

# Pride Month



## Native LGBTQ+/ Two Spirit People

The term Two Spirit was first coined in 1991 during the annual general meeting for Gays and Lesbians of the First Nations in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It originates from the Ojibwe words “niizh manitoag” (two spirits).<sup>1,4</sup> Those at the meeting decided to replace a derogatory term created by colonizers with the term Two Spirit to distance themselves from non-Natives.<sup>1,4</sup> There are more than 100 different Indigenous words that refer to Two Spirit people but not every tribe uses the term, so the general reference is Native LGBTQ+/Two Spirit.

Traditionally, Two Spirit refers to someone who is Native and who expresses their gender or spiritual identity in Indigenous, non-Western ways.<sup>2</sup> Native LGBTQ+/Two Spirit people existed pre-colonization and are people who are male, female, and sometimes intersexed.<sup>2</sup> In many tribes, they are considered neither man nor woman but a separate gender altogether. Prior to colonization, Native LGBTQ+/Two Spirit people often had specialized work roles, distinguished temperament, dress, lifestyle and social roles, and were regarded as sacred.<sup>2</sup> More than 150 tribes have acknowledged Two Spirit in their communities.<sup>3</sup>

Male-bodied Native LGBTQ+/Two Spirit people had many specialized roles and social functions in their communities, including as healers or medicine persons. They often were responsible for conducting mourning rites and other duties associated with death; they also were conveyors of oral traditions and songs and performed other ceremonial rites, such as foretelling the future and conferring “lucky names” on children or adults.<sup>4</sup> Male-bodied people could also go to war and partake in male activities such as sweat lodges.<sup>4</sup>

Female-bodied Native LGBTQ+/Two Spirit individuals occupied roles such as chief, council member, trader, hunter, trapper, or fisher, but also participated in warfare and raids, as well as peace missions and vision quests. They often were prophets and medicine persons. Oftentimes within tribes, a child’s gender was decided based on activities they participated in and, by puberty, clothing choices physically displayed their gender choices.<sup>4</sup>

The Native Center for Behavioral Health, in cooperation with [Matt Ignacio, PhD](#), a member of the Tohono O’odham Nation and assistant professor in the Arizona State University School of Social Work, has developed an extensive curriculum called *Honoring Our Relations: Increasing Knowledge of Our LGBTQ+/Two Spirit Wellness*.

## References

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2. Two-Spirit | Health Resources. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2022, from <https://www.ihs.gov/lgbt/health/twospirit/>
3. Two Spirit and LGBTQ Identities: Today and Centuries Ago - HRC. (n.d.). Human Rights Campaign. Retrieved April 20, 2022, from <https://www.hrc.org/news/two-spirit-and-lgbtq-identities-today-and-centuries-ago>
4. Rainbow Resource Centre. (2014). *Two-spirit people of the first nations - rainbow resource centre*. Retrieved May 18, 2022, from <https://rainbowresourcecentre.org/files/16-08-Two-Spirit.pdf>

