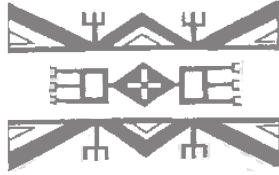


Walking in Two Worlds:  
Understanding the Two-Spirit &  
LGBTQ Community



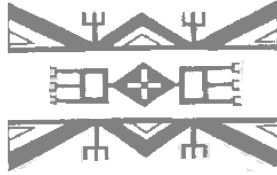
## What does it mean to be Two-Spirited?

The term Two-Spirit is a direct translation of the Ojibwe term, Niizh manidoowag. “Two-Spirited” or “Two-Spirit” is usually used to indicate a person whose body simultaneously houses a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit. The term can also be used more abstractly, to indicate the presence of two contrasting human spirits (such as Warrior and Clan Mother).

Two-Spirit People (also Two Spirit or Twospirit), an English term that emerged in 1990 out of the third annual inter-tribal Native American/First Nations gay/lesbian American conference in Winnipeg, describes Indigenous North Americans who fulfill one of many mixed gender roles found traditionally among many Native Americans and Canadian First Nations Indigenous groups. The mixed gender roles encompassed by the term, historically included wearing the clothing and performing work associated with both men and women.

**It’s important to know, the term Two-Spirit varies from tribe to tribe, but has some similarities**





Will Roscoe writes that male and female Two-Spirits have been documented in over 130 tribes, in every region of North America. Two-Spirits have had distinct gender and social roles in their tribes.

They could have been:

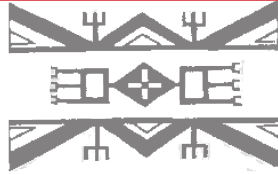
- Healers
- Medicine persons
- Conveyors of oral traditions and songs
- Name givers
- Special role players in sundance or other ceremonies
- Care givers, and/or would often be a parent to orphaned children

Before European contact, sexual and gender diversity was an everyday aspect of life among indigenous peoples. Since European colonization, the Two-Spirit community has been denied and alienated from their Native identity. As a result, Two-Spirit individuals are looked down upon as being perverted and often are shamed.

Two-Spirit people are currently living in multiple cultures; family, community, and society.

It's important to know that not all Native people identify as being Two-Spirited but will often use lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, or queer.

*“The term Two-Spirit is used currently to reconnect with tribal traditions related to sexuality and gender identity; to transcend the Eurocentric binary categorizations of homosexuals vs. heterosexuals or male vs. female; to signal the fluidity and non-linearity of identity processes; and heterosexism in Native Communities and racism in LGBT communities.”*

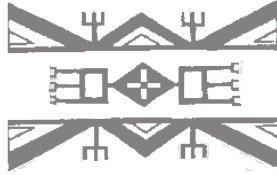


## Issues that may Effect Two-Spirit/ LGBTQ Individuals

- Cultural Identity
- Alienation from family and friends
- The coming out process
- Unreported sexual assaults due to shame and self-blame
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Depression
- Discrimination
- HIV infection
- Bullying
- Sex Addiction
- Hate Crimes
- Homophobia
- Serious mental health issues related to trauma
- Suicide
- Rejection
- Addiction
- Unemployment

The rate of victimization for American Indian adults is more than 2.5 times that of the overall US population.

AI/AN Two-Spirit women are triply oppressed. Often they confront stigma regarding their sexual orientation, not only from the wider society but also from other AI/AN 's, their families, their tribal communities, racism from the wider society and from other sexual minorities, and sexism from both Native and LGBTQ communities. Studies show that lesbians report higher rates of physical assault compared to heterosexual females.



In a recent study of Two-Spirit women, 78% of the women had been physically assaulted and 85% were sexually assaulted. This is 4 times higher than the estimate of lifetime assault among women in the general population. Most experienced abuse by multiple perpetrators, including family members, acquaintances, and strangers.

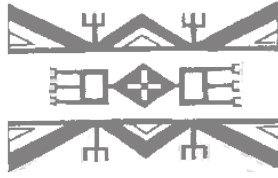
Assimilation into White lesbian culture quite often placed Two-Spirit women in the position of disconnecting from Native relatives and community.

In an Urban sample in the United States, gay, bisexual, and Two-Spirit men were more likely than heterosexual counterparts to report being sexually and physically victimized; 45% versus 2% reported sexual abuse or assault by someone other than their spouse/sexual partner.

## **How can I be helpful as a friend or partner?**

- By believing your friend or partner who has been raped
- By avoiding judgmental comments
- By controlling your own feelings of anger and/or frustration
- By asking how you can be helpful rather than giving unsolicited advice
- By respecting her/his decision even when yours might be different
- By being a good listener
- By being honest with yourself if you have trouble handling the aftermath of rape

As Little Thunder, a Lakota Two-Spirit woman activist said, *"The pain of being rejected by ones own people can be the most devastating."*



## Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming

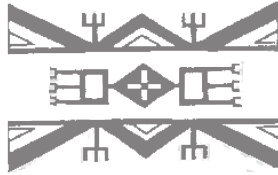
“Transgender is the state of one’s “gender identity” (self-identification as a woman, man, neither, or both) not matching one’s assigned sex. (identification by others as male, female or intersex based on physical/genetic sex). Transgender does not equal Two-Spirit (meaning that the term “transgender” was not a part of our culture but is a modern LGBT term.)

“Transgender and gender non-conforming people face injustice at every turn: in childhood homes, in school systems that promise to shelter and educate, in harsh and exclusionary workplaces, at the grocery store, the hotel front desk, in doctor’s offices and emergency rooms, before judges, at the hands of landlords, police officers, health care workers, and other service providers.

(National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, 2011)

*“Colonizers have long tried to crush the spirit of the Indian peoples and blunt their will to resist colonization. One of the most devastating weapons of conquest has been sexual violence.”*

- Andy Smith



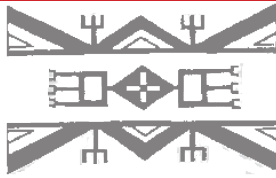
In a study done by the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force in 2011 with 6404 participants, 75 identifying as Two-Spirited found that:

- 56% Two-Spirit transgender participants attempted suicide
- 46% reported being rejected by family
- 45% reported family violence
- 74% reported losing friendships due to being Two-Spirited
- 19% of the participants reported having been refused a home or apartment
- 11% reported being evicted because of their gender identity/ expression.
- 19% reported experiencing homelessness at some point in their lives because of being transgender
- 55% reported being harrassed by shelter staff when at a shelter, 29% were turned away altogether
- 22% were sexually assaulted by residents or staff

Abuse by police and in prison:

- 22% of respondents who have interacted with with police reported harrassment by police, with much higher rates reported by people of color
- Almost half of the respondents 46% reported being uncomfortable seeking police assistance. Physical and sexual assault in jail and prison is a serious problem: 16% reported being physically assaulted, 15% reported being sexually assaulted

(National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, 2011)

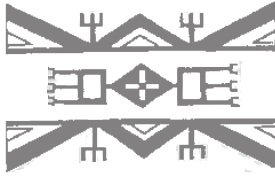


## Did You Know...

- Being sexually molested or raped by a same sex perpetrator does not make you Two-Spirited or LGBTQ
- When an individual who identifies as Two-Spirited/LGBTQ, it does not mean that they are attracted to everyone of the same sex
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, people cannot be identified by certain mannerisms or physical characteristics. People who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual come in as many different shapes, colors, and sizes as do people who are heterosexual
- The majority of child molesters are heterosexual men, not lesbian, gay or bisexual people. Almost all studies show that over 90% of child molestation is committed by heterosexual men
- Homosexuality is not a type of mental illness and cannot be “cured” by psychotherapy. Although homosexuality was once thought to be a mental illness, the American Psychiatric and Psychological Associations no longer consider it to be one
- Psychiatric and psychological attempts to “cure” lesbians and gay men have failed to change the sexual orientation of the patient. These “treatments” may help change sexual behavior temporarily but also can create emotional trauma

*“Our elders tell us that Two-Spirit individuals were gifted because they carried both male and female spirit.”*

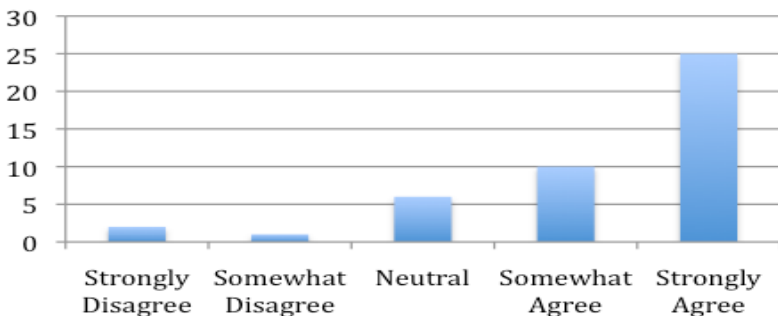


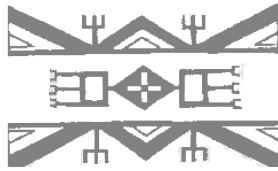


## Tips for Effective and Respectful Interactions

- Don't assume you can tell if someone is LGBTQ/Two Spirit
- Respect the need for confidentiality
- Understand the differences between “coming out” as lesbian, bisexual, or gay and “coming out” as transgendered
- Do not tolerate anti-LGBTQ/Two spirit remarks or humor in public spaces
- If you don't know what pronouns to use, ask
- Be patient with a person who is questioning their gender identity
- Don't tell a person what “category” or “identity” they fit into
- Don't ask a transgendered person what their “real name” is
- Don't ask about a transgendered person's genitals or surgical status
- Don't ask a transgendered person how they have sex
- Know your own limits as an ally

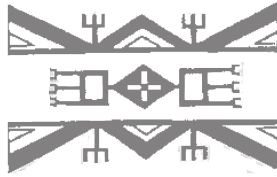
### **A Better Understanding of Two Spirit (GLBT) Issues is Needed in my own First Nations Community**





## **Reasons why Two-Spirited/ LGBTQ Individuals Do Not Report Sexual Assaults**

- Victims may have fear to disclose that they are Two-Spirited/ LGBTQ because when reporting to the police for fear of being re-victimized due to their sexual orientation or gender identity
- Often victims don't disclose because of shame
- When assaulted due to a bias, they question their own worth, regardless of whether it's due to being Two-Spirited/LGBTQ
- Lesbians, gay men, and transgendered people are targeted for sexual assault by anti-LGBTQ attackers or raped "opportunistically" (when the perpetrator of another crime inadvertently discovers that his victim is LGBTQ)
- Self-hate and blame can lead to feelings of depression and helplessness, even in individuals who are comfortable with their sexual orientation
- Those who are "out" have already faced a major threat to their self-esteem
- Those in the early stages of "coming out" will probably not have the social support and developed LGBTQ identity that can increase their psychological resilience and coping skills
- Without cultural sensitivity in the LGBTQ area, it is virtually impossible to provide meaningful, supportive services
- Many are not out to their family and friends
- Same-sex sexual assault has not received much attention from researchers, support services, or the criminal justice system
- This lack of attention to same sex rape has left many survivors without culturally competent support and, therefore, with few resources for healing



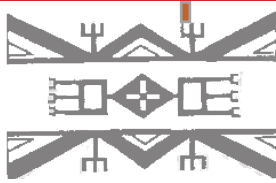
## Common Barriers that Same-Sex Survivors of Sexual Assault Experience:

- Not being taken seriously or having their experience minimized
- Not having their experience labeled as sexual assault or rape
- Having to explain how it happened in more detail than one would ask a survivor of opposite-sex assault
- Having to educate those they reach out to
- Having their experience sensationalized
- Increasing people's homophobia or being seen as a traitor in their community if they tell their story to straight people
- Having fewer people to talk to because the Two-Spirited/LGBTQ community can be a small one that is tightly knit
- Mistakenly seen as the perpetrator
- Not being understood or being blamed for the sexual assault
- Being treated in a homophobic manner by the police, the hospital, rape crisis center, and others
- Being "Outed" (having ones sexual orientation discussed or revealed without ones consent)

“

*“Living on a reserve that hate 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 during Two Spirit Youth Speak Out  
Vancouver BC*



## Terminology

**Ally:** Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and gender-straight privilege in themselves and others; a concern for the well-being of Two Spirit, LGBTQ and intersex people; and belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are social justice issues.

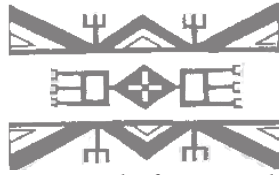
**Bisexual:** A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to male and female individuals.

**Coming Out:** May refer to the process by which one accepts one's own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersexed person (to come out to oneself). May also refer to the process by which one shares one's sexuality, gender identity, or intersexed status with others. This can be a continual, life long process for homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed individuals.

**Discrimination:** Prejudice+power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group.

**Gay:** Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic and /or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in "homosexual behavior" identify as gay.

**Gender:** One's expressions of masculinity, femininity, or androgyny in words, persons, organisms, or characteristics.



**Homophobia:** The irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is a fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

**Lesbian:** Term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to female-identified people.

**Oppression:** The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

**Queer:** An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits. For decades “queer” was used solely as a derogatory adjective for gays and lesbians, but in the 1980’s the term began to be used by gay and lesbian activists as a term for self-identification.

**Sex Identity:** How a person identifies physically: female, male, in between, beyond, or neither.

**Transgender:** A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on anatomical genitalia. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity.

**Transexual:** A person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their sense of gender/sex.

**Note:** For the complete LGBTTSQI Terminology by Eli Green and Eric N. Peterson can be found online at [Trans-Academics.org](http://Trans-Academics.org) 2006

## **Additional resources and more information:**

### **Two-Spirit Websites:**

- Minnesota Two-Spirits- [www.mntwospirits.20m.com](http://www.mntwospirits.20m.com)
- Northwest Two-Spirit Society- [www.nwtwospiritsociety.org](http://www.nwtwospiritsociety.org)
- Oklahoma City Two-Spirit Society- [www.aaip.com/programs/2spirit.html](http://www.aaip.com/programs/2spirit.html)
- Two-Spirit Society of Denver- [www.denvertwospirit.com](http://www.denvertwospirit.com)
- Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits- [www.baaits.org](http://www.baaits.org)
- Utopia Hawaii- <http://keliawai.50g.com/index1.htm>
- Native OUT, Phoenix, AZ- [www.nativeout.com](http://www.nativeout.com)
- 2SPR(Two-Spirit Press Room) <http://home.earthlink.net/~lafor002.indes.html>

### **Online sources:**

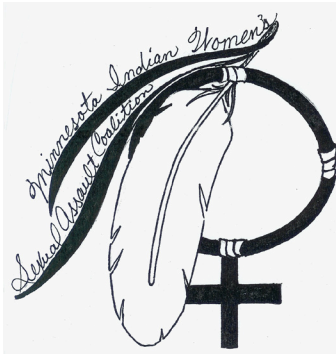
- Advocates for Youth: [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)
- Center of Excellence for Transgender health: <http://transhealth.ucsf.edu>
- Gender Spectrun: <http://www.genderspectrum.org>
- National Center for Transgender equality: <http://transequality.org>
- PFLAG T-Net: <http://community.pflag.org/Page.aspx?pid=380>
- Trans Family: <http://www.transfamily.org>
- Transgender Law and Policy Institute: <http://www.transgenderlaw.org>
- Youth Resource: <http://www.youthresource.com>

### **Two-Spirit Suggested Reading List:**

- Brant, Beth, 1991 *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art by North American Indian Women*, 2nd ed. Rockland, Md.: Sinister Wisdom; Ithaca NY. Firebrand Books
- Chrystos, *Not Vanishing*, Vancouver, BC: Press Gang, 1988 *Dream on*, Vancouver, BC: Press Gang, 1991 *In her I am*, Vancouver, BC: Press Gang, 1997
- Day, Sharon, *Drink the Winds, Let the Waters Flow Free*. Minneapolis: Johnson Institute, 1983.
- Gould, Janice. *Beneath my Heart*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1990.

## References:

1. *Abuse, Mastery, and Health Among Lesbian, Bisexual, and Two-Spirit American Indian and Alaska Native Women*, Keren Lahavot, Karina Walters, and Jane M. Simoni. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 2009, Vol 15, No. 3, 275-284
2. *Culture, Trauma, and Wellness: A comparison of Heterosexual and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Two-Spirit Native Americans*. Kimberly F. Balsam, Bu Huang, Karen C. Fieland, Jane M. Simoni, and Karino Walters. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* Copyright 2004 by the Educational Publishing Foundation, Vol 10, No. 3, 287-301.
3. *My Spirit, My Heart, Identity Experiences and Challenges Among American Indian Two-Spirit Women*, Karina L. Walters, Teresa Evans-Campbell, Jane, M. Simoni, Theresa Ronquillo, and Rupaleem Bhuyan, <http://haworthpress.com/web/JLS>, 2006 by the Haworth Press, Inc.
4. *Vicitmization, Substance Use, and HIV Risk Behaviors Among Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit Heterosexual American Indian Men in New York City*, Jane M. Simoni, Karina L. Walters, Kimberly F. Balsam and Seth B. Meyers. *American Journal of Public Health*, Dec 2006, Vol. 96, No.12
5. *Two Spirit Youth Speak Out!, Analysis of the Needs Assessment Tool* Urban Native Youth Association, [www.unya.bc.ca](http://www.unya.bc.ca)



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1619 Dayton Avenue, Suite 303  
Saint Paul, MN 55104  
[www.miwsac.org](http://www.miwsac.org)

Phone: 651-646-4800  
Toll Free: 1-877-995-4800  
Fax: 651-646-4798

For More Information on **The MN Two-Spirit Society**, contact:

Lenny Hayes, [lennyhayes1969@gmail.com](mailto:lennyhayes1969@gmail.com)

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