

TWO-SPIRIT YOUTH SPEAK OUT!

Analysis of the Needs Assessment Tool



March 2004

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is dedicated to all Two-spirit youth. May courage and strength help guide your journey. Special thanks goes out to the youth who participated in the survey. Your voice really does matter!

Thanks to our project partners: The Centre and Youthquest! and the Population Health Fund of Health Canada whose funding and support made this report and project possible. Thanks to the Project Evaluator, Lee-Anne Ragan.

Thank you to the Urban Native Youth Association for again, being the leader, and a home for Two-spirit youth.

Last, but definitely, not least...the wonderful, fantastic Youth Advisory Committee. A great big thank you to the four youth that were there from start to finish: Blake, Chantell, Kelsey and A.J., and to the other eight who “rotated” in the fifth seat (you know who you are!). Well, this is your creation. Congratulations!

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Canada

Introduction

The Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA) is committed to providing, when possible, programs and services to help meet the needs of all Native youth. This includes ensuring all of our programs are welcoming, accessible, and respectful spaces for Two-spirit youth, and when possible providing specific programming for marginalized groups such as Two-spirit or sexually exploited youth. UNYA offered a Two-spirit Youth Program & Counsellor for two years before the funding was discontinued. We have been unsuccessful in finding new funding, but continue to work on projects such as this and to advocate for others to be inclusive and accepting of all Two-spirit people.

In 2002, the Urban Native Youth Association, The Centre and Youthquest! formed a partnership to carry out a project called *Connecting With Pride*. This two-year project consisted of three main activities.

1. To help four communities in rural areas of the province to develop safe spaces for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered /Transsexual, Two-spirit, Intersexed and Questioning youth. The four sites chosen were Prince George, Nanaimo, Trail and Kamloops.
2. To develop a skills building seminar that was to be presented to youth in Kamloops, B.C. on August 13th, 14th and 15th, 2003. Conference reports are available as a separate document.
3. The Urban Native Youth Association was to develop a survey instrument to help identify the current needs and issues concerning Two-spirit youth in British Columbia. In the fall of 2002, a five member Youth Advisory Committee was established to help aid in the development of the survey instrument. Through the Advisory Committee meetings and three strategically planned focus groups with diverse populations (sex trade, transgendered/transsexual and urban youth in Victoria), a survey instrument was created by the spring of 2003.

This report is the result of the information gathered through the survey. It is intended as a resource for Two-spirit youth, as well as, for those who are in the helping profession and want to or are currently providing relevant and welcoming services to Two-spirit youth.

The survey is attached as Appendix A. The full results of the survey are in graph form attached as Appendix B. Quotes gathered from the surveys appear throughout this report, and a full list of all quotes is available in Appendix B.

But, before one can begin to understand and analyze the data, a brief history must be given with respect to First Nations and Two-spirit People. One must understand their past in order to respect their present.

The Intergenerational Effects of the Residential School System Upon First Nations People

Indian Residential Schools were set up by the federal government of Canada and operated by various organized religions as a way of assimilating and 'educating' Aboriginal people. In the beginning, federal Indian Agents were ordered onto reservations to take Aboriginal children to these boarding schools. Aboriginal children were literally stolen, then taken to these schools.

In psychology, from birth to approximately age seven, is what is termed as the human developmental years. It is within these years that a child will learn most of their behavioural and thought patterns, as well as, emotional stability from their environment and role models. It is also during this time period that a child attaches and bonds to their parents. It was during this stage of development that Aboriginal children were taken from their birth parents to attend residential schools. This forced separation caused much psychological damage and created many negative issues for both parent and child.

While attending residential schools, children were subjected to various forms of abuses: mentally, emotionally, physically, sexually and spiritually. They were told that their Creator was evil and that "God" would punish them if they practiced any of their Native traditions. If they were caught doing anything that was perceived as Native, the children were subjected to various forms of abuse and humiliation, often in front of their peers.

During holidays and special occasions the children were sent back to their home communities. These children were now in a state of confusion. They were emotionally detached from both their parents and home environment. These children began to hate their families and themselves for being Native because of what was being taught in the residential schools regarding their nativity.

The first generation of those raised in residential school soon began to use alcohol and other drugs as a way of coping with the abuses that were occurring in their lives. When they began to have children, they did not know how to parent or "attach" to their children because of what was stolen from both themselves and their parents. These children missed a part of the crucial nurturing stage in childhood development. The cycle had begun. Many of the children of this generation whose parents were brought up in residential schools were now being brought up in alcohol and drug dependent homes. When these children reached school age, they were also taken to the residential schools where they too experienced abuse, confusion, and humiliation.

When these children were sent back to their home communities, they began to believe what the 'teachers' were teaching them as all that was there was alcohol and drugs, and/or other subsidiary issues that come from the abuse of alcohol and drugs, as well as what their parents had been taught or experienced in the residential schools: physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse. This generation began a legacy of Aboriginal people abusing each other and being abused by so many outside forces.

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools lives on today. Many First Nations people have become anti-social and choose drugs, alcohol and/or violence as a way of coping with life. The push to return to traditional ways and values is currently a big movement in many First Nation communities. This probably explains why some of the responses in the survey are very subjective. As some First Nations societies begin to return to their traditions, so goes the acceptance of its Two-spirit people back into the culture.

Another devastating result of the residential school experience was the denigration of women and Two-spirit people in Aboriginal communities. The dominant religion did not make room for women to have equal roles as men, or for there to be alternate genders or sexual preferences than that of heterosexuals. As a direct result of the residential school experience, homophobia is now rampant in most Aboriginal communities, even more so than in mainstream society. The religious dogma of the Residential Schools have erased a proud and rich history of Two-spirit people in most Aboriginal communities.

Today, many Two-spirit youth leave their communities hoping to find, safety, acceptance, and fulfillment in the big city. Unfortunately when they arrive, they face harsh realities when being confronted with racism, a lack of skills and training to find employment, a lack of familial support, a lack of support within the larger GLBT community, and even homophobia. Hence, Two-spirit youth are finding themselves living on the streets of the big city, which puts them at great risk of sexual exploitation, chemical dependency, suicide, and contracting HIV.

Further information can be found through the publications listed in Appendix C.

“There are many cases of homophobia on reservations, it’s taught by older generations to disapprove [of the] queer lifestyles, my parents are against queer people because it’s so uncommon and everyone is afraid of difference”

Quote from youth participant

Two-Spirit History

"I do not label myself as a Two-spirited because I'm not sure what my tradition is from my people as a Two-spirited person"

Quote from youth participant

The term "Two-spirit" was used by North American Aboriginal societies to describe what Europeans now call Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Transsexual people. "Two-spirit" was used as it was believed that gay men had the female intuition (emotional) and the male body (physical), while lesbian women were blessed with the male physical attributes and still carried with them, the female intuition. The "dual spirits" become even more obvious with the transgendered and transsexual.

Almost 90% of all traditional North American Aboriginal cultures had specific roles for Two-spirit people within their communities. In many cultures, Two-spirit people were viewed as blessed and one of their main roles was that of a spiritual advisor or seer. In some tribes, Two-spirit people were also the mediators of the community because it was believed that they understood "both" sides of disagreements between men and women. Two-spirit men and women tried to keep harmony within the tribe. Two-spirit men generally would help in the raising of the children, while Two-spirit women would go hunting. In some tribes, Two-spirit men were also there for the sexual pleasure of the man whose primary relationship was with a woman; and the Two-spirit woman was there for the sexual pleasures of the woman whose primary relationship was with a man. These were some of their roles within their communities. Since Two-spirit was not seen as "abnormal", when children began to show traits of being Two-spirit, they were taken under the care of the Two-spirit Elders who would teach them about the history and roles of Two-spirit people within their community.

While there are some common characteristics that Two-spirit people shared within each tribe, each individual tribe also had different slants on the duties of the Two-spirited. For example, in the Cree culture, Two-spirit men opened up the Sundance. This is a very sacred ceremony and only a Two-spirit man could open it. Two-spirit people in the Cree culture also were pipe carriers. To be a pipe carrier in any tribe was an honour that was only bestowed upon those who were highly spiritual.

Most traditional North American Aboriginal cultures also had a different view of sexuality than the Europeans. Aboriginal tribes had a many gender system. Many had 4, 5, 6 or even 7 genders. Many Aboriginal cultures had a six gender system as opposed to the two gender system that we use today. The six genders were: men whose primary relationship was with a woman (hetero/bi man in today's context); women whose primary relationship was with a man (hetero/bi women); Two-spirited men (gay men); Two-spirited women (lesbian women); transgendered people (those who have physical characteristics of a man or woman, but inherently feels like the other); and transsexual people (those who have the physical characteristics of both the male and female, referred to in today's society as a hermaphrodite). Therefore, the idea of homosexuality in most Aboriginal societies did not, could not, exist because Two-spirit people were seen as completely different genders. Further information can be found through the publications listed in Appendix C.

Analysis and Recommendations of the Needs Assessment Tool (NAT)

There were a total of 44 NAT surveys that were completed and returned. Respondents were 24 years of age or younger. This section will provide a brief analysis and recommendation to the responses to each statement. While some statements and responses are pretty straightforward, some are very revealing. Some questions were geared more to the social service sector, while others were directed more toward the youth, the Recommendations will reflect that.

- ~ Questions 1 through 25 were all based on a rating scale of 1 to 5. One being strongly disagree, five being strongly agree and three being a neutral response to the statement.
- ~ Questions 26 to 28 were questions with respect to how youth defined themselves, as well as, their Nation(s)
- ~ Questions 29 to 32 were open-ended questions where the respondents could elaborate more on the question.
- ~ Question 33 simply asked if they were or are a resident of B.C.
- ~ Questions 26 to 33 do not have any analysis or recommendations, due to the statements and questions themselves. All of the responses are included in Appendix B.

Overall we have found that some of the recommendations would apply to many, if not all of the questions or statements, so we have developed a list of recommendations that would apply to the issues and concerns of Two-spirit youth in general. These are followed with further analysis and recommendations for each individual question up to question #25

General Recommendations:

1. Everyone – from First Nations individuals and communities to service and health care providers – has a responsibility to educate themselves about Two-spirit/GLBT issues, to support Two-spirit youth, and to confront homophobia.
2. More research and writing must be done about the rich history of Two-spirit people.
3. More education regarding Two-spirit, GLBT, gender identity and sexuality is needed, especially for the heterosexual population.
4. Youth workers, educators, counsellors and health care professionals must fulfill their obligation to help all people by ensuring there are appropriate services and safe spaces for Two-spirit youth.
5. Two-spirit youth need to take steps to build their self-esteem and their support networks, and to make sure they seek out healthy alternatives to behaviours and activities that put their health and lives at risk.

Statement #1: More teachings/education is needed for straight people about GLBT issues.

Analysis: Approximately 87% of the respondents agreed that heterosexual people have to become more educated about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered/transsexual issues. This statement shows that Two-spirit youth feel that most straight people do not understand them.

Recommendations:

1. Particularly in school settings, education must include role modelling and having and imposing consequences for homophobic actions and statements.
2. Each member of the GLBT population must do their best to help educate the straight population.

Statement #2: When coming out, I did/do need or prefer someone who is Aboriginal to talk to.

Analysis: Approximately 52% of the respondents remained neutral; they neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. One can infer from the responses that when coming out, as long as youth have a strong support system and have someone with whom they can talk, the majority of Two-spirit youth do not have a strong preference for whether the person is Aboriginal or not. However, it should be noted, that approximately 34% of the respondents did say that they prefer receiving support from someone who is Aboriginal.

Recommendations:

1. Anyone working with Two-spirit youth needs to be sensitive to the needs of those youth.
2. Whenever possible, the support person should be Aboriginal.
3. Whenever possible, the support person should be Two-spirit.

Statement #2a: When coming out [to someone], the person has to be a professional (ie: counsellor), who understands the issues.

Analysis: This statement shows how subjective each individual circumstance is. 36% agreed, 34% were neutral and 30% disagreed as to whether the person with whom one is coming out to has to be a professional. While there is a slight preference for having a counsellor, the difference in the category of responses is not substantial. One can infer from the responses, that if a Two-spirit youth has a strong support network, the need for a counsellor is likely less important.

Recommendations:

1. Where counselling may not be available or wanted, we must all remember that Two-spirit youth can find understanding through building a strong support network. We should all encourage youth to identify people who are positive influences in their lives and can help foster and nurture their self-esteem.
2. Service providers should offer a specific program or counsellor that is sensitive to Two-spirit youth and their issues and concerns.

Statement #3: A better understanding of Two-spirit (GLBT) issues is needed in my own First Nations community.

Analysis: 80% of the respondents believe that a better understanding of Two-spirit issues is needed in their First Nations community. Most Two-spirit youth feel misunderstood within their First Nations community. With the residual effects of the Residential School System still felt in most First Nations communities, homophobia is prevalent. As First Nations communities continue to return to traditional customs, education and understanding will likely follow.

“More education being taught to First Nations students and their parents [to help make Two-spirit youth feel safer]”

Quote from youth participant

Recommendations:

1. First Nations communities and individuals must take it upon themselves to educate themselves and others regarding the traditional roles of Two-spirit people in First Nations communities.
2. Both First Nations communities, as well as, Two-spirit people must continue to work together to help in the understanding of alternative sexualities and to fight homophobia in First Nations communities.
3. First Nations communities and individuals must find safe ways to welcome Two-spirit people back into both rural and urban communities.

Statement #4: I have a good understanding of the traditional roles of Two-spirit people in First Nations communities.

Analysis: Responses to this statement show that 50% of the respondents do not know what the traditional roles of Two-spirit people were, with another 21% remaining neutral. The responses show that Two-spirit youth need more education and understanding of the traditional roles of Two-spirit People. As Two-spirit youth begin to learn about their traditions, this will foster positive self-esteem because of the rich and powerful history of the Two-spirit people. Information can be gathered from Gender Studies and Human Sexuality courses being offered in universities around the country; numerous writings now appear on Two-spirits. If one does a search on the internet, literally hundreds of hits on Two-spirit appear.

Recommendations:

1. In the last five years or so there has been a growing fascination with the Two-spirit people, writers, educators, and others must seize this opportunity to offer resources for people to learn more about Two-spirit history.
2. Service providers must help Two-spirit youth discover their history whenever possible.
3. All people, especially Aboriginal, must help Two-spirit youth and others understand the issues, concerns and history of Two-spirit people.
4. Two-spirit youth must begin to educate themselves about their rich history.

Statement #5: Urban Two-spirit people have different issues/concerns than Two-spirit people on the reserve.

Analysis: 51% of the respondents believe that there are different issues amongst urban Two-spirits, compared to their counterparts living on the reserve. 43% of the respondents remained neutral. Since the reserve community is somewhat close-knit and most First Nations communities having strong homophobia, one can infer that the need of Two-spirit youth living on reserve to be in the closet to feel safe brings about a whole different set of issues as compared to those living in the city where homosexuality is more open and freedom of expression is more accepted.

Recommendations:

1. Social service workers and others must help create a safe environment and support network for Two-spirit youth on reserves. This can be accomplished quickly and simply through email, but ultimately direct contact with other GLBT people is important for healthy emotional development.
2. Everyone must help Two-spirit youth form support networks that foster positive reinforcements and the opportunity to share similar experiences, as it brings a sense of normalcy to their lives.
3. Individual First Nations bands must begin to take lead in developing and bringing about services for their Two-spirit youth on reserve so that they are not forced to leave their home communities to try to find safety, acceptance, and a positive sense of self.

Statement #6: More Two-spirit Elders should be visible in my community.

Analysis: 64% of the respondents believe that more Two-spirit Elders should be visible in the community. Another 27% were neutral to the statement. Two-spirit youth seem to be looking for Elders for role models within their communities. If there were more Two-spirit Elders who were visible, it would help the community move towards acceptance of its Two-spirit people.

"[We need] our very own circle in a safe place, yearly Two-spirit gatherings which includes Elders and youth"

Quote from youth participant

Recommendations:

1. Two-spirit Elders who are “out” should start to become more active in their community, whether it is working directly with Two-spirit youth or being a positive role model who can help youth with acceptance and understanding.
2. Two-spirit Elders must help to educate the Aboriginal community about traditional Two-spirit roles.
3. All community members must create a safe environment for Two-spirit Elders to come out of the closet.

Statement #7: I have the right to belong in my community.

Analysis: 84% of the respondents agreed that they have the right to belong in their community. This statement was somewhat of a “self-esteem” question. The responses reveal that most Two-spirit youth have the basic belief that they have the right to belong. With a bit of guidance and support they can develop more positive self-esteem.

Recommendation:

Two-spirit youth must begin to educate themselves on the traditional roles of the Two-spirit in order to foster and nurture this part of their esteem.

Statement #8: I feel accepted in my community.

Analysis: 39% of the respondents were neutral to this statement; however, 38% stated they did not feel accepted in their community. If one does not feel accepted, he/she tends to feel unsafe and it ultimately leads Two-spirit youth to deny who they are or “live in the closet”.

Recommendations:

1. More education and understanding is needed in all communities concerning GLBT and Two-spirit issues.
2. Everyone must create a safe environment for Two-spirit youth to be themselves.
3. More visible Two-spirit Elders are needed.

“Living on a reserve that hates gays so much is hard especially when you want to come out, but you can’t because you’re scared to be beat[en] up or called down and/or murdered”

Quote from youth participant

Statement #9: I suffer from depression.

Analysis: 43% of the respondents stated they suffered from depression, with another 30% remaining neutral. Almost half of Two-spirit youth stated they suffer from depression and almost another third were ambivalent in their response. With such high numbers, it is clear that Two-spirit youth have a lot of troubles from acceptance, peer pressure, questioning their sexuality, a general feeling of being unsafe, and much more. It should be noted also that youth who suffer depression should seek help from their doctor or counsellor wherever possible.

Recommendations:

1. Everyone must help Two-spirit youth to form support networks that foster positive reinforcements and the opportunity to share similar experiences.
2. Two-spirit youth must reach out for help when they need it.

Statement #10: Peer pressure is a cause for not “coming out” sooner.

Analysis: 71% of the respondents agreed that peer pressure was a cause for not disclosing their sexuality sooner. With the negative stereotypes and the fear of being ridiculed, teased or beaten up by their peers, most Two-spirit youth choose not to come out.

Recommendations:

1. The school and education system must take responsibility for the safety of all of their students. Curriculum regarding sexuality and gender identity needs to be designed within current sex education models. GSA's (Gay Straight Alliances) within schools must be encouraged and supported.
2. Everyone must take responsibility for educating themselves and others about GLBT issues and concerns, and to actively discourage and speak out against homophobic statements and actions.

Statement #11: Negative stereotypes of homosexuality in schools leads to more drop-outs of Two-spirit youth.

Analysis: 73% of the respondents believe that negative stereotypes in schools leads to drop-outs of Two-spirit youth. Negative stereotypes leads to bullying. Safety for Two-spirit youth is very important and those who are Two-spirit and somewhat confused about their gender identity tend to drop-out more.

“[we need to] educate all educators and students. That way the people who may identify themselves as Two-spirited can comfortably come out of the darkness and learn what should be known and use the new experiences in everyday life”

Quote from youth participant

Recommendations:

1. Education must include role modelling and having and utilizing consequences for homophobic actions and statements.
2. School must provide accessible services and information to all students that can help end homophobic actions and statements in and out of school settings.

Statement #12: I am “out” in my community

Analysis: 55% of the respondents stated they were out in their communities, while 20% said they were not. The decision to come out or stay in the closet is each person’s individual choice. Due to individual safety concerns, coming out may or may not be possible. However, although it was not delved into with this survey, it has been shown, in general that people who live their life the way they want to, tend to live happier, healthier lives. Almost all of the people who do come out, are happy they did.

Recommendation:

Everyone must take responsibility for creating safe environments for Two-spirit youth to be themselves.

Statement #13: I find myself keeping my feelings/emotions hidden, out of fear from my community.

Analysis: 43% of the respondents feel that they have to keep their feelings hidden out of fear from their community, and 30% remained neutral. The majority of respondents believe they are not safe, with respect to their feelings, within their community. The high instances of homophobia keep youth in fear and for those who are already withdrawn, it only makes the situation worse.

Recommendation:

1. Two-spirit youth need a strong support network of allies and other Two-spirit people
2. First Nations and other communities need to educate themselves about GLBT and Two-spirit issues, and create safe environments for all youth.

Statement #14: I have all the necessary HIV/AIDS information to make healthy sexual choices.

Analysis: 69% of the respondents feel they had necessary HIV/AIDS information to make healthy sexual choices, while 25% remained neutral. The fact that HIV rates are rising amongst Two-spirit youth, shows that prevention strategies are not working. This statement also shows a concern with a wider scope of health issues.

Recommendation:

While education and preventative measures are still needed, if a Two-spirit youth has low self-esteem, education alone is not likely to make a youth protect him or herself. Therefore, everyone, especially professionals, must begin by helping Two-spirit youth to positively address their core issues and concerns so that they feel 'worthy' of having a safe and healthy life.

Statement #15: My community has the necessary up-to-date HIV/AIDS information

Analysis: 50% of the respondents feel that their community had all the necessary up-to-date HIV/AIDS information, while 32% remained neutral.

Recommendation:

1. Communities must continue to gather and educate themselves with up-to-date information so that they can be supportive of Two-spirit youth.
2. Social service and health care workers must ensure that all youth have the information necessary to make healthy sexual choices.

Statement #16: My community needs more education about sexual/cultural diversity

Analysis: 78% of the respondents believe their community needed more education with respect to sexual/cultural diversity, while 20% remained neutral. As stated, lack of understanding by the general population leads to feelings of fear, and other unhealthy dynamics for Two-spirit youth.

Recommendations:

1. Everyone must educate themselves and others about sexual/cultural diversity.
2. More education must be offered in diverse learning environments regarding sexual/cultural diversity.

Statement #17: I have a doctor that I feel safe talking about my sexual history/life with

Analysis: This question is very subjective. 36% of the respondents say they don't have a doctor with whom they feel safe talking to about sexual issues. 34% felt they did have a doctor with whom they felt safe with, while 30% were neutral. It is very important for Two-spirit youth to find a doctor with whom they can share everything with. In order to best look after one's health, the doctor needs to know about everything possible about the patient.

Recommendations:

1. Two-spirit youth must regularly see a doctor.
2. Two-spirit youth must find a doctor that they feel they can share their personal information with, or they should find someone who can help them provide this information to their health care provider.
3. All medical service providers must educate themselves on the issues and concerns of GLBT youth.
4. All medical service providers must be accepting and respectful of all Two-spirit youth.

Statement #18: I am safe in my home.

Analysis: 77% of the respondents felt they were safe in their home. What was not determined was whether or not the respondents lived at home with family or if they lived on their own or with others.

Recommendations:

1. Two-spirit youth must find resources to help them find safe places to live.
2. Service providers must provide a safe and welcoming environment for Two-spirit youth to access.
3. Parents and guardians must educate themselves about the traditional roles of Two-spirit people.
4. Parents and guardians must ensure that all youth who are living in their home are safe.

Statement #19: I currently have a safe place to go

Analysis: 80% of the respondents felt that they had at least one safe place to go. This shows that if things get rough and a Two-spirit youth need a safe place to go, most could find one. Safehouses, allies, other GLBT people can all be of help.

Recommendations:

Same as statement # 18

Statement #20: The First Nations community is accepting of its' Two-spirit people

Analysis: 46% of the respondents remained neutral, with 37% of the respondents disagreeing that the First Nations community is accepting of its' Two-spirit people. As stated, lack of understanding, homophobia, violence, etc., leads most Two-spirit people to distrusting people and their community.

Recommendations:

1. First Nations communities and individuals must take it upon themselves to educate themselves and others regarding the traditional roles of Two-spirit people in First Nations communities.
2. Both First Nations communities, as well as, Two-spirit people must continue to work together to help in the understanding of alternative sexualities and to fight homophobia in First Nations communities.
3. First Nations communities and individuals must find safe ways to welcome Two-spirit people back into both our rural and urban communities.

*****QUESTIONS 21 to 25 WERE ASKED WITH THIS SPECIFIC STATEMENT:
Comparing yourself to other youth who are not Two-spirit in your community:**

STATEMENT #21: I am in more danger of being beaten up in my community

Analysis: 41% of the respondents believed that they were more in danger of being beaten up in their community because they are Two-spirit, while 34% remained neutral.

Recommendations:

1. Community members, including police officers, must learn about GLBT issues and be GLBT sensitive, so they can respond to the situations of Two-spirit youth in a healthy manner.
2. Laws regarding assaults of any individual must be upheld, and perpetrators of violence must be prosecuted. When youth are assaulted because they are Two-spirit, then hate crimes provisions of the *Criminal Code* should be applied in sentencing.
1. All youth should take steps to help ensure their own safety.

Statement #22: I am more likely to experience physical violence in my personal relationships

Analysis: Response to this statement was very subjective. 36% disagreed, 32% agreed, while 32% remained neutral to the statement. The Two-spirit youth's life situation is often what determines whether or not physical violence is a threat.

Recommendations:

1. Service providers and police must offer accessible and safe services and support to Two-spirit youth who are experiencing violence in their lives.
2. Two-spirit youth who are experiencing physical violence in their lives should seek support.
3. Police should be notified of any physical violence that occurs, and again, the law must be upheld and perpetrators must be prosecuted.

Statement #23: I am more likely to think about and attempt suicide

Analysis: Again, the responses to this statement were subjective. 41% of the respondents felt that they were not more likely to think about and attempt suicide, while 34% felt that they were, and 25% remained neutral. If a Two-spirit youth is thinking about suicide, he/she should be encouraged to talk about what is going on for them and whenever possible, urged to see a counsellor. Encouragement, love and support are especially needed for a youth who is in this situation.

Recommendations:

1. Two-spirit youth thinking about suicide must talk to someone about this.
2. All people must be more accepting and supportive of GLBT youth.
3. Governments must ensure that there are adequate financial resources to create and maintain relevant information and prevention and follow-up programs for youth, Aboriginal people, and GLBT.

Statement #24: I am more likely to take part in risk-taking behaviours, such as drinking and driving, drug use, etc.

Analysis: 53% of the respondents believed that being Two-spirit did leave them more apt to take part in risk-taking behaviours, while 22% remained neutral. Due to lack of self-esteem amongst most Two-spirit youth, this would naturally lead them into risk-taking behaviours. Two-spirit youth have to be accepted in order to develop positive self-esteem. If a person does not love her/himself, then he/she is more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviour.

Recommendations:

1. Two-spirit youth must create a support network for themselves, and socialize with people who are not taking part in risk-taking behaviours.
4. Alternative safe and healthy activities must be made available for Two-spirit youth, particularly for those youth more inclined to engage in risky behaviour.

Statement #25: I am more likely to become alcohol or drug dependent.

Analysis: The responses to this statement showed a lot of subjectivity. 37% disagreed with this statement, 34% agreed and 29% were neutral.

Recommendations:

1. Two-spirit youth must create a support network for themselves, and socialize with people who are not using alcohol and drugs.
2. Service providers must educate themselves about the history of Two-spirit people and offer relevant, accessible and safe services and support to Two-spirit youth to help them positively address their underlying issues and concerns.

Summary

As stated at the beginning of this report, the main purpose of this survey/report was to be a resource for both youth and service providers. The survey can be divided into subsections, all regarding different aspects of their lives. Questions 1 to 4 were about coming out and people's attitudes and understanding towards alternative sexualities. Question 5 was asking if they perceived a difference between living on and off reserve. Questions 6 to 8 were questions on how the youth perceived themselves within their community. Question 9 was a mental health question regarding depression. Questions 10 and 11 were specific school/education system questions. Questions 12 and 13 were "out" questions. Questions 14 and 15 were knowledge and HIV/AIDS. Questions 16 to 20 were questions about safety and sexuality. Questions 21 to 25 were how "at risk" they saw themselves when compared to non-Two-spirit youth.

While each issue is analyzed in this report, some general inferences can be drawn from the results of the NAT about the characteristics of the average Two-spirit youth of today. Some of the findings are not surprising, while others show a harsh reality facing our Two-spirit youth. The general profile of a Two-spirit youth is that:

- i. Most are terrified of someone finding out that they are Two-spirit
- ii. Many are suffering from depression
- iii. Most do not feel safe within their community, and fear they will be beaten up in their community so they keep their feelings hidden.
- iv. Thankfully, many have at least one safe place to go.
- v. He/she believes that everyone in the heterosexual population, not just First Nations people, needs education with respect to gender identity and sexuality
- vi. She/he believes that negative stereotypes and peer pressure in schools lead to fear of exposure and a higher dropout rate
- vii. He/she believes they have all the relevant information about HIV/AIDS to make healthy sexual choices, but are still likely to participate in risk taking behaviors
- viii. When coming out, the person she/he would like to talk to is a person that they can trust, regardless of their ethnicity or gender
- ix. She/he believes that there needs to be more visible and accessible Two-spirit Elders in the community
- x. He/she believes that they have a right to belong in their community
- xi. She/he wants to learn more about Two-spirit history
- xii. He/she believes that there are different issues between urban and rural Two-spirits
- xiii. A few characteristics are extremely subjective and dependent on the individual. Whether if one is "out"; whether they view themselves as "at risk" with violence, suicide and chemical dependency. And finally, if one has a doctor they can trust.

"For starters, to have a safe environment [to] hang out and feel safe about their sexuality"

Quote from youth participant

In conclusion, one of our hopes for this report is that it will help aid in the development of a resource for Two-spirit youth. Through the evaluation of the NAT, it is hoped that an organization will be able to start developing a program for Two-spirit youth or other projects that will help in the development of healthy Two-spirit youth. At present (2004), there are no programs in British Columbia that specifically work with Two-spirits. If a Two-spirit youth is in need of service, he/she is often referred to The Centre or Youthquest!, but neither have any direct programming. This coupled with the fact that most Two-spirit youth coming from reserves have a lack of trust for most non-Aboriginals due to inter-generational issues, Two-spirit youth can become easily frustrated and more often than not, do not bother accessing any services.

The Urban Native Youth Association offered a Two-spirit Counsellor Program for two years, but unfortunately the funding was discontinued. As UNYA works toward making all of their programs welcoming, accessible, and safe for Two-spirit youth, they ultimately would love to host another program that works specifically with Two-spirit youth on a continual basis.

Questions 26 to 33 begin on page 31

APPENDIX A

A NEEDS SURVEY FOR TWO-SPIRIT (GLBT) YOUTH

CONFIDENTIALITY AND PURPOSE OF SURVEY: The purpose of the following survey is to help us better understand the current needs of Two-spirit youth and to see what is needed in order to help them feel safer in their community. The results of this survey will be given at a Skills Building Seminar in 2003. This survey will be held in strict confidence and your name should not appear anywhere on this form. The questions are to be answered anonymously in order to protect your confidentiality. Thank you very much for taking part in this survey.

Circle the number that best describes your agreement with the following statements.

		Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
1.	More teaching/education is needed for straight people about GLBT issues.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	When coming out, I did/do need or prefer someone who is Aboriginal to talk to.	1	2	3	4	5
a.	When coming out, the person has to be a professional (ie: counsellor), who understands the issues?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	A better understanding of Two-spirit (GLBT) issues is needed in my own First Nations community.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I have a good understanding of the traditional roles of Two-spirit people in First Nations communities.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Urban Two-spirit people have different issues/concerns than Two-spirit people on the reserve.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	More Two-spirit Elders should be visible in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I have the right to belong in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I feel accepted in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I suffer from depression.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Peer pressure is a cause for not "coming out" sooner.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Negative stereotypes of homosexuality in schools leads to more drop-outs of Two-spirit youth.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I am "out" in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I find myself keeping my feelings/emotions hidden, out of fear from my community.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I have all the necessary HIV/AIDS information to make healthy sexual choices.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	My community has the necessary up-to-date HIV/AIDS information.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	My community needs more education about sexual/cultural diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I have a doctor that I feel safe talking about my sexual history/life with.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I am safe in my home.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I currently have a safe place to go.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	The First Nations community is accepting of its' Two-spirit people.	1	2	3	4	5

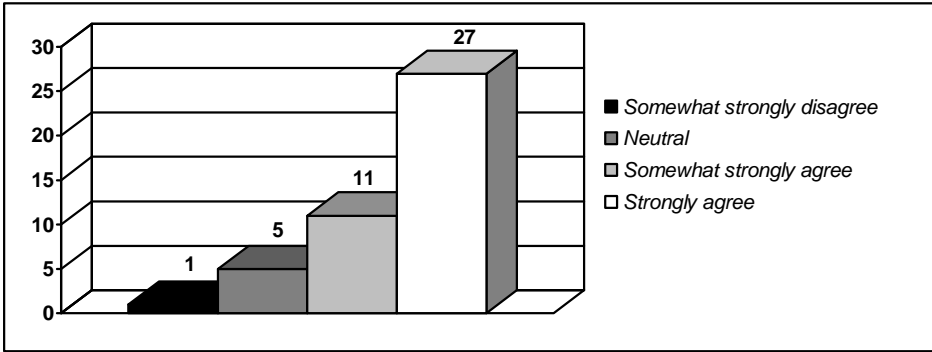
Please answer the following five questions, comparing yourself to other youth who are not Two Spirit in your community.

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21. | I am in more danger of being beaten up in my community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | I am more likely to experience physical violence in my personal relationships. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. | I am more likely to think about and attempt suicide. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | I am more likely to take part in risk-taking behaviours, such as drinking and driving, drug use, etc. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. | I am more likely to become alcohol or drug dependent. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. | How would you identify yourself (Please check as many as appropriate)
Gay ___ Lesbian ___ Bisexual ___ Transgendered ___
Transsexual ___ Questioning ___ Two-spirit ___ Other _____ | | | | | |
| 27. | Are you:
Status: ___ On-Reserve ___ Off-Reserve ___ Non-Status ___ Metis ___ Inuit ___ | | | | | |
| 28. | What is your Nation? _____ | | | | | |
| 29. | What services for Two-spirit youth are available in your local community? (ie: Reserve or Local Town). Have you used these services? Why or Why not? | | | | | |
| 30. | What is important to you about being a Two-spirit youth? | | | | | |
| 31. | What are your suggestions for making Two-spirit youth feel safer? | | | | | |
| 32. | Do you have anything that you would like to add? | | | | | |
| 33. | Are/were you a resident of British Columbia? _____. | | | | | |

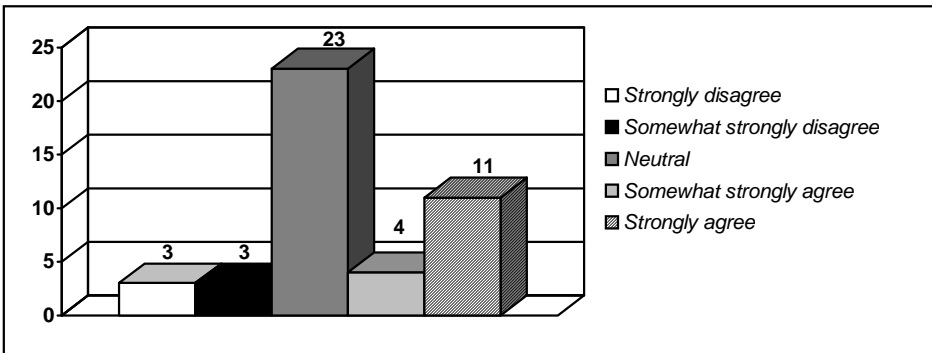
Please feel free to use the back of this form if necessary.

APPENDIX B

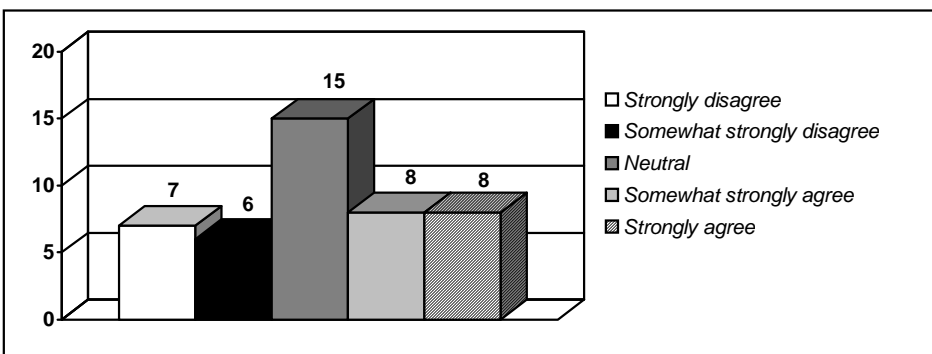
1: More teachings/education is needed for straight people about GLBT issues.



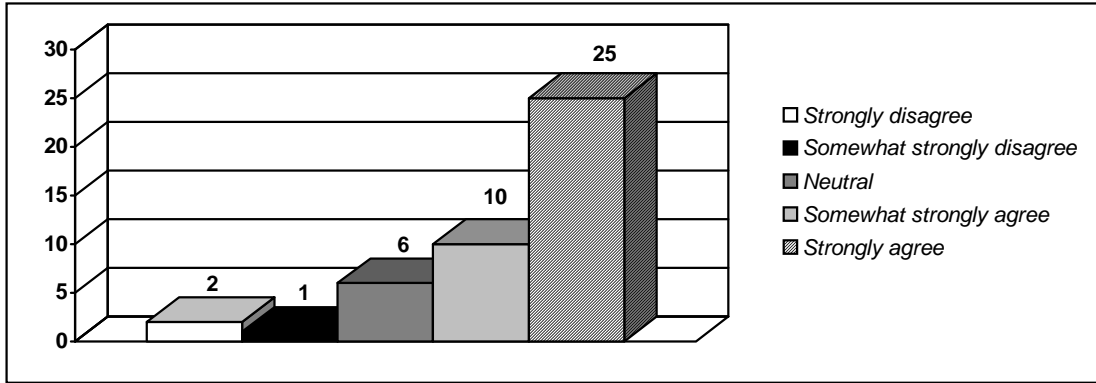
2: When coming out, I did/do need or prefer someone who is Aboriginal to talk to.



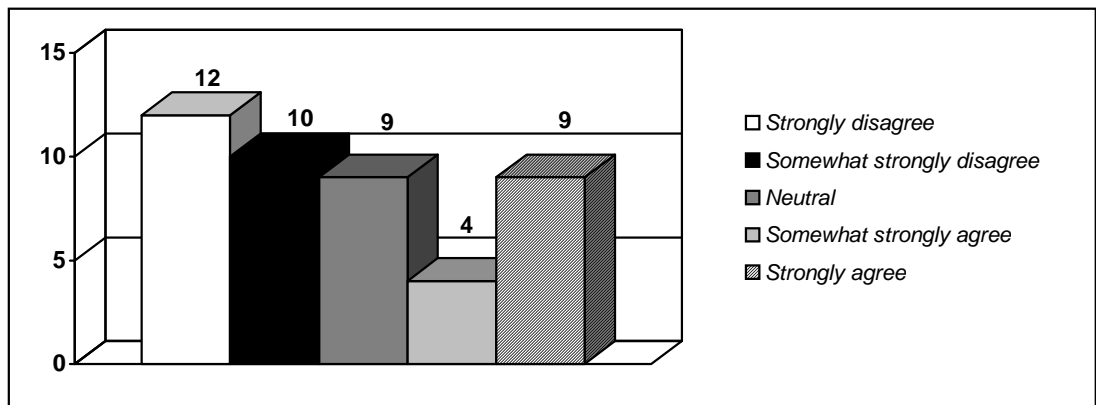
2a: When coming out, the person has to be a professional (ie: counsellor), who understands the issues.



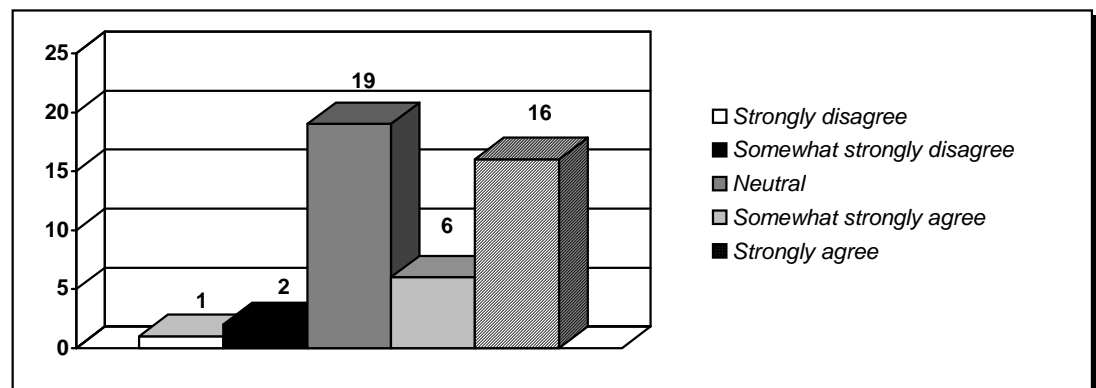
3: A better understanding of Two-spirit (GLBT) issues is needed in my own First Nations community



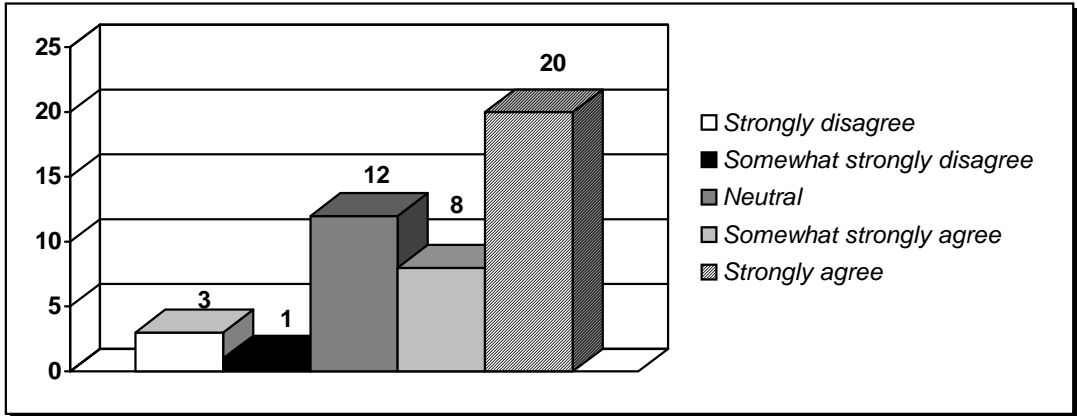
4: I have a good understanding of the traditional roles of Two-spirit people in First Nations communities.



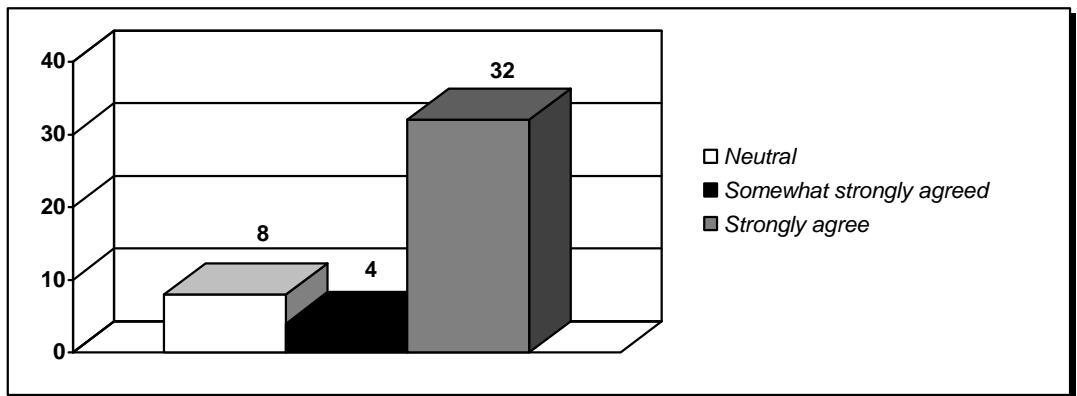
5: Urban Two-spirit people have different issues/concerns than Two-spirit people on the reserve.



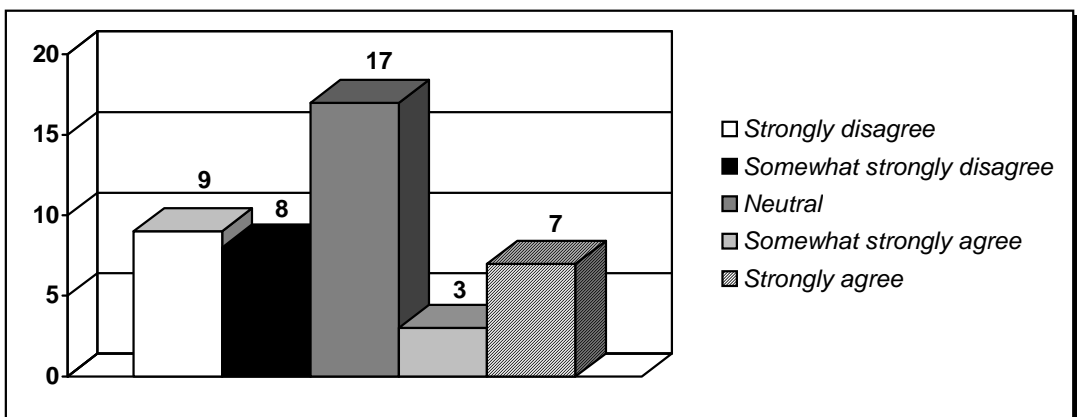
6: More Two-spirit Elders should be visible in my community.



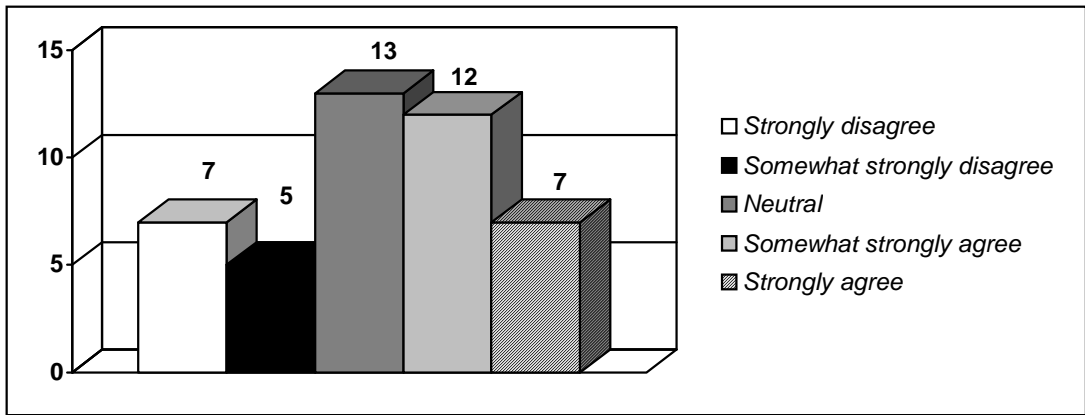
7: I have the right to belong in my community.



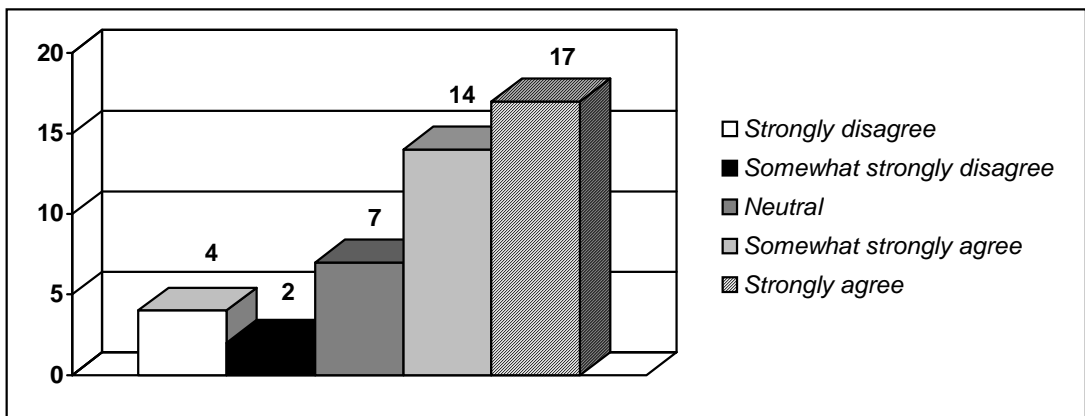
8: I feel accepted in my community.



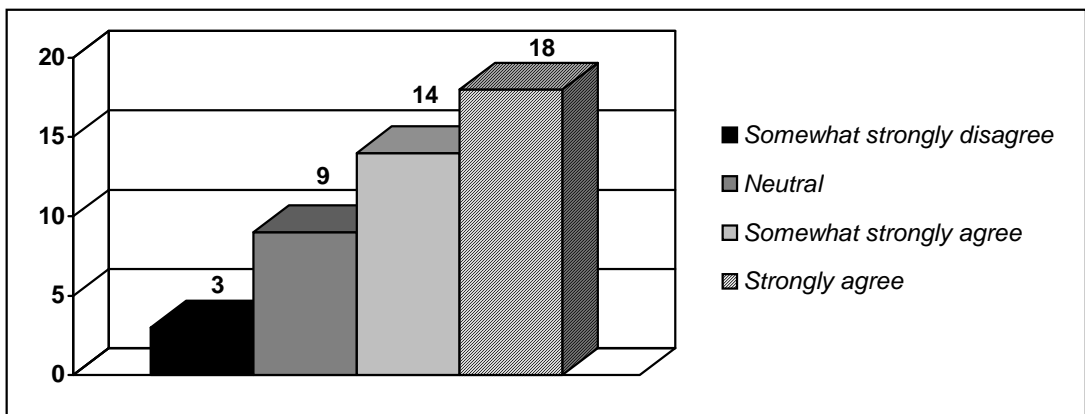
9: I suffer from depression.



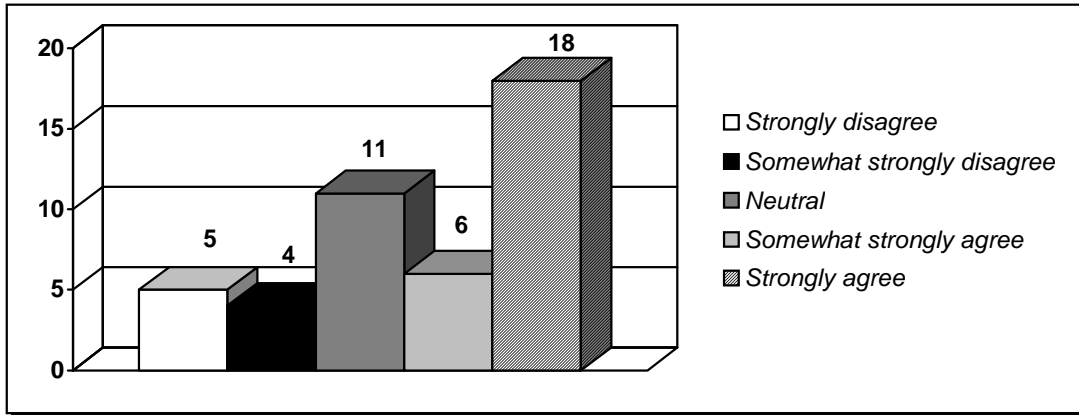
10: Peer pressure is a cause for not "coming out" sooner.



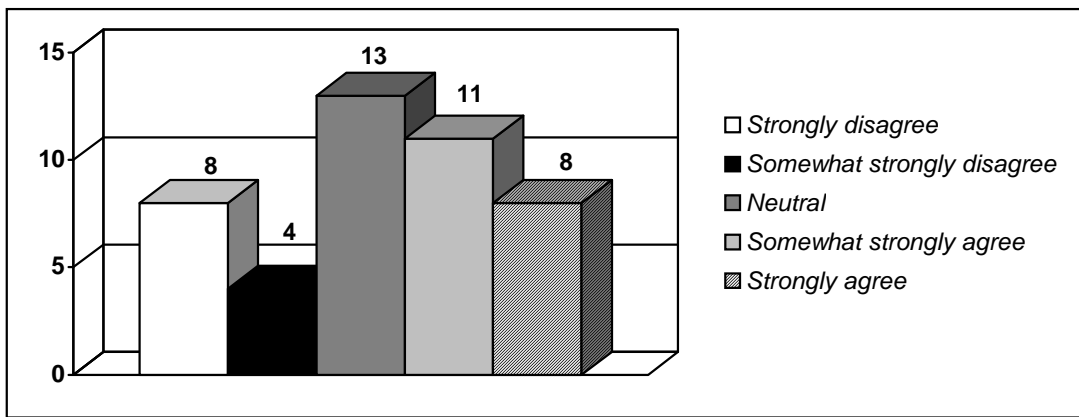
11: Negative stereotypes of homosexuality in schools leads to more drop-outs of Two-spirit youth.



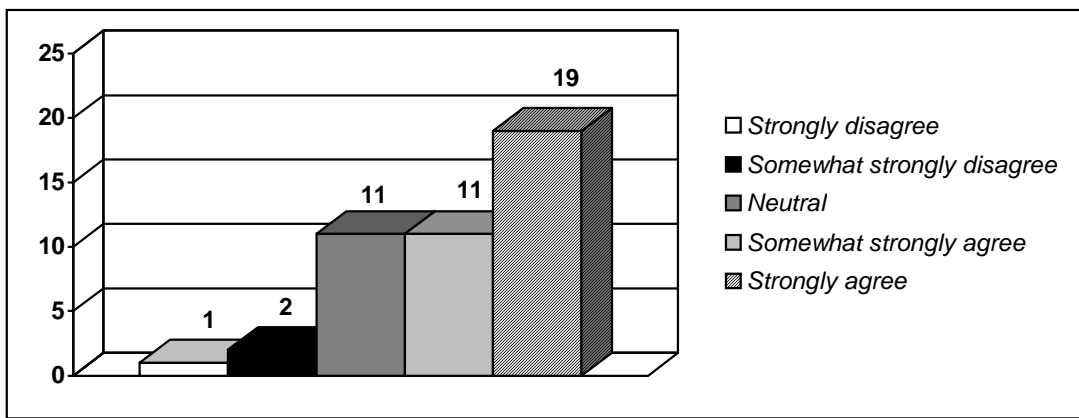
12: I am "out" in my community.



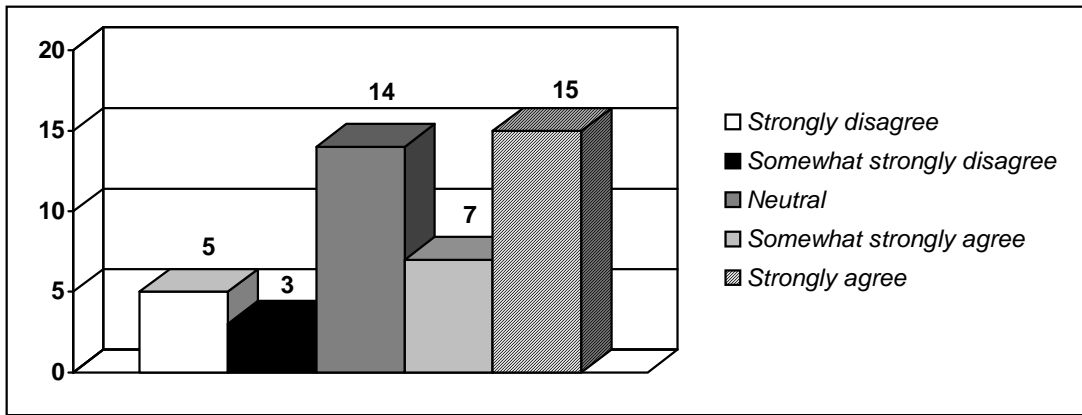
13: I find myself keeping my feelings/emotions hidden, out of fear from my community.



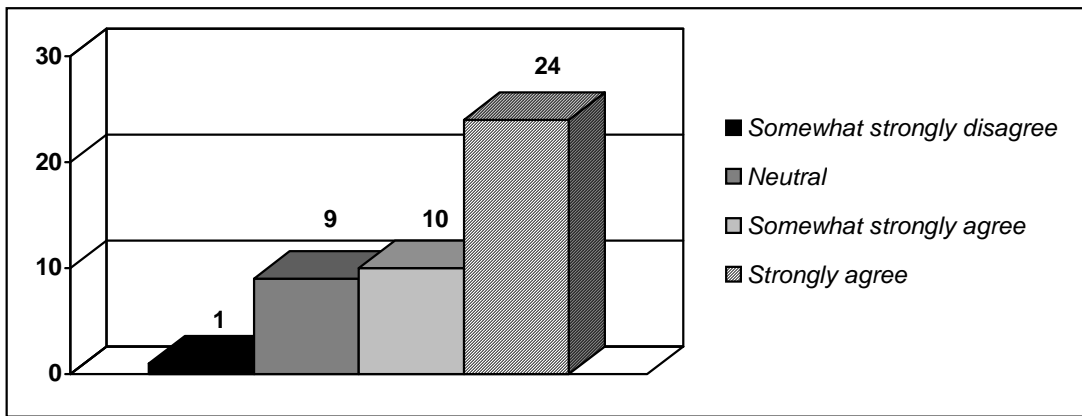
14: I have all the necessary HIV/AIDS information to make healthy sexual choices.



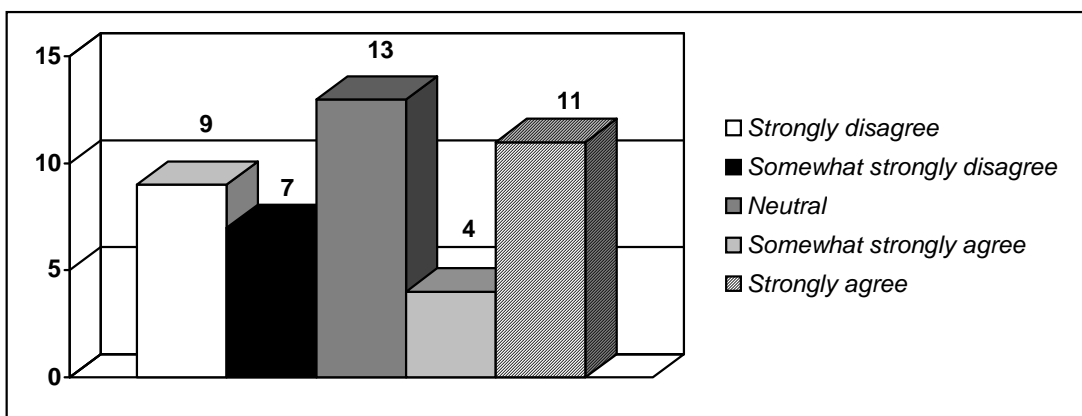
15: My community has the necessary up-to-date HIV/AIDS information.



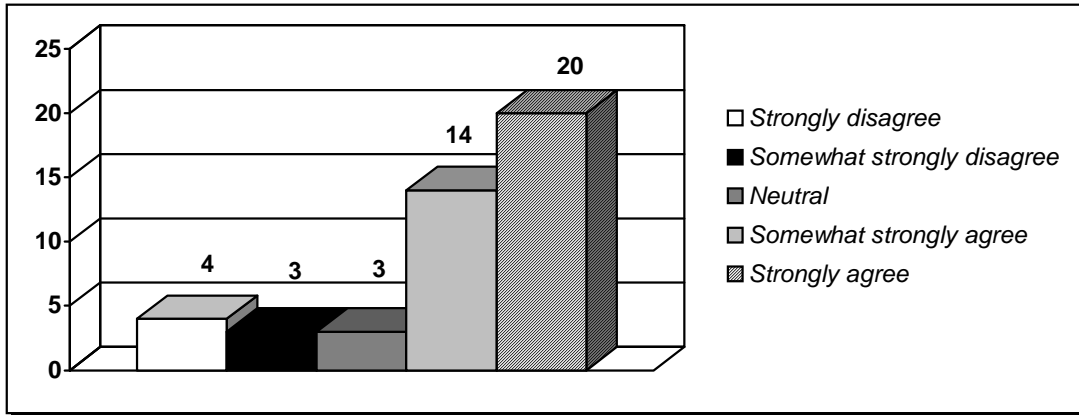
16: My community needs more education about sexual/cultural diversity.



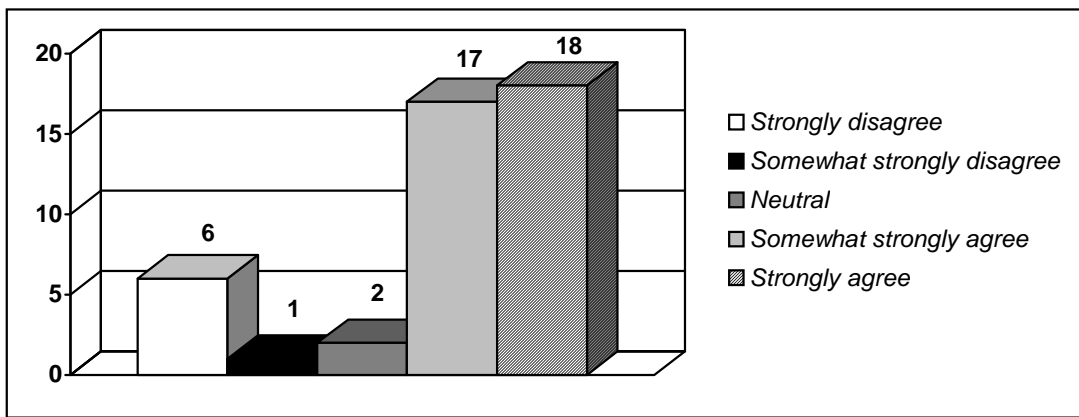
17: I have a doctor that I feel safe talking about my sexual history/life with.



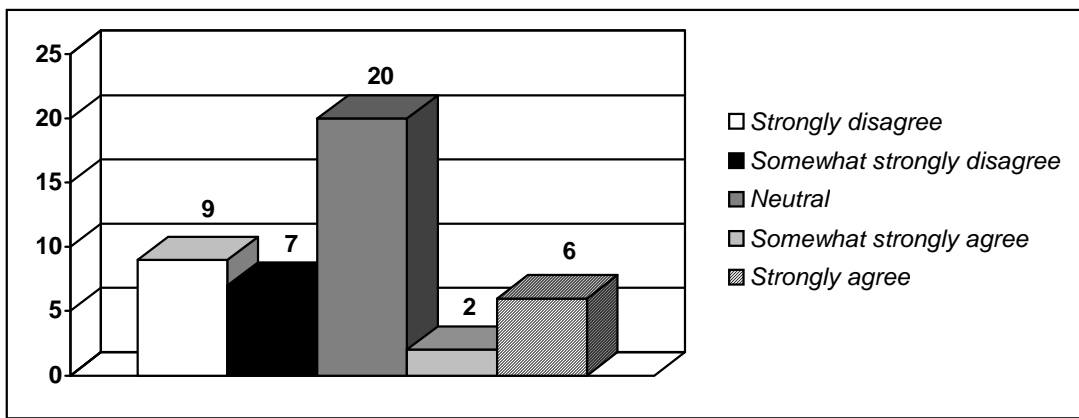
18: I am safe in my home.



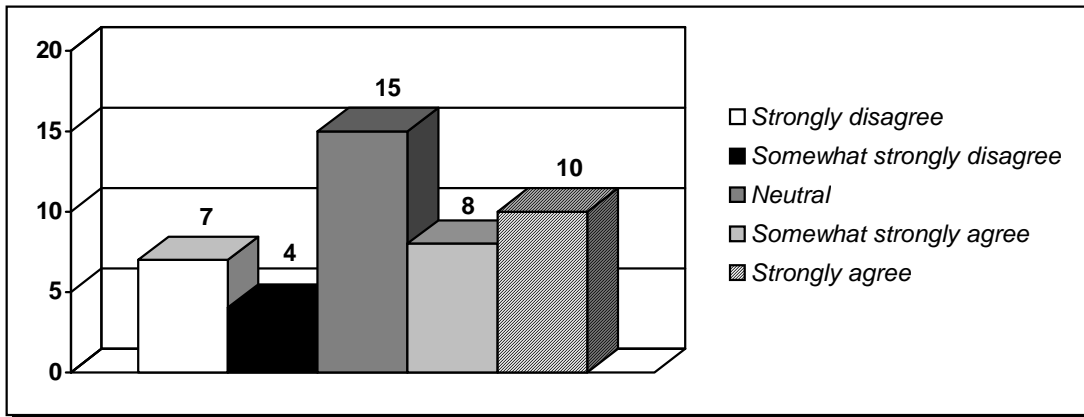
19: I currently have a safe place to go.



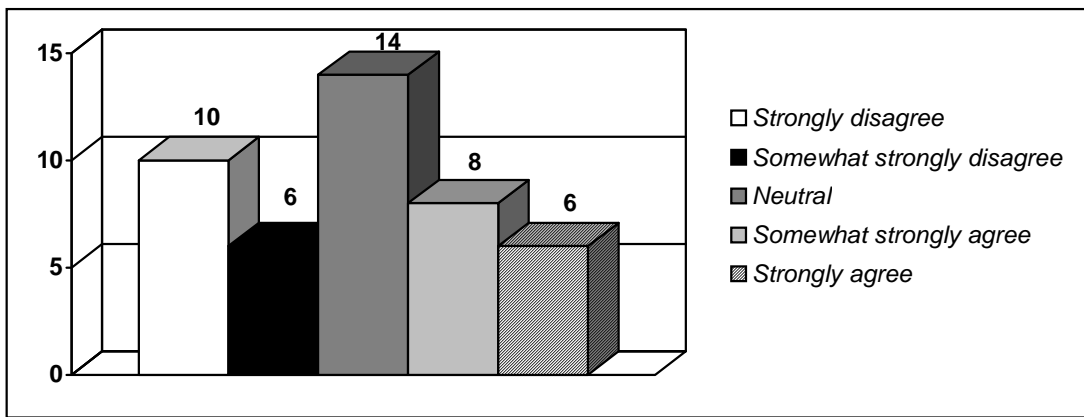
20: The First Nations community is accepting of its' Two-spirit people.



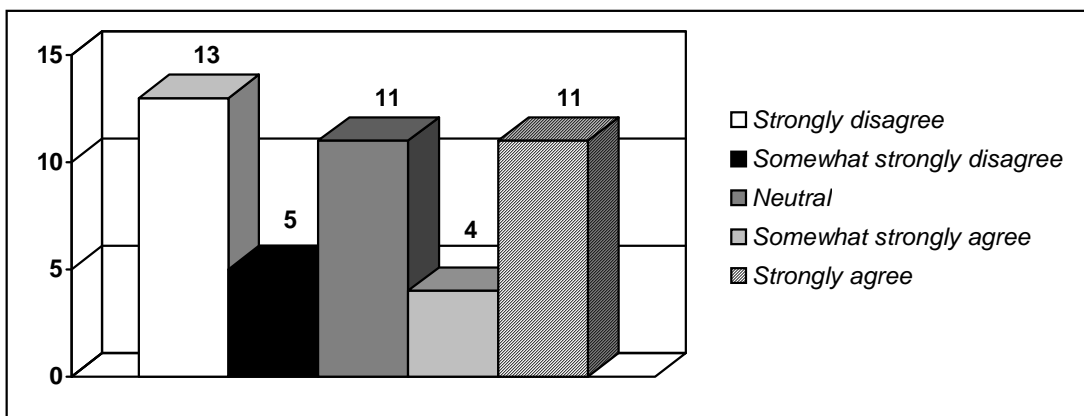
21: I am in more danger of being beaten up in my community.



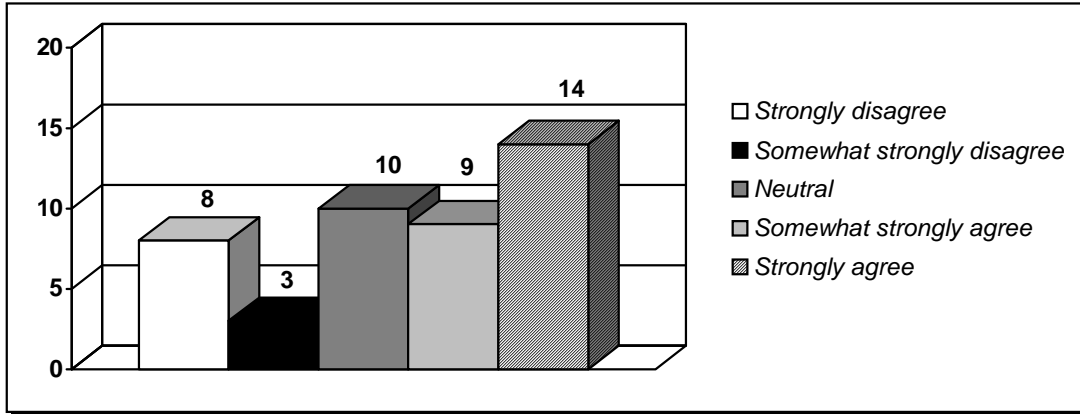
22: I am more likely to experience physical violence in my personal relationships.



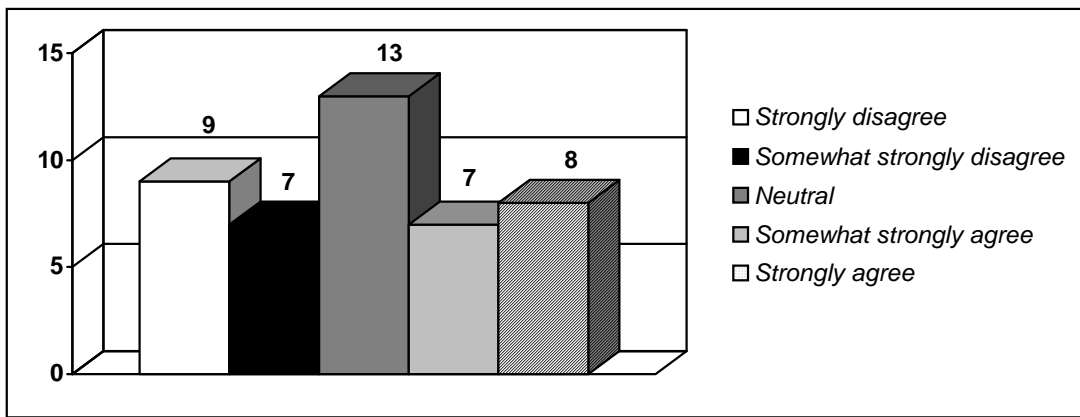
23: I am more likely to think about and attempt suicide.



24: I am more likely to take part in risk-taking behaviours, such as drinking and driving, drug use, etc.

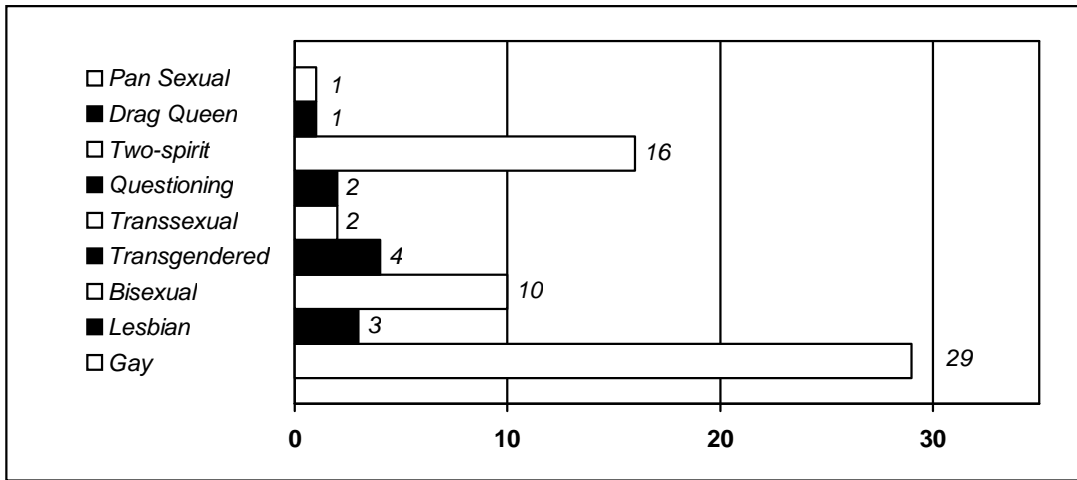


25: I am more likely to become alcohol or drug dependent.

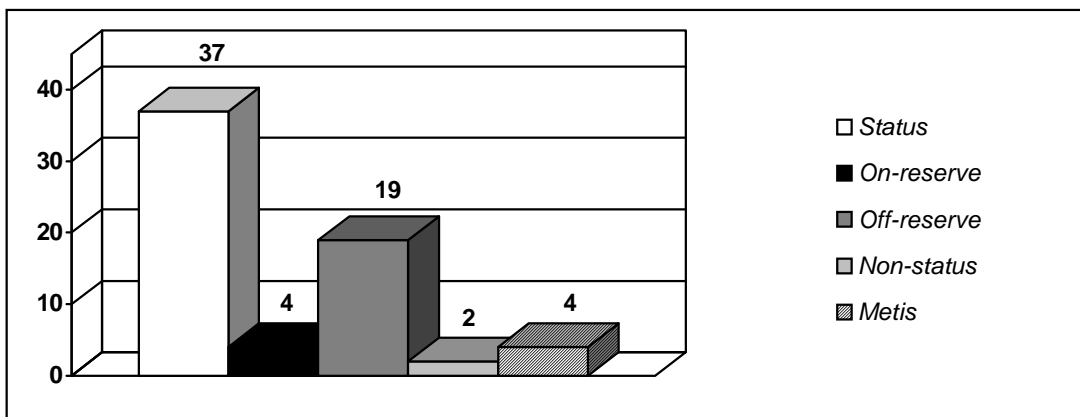


QUESTIONS 26 to 28 WERE ON SELF-IDENTIFICATION.

26: How would you describe yourself. (Some youth described themselves as more than one of the following)



27: Youth described themselves as one or more of the following:



28: What is your Nation?

13 or 29% youth stated they are Cree, 3 or 7% stated Unknown, 3 or 7% are Blackfoot, 2 or 4% are Heiltsuk, 2 or 4% are Nisga, 2 or 4% are Wet'Suwet'en/Kyah Wiget, 1 or 2% is Alquatcho, 1 or 2% is Ditidalth-Snaw-Naw-Aj, 1 or 2% is Nuuchah-Nulth, 1 or 2% is Howitsis, 1 or 2% is Statlum, 1 or 2% is Nuxalx, 1 or 2% is Gitxsan, 1 or 2% is Shuswap, 1 or 2% is Saualteaux, 1 or 2% is Haisla, 1 or 2% is Lytton, 1 or 2% is Ktunaxa, 1 or 2% is Chilcotin/Carrier, 1 or 2% is Nisga'a, 1 or 2% is Oweekeno, 1 or 2% is Slavey-Dene, and 1 or 2% is Metis.

Questions 29 to 32 were open ended questions. Responses are grouped by category and followed by quotes from youth.

Question 29: What services for Two-spirit youth are available in your local community? (ie: Reserve or Local Town). Have you used these services? Why or why not?

a) Sixteen youth stated that there are no services for Two-spirit youth in their local community

- ~ It's never talked about
- ~ Government lack of support
- ~ There are no Two-spirit facilities and services, sometimes spokespersons come in, but very rare! I don't know why there are no such services
- ~ Fighting with my addiction that is on-going
- ~ Yes, previously UNYA had the Two-spirit Program, which is no longer available. Why? I used the service because counsellor easily acceptable. No services specific for Two-spirits in Vancouver.

b) Nine youth stated that they did not know if there were any services for Two-spirit youth in their local community

- ~ I haven't sought out any Two-spirit services here
- ~ None that I know of. I get my support from the Native women.

c) Youth stated that the following services were in their local community:

- ~ Healing Our Spirit and Vancouver Native Health
- ~ Three Bridges Health Centre; Transgender Clinic
- ~ More information on the reserve about our rights in the community
- ~ Aids Vancouver; BCPWA; The Centre; Pride Health Services
- ~ Very few
- ~ Drop in at Vancouver Native Friendship Centre; Outreach at the schools
- ~ Gay Support groups like SEXY, but not Aboriginal run
- ~ Urban Native Youth Association. That's where I feel safe
- ~ Counselling
- ~ Dze L Kant Friendship Centre (Smithers). (2)
- ~ Positive Living Northwest (Smithers). (2)
- ~ Smithers Secondary School Counselling
- ~ Smithers Secondary School ASSET Counselling

Question 30: What is important to you about being a Two-spirit Youth?

All responses included youth being happy with who they are, that they would like to support other youth in coming out, and that other people should accept them and be happy for who they are:

- ~ I think its is important to me that being a Two-spirited youth is OK and you are happy how the person feels.
- ~ To lead a productive and healthy life, achieve our goals, and be proud of who we are!
- ~ I'm loud and proud. Get used to it!
- ~ Being able to understand [about people] more
- ~ Being accepted (2)
- ~ Being yourself. Walking a spiritual path.
- ~ Knowing the history. Getting in contact with other Two-spirit youth or adults.
- ~ Being myself.
- ~ The right to be who I am.
- ~ We are special people. Long ago we were honoured.
- ~ Nothing really. I am who I am.- What is important to me is to keep my friends and family with great information on my living and that I am still the same person. I also want to inform kids that it is OK
- ~ Coming to terms. Accepting who I am getting acknowledgement from my community in the most positive form
- ~ Being in contact with who I am and being to help other people
- ~ I'm not sure...being accepted and not neglected
- ~ Being accepted in my home community
- ~ Education and understanding
- ~ To be understood by everyone
- ~ Support from everyone
- ~ That I can educate people on who I am and what the Two-spirit people are about. And the honour of knowing that there are many of us in Canada.
- ~ That I am young and can help other youths come out
- ~ I want to make friends and to feel accepted for who we are
- ~ At this very moment, I do not label myself as a Two-spirited, reason because I'm not sure what my tradition is from my people as a Two-spirited person
- ~ Helping other's who may need my support
- ~ Sense of community; role models; inclusion and education
- ~ Being a community leader and earning that high level of respect from all peoples including children, youth, adults and Elders
- ~ Finding out who I am so I can help others out there
- ~ Being accepted spiritually and not being preached down upon. Ex: bible
- ~ Balancing "Native and non-Native" community. Practicing traditions, ceremony in non-judgment environment. Sharing my story with other youth. Gathering with other Two-spirits.
- ~ Feeling comfortable about myself.

Question 31: What are your suggestions for making Two-spirit youth feel safer?

a) Fourteen youth said they would like to have access to support groups and services

- ~ Have a support group
- ~ Have more housing programs
- ~ More neutral counsellors on reserve. Safe house for Two-spirit people in urban cities (ie: someone who needs a place to go from an abusive spouse).
- ~ Have safe houses for Two-spirit youth so they can live without fear
- ~ Larger amounts of street support workers who understand and accept themselves.
- ~ Greater communication between service providers. Creating Two-spirit friendly spaces.
- ~ Awareness, workshops, gatherings
- ~ For starters, to have a safe environment for their hang out and feel safe about their sexuality
- ~ acceptance vs. ignorance. More space and time vs. 1 night of drop-in
- ~ Talking, helping, just being around them
- ~ Have a safe group to be in on the reserve
- ~ Safe space that is open to Two-spirit youth
- ~ Our very own drop-in centre. Our own weekly circle in a safe space. Yearly Two-spirit Gathering which includes Elders and youth participating
- ~ Drop-ins; counselling more widely available and allies

b) Eighteen youth identified the need for more education, support, and understanding of Two-spirit people

- Love one another
- More education being taught to First Nation students and their parents
- Well just talk to all different kinds of other ethnic backgrounds
- Community
- Education
- More awareness and understanding
- First I think they need to be made aware of its existence
- Find people who don't judge
- Education and understanding
- Recommend attending a Two-spirit gathering and speaking to people who are out. Teach pride and strength in who you are
- ~ Give a lot more education and stop the promotion of hatred in the entertainment industry
- Allowing them to be themselves
- Educate all educators and students that way the people who may identify themselves as Two-spirited can comfortably come out of the darkness and learn what should be known and use the new experiences in everyday life

- Education for everyone about gays
- Love yourself and not worry about what anyone else thinks of you
- Be yourself
- Just more knowledge in the straight world about gays not being bad

c) Three youth identified the need to focus on safety and justice issues

- ~ Harsher sentences on gay bashing criminals and
- ~ Encourage self-defense classes.
- ~ For the government to have really strict laws and stick by them.

d) Two youth did not know or provide an answer

Question 32: Do you have anything that you would like to add?

- ~ I love being gay
- ~ I am a great person to talk to if anyone needs someone to talk to about coming out
- ~ I think this is a good survey
- ~ Need more activities, programs and talking circles
- ~ As far as I know, there isn't any support for Two-spirit youth in our community
- ~ It's too bad there isn't more information concerning Two-spirited and/or gatherings. To have a "visible" presence in the communities. I would love to have a Two-spirited Canada wide conference.
- ~ The communities need to cooperate with each other more. The government needs to be more pro-active.
- ~ I'm like a bird. I'm free!
- ~ There needs to be a way to teach our youths that if they believe in themselves, they can teach the community about acceptance also
- ~ Living in a reserve that hates gays so much is hard especially when you want to come out but you cant because your scared to be beat up or called down and/or murdered.
- ~ Yeah, us Two-spirit youth need to have safer sex
- ~ Have separate surveys for on and off reserve. Those are two different places to live with different issues.
- ~ A place where we can gather such as a talking circle would be great
- ~ More Two-spirit education available to people and communities out there; more outlets for victims of spousal abuse (counselling and safehouses)
- ~ There are many cases of homophobia in reservations, its taught by older generations to disapprove queer lifestyles, my parents are against queer people because its so uncommon and everyone is afraid of difference.
- ~ We need a place to go. We need a service strictly for Two-spirited people
- ~ Thank you for trying to help Two-spirited people

- ~ Yes, Currently there are no “gathering” places for Two-spirits. GLBT Centre does not have any options, except to say welcome to use The Centre.
- ~ Nope
- ~ I don't feel that there are any Aboriginal agencies taking the issue of Two-spirits seriously, except for UNYA trying to develop safe spaces
- ~ There is a lack of programs and meeting spaces for Two-spirits here in Vancouver. [An agency], which has Two-spirit clients often reminds the community that they are not a Two-spirit agency. This is confusing to me, because I feel that I am excluded. I've attended workshops and felt they can do more to be open about the Two-spirit issue.

Question 33: Are/were you a resident of British Columbia? - 100% responded yes

APPENDIX C

Reference / Suggested Reading List

A. RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

No End Of Grief: Indian Residential Schools In Canada. Dr. Agnes Grant. Pemmican Publications. 1996.

Stolen From Our Embrace. Suzanne Fournier and Erin Crey. Douglas & McIntyre Publications. 1996.

Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools. James R. Miller. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, ON. 1996

B. TWO-SPIRIT

2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations: We Are Part of A Tradition. 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, Toronto, ON, 1999.

Two-spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality. Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas and Sabine Lang. University of Illinois Press, Chicago, IL, 1997.

The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture. Walter L. Williams. Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1988.

Two-spirit People: American Lesbian Women and Gay Men. Lester B. Brown. 1997.

C. FIRST NATIONS, HEALTH AND HIV

Sacred Lives: Canadian Aboriginal Children & Youth Speak Out About Sexual Exploitation. Save The Children Canada, Vancouver, BC, 2001.

The Red Road: Pathways To Wholeness. An Aboriginal Strategy for HIV and AIDS in BC. BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Task Force Report, Vancouver, BC, 1999.

Healing Ways: Aboriginal Health and Service Review. Vancouver/Richmond Health Board, Vancouver, BC, 1999.

HIV Transmission: Guidelines for Assessing Risk. A Resource for Educators, Counsellors and Health Care Providers. Canadian AIDS Society, Ottawa, ON, 1999.