

## Report on the Workshop of the **IASSA Working Group “Gender in the Arctic”**

### **Queering Indigeneity: Indigenous Queer Intersections in the Arctic**

Oulu, 6 September 2018, as side event of the UArctic Congress

Conveners: Gertrude Saxinger, Rauna Kuokkanen, J. Otto Habeck, Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv

#### **Abstract**

In the Arctic, queer identities and issues are rarely discussed in public, especially in Indigenous communities. Besides the common heteronormative discrimination in society, many Indigenous queer individuals are ostracized in their communities and as the result, relocate to more urban settings. The workshop examines these experiences and practices from both an academic and activist perspective. It presents Indigenous perspectives on queerness and interrogates assumptions of Indigenous heteronormativity. The workshop consists of three sessions: an academic panel on queer Indigenous studies, an activist panel on queer Indigenous experiences and reflections and a concluding academic-activist round table discussing the future prospects and challenges of queering Indigeneity and the need for queer Indigenous studies in the Arctic.

**See all paper abstracts:** [gender-arctic.jimdo.com/iasc-iassa-workshop-abstracts](http://gender-arctic.jimdo.com/iasc-iassa-workshop-abstracts)

#### **Session One: Academic Panel**

Participants: Maureen P. Hogan, Katariina Kyrölä, Stephan Dudeck, Ryan Jimmy and Ranjan Datta, Rauna Kuokkanen

Chair: Gertrude Saxinger

#### **Session Two: Activism Panel**

Participants: Kyle Shaughnessy, Stina Roos, Alexandria Wilson, Vivian Boyne (on behalf of Mikkel E. Mikkelsen)

Chair: Rauna Kuokkanen

#### **Panel Discussion**

Participants: Ryan Jimmy, Rauna Kuokkanen, Anne Olli, Stina Roos, Kyle Shaughnessy

Chair: J. Otto Habeck

#### **Summary of the Panel Discussion**

The Chair opened the panel discussion with a short summary of topics discussed during the two morning sessions (colonial experience; commodification of queerness/ indigenous cultural heritage; the interface of research and activism). Panellists and other workshop participants started from necessity of research on the intersectionality of queer and Indigenous and the advantages of indigenous persons conducting research on their own community. They entered then a more general discussion about research ethics: the legitimacy of researchers to study "others"; participatory research as a way forward that nonetheless also entails certain practical and ethical challenges; and the positionality of researchers. Subsequently, the discussion moved to the topic of research impact – not necessarily in the academic sense, but rather in terms of the relevance for the communities, groups and individuals "under study". Some activists among the panellists stated that mental well-being is a topic of immediate relevance, worth to be studied for the urgent need to be practically addressed. Others added that violence, suicide and other forms of (self-) harming behaviour need to be addressed. Projects and initiatives to address these issues already

exist, but much more needs to be done, also in order to overcome queer indigenous persons' feelings of being isolated and powerless. While ongoing research initiatives have a focus on negative phenomena, queer Indigenous perspectives and experiences should not be exclusively interpreted as problematic: different disciplines of social sciences and humanities should also explore connotations of self-esteem and supportive forms of relatedness when studying queer indigeneity.

In the earlier sessions, there were repeated remarks about Indigenous conceptualisations of gender that differ from binary and heteronormative views on gender emanating from colonial regimes. However, as discussants pointed out, it is impossible to simply ignore or "undo" colonial discourses and influences; rather, it is necessary to acknowledge their impact and take them as points of departure to strengthen, revive and recreate Indigenous and queer forms of self-determination and social relations differing from dominant heteronormative ones. This also implies, as one participant stated, a stronger self-reflexivity of "white" researchers about the ways how colonial relations have shaped their own positions (drawing on Critical Whiteness scholarship). In addition, non-Indigenous researchers should engage more seriously with Indigenous epistemologies.

Final remarks of the panel discussion pointed to the quickly growing interest in the intersection of queer and Indigenous experience, but also emphasized that discussions on this topic are still subject to silencing and stigma in many scientific, regional and social settings. There was general agreement of participants and the audience that the topics raised entailed emotional responses, bringing up personal memories about difficult situations and simultaneously providing encouragement.

Furthermore, future activities and themes of the IASSA Working Group Gender in the Arctic were discussed. Potential topics for next workshops include: additional aspects of intersectionality, creativity and arts, masculinity, mental well-being or security.

More ideas for upcoming workshops, your willingness to conceptualise/co-host a workshop as well as contributions to a broader discussion are welcome and can be posted on: [gender-arctic@lists.univie.ac.at](mailto:gender-arctic@lists.univie.ac.at) – or get in touch with the coordination team.

*Register as WG/list-member:* [lists.univie.ac.at/mailman/listinfo/gender-arctic](https://lists.univie.ac.at/mailman/listinfo/gender-arctic)

*If you want to list your gender-related activities and institutions on the website of the IASSA WG Gender in the Arctic send a note to:* [gender-arctic.jimdo.com/gia-network](http://gender-arctic.jimdo.com/gia-network)

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