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SASK TRANS LIVING



NAVIGATING LIFE AS A TRANS
PERSON WITHIN THE HEART OF
THE PRAIRIES



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**RADICAL
REVOLUTIONARY**

SASK TRANS LIVING

*Navigating life as a transgender person
within the heart of the prairies*

*WGST 220 - Queering The Terrain: Cultural Space
and Queer Theory, Dr. Rachel Lowen Walker
By Rene O'hÁinle & Mikaela Smith*

Personal Intros:

Rene: Born in British Columbia, raised in New Brunswick, spent developing years in Fond Du Lac and Flin Flon, and currently spending my early adulthood in Saskatoon. Suffice to say, I have a deeply rich and varied lived experience as a transgender person having to navigate different community cultures while also navigating my own queer identity.

As a child I was raised in a Roman Catholic household with my grandmother standing as a god-fearing matriarch. All I knew about gay people was that they were a blight upon humanity who chose to live in sin. Trans people were not ever discussed other than being a punchline to blatantly transphobic jokes. I tried my best to keep my dysphoria deep in the closet, tried to be a good subservient catholic girl, but my true self was growing stronger the more I tried to hide from it. My eggshell violently burst apart during the Covid19 lockdown when I had to look my truth in the eyes and accept it with gentle hands.

I am a transmasc nonbinary entity that somehow got caught in a human body. I am raw, ever evolving energy determined to find myself in others cross culturally. Transgender people, no matter the cultural context, have existed since the dawn of time. Now we are empowered and able to recontextualize history. It starts here by documenting the lived experiences of the people within the heart of local communities.

Mikaela: Born and raised in Saskatoon, I spent most of my childhood at events that the church I attended held. I always felt out of place growing up, being the only one in my age group and having mostly friends who were boys. I slowly came into my sexuality and started questioning faith and the beliefs of the community I was raised in.

I left the church and quickly experimented with my expression. The control of my identity helped me feel comfortable even while I was deeply in denial of who I am. I often felt like my identity wasn't enough. I wasn't trans enough to be out and wasn't cis enough to remain in the closet. Not gendered enough in any spectrum to get away with my identity.

My dad asked me, "are you trans?" when I was in grade 11, I responded with "I don't know, we'll see." Today I can say I am a trans genderqueer human, I am forever figuring how to exist in this shell of humanity. Gender diversity and transgender people are a huge part of any culture and colonialism has often erased their existence. Queer history is recorded by other queer individuals and that happens by documenting our lived experiences.

"THERE ARE NO CLOSETS IN TIPIS"

Before we can start to talk about current legislative and societal issues of transgender people, we need to get some important historical context. Prior to colonization, there was no queer rights movement because there was no queer oppression. This is why the term Two Spirit gets its own set of letters in the 2SLGBTQ acronym, because there was a need for an additional component that reflected the "historical acceptance of gender diverse peoples, the ceremonial roles they held, and the understanding of diverse sexual identities within Indigenous communities in pre-contact times." [OUTSaskatoon Resource Library]

The term Two Spirit also sits at the intersection between colonial and Indigenous languages in that it serves as an English placeholder umbrella term. This umbrella term creates space for queer Indigenous people to reclaim identities within their own languages and cultural contexts. Two Spirit is used primarily by Indigenous people who live on Turtle Island; The English term used when speaking about the combined landmass of the North and South Americas. This is because Two Spirit is a powerful term that also advocates for colonial resistance.

Colonial views on gender are strictly binary and, until recent western attitude shifts, focuses solely on the physical attributes of the body. This concept has historically been a point of cultural conflict with Indigenous views on gender that are based on the individual's spirit.



Most commonly used Two Spirit pride flag.
Other variations include the medicine wheel



The OUTSaskatoon Two Spirit Tipi. Retrieved from
OUTSaskatoon's twitter @OUTSaskatoon

This spirit based perspective creates unlimited potential for the individual's gender identity as well as highlights the oppressive limitations of Eurocentric gender binary systems. Because traditional colonial gender roles/systems are inherently oppressive by design, transphobia and homophobia are byproducts of colonization. Because "Canada" writes the history books and controls the education system, historical records of Indigenous gender identities were either destroyed or purposefully undocumented. This is unsurprising when you take into consideration that the primary agents responsible for colonization were the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and United churches of Canada who continue to be empowered by the Canadian Government.

Unlearning homophobic and transphobic rhetoric is, at its core, an act of decolonization. This is why community organizations like OUTSaskatoon are dedicated to educating the public on the complex dynamics between queer liberation and colonization.

QUEERING THE TERRAIN: INDIGIQUEER ACTIVISM



*"It's taken me a little while to get to the knowledge about Two Spirit stuff because it's [...] something that not a lot of First Nations peoples talk about. [...] We need to start to decolonize ourselves, and through talking about two spirit issues, we are getting at the root of decolonization."
[Me as I am introduction, Instagram]*

JACK SADDLEBACK

Jack Saddleback is a Cree, Two-Spirit, transgender, gay man from the Samson Cree Nation in Maskwacis, Alberta. An internationally renowned public speaker, activist, and

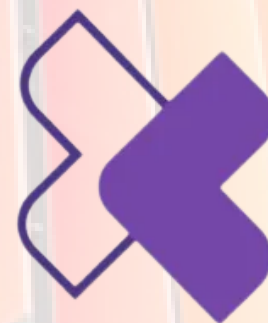
equity champion, Mr. Saddleback is a staunch advocate for Two Spirit topics, mental health, Indigenous engagement, gender and sexual diversity, equitable policies, and social stewardship [International Indigenous Speakers Bureau, LinkedIn]. Jack's impressive resume includes USSU Pride Centre coordinator, USSU president, Co-Interim Executive Director and Cultural & SHOUT Project Coordinator at OUTSaskatoon, Human Environment Specialist at Canada North Environmental Services, internationally recognized professional speaker, and current Director of Programming at JusticeTrans.

"JusticeTrans recognizes that Canadian law is a colonial creation that is inherently oppressive to the lives of many. Canadian law exists to uphold the colonial state's authority and the unequitable power structures it places upon us. As such, the law is often used to harm Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities and to uphold systems of white supremacy and patriarchy. It also has a long history of being used as a tool for transphobia, homophobia, and sexism. We aim to use [JusticeTrans] to give Two Spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming peoples tools to combat these injustices if they wish to fight within the legal system." [JusticeTrans.org]





OUT
SASKATOON



SASKATOON
**SEXUAL
HEALTH**

OUTSASKATOON &

SASKATOON SEXUAL HEALTH

OUTSaskatoon began in 1991 and has changed its name many times. Beginning their journey as Gay & Lesbian Health Services, providing mental, social, emotional, and physical health support. In 2005, they changed their name to The Avenue community Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity to better reflect the wide communities it served. In April 2015, the board of directors changed the name to OUTSaskatoon. They also began to look into housing for 2SLGBTQ and opened Pride Home in January 2017.

They started the Trans Health Navigator Project, this was to identify gaps in the current healthcare system. OUTSaskatoon merged with Saskatoon Sexual Health in August of 2019 when both organizations relocated into the same building at 213 Ave C South. This physical merge of the two organizations strategically secured a free, safe, queer friendly sexual health centre located within the heart of the city. Saskatoon Sexual Health provide sexual and reproductive health services in Saskatoon.



Their work has an emphasis on inclusive, empowering and safe clinical care. Advocating for change within their organisation and the community. Saskatoon Sexual Health provides many resources and guides on inclusive, queer, anti-racist, and indigenizing sex education resources.

OUTSaskatoon and Saskatoon Sexual Health have developed a close relationship over the years where staff from Saskatoon Sexual Health would regularly provide care out the OUTSaskatoon building. This was to create a dedicated safe space for all members of the queer community to get judgement free healthcare. The relocation has created a juggernaut of queer health and safety in Saskatoon.

TRANSGENDER HEALTHCARE ACCESS IN SASKATCHEWAN



TransSask Support services is a province-wide non-profit organisation. Their work is directed towards people who identify as trans, intersex, and IndigiQueer individuals. They have resources such as job openings, intermittent housing and guides for changing your name and Trans-Inclusive media guides for media workers to use when covering stories about transgender issues.

TransSask has released guides to help trans individuals along their journey such as a changing legal documents guide, a list of health and mental health providers, and a guide for accessing hormones. These guides help trans individuals to access the services that allows them to be who they are, but these guides were not available and so a coalition was formed to provide the information that was needed for gender affirming services. The Saskatchewan Trans Health Coalition (STHC) is a combined effort between organisations such as TransSask Support Services, OUTSaskatoon, UR Pride, Trans Umbrella Foundation, and Moose Jaw Pride. The coalition also includes family doctors, psychiatrists, surgeons, counsellors, researchers, along with members of the trans community.

INTRODUCING THE SASKATCHEWAN MEDICAL TRANSITION GUIDE

The STHC created this guide to provide provincial based information on how to access gender affirming care within Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Medical Transition Guide gives information on potential cost and what to expect from the various forms of intervention, along with organisations and resources that individuals can access. The guide is a living document and changes with the updates of system changes within health services to give trans individuals the information they need.

The guide goes over different types of hormones and puberty blockers, surgeries, criteria for interventions, diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria, and a list of health providers who provide assessments for out-of-province procedures. It gives steps for starting hormones and discussing surgery options, guiding gender diverse people to figure out how they can access the care to meet their transition goals.

The medical transition guide is a stepping stone in a direction of trans health that health care providers can strive for. Offering a list of practitioners, services, and organisations that can help trans and gender diverse people reach their goals within their community and providing easier access to these interventions.



QUEERING THE TERRAIN: **ACADEMIA**



"I would love to see more of us happy, successful and celebrated. To see us focus on the positives of who we are and to just be allowed to live our life without all the stigma. But there's still a long way to go. I know I'm the first and only trans woman physicist in Canada. It's sad there isn't more... but there will be!" [Interview]

DR. GWEN GRINYER

Dr. Grinyer shatters the glass ceiling for trans women in STEM as an associate professor at the University of Regina. Her research "spans a broad range of topics including ultra-high precision measurements to test the Standard

Models description of electroweak interactions, high-resolution gamma-ray and charged particle spectroscopy to study in-beam reactions and decays of exotic nuclei, and designing state-of-the-art instrumentation to be able to study the rarest isotopes whose production rates are at the limits of feasibility." [University of Regina Physics Department faculty page]

UR Pride began in 1996 as students created a student club for the 2SLGBTQ+ community at the University of Regina. They provide and promote health, wellness, and social support for sexually and gender diverse people on campus and throughout the city of Regina. They aim to promote an intergenerational community, advocate for the safety and equitable inclusion, and provides avenues for sexually and gender diverse people to expand their skills and explore new leadership opportunities on campus and throughout the city. [UR Pride About Us]



UR PRIDE

**Centre for Sexuality
and Gender Diversity**

The USSU Pride Centre strives to work with diverse sexual and gender identities in a progressive environment that advocates and affirms sexual and gender diversity. They provide information, peer support, and advocacy on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression issues. They have programs that include workshops, social events, discussion groups, and drag performances. The pride centre gives resources for the University of Saskatchewan campus including faith leaders, protective services and U of S positive space. [USSU Pride Centre About Us]



SASKATCHEWAN QUEER CULTURE

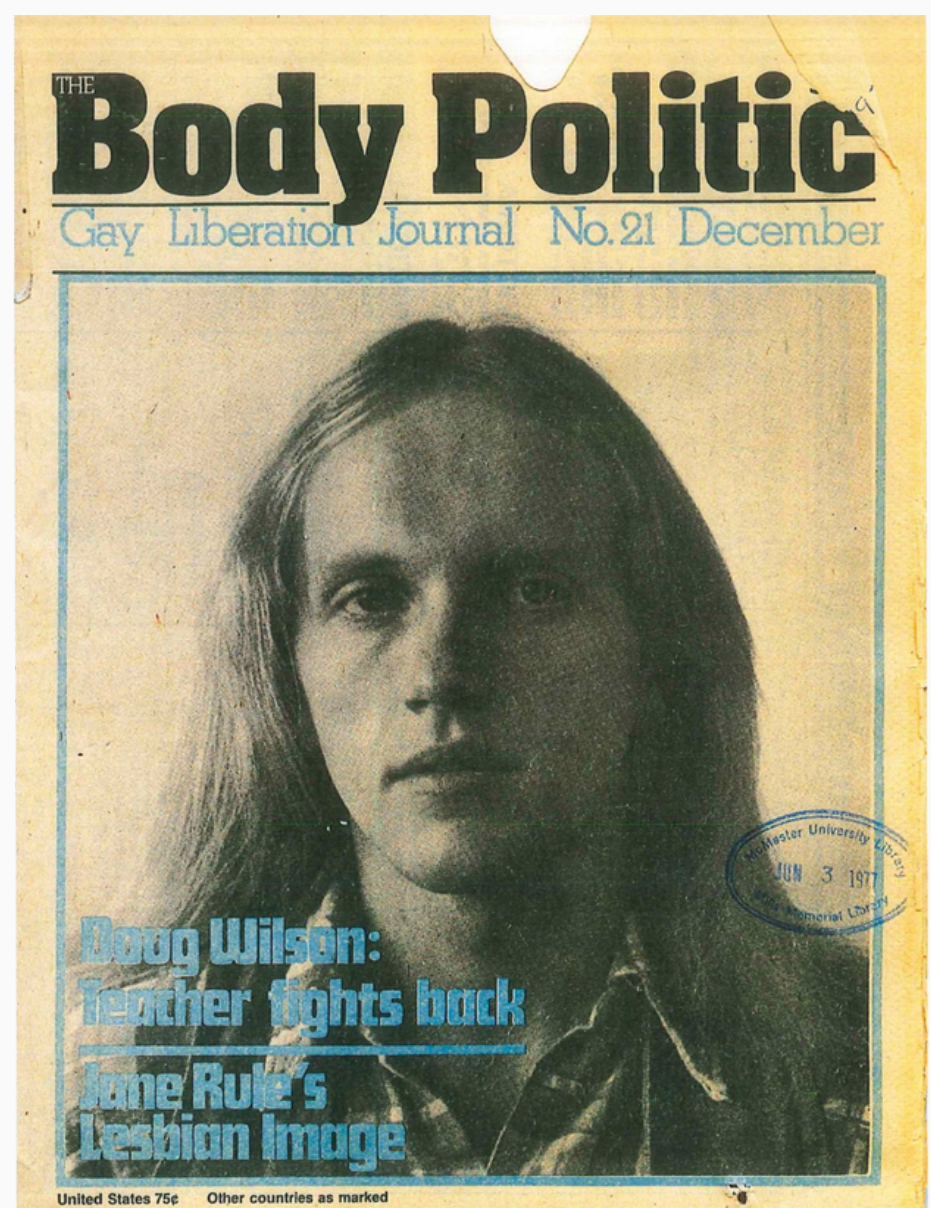
Saskatoon has historically been the hotspot of queer culture within Saskatchewan mostly due to the geographical placement of the University. While colonialism violently took control of the land and modern cities began development, three major players emerged. These were the cities of Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and Regina. The three cities had to decide who was going to house the provincial government, the university, and the prison.

Prince Albert decided to house the prison due to exponential growth of employment opportunity. Regina chose to house the government, and therefore established itself as the capital city of the province. Saskatoon chose to build the University, which continues to be the foundational institution that fuels both the economy and culture of the city.

University culture is often associated with artistic expression as well as a generally higher tolerance of queer lifestyles. Because academia aims to further human knowledge, beliefs and ideas are welcomingly challenged. However, this does not mean that the University of Saskatchewan has always been accepting of the 2SLGBTQIA community nor does it mean it has not faced its own share of public scandals.

Multiple queer controversies for the University of Saskatchewan surfaced in the 1970s. Peter Millard and Doug Wilson became historical figures for queer civil rights when Dr. Peter Millard's nonconsensual public declaration of his homosexuality and Doug Wilson's attempted dismissal from the College of Education broke headlines. Doug Wilson's dismissal was due to his attempt to create a ratified gay and lesbian campus club. The student body recognized that there was a clear deficit in accessible knowledge and supports on campus for queer students and banded together to create a what would grow today as the USSU Pride Centre.

Peter and Doug became symbols of resistance to the queer student body. Doug Wilson became a key editor for the independently published newsletter Gay Saskatchewan: The Newsletter Of The Saskatchewan Gay Coalition. Doug sought to document the stories and culture of underrepresented rural Saskatchewan communities.



USSU Facebook page

Because Doug was familiar with small-town provincial life, he did not "preach 'being out' as it was conventionally understood (self-declaring to family, friends, and colleagues)" [Korinek, 2018]. Because being outwardly queer can be dangerous in small communities, many small-town queer people dream of moving to the city for a better life. Doug instead advocated for rural queer people to accept themselves and to shift their energies to connecting with other queer locals who may also be living in secret. This is so that this demographic of people can start living fulfilling and authentic lives within their communities.

Transgender people are still fighting to be safely visible within rural communities. There is a sense of anonymity within the city, but rural Saskatchewan communities are tightly knit, making authentic expression difficult and sometimes dangerous. Jaycen Jakubowski is a trans man who began his transition within his hometown in Lashburn, SK.

"In a small town, there was no hiding my identity, the moment I "came out" the news spread fast. Overall, the community was tolerant and many even accepting of my identity. I had gotten eye rolls and rude looks when I first started coming out, but eventually many people came around. The schools gave me a bigger issue, with most of the transphobia I faced being from students and staff. While most of them were okay, there were a few staff members who gave me



backhanded comments or statements. The students who hated me before for not conforming to their gendered expectations just had more fuel to add to the fire. I found these same students coming to my workplace and harassing or outing me. I did have accepting people within the schools who were supportive. However, there was another issue with having a community. Despite the acceptance, I found it very difficult to create connections because of the lack of openly queer people in rural communities. Even though I tried looking online on various sites, it felt impossible to find any other queer folk in my town." [Interview]

JAYCEN JAKUBOWSKI

Jaycen is a psychology/pre-social work student at the University of Saskatchewan and volunteers at both Peer Health and the USSU Pride Centre.

Living in Saskatchewan as a transgender person has its challenges no matter the community style, which is exactly why we need to be loud and proud in our identities. *Queering the terrain* means taking up space in unexpected places, which is exactly why local YXE readers may have noticed a sticker explosion of the P&G logo on campus, Broadway, and downtown. Stickers have been made accessible on campus at the USSU main desk in Place Riel as well as the USSU Pride Centre. Stickers have also been dropped off at OUTSaskatoon. Readers are encouraged to *queer the terrain* by picking some up from these drop-off locations and spread them around your communities. Take a photo and tag [@prideandgender.zine](https://www.instagram.com/prideandgender.zine) on your instagram story with the hashtag [#pngspotting](https://www.instagram.com/pngspotting) to be reposted. Let's see how far we can can queer the terrain together!



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