

## LGBTQ+ NATIVE AMERICA AND THE NAVAJO

On the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, reflect upon the diversity of people who identify with this larger community, specifically the Indigenous inhabitants of this continent.

Today Native America is comprised of more than 500 tribes and nations that are extremely variable in their cultural practices, with a diversity of gender roles and sexualities. These expressions were violently suppressed by European colonizers and the imposition of Christianity, though knowledge and practice of traditional expressions nevertheless has survived under duress. The term Two-Spirit sometimes is used to identify across Native American communities as LGBTQ+.

Among the Navajo people (Diné), traditional stories regarding gender and identity that were taught and instilled, were fair and egalitarian. Stories about Navajo third-genders (Nádleeh) relate how they were revered and respected because they were known leaders, herbalists, healers, and were caretakers of orphaned children.

Colonization brought distinct, pejorative views to the Navajo people. Heterosexual constructs, such as heteronormativity (the belief that heterosexuality, predicated on the gender binary, is the norm for sexual orientation) and heteropatriarchy (a socio-political system where males and heterosexuals have authority over females and over other sexual orientations and gender identities) were introduced to the Navajo people through boarding schools and foreign religion. Navajo children were taught male-female gender binary systems, privileging the male role and heterosexuality. These settler colonial teachings negated and repressed traditional stories of gender and identity.

Today Navajo relatives outside the male-female gender binary system, also known as LGBTQ+, confront those who have been indoctrinated to accept heterosexual constructs. However, Navajo people believe their life and its teachings are cyclical. This belief is motivating LGBTQ+ Navajo people to re-inscribe their teachings of gender and sexuality, because Navajo people are all five-fingered children of Mother Earth and Sky Father.

*Background image: Queen of Diné Pride, Navajo Nation, 2018. Rapheal Begay.*

*Bottom left: Michelle Sherman (Diné), January, 2019. Laurel Morales for KJZZ, Frontera Desk.*

*Bottom right: Trans Indigenous community icon, Mattee Jim (Diné), ca. 1999. Equality New Mexico.*



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2019  
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STONEWALL UPRISING