

BEING TWO SPIRIT

The contemporary term Two Spirit was first coined in Winnipeg in 1990 at the 3rd annual Native American and Canadian Aboriginal LGBT Peoples gathering. The founding group wanted the term to reflect the historical acceptance of gender diverse peoples, the ceremonial roles they held, and the understanding of diverse sexual identities within Indigenous communities in pre-contact times.

Two Spirit also exists as an English placeholder as many Indigenous communities uncover and reclaim the terms for gender and sexual diversity within their Indigenous languages. The term can be used by Indigenous people who are gender and/or sexually diverse. Two Spirit encompasses the interconnectedness of one's own cultural identity, gender, and romantic/sexual identity. Being Two Spirit is a very fluid identity and each community and Indigenous person has their own understanding of what it means to be Two Spirit.



**THERE ARE
NO CLOSETS
IN TIPIS**



OUTSaskatoon works to uplift 2SLGBTQ people by leading, serving, and supporting in a dynamic community. OUTSaskatoon fosters physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health through community support groups, counselling, drop-in services, queer-specific education and training, sexual health services, community events, and a long-term group home for Two Spirit, queer and trans youth ages 16-21.

FIND MORE RESOURCES AT:
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TWO SPIRIT

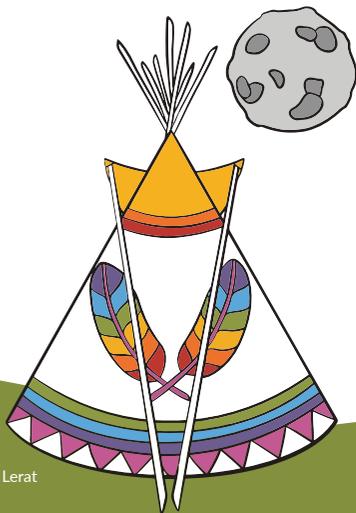


HISTORICAL ROLES

Indigenous views of gender come from a spirit based teaching; that a person's gender is based on their spirit rather than their physical body. This worldview is different from the flawed and limiting eurocentric colonial belief in a gender binary that is defined by the physical body.

The Nehiyawak (Cree peoples) of the Treaty 6 territory included the **Tastawiniwak** (the in-between society / Two Spirit society) which had many individual and unique cultural roles for transfeminine, transmasculine, non-binary, and intersex peoples.

In most Indigenous communities, Two Spirit people were seen, loved, and respected as the unique individuals that they are. They were often gifted with keen insights and the ability to see things from a balanced viewpoint. Many held important roles within their tribes, such as Chiefs, medicine people, caregivers, protectors, and knowledge keepers; as they had always strived to create balance.



IMPACTS OF COLONIZATION

Within Treaty 6 (the Treaty land that Saskatoon and area inhabits), European settlers began colonizing Indigenous peoples as early as the 1600s. This process included violent assimilation tactics, such as residential schools, the 60's Scoop, policies that prohibited cultural roles and practices, limiting or criminalizing access to land and resources, the introduction of homophobia and transphobia, systematic attacks on Indigenous worldviews that originally saw gender and sexual diversity as normal and positive, and current day systems that disenfranchise and discriminate against Indigenous peoples and communities.

In particular, the implementation of residential schools resulted in children being torn away from their families and culture and placed in environments where rigid colonial gender roles and norms were mandatory. For all children, and especially those who were Two Spirit, the impacts of these roles and norms were devastating.

Over the course of 150 years residential schools expanded to nearly every Indigenous community in Canada.

OVER 150,000 FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, AND MÉTIS CHILDREN WERE TORN AWAY FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND CULTURE.

The last residential school only closed in 1996. The impacts of these schools will last for generations.

RESURGENCE

Two Spirit people have existed since the beginning of Indigenous oral history and many Two Spirit activists are now coming forward to teach the traditional Indigenous values of respect, love and kindness towards all, including those who are part of the 2SLGBTQ community.

Indigenous communities are reclaiming traditional names for diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. This includes the Nehiyawak (Cree) of Treaty 6 territory, where language of gender diverse peoples is being shared:

ISKWEW: cisgender woman

ISKWEHIKAN: transgender woman /trans-feminine

AYAANKWEW: non-binary/genderfluid

NAPEHIKAN: transgender man /trans-masculine

NAPEW: cisgender man

Indigenous communities are now holding their own Two Spirit Pride Festivals to highlight the love and acceptance the community holds for all members. For example, Beardy's & Okemasis First Nations held Saskatchewan's first Two Spirit Pride festival on June 9, 2016.

Over the years, Two Spirit activists have been vital in building bridges between the Indigenous community and the Queer community. They are bringing forth the need to address issues in both communities, such as racial discrimination and the need for reconciliation and decolonization within Queer spaces.