



## - FAQ about Two Spirit People -

### **Who are Two Spirit people?**

Two Spirit people are Native and Indigenous people of any tribe or ancestry that identify as LGBTQPIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Pansexual, Intersex, Asexual).<sup>1</sup>

### **What is Two Spirit?**

Two Spirit describes a Native American (or otherwise Indigenous) person who embodies both masculinity and femininity or whose gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation differs from what is expected of them based on physical sex or gendered traits. Two Spirit people are often considered a separate or third gender, have distinct tribal roles, and may dress in a combination of male and female clothing/regalia. Two Spiritedness is exclusive to Native people and every tribe has its own unique word(s) and traditions.<sup>2</sup>

### **What is the History of the term Two Spirit?**

Before contact with western colonizers, each tribe used their own words to describe Two Spirit tribespeople. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, French colonizers wrongly coined the term “Berdache” (generally translated as homosexual prostitute or slave) and the term still exists as slur. Because Two Spirit people challenge western values of gender and sexuality, colonial governmental and religious systems used violence to erase Two Spirit people and tribal culture. By the mid-1970s, transgender, lesbian, bisexual, and gay Native people began to reclaim community spaces. In 1988, the first International Two Spirit Gathering was held in Minneapolis, MN and by the 1990s the term Two Spirit had become a common umbrella term used across tribes.<sup>3</sup>

### **Why is building Two Spirit community important?**

Two Spirit people and otherwise LGBTQPIA identified Native people experience an increased rate of violence, poverty, health problems, addiction, suicide, family rejection, and oppression both outside and within Native communities. In order to combat the impacts of historical trauma and colonization, we must reclaim our cultural values that have been erased or replaced by western demands. By supporting Two Spirit people, we are supporting our families, our friends, our elders, and our children. By honoring a person as their genuine, authentic self, we are honoring our cultural history and strengthening our Native community.

### **Minnesota Two Spirit Society**

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<sup>1,2</sup> Heartland Trans Wellness Trans and Queer Terms, JAC Stringer MSW, 2011

<sup>3</sup> Two Spirit: Then and Now, Harlan Pruden, 2014