

The Rainbow Resource Centre is a non-profit, community based charitable organization that serves as the central agency offering support, information, counselling, referrals, library, and public awareness on issues related to sexual orientation, gender diversity, and anti-homophobia education.

The Rainbow Resource Centre envisions and works toward an equal and diverse society, free of homophobia and discrimination, by encouraging visibility and fostering health and self-acceptance through education, support, resources, and outreach.

Peer Support/Info Line:

(204)284.5208 or 1.888.399.0005

(Toll free in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario)

Monday to Friday: 7:30—10:00 pm

(subject to volunteer availability)

Counselling: (204) 452-7508 (intake line)
counselling@rainbowresourcecentre.org

Address: 170 Scott Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 0L3

The Rainbow Resource Centre is open:

Wednesday—Friday: 1:00 pm to 4:30 pm

Monday—Friday: 7:30 pm to 10:00 pm

(subject to staff and volunteer availability)

Please visit our website:

www.rainbowresourcecentre.org

Two-Spirit People of the First Nations



*For individuals who want to
learn more about it*

2008

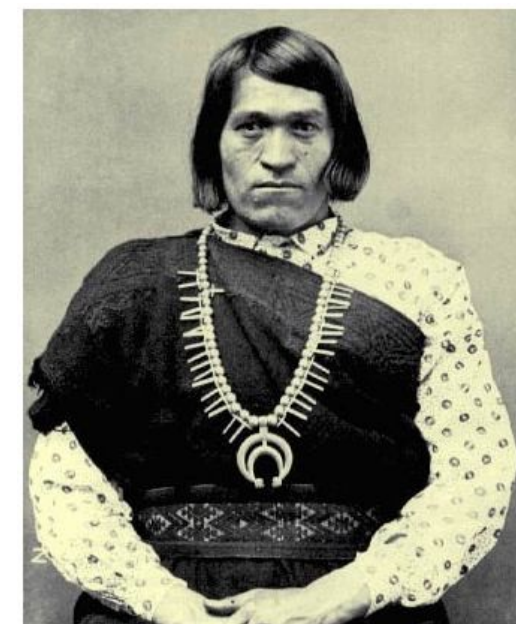
We Are Part of a Tradition

In many of our cultures, before the arrival of Europeans to North America, “Two-Spirit” referred to the ancient teachings. Our Elders tell us of people who were gifted among all beings because they carried two spirits: that of male and female. It is told that women engaged in tribal warfare and married other women as there were men who married other men. These individuals were looked upon as a third gender in many cases and in almost all cultures they were honoured and revered. Two-Spirit people were often the visionaries, the healers and medicine people. They were respected as fundamental components of our ancient culture and societies. This is our guiding force as well as our source of strength. This is the ancient heart of Two-Spirit People.

Today, Two-Spirit People are Native people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, other gendered, third/fourth gendered individuals that walk carefully between the worlds and between the genders. Unfortunately, due to many of the colonizing forces and experience that Native People have gone through, the roles of Two-Spirit people have been lost in our consciousness and many Native People have adopted homophobic attitudes that are present in today’s society. With the coming of the Seventh Generation, Two-Spirit people are slowly relearning their traditional roles in Native Communities.

Ongoing education for all the Native communities, along with the Two-Spirit youth, is very important to our future. We believe that only when Two-Spirit People are brought back to their respected places as teachers, artists and healers will all Native People of Turtle Island, and by extension, the world, begin massive healing of spirit. We begin by greeting one another.

-Doe



Two-Spirit Origins

The term "*Two-Spirit*" originated in Winnipeg, Canada in 1990 during the third annual intertribal Native American/First Nations gay and lesbian conference. It comes from the Ojibwa words *nii-zh manitoag* (two-spirits). It was originally chosen to distance Native/First Nations people from non-Natives as well as from the words "berdache" and "gay."

Historically, Two-Spirit individuals perform specific social functions in their communities. In some tribes, male-bodied two-spirits were active as healers or medicine persons, gravediggers, undertakers, handling and burying of the deceased, conducted mourning rites, conveyers of oral traditions and songs, nurses during war expeditions, foretold the future, conferred lucky names on children or adults, wove, made pottery, made beadwork and quillwork, arranged marriages, made feather regalia for dances, special skills in games of chance, led scalp-dances, and fulfilled special functions in connection with the setting up of the central post for the Sun Dance. In some tribes, female-bodied two-spirits typically took on roles such as chief, council, trader, hunter, trapper, fisher, warfare, raider, guides, peace missions, vision quests, prophets, and medicine persons.

There are descriptions of Two-Spirit individuals having strong mystical powers. In one account, raiding soldiers of a rival tribe begin to attack a group of foraging women when they perceive that one of the women, the one that does not run away, is a Two-Spirit. They halt their attack and retreat after the Two-Spirit counters them with a stick, determining that the two-spirit will have great power which they will not be able to overcome.



Native people have often been perceived as "warriors," and with the acknowledgement of Two-Spirit people that romanticized identity becomes broken. In order to justify this new "Indian" identity many explained it away as a "form of social failure, women-men are seen as individuals who are not in a position to adapt themselves to the masculine role prescribed by their culture" (Lang, 28). Lang goes on to suggest that two-spirit people lost masculine power socially, so they took on female social roles to climb back up the social ladder within the tribe.

Cross dressing of Two-Spirit people was not always an indicator of cross acting (taking on other gender roles and social status within the tribe). Lang explains "the mere fact that a male wears women's clothing does not say something about his role behavior, his gender status, or even his choice of partner...". Often within tribes a child's gender was decided depending on by their inclination toward either masculine or feminine activities, or their intersex status. Puberty was about the time frame by which clothing choices were made to physically display their gender choice.

Two-Spirit people, specifically male-bodied (biologically male, gender female), could go to war and have access to male activities such as sweat lodges. However, they also took on female roles such as cooking and other domestic responsibilities. Today's societal standards look down upon feminine males, and this perception of that identity has trickled into Native society. The acculturation of these attitudes has created a sense of shame towards two-spirit males who live or dress as females. This can also be said for those who are biologically female, gender male.

As far as gender is concerned, Two-spirit people also associate with the term bi-gender, which involves having a separate male persona and a separate female persona. Although these terms are not exactly alike, they are still closely related in both experiences and representation of that person.

LOCAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Two Spirited People of Manitoba
twospiritedmanitoba@hotmail.com

Ka Ni Kanichihk
455 McDermot Ave
Winnipeg, MB R3A 0B5
Tel. (204) 953-5820, Fax 953-5824
www.kanikanichihk.ca

Nine Circles Community Health Centre
705 Broadway Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3G 0X2
(204)940.6000 or 1.888.305.8627 (toll free)
www.ninecircles.ca

EMAIL LISTSERVS

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northwesttwospiritsociety@groups.msn.com
theprideoftwospirits@yahoo.com
two_spirits_of_texas@yahoo.com
newmexicotwospirits@yahoo.com
mntwospirits@yahoo.com
two-spirit@yahoo.com
info@nativeout.com
nativeamericanlgbti@yahoo.com
gay_native_americans_indians_2005@yahoo.com
gibt_native_americans_houston_area@yahoo.com

SUGGESTED READINGS

<http://androgynous0catch.com/2spiritx.htm>
<http://nativeout.com/content/blogsection/1/55/>
<http://www.androphile.org/preview/Culture/NativeAmerica/amerindian.htm>
<http://www.tobyjohnson.com/twospirits.html>

Lang, S. (1998). *Men as Women, Women as Men. Changing Gender in Native American Cultures*. University of Texas Press

Jacobs, S., Thomas, W., Lang, S. (1997). *Two-Spirit People, Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality and Spirituality*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press