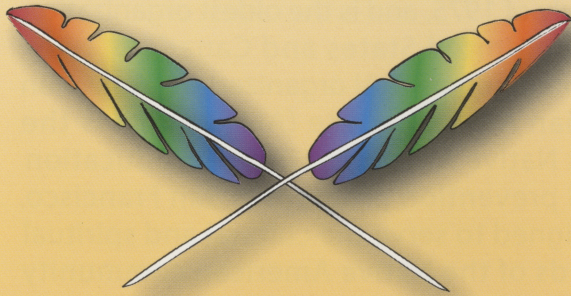


A New Urgency...

Stories on the news recently describe a disturbing trend in the United States—suicide among gay teens. CNN, Ellen Geneses, and others have addressed the disturbing rise of bullied gay teens taking their own lives. According to a survey of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Network, 9 out of 10 gay students are bullied in school, and they are four times more likely to commit suicide. It is more urgent than ever for Two-Spirit communities to strengthen and come together, to reach out to those who may be suffering alone.



Language of Love

Each Nation has a term for a "Two Spirit"

A small sampling is list below:

Acoma: "Kokwi'ma" (male-bodied)

Cree: "Aayahkwew" (neither man nor woman)

Crow: "Bote/Bate/Bade" (not man, not woman)

Inuit: "Sipiniq" (infant whose sex changes at birth)

Navajo: "Nadleeh" (one who changes)

Ojibwa: "Agokwa" (man-woman)

Omaha-Ponca: "Mixu'ga" (instructed by the moon)



Resources

www.friendshiphousesf.org

www.nnaap-ca.org

www.nativehealth.org

www.gsanetwork.org

www.community.pflag.org



www.baaits.org



BAAITS exists to restore and recover the role of Two-Spirit people within the American Indian/First Nations community by creating a forum for the spiritual, cultural and artistic expression of Two-Spirit people.



BAAITS is a community-based volunteer organization offering culturally relevant activities for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Native Americans, their families and friends. Two-Spirit refers to the commonly shared notion among many Native American tribes that some individuals naturally possessed and manifested both a masculine and feminine spiritual qualities. American society commonly identifies Two-Spirit People as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender.

Two-Spirit people are defined as LGBT and gender-variant members of the Native American community. The term Two-Spirit was coined in 1990 by queer Native Americans gathered in Winnipeg. Many contemporary LGBT native Americans use the term Two-Spirit to maintain cultural continuity with their traditions. In many of our cultures, some individuals possessed and manifested a balance of both feminine and masculine energies.



Two-Spirit identity is a complex interaction between biological sex (male/female/intersex), gender identity (man/woman/other gender), traditional role (spiritual/cultural), partner choice (sex of partner), and acculturation (identification through traditional terms and/or contemporary GLBT terms). Traditionally, two-spirit people were/are defined by social role, and identified by elders or family members early on due to their 'spirit' or other characteristics. Roles (and retention of roles) differ significantly by Nation.

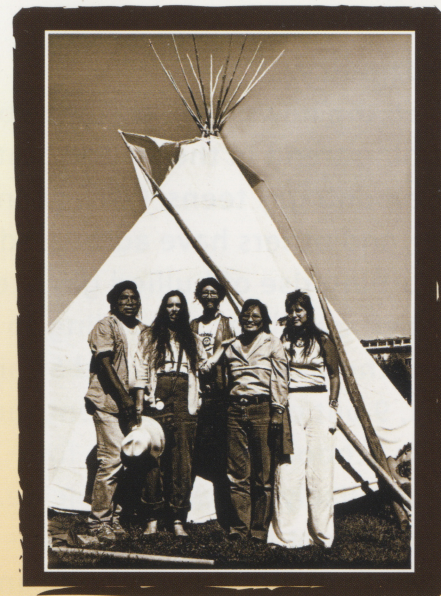
Historically, more than 155 Nations had roles for Two-Spirit people, and each had a specific name, meaning and traditions, including *nàdleehé* (Navaho), *winkte* (Lakota), *alyha* and *hwame* (Mohave), and *he'eman* (Cheyenne). Two-Spirit Native Americans were greatly respected in their communities in the past, but the anti-LGBT sentiment found in other American communities is present in some Native American communities today.

Elders say that homophobia did not exist on this land before we were invaded and occupied. Two-Spirit or LGBTQ people were recognized, valued members of tribal communities. They lived openly in their tribes. They did not have to fight to be accepted in society because they already had a place, a special and sacred place. In the plains tribes, visions were respected so that if a person had a vision that they were in an opposite gender role or wearing opposite gender clothing, they were to live out that vision and it was to be respected.

We'wha was a Zuni Native American from New Mexico, near the border of Arizona. In Zuni culture, We'wha was a lhamana, an individual who combined male and female work and social roles and often dressed in women's clothing. Anthropologist Mathilda Coxe Stevenson described We'wha as "the strongest character and the most intelligent of the Zuni tribe." Some gay historians contend that lhamana were holy people-priests and artists.



We'wha (1849-1896)



S.F. Pride, 1986. Photo by Cathy Casle

Gay American Indians (GAI) was founded in July of 1975, and is the oldest organization in the United States and Canada of two-spirited people. GAI organized the American Indian AIDS Institute (AIAI) which is the first Native American HIV/AIDS education and prevention program in San Francisco, designed to serve the cultural and spiritual needs of the Native American community in the Bay Area.

BAAITS Membership

Inspired by GAI (which has now dissolved), BAAITS formed as a volunteer group, to keep Bay Area (California) Two-Spirit community connected by offering events and gatherings. Members generally sign up for our email listserv in order to stay informed about local Two-Spirit issues, events, and opportunities. Many dozens of members regularly participate in the activities and events of the group. A core group of members regularly meets to plan events and strategies to advance Two-Spirit visibility and wellbeing.