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Author Joseph Boyden and the Two-Spirit Human Rights Movement

Clarifying how the Two-Spirit name is synonymous with Indigenous LGBTQ people

Winnipeg, MB: Recent media reports regarding the indigenous identity of author Joseph Boyden have attributed the following quote to him: *“There’s something called the ‘two-spirit person’ in a lot of First Nations cultures,” he says, “meaning somebody who is never completely in one physical place, in one mental place, and I think I’m a bit of a two-spirit person. Home for me has to be both places—it has to be New Orleans, it [also] has to be Ontario. I would be very incomplete without either of those. It might be a little schizophrenic, but it works for me.”* (NUVO, May 28, 2011).

As a founding member of the **International Council of Two-Spirit Societies**, our organization feels that it is important to clarify that the Two-Spirit identity and human rights movement is specifically about indigenous people who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning. Our movement has evolved over the past 41 years since the Gay American Indians (GAI) organization was founded in San Francisco in 1975. During the 60’s and 70’s many indigenous LGBTQ people found varying degrees of acceptance in the broader LGBT community. In response to the growing HIV epidemic in North America, the first international gathering of Native American gays and lesbians was held in Minneapolis in 1988. Subsequent gatherings have been held across the continent since then. <http://www.twospiritmanitoba.ca/two-spirit-gatherings.html> The 30th anniversary of the gathering will be held in New York State in September 2017. Our travels to various locales have been intentional and serve to create safe spaces for local Two-Spirit people.

At the third annual gathering in 1990 at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre near Beausejour, Manitoba, the name “Two-Spirit” was introduced as a spiritual name for us. The act of *spirit-naming* mirrors First Nations who have renamed their communities using traditional names; the process is affirming and reinforces cultural history and social location. *Two-Spirit* was quickly adopted by indigenous LGBT people in Canada and the US. Despite recent advances in creating safe spaces for Two-Spirit people, a great degree of resistance, fueled by homophobia and transphobia, still exists within the First Nation, Inuit, and Metis leadership.

While we do not feel obliged to comment on Mr. Boyden’s indigenous heritage, we do believe that academics, writers and researchers must acknowledge that a rich and vital history of the Two-Spirit movement exists and that we have leaders today who continue to advocate for our civil and human rights as indigenous LGBTQ/Two-Spirit people.

http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2014/08/NewLookHomophobia.pdf