

## Understanding and Reclaiming our Two-Spirit Relatives

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## ICWA Education Days

- ICWA Ed Day is a cultural learning experience
- The curriculum is designed to stimulate the mind, body, and spirit.
- Ed Day topics: Historical trauma; Customary Adoption, ICWA 101, etc.



You train dogs and horses.....



**You educate people or rather.....  
people educate themselves**





## We had a conversation and followed their lead

- Invited Two-Spirit individuals to our meeting
- Met after hours to make sure everyone was included.
- Asked them about language
- What did they want participants to know?
- Plan for safety
- Told them what I thought barriers might be
- Asked specific questions
- Developed vocabulary list
- Developed resource list
- Thought of initiative that would stimulate “out of box” thinking.

Indian Child Welfare Education Day  
and

Minnesota Two-Spirit Society  
Presents

*From a Place of Honor to a Place of Shame Return to Honor  
Understanding the Native American GLBTQ Community*



**Indian Child Welfare Education Day  
Co-Sponsored by WMCL Indian Law Center**

**The Minnesota Two-Spirit Society  
Presents**

***Dynamic Families and Strengthening Children:  
A Two Spirit Perspective***

***Opening Remarks:***

***Representative Susan Allen***

***Presenters:***

**Antony Stately, PhD**

Honor Project – Critical Issues and LGBT Two-Spirit  
Populations

**Diverse Parent Voices Panel**

Lisa DeCory, Claudia Nicolosi, Antony Stately, Conan  
Comes Flying, Angie Thornhill

**Nick Metcalf, MSW**

Systemic Barriers for Two-Spirit Families

**Indian Child Welfare Education Day**  
**Co-Sponsored by WMCL Indian Law Center**  
**and**  
**The Minnesota Two-Spirit Society**

**Psychosocial Trauma: Boarding School to**  
**Bullying**  
**Two Spirit Resiliency and Coping, Best**  
**Practices**

**Presenters:**

**Florentine Blue Thunder**  
Traditional Cultural Perspective of Two Spirit People

**Antony Stately, PhD**  
Historical Trauma Overview of Two Spirit People

**Comanche Fairbanks**  
Bully Transformation

**Panel Discussion**  
**Reva D'Nova, Nathan Taylor, Conan Comes Flying**  
Clarity, Truth, and Transformation:  
Two Spirit panel discussion on Healthy Safe Response to Bullying

**Nick Metcalf, MSW**  
Lateral Violence: Hurt People, HURT People

**Lenny Hayes, MA**  
Clinical Implication of Bullying on Two Spirit People

# Welcome Back to the Circle



Smudge  
Don't  
Judge

## TWO SPIRIT AND LGBT NATIVE AMERICANS



## Beginning of Time

- 1492-1990 –Berdache:**Two-spirit people** (also **two spirit** or **twospirit**) is a modern umbrella term used by some indigenous North Americans for Gender variant individuals in their communities. Non-Native anthropologists have historically used the term **berdaches** /ber'dæfɪz/ for individuals who fulfill one of many mixed gender roles in First Nations and Native American tribes, but this term has more recently fallen out of favour.
- Before the late twentieth century, the term *berdache* was widely used by anthropologists as a generic term to indicate feminine Native men; however, this term has become considered increasingly outdated and even offensive.



## Where did the Two-Spirit term emerge from?

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- Use of the *berdache* term has widely been replaced by the self-chosen *two-spirit*, which itself gained widespread popularity in 1990 during the third annual intertribal Native American/First Nations gay and lesbian conference in [Winnipeg](#). *Two-spirit* is a term chosen to distinctly express Native/First Nations [gender identity](#) and [gender variance](#), in addition to replacing the otherwise imposed and non-Native terms of *berdache* and *gay*.

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

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- "Two-Spirited" or "Two-Spirit" usually indicates a Native person who feels their body simultaneously manifests both a masculine and a feminine spirit, or a different balance of masculine and feminine characteristics than usually seen in masculine men and feminine women.
- Most Indigenous communities have specific terms in their own languages for the gender-variant members of their communities and the social and spiritual roles these individuals fulfill — including [Lakota](#): *wínkte*, [Navajo](#): *nádleehé*, [Mohave](#): *hwame*

## Two-Spirit also means

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- Male Two-Spirits were considered to be a "third gender," and female Two-Spirits were considered to be a "fourth gender" (similar to the way in which both male and female homosexuals are considered to be gay, while females are also considered to be lesbian).
- It is very important to remember that genders vary from tribe to tribe but are similar.
- It is said that some tribes have up to 15 genders to identify Two-Spirit individuals.

## Traditional Two-Spirit Dress

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- Their dress is usually a mixture of traditionally male and traditionally female articles, or they may dress as a man one day, and a woman on another.
- According to Sabine Lang many tribes have distinct gender and social roles.

## Two-Spirit Community Roles

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- Healers or medicine persons
- Parents of orphaned children
- Conveyors of oral traditions and songs ([Yuki](#))
- Foretellers of the future ([Winnebago](#), [Oglala Lakota](#))
- Name givers of children or adults (Oglala Lakota, [Tohono O'odham](#))
- Nurses during war expeditions
- Potters ([Zuni](#), [Navajo](#), Tohono O'odham)
- Matchmakers ([Cheyenne](#), [Omaha](#), Oglala Lakota)
- Makers of feather regalia for dances ([Maidu](#))
- Special role players in the [Sun Dance](#) ([Crow](#), [Hidatsa](#), Oglala Lakota)

## Two-Spirit Community Roles

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- Peace makers for the tribe
- Joined war parties
- Boys' and girls' puberty ceremonies
- Husbands
- Wives

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- Will Roscoe writes that male and female Two-spirits have been "documented in over 130 tribes, in every region of North America, among every type of native culture."

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

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- Alex Wilson (1996), a Two-Spirit woman activist and educator, wrote that the term Two-Spirit "proclaims a sexuality deeply rooted in our own cultures. Two-Spirit identity affirms the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity, including sexuality, gender, culture, community, and spirituality."

## What Happened to Honor and Respect?

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- Since European colonization, the Two-Spirit community has been denied and alienated from their Native identity and community.
- As a result, Two-Spirit individuals were often looked down upon as being perverted and were shamed.
- Results of Historical and Intergenerational Trauma

## What happened to our Two-Spirit people?

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- Out of the love and respect for Two-Spirit people, many chiefs were reluctant to defend their Two-Spirit people and they were sent underground to protect them.
- It has been said that Europeans and missionaries were murdering our Two-Spirit people.

## Issues that impact the Two-Spirit Individual

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- Loss of Identity
- Loss of Culture
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Serious mental health issues related to all forms of trauma
- Depression
- Suicide
- Discrimination
- Sexual Assaults
- HIV infection
- Alienation from family and friends
- Sex addiction
- Gambling
- Hate crimes
- Shame
- Homophobia
- Racism
- The Coming Out Process
- Bullying
- Domestic Violence

## Digital Recordings of Two-Spirit Individuals involved in the foster/adoptee system

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## Statistics of Two-Spirit vs. Hetrosexual

### Two-Spirit Individuals

- Childhood physical abuse 40.0%
- Childhood sexual abuse 40.0%
- Lifetime sexual assault 48.0%
- Lifetime physical abuse by partner 29.2%
- Lifetime physical assault by other acquaintance 28.0%
- Lifetime experience of being  
robbed, mugged, physically  
attacked 60.0%

### Hetrosexual Individuals

- Childhood physical abuse 20%
- Childhood sexual abuse 25.8%
- Lifetime sexual assault 35.1%
- Lifetime physical abuse by partner 29.1%
- Lifetime physical assault by other acquaintances 23.8%
- Lifetime experiences of being robbed, mugged, physically attacked 48.3% (Jane M. Simoni, PhD, Karina L. Walters, PhD, Kimberly F. Balsam, PhD, and Seth B. Meyers, PhD)

## Risks for Our Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Youth

- LGBTQ youth are up to 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual peers
- Over 30% of all reported teen suicides each year are by LGBTQ youth
- 50% of all LGBTQ youth reported being rejected by their parents and community due to their sexual orientation.
- 26% of LGBTQ youth are forced to leave home because of conflicts over their sexual orientation

## Risks for Our Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Youth

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- Nine out of 10 LGBTQ students (86.2%) experienced harassment at school
- Three-fifths (60.8%) felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation
- About one-third (32.7%) skipped a day of school in the past month of feeling unsafe (GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, National School Climate Survey, 2009)

## Risks for Our Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Youth in Rural Areas

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- Two-Spirit/LGBTQ youth in rural communities and those with lower adult educational attainment face particularly hostile school climates (JG Greytak, Diaz EM-Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 2009)



## What Can We Do?

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- Educate on Bullying
- Zero tolerance for bullying
- If we don't have the answers, seek them out
- Laws protecting LGBTQ victims
- Encourage
- Choose not be silent

## What can Mental Health Professionals and others do?

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- Understand the effects of homophobia and to remember that "Homophobia is a choice."
- Don't focus therapy on the client's sexual orientation unless the clients wants to
- Be culturally competent on Two-Spirit/LGBTQ issues
- Be aware of Two-Spirit/LGBTQ community resources
- Exhibit gay-affirming attitudes
- Understanding what it means to be oppressed
- Being more understanding of Two-Spirit/LGBTQ issues

## What can Mental Health Professionals and others do?

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- Show compassion and empathy
- Being willing to find services for Two-Spirit/LGBTQ individuals if you are not able to provide proper services
- Understand the impact of Native American Historical and Intergenerational Trauma and how it impacts the Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Community
- Allow the individual to define the identity of themselves either as Two-Spirited or LGBTQ

## As an individual, ask yourself

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- If someone were to come out to you as Two-Spirited/LGBTQ, what would your first thought be?
- How would you feel if your child came out to you as Two-Spirited/LGBTQ?
- How would you feel if your mother, father or sibling came out as Two-Spirited/LGBTQ?
- Have you ever stood up for a Two-Spirit/LGBTQ individual who was being harassed?

## As an individual, ask yourself

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- Have you ever laughed at or made a joke at the expense of Two-Spirit/LGBTQ people?
- If you do not identify as Two-Spirited/LGBTQ, how would you feel if people thought you were Two-Spirited/LGBTQ?

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- **As Little Thunder, a Lakota Two-Spirit woman activist said “The pain of being rejected by one’s own people can be the most devastating.”**