

BLM 1 – Excerpt from N’tacimowin inna nah’ – Our Coming In Stories

by Alex Wilson

Downloaded from cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/view/22131/20785

My family is from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, a community several hours north of Winnipeg. The Swampy Cree dialect of our community has no word for homosexual and no gender specific pronouns.¹ Rather than dividing the world into female and male, or making linguistic distinctions based on sexual characteristics or anatomy, we distinguish between what is animate and what is inanimate. Living creatures, animate objects, and actions are understood to have a spiritual purpose (Ahenakew). Our language and culture are rooted in this fundamental truth: that every living creature and everything that acts in and on this world is spiritually meaningful. This understanding is reiterated in the term “two-spirit,” a self-descriptor used by many Cree and other Aboriginal lesbian, gay, bi, and trans people. When we say that we are two-spirit, we are acknowledging that we are spiritually meaningful people. Two-spirit identity may encompass all aspects of who we are, including our culture, sexuality, gender, spirituality, community, and relationship to the land.

As a two-spirit woman, I know that an understanding and expression of my own identity is very different from those that prevail in most other Canadian cultures and I am very grateful for this. For me, two-spirit identity is empowering. As an educator and psychologist, I wanted to learn more about what our identity means to other two-spirit people and how this empowered identity appears within the context of the sustained racism, homophobia, and sexism that most of us have experienced.

....

In the narratives of two-spirit people, “coming in” is not a declaration or an announcement. Rather, it is an affirmation of interdependent identity: an Aboriginal person who is glbt comes to understand their relationship to and place and value in their own family, community, culture, history and present-day world.

¹The Cree name Aayahkwew was used by anthropologist D. Mandelbaum to describe a Plains Cree person who seemed to defy western gender roles.