

Sexy Health Carnival

One Small Part of Indigenous Herstory

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Aanii! I am an Anishinaabe woman from Naotkamegwaning First Nation in Northwestern Ontario. I am a sister, cousin, bear (from the bear clan), friend, and auntie, and, as part of my many roles, I'm also a Youth Facilitator at the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN). This is a by and for Indigenous youth organization that works across issues of reproductive health, rights, and justice, which is just another way of saying that we support community and youth awesome-ness!

In wanting to create supportive environments in which to learn, teach one another, and laugh, I created, with the help of my family, community, and NYSHN, the Sexy Health Carnival (SHC). The carnival is referred to as sexy because it is about positive esteem and feeling good about one's body and life as well as about one's decisions. Its intention is to create a fun-filled and interactive opportunity for other Indigenous youth to become educated on HIV prevention and on other sexual and reproductive health issues. The SHC is a series of booths, interactive games, and activities that engage with tons of topics and issues affecting our communities, but that also provide ways to help support our families and our nations.

As native youth, we are often confronted with shitty realities and scary statistics about what our lives will pan into, but don't always hear about the amazing kick-ass ways we are changing those realities. However, we can sometimes fall into the trap of only talking about these realities without actually breaking down barriers of fear, stigma, and shame. And so I felt it was important to provide as much information, and support, for issues we face like suicide, HIV and AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and shame related to sexuality, so that we could be better equipped to deal with these kinds of things. I also wanted to make sure that we were celebrating our strengths, and learning about sexual health (relationships, birth control,



family planning, and self-pleasure, for example) in fun-filled, non-shaming, interactive ways.

It is our birthright to have access to all the information pertaining to our bodies so that we can make informed decisions. And so a crucial part of the carnival is making sure never to shame the things we do, or the actions and steps we take to survive, but rather to provide support and love, as our ancestors and spirits have taught us well to do. The carnival, since its birth in 2012, has become so much bigger than me as many other Indigenous youth and communities across Canada and the United States continue to build and revitalize culturally safe sexual health education for young people in supportive, resurgent ways. I am one small part of this herstory, but hope that this can be looked back on as an example of how young Indigenous people are revitalizing the fierce love and hope our ancestors give to us.

89

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89