

TWO-SPIRIT

The term Two-Spirit reflects complex Indigenous understandings of gender roles, spirituality, and the long history of sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous cultures. Individual terms and roles for Two-Spirit people are specific to each nation.

Reclaiming Two-Spirit Identity.

At the 1990 Intertribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference, held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, activist Albert McLeod proposed the term two-spirit to refer to the Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Two-Spirit is a translation of the Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe) term *niizh manidoowag*, which refers to a person who embodies both a masculine and feminine spirit.

The role of Two-Spirit people in Indigenous communities is being reclaimed, and it is becoming recognized that homophobia and transphobia are in direct contradiction with most traditional Indigenous values. Reclaiming the traditional roles and value placed on Two-Spirit people's gifts, is part of a larger healing process taking place within Indigenous communities.

Prior to European arrival, Two-Spirit people were respected members of their communities and held special status based on their unique abilities to understand both male and female perspectives. These identities were recognized and celebrated from a young age as gifts from the creator; Two-Spirit people were often the visionaries, healers, and medicine people.

As part of the colonization process, Europeans attempted to eliminate Two-Spirit people. The Western religious values and belief systems that were imposed on Indigenous people condemned any sort of sexual or gender diversity, and Two-Spirit people were killed or forced into assimilation and hiding.

Being a Gay Indigenous person is often confused with being Two-Spirit. While the two may have parallels and intersections, they are not the same. Gay specifically is about attraction to a person of the same sex. Two-Spirit is more about the embodiment of two genders residing within one person.

The broader 2SLGBTQIA+ community should respect cultural, spiritual, and historical context; the concept of "Two-Spirit" is to be used only by Indigenous people.

Two-Spirit Allyship.

Allyship requires a commitment to listening, learning, and challenging our own assumptions. Allies unite and speak out against homophobia, transphobia and racism.

TIPS FOR PRACTICING ALLYSHIP:

- 0 Educate yourself on the experiences and perspectives of Two-Spirit people.
- 0 Identify relevant resources and be ready to refer someone in need.
- 0 Reflect stereotypes and assumptions you hold on 2SLGBTQIA+ and Indigenous peoples.
- 0 Know how to intervene when racism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia happen.
- 0 Respect and support the choice of Two-Spirit Trans people in using the pronouns of their choice.
- 0 Do not lay claim to Two-Spirit identity if you are not Indigenous.

TWO-SPIRIT GROUPS OF CANADA

Two-Spirits of the First Nations (Toronto, ON)
www.2spirits.com

Two-Spirited People of Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB)
www.twospiritedmanitoba.ca

Dancing to Eagle Spirit Society (Vancouver, BC)
www.dancingtoeaglespiritsociety.org

Two-Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society (Edmonton, AB) Ed
Lavallee at www.edlavallee@shaw.ca

Regina Two-Spirited Society (Regina, SK)
www.allnationshope.ca/Two%20Spirits.htm

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