Introducing the Cultured Queer/Queering Culture: Indigenous Perspectives on Queerness’ Symposium

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Abstract
On February 19, 2015 the Forum for Indigenous Research Excellence (FIRE) at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia, hosted Australia’s first Indigenous LBGTIQ symposium, Cultured Queer/Queering Culture: Indigenous Perspectives on Queerness. The symposium ignited considerable interest both from attendees and from those who were unable to attend but are interested in accessing the presentations as teaching resources. This edition of the Journal of Global Indigeneity builds on the interest generated during and since the symposium by offering readers a range of resources that include the recording of each presentation accompanied by a peer reviewed paper and a recorded interview with each presenter. This issue continues the momentum of the symposium. We are happy to offer contributions as an accessible resource for interested parties, students, and importantly, for Indigenous people and communities across the world.

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Introducing the Cultured Queer/Queering Culture: Indigenous Perspectives on Queerness’ Symposium

Bronwyn Carlson

On February 19, 2015 the Forum for Indigenous Research Excellence (FIRE) at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia, hosted Australia’s first Indigenous LBGTIQ symposium, *Cultured Queer/Queering Culture: Indigenous Perspectives on Queerness*. The symposium ignited considerable interest both from attendees and from those who were unable to attend but are interested in accessing the presentations as teaching resources. This edition of the *Journal of Global Indigeneity* builds on the interest generated during and since the symposium by offering readers a range of resources that include the recording of each presentation accompanied by a peer reviewed paper and a recorded interview with each presenter. This issue continues the momentum of the symposium. We are happy to offer contributions as an accessible resource for interested parties, students, and importantly, for Indigenous people and communities across the world.

The initial idea for the symposium came from conversations between UOW PhD candidate, Andrew Farrell and Bronwyn Carlson. These discussions, and Andrew’s research, suggested that ‘queerness’ in relation to Australian Indigenous subjectivities and knowledges, has been for the main part uncharted territory in the Australian academic landscape. Despite the dearth of academic scholarship in the field to date, there is currently evidence of a growing interest, marked recently by the edited volume by Dino Hodge (2015), *Colouring the Rainbow: Blak Queer and Trans Perspective* which includes chapters by two of the symposium presenters Dr Sandy O’Sullivan and Maddee Clark.

Andrew Farrell’s work is innovating and makes a significant contribution to this burgeoning field of inquiry here in Australia. His interest in this topic area has led to his online archival blog, *Black Gold: Archiving the Black Rainbow*. Andrew’s research investigates and theorizes the lives of transgender and gender diverse identified Indigenous peoples in Australia. His research focuses on the emerging voices of community, activists, artists, and scholars working in the areas of gender, gender diversity, and Indigenous Australian transgenderisms. Located within the socio-geography of diverse Australian Aboriginal cultures and traditions, Andrew’s research addresses the question: In what ways can Aboriginal peoples be gender diverse?
The purpose of the symposium was twofold: to bring together LGBTIQ academics and interested participants with a view to enriching and extending current dialogues, and secondly, to capture the momentum of current international activity in this sphere of inquiry. International presenters include, Cherokee Two-Spirit scholar, Dr Qwo-Li Driskill. Dr Driskill is a writer, teacher, activist and performer. S/he is one of the editors and contributors to two seminal works published in 2011, *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* and *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literature*. 
Dr Alex Wilson is a Neyonawak Inniwak scholar from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. Dr. Wilson’s scholarship has significantly contributed to building and sharing knowledge about Two-Spirit identity. Her work includes historical research, research into teaching, Indigenous research methodologies, and the prevention of violence in the lives of Indigenous peoples. Her publications include chapters, ‘How we find ourselves: Identity development and two-spirit people’ (2013) and ‘N’tacimowin inanna: Our Coming in stories’ (2009). Dr Wilson’s current projects include “Two-Spirit and Indigenous Feminisms research: Two-Spirit identity development”; “Coming In” theory; working with the Aboriginal HIV/AIDS CBR Collaborative Centres National Aboriginal Research Advisory Council; studies on Two-Spirit people and homelessness; and an International study on Education and LBGTIQ Indigenous peoples.

Tawhanga Mary-Legs Nopera, is a PhD candidate from the Te Arawa, Ngati Tuwharetoa, Tainui and Ngapuhi peoples of Aotearoa. Tawhanga integrates his knowledge of Te Wharepora o Hineteiwaiwa, the Maori school of artistic weaving, with performance and digital art paradigms. Tawhanga creates work that critiques hegemonic discourses and destabilizes pervasive stereotypes with a view to reaffirming Maori cultural identities. Tawhanga is currently a PhD candidate in creative practice in the School of Maori and Pacific Development at the University of Waikato. His research interrogates the ways that taonga can perform tino rangatiratanga. While at the symposium Nopera was interviewed by radio presenter Lana from Joy 94.9 FM, a Sydney based gay and lesbian volunteer-based community radio station.
In addition to international presenters, the symposium was delighted to showcase Indigenous Australian scholars and researchers who are working in this field. Dr Sandy O’Sullivan, a Wiradjuri woman and Director of the Centre for Indigenous Research Collaborations, at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education has challenged the way Aboriginal lesbian identity is represented in her forthcoming chapter ‘How to [not] define Aboriginal lesbian identity’. Dr O’Sullivan has also contributed a chapter in Colouring the Rainbow: Blak Queer and Trans Perspective (2015) entitled, ‘Stranger in a strange land: Aspiration, Uniform and the Fine Edges of Identity’. Her current research focuses on the representation and engagement of First Peoples/Nations as these are presented and represented in major international museum spaces. This project is funded by the Australian Research Council.
Maddee Clark is a Bundjalung, queer and gender diverse person who is a writer, educator and PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne. Maddee has published in *Overland Literary Journal* and has presented her work at the *Reading the Country: Thirty Years On* festival held in 2014 and at the *Network of Women Students Australia 2014 conference* at Edith Cowan University. In addition, Maddee hosted the 3-day symposium *Austracism: Racial Literacy and Critical Whiteness Studies*. She has also contributed a chapter in *Colouring the Rainbow: Blak Queer and Trans Perspective* (2015) titled, ‘Are we Queer? Reflections on ‘Peopling the Empty Mirror’ Twenty Years On’.
We were very fortunate to have Daniel Browning acting as the MC during the symposium. Daniel is a Bundjalung man and a radio presenter for the ABC (*Australian Broadcasting Commission*). Daniel produces and presents *AWAYE!*, a national Indigenous radio program foregrounding Aboriginal arts and culture. Daniel interviewed Indigenous queer scholars at the symposium and has since featured the event on *AWAYE!*

![Daniel Browning. Photo by Adam Orvad.](image)

The symposium was made possible with support from the following University of Wollongong’s research entities within the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts:

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References


