit sees the painting as “a reflection of her hurt feminine pride, and as masochistic self-punishment following the breakdown of her marriage” (128). She adds that the act of Kahlo depicting herself with short hair is a statement of rejection of her former identity as the traditional Mexican wife (128). The lyrics from a popular Mexican song inscribed at the top of the painting read “Look if I loved you, it was for your hair, now that you are hairless, I don’t love you anymore,” reinforces the interpretation that her divorce from the muralist was the inspiration for this painting. This may be true, but Gannit suggests that it is possible that it could also be an expression of Kahlo’s desire to return to her life before Diego — the life that is so vividly illustrated in the family album photographs (128).
Favell was drawn to Kahlo’s androgyny depicted in her painting *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, which inspired her use of this image in her homage to Kahlo (Favell). Favell’s digital photo college tribute, from her series Plain(s) Warrior, depicts her wearing a similar black suit and aubergine-colored shirt. In her right hand she, too, holds a pair of scissors. At her feet are locks of hair suggesting that she has shorn her locks (see fig. 34). Similar to Kahlo’s pose, Favell engages the viewer; her gaze is not confrontational but compels the viewer to witness her actions. A music score with lyrics is written across the lower portion of the wall that forms the backdrop. It is here that
Favell deviates from Kahlo’s painting. Instead of a music score, lyrics from a Mexican folk song, Favell has inserted a segment of a song from her own childhood, *Swans on the Lake.* The full lyrics of the song are as follows:

Stately as princes the swans part the lilies and glide,  
under the willows.  
Are they enchanted men soon to be free again here,  
under the willows?  
Oh how I would like to be  
here when the fairy wand  
touches the leader and  
changes his looks!  
Would he be handsome and brave as the heroes that live  
hidden in my fairy books?

The lyrics Favell has chosen to emphasize are “to be here when the fairy wand touches the leader and changes his looks! Would he be handsome and brave as the heroes that live.” Like the lyrics used by Kahlo, the artist’s intended message becomes more transparent when considering the hand-written text Favell has added to the background of the image. The text “If only you could love me the way I am,” along with the music score and lyrics evokes the loss or mourning of an existing or desired intimate relationship. The message is clear though its intended audience is not. In the background a small cat holds a piece of Favell’s shorn locks in its mouth. The addition of the cat, a deviation, Favell admits, is nothing more than a playful kitten, who wandered into the frame and carries no symbolic significance. However, the image and text have multiple meanings when Favell’s identity as lesbian and Mètis are brought into the discussion. It is indicative of the lived reality of individuals who do not conform to a binary construction of gender or a heteronormative sexual identity. The text can be seen as a recognition of the tensions so

---

24 This version of the song is from John Thompson modern piano course grade 1 no.5.
prevalent in a country that prides itself on it multiculturalism. Favell recalls when she was a small child she scrubbed her skin in the bath to remove her tan, so that she would look more like her non-Native mother. Favell, like Kahlo, is of mixed European and Native descent. Being Native was something that was seldom addressed in the Favell home (Favell).

Fig. 34. Rosalie Favell, *If only you could love me for the way I am*. 2003, digital image, collection of the artist.

The five hundred years of colonialization have contributed to the erasure of the collective memories within our families and communities resulting in the isolation and judgment leveled at those whose gender identity and sexuality do not conform to heteronormativity and the internalization of racism.
Many have had to deal with homophobia and transphobia, whether they grew up in large urban centers or on reservations or settlements. The absence or lack of access to information about Indigenous traditional teachings concerning gender and sexual identities often has violent repercussions. Colonization and its institutions have all but erased the knowledge of Indigenous constructions of gender and sexuality in many communities. This rupture is a topic that Cree artist Thirza Cuthand (b. 1978) explores consistently and often humorously in her artistic practice.

In 2015, Cuthand was commissioned by ImagineNATIVE to produce one of her more recent projects, entitled *2-Spirit Introductory Offer* $19.99. The video appears to be a light-hearted glimpse into the issues encountered by Two-Spirited persons coming out. However, underlying the humour is the acknowledgment of the knowledge that has been lost concerning Two-Spirit identities that include gender variance and sexual identities that are not heteronormative.

Using a format reminiscent of an infomercial, Cuthand stands against a projected image of a prairie landscape referencing the place where she grew up and came to understand her gender and sexual identities (see fig. 35). Her Two-Spirit introductory offer promises 24-7 access to traditional knowledge and support. Here you can consult with Two-Spirit friendly elders. Your subscription also entitles you to monthly offers, such as a beaded whisk, which has a number of possible uses, along with the requisite safe-sex supplies.
Cuthand’s video acknowledges the unique circumstances that Two-Spirit people face within a mainstream queer world. The dialogue reflects many of the issues and questions Cuthand had when she came out in her teens, including finding a community in which she felt comfortable. In the opening screen of the video, Cuthand wields a copy of Walter Williams’ book *The Spirit and Flesh*, a text on Indigenous gender and sexual identities. She asks “New to the Two-Spirit Lifestyle? Do you want to talk to someone in the spirit in the flesh rather than reading the *Spirit and the Flesh*?” Her question is a thinly veiled reference to the ways in which many Two-Spirit people came to understand that their “difference” had a history. For many, this knowledge was not available to them because of the many manifestation of colonization. For example, her statement that for the low price of $19.99 her service provides access to Two-Spirit friendly elders alludes to the debates that have been played out in many arenas within Indigenous communities.
regarding conflicting definitions of traditional versus non-traditional practices, as seen in the very public deliberations concerning issues such as same sex marriage and skirt-shaming. Alex Wilson writes, “today some of our Elders and spiritual teachers have adopted and introduced understandings and practices and understandings [sic] that were not necessarily part of their own cultures prior to colonization and the imposition of Christianity” (Our Coming In 2). This message is a consistent theme throughout Cuthand’s work.

Cuthand relates that her mother was very accepting of her disclosure at the age of fourteen that she was attracted to other young women: “Overall, it was good thing, the first person I told was my mom and she bought me a bunch of books about being queer.” However, not all family members were as accepting; Cuthand states that some of her immediate family had difficulty accepting her gender and sexual identity.

Coming into her gender and sexual identity Cuthand explains that her non-Native peers did not have the same questions or concerns that she had as a Two Spirit Indigenous person. She grew up in the urban center of Saskatoon, not in an aboriginal community that was informed about historic acceptance of gender variance.

In her film Alice Through the Looking Glass (1999), Cuthand explores the intersectionality of race, color, gender and sexuality (see fig. 36). In the film based on the

---

25 One of the issues that has arisen in the United States is that since the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of sex-sex marriages, nine federally recognized tribal governments besides the Diné and Chicksaw Nations have banned same-sex marriages or have refused to recognize them. The bans are legal because they are exercising their tribal sovereignty by determining the laws that will be passed within their respective Nations’ boundaries. To read more about how this has played out in the Diné Nation see Jennifer Nez Denetdale’s essay Return to “The Uprising at Beautiful Mountain in 1913: Marriage and Sexuality in the Making of Modern Navajo Nation.” Skirt shaming refers to the practice where elders have insisted that an individual attending a ceremony dress according to what the elder perceives as he/her gender identity, not how the individual perceives his/her identity.
Lewis Carroll’s tale of the same name, Cuthand casts herself in the role of Alice. In an interview with Dana Claxton, Thirza explains how the Red and White Queens were sources of inspiration and how the character of Alice resonated with her as a bi-racial person.

When I read it when I was a kid, I was always fascinated by the Red Queen and the White Queen because to me, it seemed like it was a total fairy tale that explained how I was trying to construct my own race, being bi-racial and I would sort of see Alice as being this sort of half-breed character and trying to find her place, trying to find her identity. In the story, she is trying to become a Queen which is kind of interesting too because there is the Red Queen and the White Queen and the whole story is set on sort of this chessboard kind of thing and then there is this third queen. So it sort of brings up this whole idea of sort of a third race beyond Red and White (qtd Claxton 25).
A major theme in the video, besides the issue of being mixed race and the pressures to make a choice to identify herself as either Caucasian or Aboriginal, is the issue of her sexuality. Cuthand’s Alice acknowledges that it might be “alright to bow down to the White Queen, perhaps, at least I could openly express my sexuality,” lamenting that the Red Queen sees Alice’s sexuality as an abomination, and untraditional. In one scene the Red Queen espouses the heterosexist rhetoric indicative of Native Americans who have internalized Western notions regarding sexuality. The Red Queen informs the viewer of the characteristics of a real Indian woman, “who walks two feet behind her man. Not like this Alice girl,” exclaims the Red Queen, “She doesn’t even like men. She likes women and she wants to be a real Indian? …Who ever heard of two
women going out with each other? How are they going to have kids?” The Red Queen continues by stating that Alice “…obliviously did not know what it is like to be a real Indian, because us real Indians, we love our men.” The Red Queen’s soliloquy defines contemporary Native American society as heteronormative, and Alice’s behavior does not fit within the parameters of acceptable behavior for Native women. Therefore, Alice does not know what it means to be a “real Indian.” Cuthand critically engages these dominant ideologies by pointing out that Christianity and colonization have heavily influenced the Red Queen’s notion of traditional.

Via voiceover, Cuthand provides an alternative view of her sexual orientation and gender difference when Alice states, “I would have been sacred, and a leader in the community and that then she would have to give me her crown.” In an interview Cuthand speaks about how this scene represents Native Americans who identify themselves as traditional Natives have what she believes is a very Christianized view of what “traditional” means. It also demonstrates how dominant ideologies alienate Two-Spirited people from the Native community. Cuthand’s early videos give us a small window into the experience of Indigenous youth who are coming to terms with being Two Spirit in this modern colonial reality. Throughout her twenty-year career of making videos, Cuthand’s artistic practice, like Favell’s, lays bare the issues that the rupture in the transmission of Indigenous knowledge are realized at a very personal level.

Renewal

In contrast to Favell’s and Cuthand’s experiences, Anishinaabe artist Barry Ace (b. 1958) recalls his experience coming out in the 1990s. Although his sexual and gender identities were never questioned, they were never overtly acknowledged; his experience
echoes Favell’s comments that when she first made connections in the Aboriginal community, her sexual and gender identities were not an issue.

Ace grew up on and off the reserve. He spent many summers with his grandmother and great aunt on the Wikwemikong reservation on Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario. At the age of sixteen, Ace began his apprenticeship with the women in his family and was schooled in the arts of basketry, quillwork and beading, normally the purview of cisgendered women (Ace).

Throughout his apprenticeship, Ace learned the skills to work in these mediums, and, in keeping with protocol, he also learned the cultural practices and ceremonial knowledge that accompanied them. The knowledge of the successive generations of women in his family regarding where, when and how the material could be harvested was passed down to Ace through the teachings of his great aunt. She also taught him about plants and their uses, noting, “When we were walking gathering sweetgrass for the baskets, she pointed out to me a plant. She said ‘Its English name is Princess pine, it’s a men’s medicine, you’re going to need that someday’” (Ace).

During his apprenticeship, Ace states he never actively sought to learn these practices, but rather was chosen by his great aunt to carry these traditions forward. He recollects that others had approached his great aunt and requested to apprentice with her, but she turned them down and focused on passing this knowledge onto him.

Although Barry knew from a young age that he was attracted to men, it was not something that was really ever discussed. “Maybe we were an anomaly, but on the reserve we didn’t get teased about being gay. Nothing was ever really said. The only thing that changed when I brought Earl home was that they stopped asking about
“grandchildren” (Ace). Ace states that there was also never formal acknowledgment that he was chosen to do these cultural arts because he was gay. However, Ace states that the notion of his gender fluidity was very present in his tutelage: “My aunt and grandmother were never concerned that I wasn’t a woman.” Basket weaving was traditionally an activity that at the time was usually undertaken by women, but Ace was never ridiculed for doing what would have been perceived as “women’s work.” He adds, “maybe that was because people recognized it as being protocol. Nobody said, ‘oh, you are hanging out with the women, oh you are doing women’s work, you must be a fag.’ People actually respected what I was doing.” Ace relates with humor how his great aunt would look at his hands and tell him that they were small like a woman’s.

Although Ace states that he does not really address his gender or sexual identity as subject matter in his work, there are some recent exceptions to this claim. Generally it is through the mediums that Ace works that one can see the influence and knowledge these women shared with him. Always innovative, Ace’s oeuvre references and pays homage to materials and cultural art practice while adding his unique contemporary interpretation.

His grandmother taught him to bead and, as a pow-wow dancer, he refined his beading skills by making his own regalia and repairing the regalia of his fellow dancers. His beadwork is a reflection of a well-defined Anishinaabe aesthetic of flowing floral designs on a dark velvet cloth background (see fig. 37). Ace has taken these floral designs to a new level in his desire to demonstrate the confluence between the historic and contemporary through his use of reclaimed computer resistors and capacitors. For him the use of these recycled computer parts functions in the same way as beads: as
metaphors for energy. He states that the Anishinaabemowin word for beads, *manidoominens*, means “little spirits” or “little spirit berries.” Beads, he explains, were a symbolic way to cover someone with the power and protection of medicines represented by the plants depicted in the floral designs. These new materials reinforce that symbolism as he arranges them on wire mesh backgrounds in the same floral patterns taught by his Grandmother.

![Image of Barry Ace's Women's Woodland Jingle Leggings](image)

**Fig. 37.** Barry Ace, *Women’s Woodland Jingle Leggings*. 2014, mixed media, collection of the artist.

In his bandolier bags, Ace combines an older form with new materials. The bandolier bag is a symbol of friendship, Ace explains. They are something that you give to someone to honor them. Originally, these bags were crafted by women and worn by men in ceremonial and social settings. Said to have been inspired by European military ammunitions bags, they are worn over the shoulder and across the body (Berlo and Phillips *Native North*). They originally were made from trade cloth and embellished with
intricate beaded floral designs. His most recent bandolier bag was made to honor a young non-Native man who was killed in 1989. Walking home over the Alexandra Bridge that spans the Ottawa River running between the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau, Alan Brosseau was accosted by group of young men. After a short scuffle, he was hung upside down over the bridge’s railing and then dropped head first. The last words he heard were, “I like your shoes.” His only crime was that he looked “gay.” The crime sent shock waves across the city as no one felt safe. Being straight did not prevent you from being a victim of gay bashing, if someone thought you looked gay. The impact of Brosseau’s death brought changes to the ways in which the city of Ottawa and its police force would interact with the LGBT community.

Ace created *Tribute to Alan Brosseau* for the 2017 Queer Arts Festival’s *Unsettled* exhibition in Vancouver, B.C. (see fig. 38). The bag is Ace’s way of honoring Alan Brosseau and recognizing the changes that were brought about as a result of his murder. Using the familiar form of the bandolier bag, Ace brings the aesthetic into contemporary times. The beads that create the characteristic floral designs are fashioned using recycled computer resistors and capacitors. Ace believes that, like the beads used in previous generations, these materials are symbolic of the transmission of energy and its exchange between animate entities. This idea is reinforced by the inclusion of a motion sensitive tablet installed in the bag. When someone approaches the bag, the video Ace made recounting Brosseau’s final walk across the bridge is activated. Its images and text are haunting as we are visually confronted with Brosseau’s final moments.

The references to the queer community are subtle. The horse hair that hangs from the gold-coloured cones at the bottom of the piece and center of the bandolier shoulder
strap has been dyed to reflect the colours of the Pride flag. The four pink triangles on the pocket that holds the tablet are a reference to the ongoing persecution of gays and lesbians (Ace). The number four is significant, as Ace explains; it is a metaphor relating to the four cardinal directions and queer bodies everywhere.

Fig. 38. Barry Ace, *Bandolier for Alain Brosseau*. 2017, mixed media assemblage, collection of the artist.

Queer bodies transgress more than binaries; their presence reminds us that all borders can be breached. For Indigenous peoples the recognition of the borders that separate the United States and Canada are lines drawn by settler colonial nation states,
not by Indigenous people. It is common histories that bind people. In the 1980s and 1990s it was the AIDS pandemic that brought the communities together. As governments on both sides of the border remained inactive, the LGBT communities rallied to advocate for government involvement and funding to fight the cause and spread of the disease. They formed organizations to take up what both governments seemed reluctant to do. Indigenous people in urban centers rallied and organized Indigenous-centered organizations to care for those dying, while also educating other Indigenous people about prevention. Ace recalls that time as friends and acquaintances who were diagnosed at that time. His older brother opened his home to those who could not or chose not to return home because of the prejudicial attitudes towards those with the disease. He offered them a place to die in dignity.

It is this history that Ace references in one of his latest contemporary reiterations of an Indigenous aesthetics. *Erased,* created for the *Queer Landscapes, Queer Intersections* exhibition in Toronto, addresses the impact AIDS had on the Indigenous community (see fig. 39). In this work, Ace presents a pair of brightly coloured embellished cowboy boots. On the vamp of each boot are an array of resistors, capacitors, light-emitting diodes, and beads arranged in floral patterns. The arrangement is a mirror image of the other vamp. Along with these patterns Ace has placed a cross on the vamp of each boot. This geometric design is often interpreted as the morning star, also known as Venus, the planet of love.

---

26 For more information of the Canadian government’s response to the crisis see David Rayside and Evert Lindquist’s paper entitled *AIDS Activism and the State in Canada* (1987).
Attached to the pull-tab of each boot is a dyed hot pink horsehair tassel fastened to a metal cone and a blue bead. From the back quarter of each boot’s shaft are a series of wires that radiate out from the boot, each long enough to touch the ground. This style of decoration has a history among Indigenous people. Instead of wires, long pieces of hide where sometimes attached to a moccasin’s heel seam, which would erase the footprint of the wearer. In the exhibition catalogue, Ace explains the intent of the artwork:

Like trailing fringe on Indigenous footwear erasing the tracks of the wearer, AIDS erased the lives of friends and lovers, as the privileged class marginalized the queer community to take care of our infected and dying. Through activism, we
challenge homophobia for our survival and healing. Like Anishinaabeg floral medicine motifs, the digital age provides new interconnectivity for sharing and healing, so that lives of our courageous warriors who pushed our community forward will not be forgotten (Erased 8).

On many levels, Ace consistently grounds his practice in the understanding that a culture must always evolve in order to survive. From the circumstances of his apprenticeship with the women in his family, he integrates what they have taught him about the materials, the cultural teachings and responsibilities that are embedded in their use in his art practice. His apprenticeship, like his art work, is symbolic of the renewal ceremonies that maintain our cultural ties to each other and our ways of understanding that include the need to embrace all of our relations, regardless of gender and/or sexual identity.

Adrian Stimson’s performances are a form of renewal as well. The self-described trickster was born into a Blackfoot family. Adrian attended residential day schools across Canada before his father’s job as a childcare worker brought them back to the Blackfoot reservation just outside Calgary’s city limits. The Siksika Nation is situated in the heart of Alberta’s cattle country, fifty-nine kilometers from the home of the world-famous Calgary Stampede. However, it was the prairie landscape of the neighbouring province, Saskatchewan, which would give birth to Adrian’s alter ego, Buffalo Boy.

Formally trained as a painter, Stimson began engaging in performance art while attending graduate school at the University of Saskatchewan. He confides that if the truth were known Buffalo Boy’s genesis occurred much earlier:
When I actually think about it, Buffalo Boy came to be when I was about 7 or 8 years old, while attending the residential school in LeBret, Saskatchewan. Where my personality kind of split. I had Adrian and my twin sister at home, was Adrianne. I would go to school all day and go home at night and put on this white pleather fringe jacket and become Adrianne.

Stimson would later trade in the fringed jacket for Buffalo Boy’s signature disco cowboy hat, buffalo corset, G-string, a string of pearls, a pair of black fishnet stockings and cowboy boots. Buffalo Boy and his audiences would probably agree that it was a good trade. Stimson relates that the cowboy hat is cheeky homage to the Wild West, Buffalo Bill and the machismo of the rodeo, all of which reproduce a hypermasculine stereotype of masculinity, while the other accouterments signify Stimson’s Two-Spirit identity.

Using performative acts to subvert expectations and transgress boundaries and binaries has a long history. Looking further back into Indigenous oral traditions there is the character that shows up in almost every culture: the Trickster.

The Trickster, according to Amethyst First Rider, is not so much a person but rather an energy. The Trickster, born out of chaos, is the reminder that nothing is certain except for constant change and transformation. She writes:

From …Aboriginal Views one can see that there is no great concern about how the trickster figure came into being and the scope and limits of his nature and powers. He or she just is. But if looked at in view of the concept of constant flux/motion, one can readily see the perspective of Aboriginal people: all of creation is forever moving and changing. Nothing remains forever. There is no
finality… The only constancy is non-constancy. Anything and everything is possible. That is the trickster. He or she is a culture-hero, an ignoble, stupid character, a transformer, a gift giver and an enemy of boundaries. He is a creator, and a teacher (30).

Lynne Bell describes Stimson’s performances by his alter ego as in keeping with the chaotic tradition of the Trickster: “Buffalo Boy restages and resignifies various colonial encounters (in the past and present) as high-camp theatre, in which everything is done in ‘quotations’ and nothing is what it seems to be” (par.10). Although it is easy to identify his work as camp, Stimson refuses this label in favor of the Indigenous construction of the Trickster. He says that, “often with the tricksters, they went to different places, they allowed themselves to become these conduits for the spiritual in many ways” (Stimson). Stimson sees some of the other personas he enacts, such as the Shaman exterminator, as examples of the transformative or shapeshifting. He states, that in the act of performing, “I turn into something that is there, but maybe not” (Stimson). Stimson is clear about the role of ritual in the act of performance: it is not ceremony. Although the line between the sacred and profane is often blurred in his embodied acts, more often than not, this boundary is breached by humour and exaggeration.

In Jeff Thomas’ (b. 1956) photograph Buffalo Boy poses in a defiant haughty manner against a settler colonial monument to the doctrine of discovery – the base of the statute of Samuel de Champlain (see fig. 40). This photograph speaks to how performance as a form of storytelling can also be a form of survivance; it can make stories visible and present ways of knowing that counter dominant narratives. In doing so, performance can speak to the survival and resistance of Indigenous people. As art
historian Carla Taunton writes, “Indigenous performance art is an art practice engaged in the colonial and neo-colonial occupations and in the articulations of Indigenous sovereignty, agency and cultural autonomy” (Embodying Sovereignty 352).

Fig. 40. Jeff Thomas, *Buffalo Boy (Adrian Stimson) at Samuel de Champlain Monument*, 2011, color photograph, collection of the artist.

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Glenbow’s controversial 1988 exhibition *As the Spirit Sings*, Simpson created the multi-media installation entitled *The Two-Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Buffalo Boy's First Peep Holes*. In their article
“Buffalo Boy: Then and Now,” Ryan Rice and Taunton describe how Simpson used this opportunity to critique the museological, anthropological and ethnographic practices in the display of Indigenous cultures, while also queering the museum space (par. 3). For one part of the installation he mined the museum’s collection for material culture that had been displayed in the original exhibition and placed these entities alongside Buffalo Boy’s paraphernalia, including mix-and-match drag accessories such as G-strings, panty hose, pearl necklaces and pasties (par.3). This insertion although humorous addresses an absence of a narrative within the museum space –The Indigenous Two-Spirit. The more interactive portion of the installation was the peep shows. Museum-goers were invited to watch videos of Buffalo Boy through peep-holes cut of four different coloured boards, each colour representing one of the four directions. As viewers bent to view the videos through the holes, located about three feet from the floor, their body positions revealed the humour of Buffalo Boy.

The ability of Indigenous performance to critique settler colonial agendas is often the main objective, but Buffalo Boy’s performances also fulfill the role of the Indigenous Trickster by unmasking the ways in which Indigenous people are implicated in maintaining the logics of settler colonialism. The Trickster’s role has always been one of criticality. In one of his more recent performances Buffalo Boy provides a commentary on the spectacle of the Calgary Stampede parade and the participation of Kent Monkman’s alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle’s in events celebrating Canada’s one hundred-fifty years as a settler nation state.

Calgary’s annual summer festival, the Calgary Stampede has a long history of engaging Indigenous people with its narrative of the settling of Canada’s “Wild West.”
Its tropes borrow from the turn-of-the-century Wild West Shows and situate the agenda of Manifest Destiny within a contemporary reiteration. As in its predecessor, Indigenous people are presented as part of the spectacle by occupying the “Indian Village” on the Stampede grounds throughout the duration of the ten-day celebration.

As a critique of the Sesquicentennial celebrations of Confederation, Buffalo Boy’s performance *Stampede: Slap and Tickle* is a commentary on the participation of Indigenous peoples in events that celebrate 150 years of settler colonialism, such as the participation of the Treaty Seven Chiefs as the Grand Marshals of the Stampede’s parade and Kent Monkman’s participation in Toronto’s Pride parade. “In all the years we have had the Stampede,” Stimson wonders, “Is this the first time they have asked Indigenous people to be the marshals of the parade? Is it the times? Is it just good media?” Although he respects the decision for the Treaty Seven Chiefs to participate in the parade, he questions the motivation and celebratory atmosphere of the sesquicentennial, which overshadows the violent history of colonization and the continued systemic violence enacted on Indigenous bodies. Stimson related that the function of the Trickster “is to do things in the opposite way so it shocks everyone. …And causes them to examine an issue…are we playing into their colonial game? As Buffalo Boy, I want to look and examine how I can subvert this, in a respectful way.”

Stimson’s subversion is to create his own parade, with Buffalo Boy as the Grand Marshal, winding a parade of followers and devotees through the streets of Calgary. In his buffalo hide corset, G-string and pearls, Buffalo Boy reminds us that every once in a while we need a slap and tickle to wake us from our slumber and complacency. Whenever the Trickster is evoked, one situates his/her art practice as either being
grounded in or at the very least an acknowledgement of Indigenous worldviews.

Stimson’s performances are rituals that bring older ways of knowing into a contemporary context.

What does decolonizing gender, sex and sexuality look like? These seem to be the questions being asked by a newer generation of Two-Spirit Indigenous artists. Rather than focusing on renewal of gender and sexual identities, they are asking what possibilities can be set in motion by Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. This new generation of artists not only sets out to reclaim the knowledge regarding gender and sexual identities that have created the space for the Two-Spirit body to re-emerge, but they are also exploring what other spaces can be opened by this activation. As activists they are addressing the gendered violence of settler colonialism through their art practices.

According to Indigenous scholar Kim Tallbear, to decolonize sexuality is to reactivate our kinship responsibilities of being in good relations with all of our relatives (Black Kink 00:6:21-00:7:00). Within the context of many Native American worldviews the notion of “relative” includes all animate beings. McCaslin and Breton write that good relations require respect, which involves finding ways to work things out not by coercion but rather by honoring the needs, views, interests, competence and autonomy of others (523). This is what Leanne Simpson refers to when she states that “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” (Anger, Resentment par. 26).

The queering of Indigenous constructions of sex, gender and sexuality, as Michel Foucault wrote, resulted in the deployment of sexuality that created a prescriptive delineation of permissible and non-permissible kinds of sensations and pleasures. Sexual practices that did not conform to settler colonial forms of sexuality and sexual practice were labeled deviant and pathological. Settler government policies and institutions were, and continue to be, the apparatus employed in disciplining the Indigenous body. The goals of forced assimilation included the replication of settler colonial forms of sexuality, gender and kinship (Rifkin 2011).

**Reclamation**

Questioning the settler forms of sexuality and the differentiation between the pornographic and erotic, Dayna Danger (b.1987) describes her current work as an exploration of “the complicated dynamics of sexuality, gender, and power in a consensual and feminist manner.” These complicated dynamics she refers to are the ways in which BDSM can reveal the gendered violence of settler colonialism and the ways in which Indigenous women and Two-Spirit are disempowered within a patriarchal society. When presenting images of the female body it can be difficult to navigate the history of the female nude and its presentation for the male gaze. Yet through her collaborative process these photographic series have the power to be emancipatory and, according to Danger, empowering.

The potential for empowerment in Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism & Masochism (BDSM) is in the power dynamic that exists between two
consenting adults is explicit. Robin Bauer states that one of the reasons queer and trans people engage in BDSM it is that “in contrast to everyday life, in BDSM spaces one can consciously choose and negotiate roles and identities for play. Therefore, the participants may agree upon the gender, race, age, class, or status one chooses for a scene in a consensual manner.” (Bauer 234). The consent, the use of safe words and creation of a space where all sexual play is navigated through a process of negotiation, are what draws Danger to explore the possibilities BDSM offers, especially for Indigenous women who under the hegemony of the settler colonial institutions and policies have had very little control over their bodies and in particular their reproductive rights.27 She states that although the BDSM world is very colonized, it also has the ability to heal sexual trauma, where under safe conditions a person can play out the trauma and produce a different outcome, enabling them to resolve issues.

In her series Masks 01 Danger’s collaborators wear black-on-black beaded, leather fetish masks. Masks 01 currently consists of three head-and-shoulder portraits of her collaborators, Adrienne, Georgia and Sasha (see figs. 41, 42, 43). Each mask is beaded with a distinctive design; this beadwork creates a tension between the anonymity the fetish mask represents in BDSM practice and the function of beadwork within an Indigenous context. Beadwork is often used as a signifier of one’s indigienity, and beadwork designs, especially those on regalia, have a very deep and personal significance. Beadwork can signify a persons’ tribal identity, clan identity and family

---

27 In the United States a study by the U.S. General Accounting Office finds that 4 of the 12 Indian Health Service regions sterilized 3,406 American Indian women without their permission between 1973 and 1976. Two years earlier, an independent study by Dr. Connie Pinkerton-Uri, Choctaw/Cherokee, found that one in four American Indian women had been sterilized without her consent. https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/exhibition/index.html Accessed July 09, 2017. For information on the forced sterilization of Canada Indigenous women see Stote (2015).
history. In this instance, the beadwork on the masks is based on the wearer’s tattoos. On Adrianne’s mask there is a beaded dagger; on Georgia’s mask a phase of the moon.

In the image labeled Sasha, the collaborator wears a mask with a beaded symbol of labrys, a symbol that Danger carries on her own body. The symbol is associated with the legend of the Amazons, an ancient race of women from Asia Minor first immortalized by Homer in the Iliad. Rachel Poulsen writes “According to the legend they eschewed male company, using men only to mate. Amazons raised their female offspring and exiled the males” (43). She adds that although there is no known association of Amazons with lesbianism, the lesbian community values the archetype, and in the 1970s the radical
feminist movement claimed the Amazons as part of its heritage. Drowning writes that the attraction of the Amazon for the contemporary lesbian community is that they control their own bodies and sexual behavior, and they are willing to fight for that right. Amazons also reject both patriarchal and matriarchal rule in favor of egalitarian self-government based on sister-like bonds (192).

Fig. 43. Dayna Danger, *Masks 01 Sasha*. 2016, colour photographic print, collection of the artist.

Danger replicates these sister-like bonds in her artistic practice, with an added Indigenous twist. All of her collaborators in this series are friends—people with whom she shares an intimate relationship. Although Danger is in control behind the camera, the dynamics of BDSM are brought into the relationship between the collaborator and the photographer. Danger, who identifies as a hard femme, shares that the process of image-
making for her is a negotiation that recognizes the agency of those with whom she collaborates.

Danger calls herself a feminist pornographer. According to Tristan Taormino et al, this concept grew out of what became known as the “feminist porn wars” of the 1980s. The divide between the opposing factions of feminism is based on the role that pornography is thought to play in the exploitation and oppression of women versus the role it plays in creating alternative images and developing its own aesthetics and iconography to expand established sexual norms and discourses (10). For Danger the aesthetic practices she borrows from the porn and fashion industries such as presentation of the scantily clothed or nude body are intended to “… challenge the ways in which our bodies have been consumed in a way that doesn’t feel consensual and that doesn’t feel like it’s authentic or that it’s our own” (personal interview). Other references to pornography and the fashion industry are subtle, with the flesh tone backdrops and high key lighting.

Danger’s process is collaborative because those participating have agency and there is reciprocity in the relationship between herself and the cis and trans women she photographs. Danger shares that she does not have her collaborators sign model releases because she does not want to own the images. Each time she displays the works she must renegotiate the terms. The empowerment for the women participating in the photographs comes from their agency. These Indigenous women have a presence in larger-than-life images. They take up space and command the viewers’ attention.

Her newest series entitled, Big ’Uns, she states, is “all about reclaiming pornography, media, our gaze, our bodies and projecting it in a way that was
challenging” (Arcand 2017). It is challenging for some people. The presentation of the female nude body creates a certain level of anxiety, especially around the issue of objectification. In this image the nude collaborator stands in front of a flesh-toned backdrop, facing the viewer, her body oiled, a practice shared by body builders to accentuate the body’s curves and musculature. Around her neck is a black choker. On her sternum is a tattoo of a matrix in the shape of a star, and to the left of this are tattooed words, but only the word “soeurs” is legible. On the right lower thigh is a buffalo skull tattoo, next to another tattoo that reads “chaos reigns.” She covers her pubic area with a set of caribou antlers (see fig. 44).

Fig. 44. Dayna Danger, Big ’Uns. 2017, collection of the artist. Canadian Art, Canadian Art Foundation, www.canadianart.ca.
The pairing of the nude female body with the antlers, Danger explains, is to address the parallels between the predation of game hunting and the sexual predation of Indigenous women. The misogynistic language of sport hunting sexualizes animals, “women,” and weapons, and speaks about them in ways as if they were interchangeable (Kalof, Fitzgerald and Baralt 241). Citing an article by Linda Kalof et al. in an interview, Danger connected this type of violence to the violence that is enacted on the bodies of Indigenous women (Big’ Uns Explores par.11) Her artist’s statement for the exhibition of this series at the artist-run gallery Latitude 53 reads, “Big’ Uns is an act of reclaiming power over our own sexualities” (Danger Artist statement). She adds that the colonial history of residential schools, sexual abuse and intergenerational trauma have a profound effect on the Indigenous woman’s ability to have healthy relationships, and a positive self-image.

The line between what is considered pornographic and erotic is always indistinct, because that what is considered pornographic in one community is not so in another community. These lines also change over time. Recently, the cover of Canadian Art featured an image from Big’ Uns. The title in Cree syllabics translates to “on Turtle Island.”

The theme of the publication was kinship. Recognizing the importance of kinship is emblematic of this new generation of Two-Spirit artists. The placement of this image on the cover of the magazine is a stark reminder of the differences between those who embrace a hierarchy that enables the exploitation of women, animals and the earth as a part of the natural order and those who believe that our survival is dependent on the

28 Turtle Island is the term used by many Native Americans to refer to the North American continent.
survival of all animate beings. The latter concept of interdependence is an extension of kinship and the responsibilities and duties of being in good relations with all beings. This is a recurring theme in the work of artists engaging with Indigenous communities as part of their practice.

Erin Konsmo (b.1986) describes herself as a self-taught, community-engaged visual and multi-media Indigenous artist. She identifies as Métis/Cree and grew up in Alberta with familial ties to the Métis communities of Onoway and Lac St Anne. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Calgary and a Master of Environmental Studies from York University, with a concentration in environmental and reproductive health. Her artwork brings together these interests in her community-engaged projects that extend her position as the Coordinator of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network’s Media Arts Justice & Projects. The media arts are seen as a way to “not only push back on demeaning and/or stereotyping mainstream narratives, but also collectively create new visions” (www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com).

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) is an organization that was founded by Native youth to address issues of sexual and reproductive health rights and justice across Canada and the United States. The mandate of the organization is based on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people. It focuses on developing youth leadership skills, and advocacy for improving economic and social conditions of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities. The NYSHN also advocates for protection against all forms of violence, and the need for active involvement by these groups in both the development and administration of economic and social programs. Their actions are also directed towards defending the
right to traditional medicines and the maintenance of health practices, including the conservation of vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals (Danforth 2014).

Grounded in human rights advocacy and the right to self determination the NYSHN proclaims:

Our bodies as Indigenous youth are grounded in our cultures, communities, histories and lands, which cannot be separated. When these connections are recognized as related to our bodies as rights that must be respected and protected, [it] supports our ability to access justice. Justice over our bodies goes beyond just sexual health; it involves a myriad of expressions of self- determination over our bodies and the spaces they are in as Indigenous youth (International Expert Group Meeting 2).

This advocacy work recognizes the gender violence of colonialism and the price that has been extracted from the bodies of Indigenous youth, women and children.

Only recently academia has begun to address the intersectionality between gender, sexuality, colonial violence and capitalism. (Smith 2005; Goeman 2017) In 2014, the NYSHN entered a partnership with Women’s Earth Alliance (WEA) and began a multi-year initiative to document the ways that North American Indigenous women and young people’s safety and health are impacted by extractive industries.

This is the topic of Konsmo’s poster entitled Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius. Konsmo shares that the initial idea for the poster came out of a discussion on the United States Supreme court ruling on Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe. The 1978 ruling stated “that Indian tribal courts do not have inherent criminal jurisdiction to try and to punish non-Indians, and hence may not assume such jurisdiction unless specifically
authorized to do so by Congress” ("Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe 435 U.S. 191 (1978)").

The impact of the ruling was two fold. It left tribal courts unable to investigate or prosecute non-Natives for crimes committed on reservation lands, thus making tribal courts unable to protect their most vulnerable citizens. It also effectively diminished the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous Nations while at the same time enforcing the doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

The iconography Konsmo employs relays a complex narrative that speaks to the violence of settler colonialism. She not only refers to the Indigenous body and its long and complicated relationship with Christian religions, but also draws a parallel between the violence enacted upon the Indigenous body and the violence of resource extraction on the earth that is occurring in contemporary times.

The title of the piece refers to the “Doctrine of Terra Nullius,” which is the justification used by settler colonialists to appropriate the lands of Indigenous people in North America. The Latin phrase Terra Nullius means “land belonging to no one.” The Latin phrase is a reference to the papal bull issued by Pope Alexander VI on May 4, 1493, that effectively gave Spain the exclusive right to the lands “discovered” by Christopher Columbus the previous year. The concept is connected to the Doctrine of Discovery. European nations and later settler nation states claimed that, “when Christian Nations discovered new lands, the discovering country automatically gained sovereignty and property rights in the lands of non-Christian, non-European people, even though native people already owned, occupied and used these lands” (Miller 10). The governments of Canada and the United States later used the Doctrine of Discovery to justify the removal
of Indigenous nations to reservations, and open the land and its resources for settlement and exploitation by non-Native settlers.

In using the image of the Spanish ship, Konsmo connects the activities of contemporary resource extraction to a long history of resource extraction that began with the arrival of Christopher Columbus. Columbus’s voyage was not only to seek out and claim land, but to lay claim to both the natural and human resources the land held. Just as in Columbus’ time, the violence of colonialism continues to be enacted on land, while also marking the bodies of Indigenous women, children and Two-Spirit people.

In this image, only the torso, clothed in a red tunic, and the upper thighs of the figure are shown. The image of a pump jack is depicted on the section of the tunic that covers the pubic area. On either side of the pump jack are graphic references to the oil refining industry. Using this same graphic style, Konsmo has drawn a series of oil barrels as if they had been carelessly discarded. Mid-body, she depicts the Spanish ship being refueled by two back hoses that encircle the torso. Warning symbols of skulls and cross bones, bio hazard waste, and flammable material run in alternating horizontal lines covering the surface of the poster. The repetition of the familiar symbols accentuates the urgency of the message. The words “Our bodies are not Terra Nullius” in white lettering against a black background are bold and distinctive, as is her colour palette of yellow, red, brown, black and white. She uses a heavy black line to outline the partial figure (see fig. 45).
The choice of depicting only the torso creates a tension that is not easily resolvable, given
the nature of the topic this graphic is addressing. The anatomized faceless body is
impersonal and desexualized emphasizing the hegemony of heteropatriarchal
objectification of the Indigenous body. Although there is a slight swell in the hips, the
size of the hands in relation to the rest of the body leaves the viewer to question if the
image is depicting a cisgendered woman or a transgender woman.

Having grown up under the shadow of the Alberta tar sands, Konsmo speaks
about the issue of the violence against women and the environment from a place of
intimate knowledge. The tar sands industry is the biggest source of revenue for the province. In 2017 the exports of the oil and gas industry totaled 58.5 billion Canadian dollars, the biggest source of revenue for the province (www.albertacanada.com). Touted for its economic benefit, the true costs to the environment and the health of the Indigenous people who reside closest to the mega project are still unknown. In 2016, the tar sands came under greater international scrutiny as the construction on the Keystone XL and the Dakota Access pipelines were halted amidst protests from Indigenous communities and their environmentalist allies along the proposed route. The stay of execution was short lived, reversed when the new American president was sworn into office. The attention garnered from the protests brought the concerns of those most impacted by the pipelines to the attention of the world.

Part of the campaign strategy to stop the construction on the pipelines was to expose the collateral damage of these projects. It not only includes health, and environmental damage, but also other costs such as the human trafficking of Indigenous women and children in the temporary “men camps.” The high wages and transient nature of the camps contribute to drug abuse and to the occurrence of violent crimes (landbodydefense.org). The statistics of this are staggering. Their report entitled *Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies* states:

> Between the start of the Bakken oil boom in 2008 and 2013… the assaults in Dickinson, ND rose 300%. The tribal police department of Fort Berthold (where the population has more than doubled with an influx of non-Indigenous oil workers) reported more murders, fatal accidents, sexual assaults, domestic disputes, drug busts, gun threats, and more than any year before. Once one of the
safest states in the country, North Dakota now has the eighth highest incidence of rape in the U.S. (Ibid 8).

This violence directed toward Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people has been the subject of the Canadian government’s Inquiry on the Missing and Murdered Women across Canada. Since 1980, over 1,181 Indigenous women have been murdered or are missing (www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca). Prior to the establishment of the inquiry, there was a grass roots movement founded by Métis artist Christy Belcourt that worked to raise awareness about systemic racism encountered by Indigenous women in the justice system while also helping families deal with the grief and frustration over government inaction to look into the deaths of the women.

Belcourt’s *Walking with our Sisters*, a commemorative art installation, presented over 1,800 pairs of moccasins whose unfinished vamps represent the lives unfinished, ended by senseless acts of violence. Attendees are invited “into this collaborative, community-based memorial that creates a ceremonial public space so that people can come together to honor, to mourn, to remember, and to raise awareness” (WWOS.ca). This installation provides a visual representation of the gendered violence of colonialism. The imposition of the colonial structure that maintains heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity has had and continues to have a devastating impact on the daily lives of Indigenous people, especially our women, girls and the Two-Spirited. Konsmo created a pair of vamps for the exhibition, and is the youth and two-spirit representative with the Walking with Our Sisters collective (see fig. 46).

---

29 This number includes children’s vamps to commemorate those children that did not return from the government residential schools.
In an interview with RAMP 1885, Konsmo explains the thought symbolized in both the graphics and the materials she used in the creation of these birchbark vamps.

Land makes up a huge part of who we are, our identities, our spirituality...That tension from leaving rural or remote areas or their reserves to move to the city is a part of what has impacted gender-based violence – that was something that I wanted to reflect on the pair of vamps that I made. When those connections are disturbed, I think that those are the types of things that put us at risk of gender-based violence (Bourgeault-Tassé).

Here the reference to the land, water and the migration to urban spaces is rendered in bold black graphics. The landscape of mountains and water is contrasted with the rigid phallic urban landscape. In the center of each vamp is an evergreen tree illuminated by a
full moon, next to a traffic light. The black and white palette against the subtle beige tone of the birch bark is used to dramatic effect. The trim at the top of the vamps is made from braided sweet grass, reinforcing Konsmo’s mantra, “the land is ceremony.”

Re-purposing the graphic and layout from the *Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius* poster, the image “On Policing” refers to the long history between Indigenous people and the control of Indigenous bodies by the police (see fig. 47). This poster was used as a graphic for a joint statement issued by the Families of Sisters in Spirit and the NYSHN. In the upper right hand corner on the chest, she depicts a police shield inscribed with the words: land, theft and police. These words reference how “law enforcement” has been employed as a means of dispossessing Indigenous people of their lands. The Northwest Mounted police was formed in 1873 to patrol the Canadian frontier, enforce prohibition, supervise the treaties, and assist in the settlement process (North West Mounted Police (NWMP) - Personnel Records, 1873-1904 - Library And Archives Canada). The recent Truth and Reconciliation commission revealed that Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) were deployed along with Indian Agents in enforcing the Indian Act, and as such played an active role in removal of Indigenous children from their communities (Smith, K. 100).

In 1885, the NWMP were shipped west to quash the Northwest Rebellion. Discouraged by the Federal Government’s inaction to guarantee title to their river lot homestead and farms, the Métis set up a provisional government. Seen as an act of treason, the Federal government deployed the NWMP to stop the rebellion. After five months of armed resistance, the Metis and their First Nations allies were defeated by the government forces. The leader of the rebellion, Louis Riel, was hung. Big Bear, One-
Arrow, and Poundmaker were charged with treason and incarcerated for their part in the rebellion.


The fraught relationship between indigenous people and law enforcement in these contemporary times is signified by the letters MMIW; the acronym, which I mentioned previously, refers to the missing and murdered Indigenous women. Here, Konsmo creates a visual narrative representing the frustration of the families of the missing and murdered for what is seen as a failure to investigate or follow up on these cases. In 2016, the newly elected Liberal government set up a national inquiry to investigate the systemic causes of
the violence, including social, economic and historical factors. The commissioners have also been charged with the task of examining institutional policies and practices. Many of the victims’ family members were disappointed that the inquiry would not be investigating why the police force has consistently failed to solve the crimes or resolve the cases of the missing women and girls.

Konsmo’s connects with this on a very personal level as an Indigenous woman. In the above graphic Konsmo uses the mirrored image of a loon to reference her own indigeneity, which she traces from the maternal side of her family. She relates in an interview with the *Radical Criminology Journal*, “The loon has a lot of sentimental significance to me in terms of an animal in my life. For my mom’s side, which is my Indigenous side of my identity, the loon has been a really important animal” (85). The commentary that Konsmo engages in is not confined to the victimization of Indigenous women at the hands of the police. The images of two police cruisers and the text “STAR LIGHT TOURS” refers to a practice of the Saskatoon police force, who would pick up Indigenous men and drive them outside of the city and abandon them. In 2000, *McClean’s Magazine* reporter Megan Campbell wrote that two of the city’s police officers were charged with unlawful confinement when it was revealed that they drove Darrell Night five kilometers outside of Saskatoon’s city limits and left him with only a t-shirt and jean jacket in -22 degree weather (par. 1). The *Windspeaker* newspaper later reported the city’s Chief of Police as saying that there was a possibility that the police force been conducting “Starlight tours” for years (par.1). Instead of incarceration Indigenous men were left to die.
Konso also addresses the demise of the residential school system and the rise of the prison industrial complex which has become the latest institution used by the settler colonial state to discipline the Indigenous body. This connection is vividly illustrated. Like its previously discussed iteration, the hands are rendered with the palms pressed into the front of the body. The backs of the hands are tattooed with guns; spilling out of the gun barrels, flowers crawl up the forearms and biceps. Their stems and leaves resemble razor wire, while also referencing the aesthetic of the floral style beadwork of the Métis and many First Nations. The wrists are secured with a pair of handcuffs. Between the chained wrists is a stenciled outline of a building with the words ‘Residential School’ written below the structure. Prior to the 1960s Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities by government agencies and placed in residential schools. Since the closure of these schools Indigenous children have continued to be removed from their families and funneled into the child welfare system. It is a trend that continues to this day. A recent Statistics Canada report indicates that in the prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Indigenous children represent 73 percent to 87 percent of the children in the foster care system (Turner par. 11). These numbers show that there are three times as many children in the foster care system than there were in the residential schools system at its height. Pam Palmater, an Indigenous lawyer and research chair, writes in McCleans Magazine that Canada’s child welfare system has become a pipeline to prison for Indigenous people, but for Indigenous women and children it has become a pipeline to exploitation, sex trafficking and becoming one of the murdered and missing women and girls (par. 6).
Sovereignty of the land is sovereignty of the Indigenous body. This has also meant creating a safe place for those individuals who are gender variant. It is not enough to reclaim Indigenous non-binary construction of gender and sexuality; it is imperative to redefine this knowledge in a manner that is inclusive and reflects the notion of being a good relation. This includes responsibility for your own sexual health. As a means to create dialogue around sexual activity, Konsmo introduced a workshop on beading condoms, dental dams and medallions workshop (see fig. 48).

The arts-based dialogue in these workshops provides the opportunity for discussions about sex and sexuality and harm reduction in a culturally safe space. “[B]eading is an activity that we sit around the kitchen table and do with family…lots of young people like to bead, it is an accessible art activity and people think it is fun and kind of funny, it breaks down those initial barriers, touching a condom and basically getting really intimate with it” (Konsmo qtd in Bell ). Konsmo relates in an interview with Windspeaker reporter Andrea Smith that it started as joke, but adds that “condoms, in the way they’ve been presented in Indigenous communities, are about fear, stopping youth pregnancy, and shame. It’s very disease control oriented… and about stopping Indigenous youth from having babies.” The stigma around using condoms has very real consequences, as HIV infections continue to climb among Indigenous people. To date the NYSHN has conducted over 100 workshops focusing on sex positivity while de-stigmatizing the usage of condoms (www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com).
Missionization and the residential school experience have socialized Indigenous people into being ashamed of their bodies and their sexuality as they were indoctrinated to adopt settler colonial attitudes regarding gender, sex and sexuality. This includes the assimilation of state sanctioned forms of relationality, as manifested in the conjugal contract and the nuclear family. Konsmo relates that, in identifying as Queer and Métis, she has a “responsibility to address the stigma and shame and the violence we still face around our bodies…having these identities means that I have responsibilities to uptake.” For Konsmo these responsibilities include supporting those individuals within the Indigenous communities who identify as non-binary and non-normative.

Danger and Konsmo address ways in which Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality are being reclaimed. Their art practices actively recover non-binary
understandings of gender and sexuality by focusing on the creative process as a means to build community and decolonize the indigenous body.

Although it can be problematic to affix a label to the artwork of these artists, the manner in which each artist participates in the conversation is important. The hegemony of heteronormativity as it is expressed in homophobia and transphobia has real consequences, as demonstrated in the artwork of Favell and Cuthand. Barry Ace does not see his gender and sexual identity as being made visible in his artwork; it is the renewal of indigenous knowledge that is seen in the materials he uses and the processes in which the women in his family passed on the knowledge to him. Ace’s artistic practice is a renewal of those traditions that were once seen by outsiders as the purview of the women, yet taught to this man as a young boy. Stimson’s performances are viewed similarly as a renewal of cultural knowledge regarding gender and sexuality. Stimson’s form of “cultural continuance” is found in his Buffalo Boy’s performative acts of renewing the energy embodied by the Napi, the Trickster. To go beyond these understandings, it is important to look at the ways artists are not only reclaiming Indigenous understanding regarding gender fluidity and sexuality, but also redefining them. The artwork of Danger and Konsmo is important, but the real possibilities for the decolonization of Indigenous people lies in their process. Both artists understand the profound effect the colonial history of residential schools, sexual abuse and intergenerational trauma has had on Indigenous people, limiting the ability to have a positive self-image and healthy sexual relationships. To reclaim non-binary gender and sexual identities is a political and revolutionary act. It is ultimately tied to reclaiming indigenous sacred histories, ceremonies, traditional homelands and languages.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

As Robert Warrior wrote, decolonial gestures are not so much ideological as they are methodical in that if we make Indigenous knowledge central to our inquiry we are able to disrupt the settler colonial authority over the construction of knowledge (195). The intent of this dissertation was not only to look at how Native American people construct knowledge regarding gender and sexuality but how these understandings are embodied in their artistic production. The artwork created by all of the artists discussed in this dissertation are responses to our colonial state and, as such, present a different way of understanding gender and sexuality that is not binary nor is gender and sexuality conflated with biological sex. By presenting both historical and contemporary case studies of Indigenous artists, I have demonstrated that the resistance to colonial subjectivity is ongoing. However, the hegemony of settler colonialism continues to have a severe impact on the acceptance of non-binary gender and sexual identities. I contend that to assert different ways of knowing is to assert our sovereignty as Nations and citizens of those nations.

Although I concede that, like many other scholars before me, sovereignty within an Indigenous context is vexing in its contemporary articulation, we are not fully sovereign nations. In exercising the limited sovereignty Indigenous nations do possess, our institutions have been restructured to reflect the settler nation state. As I have pointed out this has occurred through Indian policy and the residential schools.

Lerma’s model of Contemporary Indigenous Sovereignty demonstrates how Indigenous sovereignty consists of multiple components, including supreme authority. According to Lerma multiple components are found in Indigenous ceremonies,
languages, homelands and sacred histories. It is within these ceremonies, languages and histories that we are able to affirm the existence of gender and sexual variance that does not conform to a binary construction. However, as demonstrated, the access to this knowledge has been ruptured by the actions of the settler nation states. Residential schools and missionization of Indigenous people continue to affect Indigenous communities. Government policies such as Canada’s Indian Act and the Dawes Act in the United States, as Mark Rifkin so eloquently argues, were employed to discipline Indigenous peoples’ sexual and kinship relationships and reify the hegemony of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy. A consequence of this has been that not everyone has had equal access to traditional knowledge and teachings regarding sexual and gender variances. It is here that that applicability of Lerma’s model to my line of inquiry seems problematic. However, sovereignty is not confined to only nations; citizens, too, have the right to exercise their sovereignty and self-determination. As I have written earlier, this notion of sovereignty within an Indigenous context is realized in the interconnection of all beings and is expressed in the concept of being a good relation. One of the ways being a good relation is exercised is through non-interference. As Alex Wilson, a Cree scholar, reminds us within Cree culture, one of the basic tenets of the philosophy is non-interference. 30 This reiteration of individual autonomy is manifested in the Nishnaabeg society concept as well. Lee Anne Simpson writes that the concept of non-interference is understood from an Anishinaabe perspective where there is a strong respect for individuals made visible in the ways in which children are raised and gender is conceptualized as being fluid. According to Simpson this, “combined with an equally

30 In keeping with the concept of non-interference and an individual’s right to claim their sexual and gender identities, whether it is based on traditional teaching or not is the purview of the individual.
strong ethic of non-inference, creating a culture where individuals were encouraged and supported in developing and fulfilling their destinies, as long as their actions did not have a negative impact on others or on the community in general” (Oshkimaadiziig 17).

It is my contention that if the concept of non-interference is present among the Cree and Anishinaabe, there exists a strong probability that the concept is found in other cultures within Algonquian language families. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, the interrelationship between language and cognition makes it possible to express a specific ontology and epistemology. One cannot make the assumption that every Native culture exercises the tenet of non-interference as it has been described here (to do so would be essentialist). It is interesting to note that the Haudenosaunee, who do not belong to this language family, present their notion of non-interference or sovereignty with the Two-Row wampum. It is presumed that if the nation values sovereignty and self-determination then its citizens also value these concepts. As I mentioned previously, this idea is expressed in the notion of being in “good relation.”

Unlike art historical inquiries of the past where objects created by artists are examined for their formal qualities, this inquiry proposed that artistic production must be examined through a lens of intersectionality. In this instance, each chapter explored these questions through the lived experience of Indigenous people. What became so clear was how each artist expressed or expresses his/her gender and sexual identities through his/her artistic practice in a manner that reflects his/her unique personal history.

In the chapter on Hasten Klah, I demonstrated how his identity as a hatáałii and Nádlééhí embody a very specific Diné ontology. Other researchers have written about Hosteen Klah to recuperate an essentialist notion regarding the existence of
homosexuality across time and cultures as well as a model for modern society to emulate (Morgansen 56). Instead, I used what Aaron Fry refers to as an ethnotheoretical or Indigenous epistemological approach (47). By engaging a Diné-specific ontology, I demonstrated how Hosteen Klah’s gender and artistic production are a synthesis of the Diné concept of Hózhó.

Having worked in the museum that houses his legacy, I have been intrigued by Klah’s permanent representations of the sand paintings, despite the taboos against doing so. Although it is impossible to ever really know the reason why he chose to do this, one can speculate that it was a response to missionization and acculturation that was occurring around him. I assert that the textiles Klah produced reflect an Indigenous sovereignty that is aimed at keeping the knowledge he possessed available for future generations of the Diné nation.

Not all Indigenous people had the strong community and kinship ties that Klah had; Go-won-go is an example of someone who did not. Born Caroline Mohawk, to a Seneca father and non-Native mother, the matrilineal Seneca nation never claimed her as a member of the community, because their custom has tribal membership passed down through matrilineal lines. Growing up in Ohio after the untimely death of her father, Go-won-go would abandon small-town life for the vaudeville stages of New York, Canada and Europe. She first wrote and performed her own play Wep-ton-no-mah, the Indian Mail Carrier and then starred in the play Flaming Arrow written by fellow playwright Lincoln Carter. Go-won-go’s performances as the male lead in these plays complicated non-Native audiences’ expectations regarding gender. Some have considered her Two-Spirited in the modern sense of the word.
I assert that Go-won-go performed an Indigenous understanding of gender fluidity as a means to undermine the construction of the Native American as uncivilized. I have argued that she did this as part of a growing movement among Native American people that sought to address injustice and lobby for Indian policy reform. During her lifetime the settler nation government of the United States passed the Dawes Act and increased the pressure for Native Americans to assimilate. Not only did the Dawes Act result in the loss of millions of acres of land, it was an attempt to “detribalize” Native American people (Rifken 40). This reading of her performative acts is an example of how, when Indigenous concerns and Indigenous knowledge are central to an inquiry, the depth and scope is greatly enhanced.

After her death, Go-won-go faded from the public’s memory and consequently very little has been written about her. It seems odd considering the popularity that she seems to have enjoyed during the height of her career. In the end, however, she was relegated to being a fictionalized character who only existed in dime store novels. Popular culture worked to reign in and control her race, gender and sexuality to maintain heteronormativity and the heteropatriarchal order.

What Go-won-go accomplished in her lifetime was quite remarkable, especially when one considers the stage personas of her peers. Not the typical “Indian maiden,” she presented a very different expression of Native American masculinity than what audiences knew from the Wild West Shows. In her plays, the Native American male was socially mobile and had a non-Native love interest.

Go-won-go was the consummate Trickster, displaying that vibrant energy inherent in chaos. Her gender-fluid performances were a reminder that gender and sexual
identities are constructions and that chaos is the true nature of life. As Leroy Little Bear pointed out, Western society attempts to put order in the world by creating hierarchies that only serve to separate human beings from other beings. The trickster is an energy whose function, as I demonstrated, is to call into question the artificiality of cultural categories, as Go-won-go’s performances demonstrate the manner in which settler colonial culture conflates gender and sexuality with one’s biological sex.

Go-won-go’s performances were interventions that presented the Native American as not needing to be civilized because he/she already was. She presented the Indigenous sovereign body that carried the knowledge that she was equal to but separate from her settler colonial counterparts.

In the sixty years between the creative acts by these two historical figures and the beginning of the Two-Spirit movement, Native American people who did not conform to the settler colonial gender and sexual constructs often lived their lives in secrecy. They were the aunties and the uncles that more often than not never married and had children; they may have lived with same-sex “friends.” They were often the ones that left home and moved to urban centers, their secrets hidden, until many came home to die in the 1980s and 1990s. Sometimes they were welcome, but frequently they were not. Out of the devastation of the AIDS pandemic and the organizing that followed, a movement began to take shape focusing on the reclamation of Indigenous constructions regarding gender and sexual identities. The ways in which the artists who were interviewed for this dissertation engaged with gender and sexual identities varied, and there is a discernible generational difference. Artists Rosalie Favell and Thirza Cuthand both reflect on the disruptions caused by colonialization in the transmission of Indigenous knowledge about
gender and sexual identities more fluid than the binary constructions of settler colonial society. Their artwork relates the impact of this on a personal level.

Ace’s and Stimson’s stories demonstrate that the hegemony of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy was not completely successful in the eradication of Indigenous values, languages and knowledge. Through their ties to their communities their identities were nurtured but often not formally acknowledged. A generation later, Cuthand would receive affirmation of her sexual identity from members of her immediate family, but due to missionization, not all family members were accepting. Using humor, Cuthand’s artistic production addresses these discrepancies between the lived reality of Two-Spirit people and the romantic fantasies.

The contemporary generation has very few romantic fantasies. Danger’s and Konmos’ artistic practices reflect how this contemporary generation of Two-Spirit artists are not only reclaiming these identities but they are redefining them as we enter the twenty-first century. Not just a label, using the term Two-Spirit grounds one’s identity in an Indigenous practice that carries the responsibility to be in good relations with all your kin. The art practice of this generation of artists is focused on the process of artistic production not the end product. It is based on building relationships and reciprocity. Danger’s artistic practice involves informed consent and negotiation between her and her collaborators. In incorporating these methodologies, she introduces a process that is underscored by reciprocity and egalitarian relationships. The idea of the singular art star and celebrity status is replaced by the potential of art to heal and reclaim one’s sovereignty and self-determination, and to act from a place of empowerment rather than of victimization.
Konsmos’ artistic production, too, is indicative of the Indigenous feminist critique, which addresses the intersectionality between gender, sexuality, colonial violence and capitalism. The violence enacted on the earth is reflected in the violence enacted upon the Indigenous body, in particular the bodies of Indigenous women, children and Two-Spirit people. Konsmo’s community-engaged visual and multi-media projects are about justice and human rights. We as a society understand that access to clean water, food and shelter are basic rights. We also believe that everyone is equal under the law. However, as Konsmo points out this is not necessarily true; she is part of a newer generation, who knows that we cannot continue the ongoing violence against the earth or each other if we are to survive. Art becomes a means that can help build and maintain good relations with all of our relations.

The questions this generation of Two-Spirit artists and scholars raise go beyond the reclamation and renewal of gender and sexual identities; they are asking us to consider what possibilities can be set in motion when we activate and embody our Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. They are exploring what other spaces can be opened up by this activation. They are seeking answers to the questions: How can we decolonize sex? How do we reclaim our sovereignty over our bodies and our pleasure? These are questions that provide us with a focus for further research, while the process of decolonization should cause us to reflect on how our work as scholars contributes to the building and maintenance of good relations.

Although it is tempting to focus only on the future of Indigenous epistemes of gender and sexuality, other areas for further research include returning to the archive in search of other stories. The archive I speak of is not only contained in buildings, but it is
found in the collective memory of communities and families. For so long these stories have been unspoken and, if we do not give words to these memories, they will disappear. We can no longer afford the cost of this disappearance. The self-inflicted violence and violence enacted against Two-Spirit people is a constant reminder of the importance of reclaiming Two-Spirit histories.

As more youth learn their languages, the access to the worldviews these languages embody will only grow. Language is a key in understanding how we relate to the world around us and how we express these ideas about relationality. Perhaps this area holds the greatest promise for a continued inquiry into Indigenous construction of gender and sexual identities. It is important to not only focus on the roles and positions gender variant individuals occupied in the past, but to also look at what they are doing today. This approach implies that those with a deep commitment to making Indigenous concerns and knowledge central to their inquiries will conduct this future research.

Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, it became more and more apparent that one word could not fully articulate the multiplicity of gender and sexuality identities. As these languages become spoken more frequently, the likelihood increases that words once forgotten will be remembered and perhaps new words will be formulated that reflect a deeper understanding of the complexity of gender and sexuality.

As I complete this dissertation, I cannot help but reflect on the irony that on June 16\textsuperscript{th} 2017, the Canadian government passed Bill C-16. The “Transgender Bill,” as it became known, amended both the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code of Canada, making it a criminal act to discriminate against someone on the bases of their
gender identity or expression. This bill was passed on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Canadian state. The member who sponsored the bill is an Indigenous woman, Jody Wilson-Raybould of the Kwakwaka’wakw nation. The satisfaction for indigenous LGBTQ2 and their allies is the realization that the revolutionary nature of our cultural teachings will no longer be contained and we can work towards being the good relations we were intended to be.

---

31 Gender identity is defined as being an internal sense of being male, female or something else. Since gender identity is internal, a person’s gender identity is not necessarily visible. Gender expression, on the other hand, is how a person represents or expresses one’s gender identity to others, as observed through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics. (*Queering Reproductive Justice* 8).
Works Cited


Cuthand, Thirza. Personal interview. 08 December 2016.


Eyre, Alice W. “From Wigwam to Stage.” Metropolitan Magazine, 1898.


Favell, Rosalie. Personal interview. Favell, Rosalie personal interview. December 15, 2016, July


McChesney, Lea S. "From Entangled Objects to Engaged Objects: Knowledge Translation and Cultural Heritage Regeneration." *Museum as Process*: 186
Translating Local and Global Knowledges, edited by Raymond Silverman.
Routledge, 2014.


Web 01 May 2017.


Turner, Annie. "Living Arrangements Of Aboriginal Children Aged 14 And Under."  


