

# American indians two spirits

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The role of the American Indians (Native Americans) in the United States cannot be underestimated. In fact, this people are the part of a cultural legacy of the United States. Due to the multiple tribes inhabiting America from East to West Americans loaned many of the common names and other terms going directly from the language of Native Americans. It concerns everything about the names of multiple states, towns, cities, etc. However, this research has its aim to disclose the nature of Native Americans in terms of gender roles and gender issues scoped out for today.

In such an analysis one should pay special attention to some similarities or differences (match!) about two-spirit people among Native Americans. Moreover, it is not for nothing that the cultural as well as mythological approaches are taken to help an observer get the right idea of specificities going around these unique people, namely American Indians.

First of all, it is possible to suggest that Indians living in the North America and throughout the United States, in particular, keep their culture in safety from the ominous (as they say) impacts of the Western culture.

Hence, some similar terms and states of people have another coloring among Natives than it is among Westerners. Thus, one of the aspects in the research paper covers the cultural aspects of these spiritually well-treated people. Next, the question will be about the concept of two-spirit people (two-spirits) coming out to be among Native Americans. Finally, the discussion will touch upon some justifications of suchlike characterization of Native Americans. This will presuppose using features of compare/contrast analysis.

As a finishing stroke, an observer should be ready to perceive the reality of two-spirit people, as it falls into traditional concept of gender, sex, sexuality, and spirituality among Native Americans (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997).

Nonetheless, the play is worth candles, as they say. Thus, the value of the research is in its sociological as well as anthropological investigation of tribal life of Native Americans and some peculiarities of berdache people (meaning two-spirits). Evaluation First of all, it is necessary to draw one's attention to the mythology of Native Americans.

They are quite spiritual in their beliefs and in traditions as well. Everything about their beliefs in divinity starts from glorifying spirits incorporated in well-known elements of nature or natural features (Leeming & Page, 2000).

Woodlands and Plains are the most appreciated by Natives, as the place for the basic spiritual powers (Manitou and wakan) which are personified in these widespread areas inhabited by American Indians (Leeming & Page, 2000). Hence, the cultural background of Native Americans starts with the mythology and faith they share for centuries.

Such a multifaceted reality encounters some critical points while Western civilizations are trying to critique beliefs of Natives, as primitive and no longer possible in a fast-growing world. Nevertheless, mythology is inseparable out of what Natives secure about their own attitudes toward some social events or people being different than the rest of the tribal community. This characterization is for a reason, since gender roles and the concept of sexuality are thought of in a different way by American Indians.

It is a matter of their identity and dignity. Owing to keeping their culture(s) in safety, Native Americans secure social equilibrium on the spot. Thus, it is worth mentioning that features of any kind are open for discussion in a tribe.

Some of them being a taboo for Western people are beyond reproach among Natives. In fact, the question is about Native American berdaches, as the two-spirit people. As it was mentioned before, American Indians kept their precious beliefs out of Western implications.

As a matter of fact, Indians are likely to omit the notion of "berdache" by changing it to another concept of "two-spirit" (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997). This is because the term itself originates from the nineteenth century when it defined "slaveboys," "catamites," or "inverts."

Hence, Natives, as a freewill community of people in the United States, prove their identity through the notions of spirituality and belonging to a tribe. This is the most valued features associated with these people. American Indians are non-violent by nature. It is well reported in the legends going along with tribes throughout the continent.

Before getting the idea of the Great Spirit, two people were proposed to choose the weapon: the first one chose a gun and became a white man while the second one chose a bow and an arrow and became an Indian (Leeming & Page, 2000).

In this mythic inscription American Indians tried to illuminate that spirits saved them from "extinction," so to speak, by letting to choose afterwards. Otherwise, they would become as a Whiteman, cruel and apt at violence. This

is the gist of why American Indians are likely to ignore what the Western civilization has proposed them.

It is so even in social relationships, of course. Indians are not willing to use the same terms as whites use. They are scrupulous at finding a better explanation of peoples' lives. Notwithstanding some unique states of peoples' souls and spirits in a tribe, Indians follow the prescriptions of their predecessors in judging all of their identity. It is about time to give some new implications on the term of two-spirit people. In fact, these are those being of one gender physically, but feeling strongly the presence of another gender at the same time.

This simple definition provides a scope of reasoning over the nature of indigenous people in the United States. Gender was always viewed by Native Americans as having a spiritual background. The physical sphere for the spirit is a secondary thing to interpret Indians' justification of why they think of gender relationships differently. By contrast, indigenous people of America use their own characterization of gender. Brown (1997) identifies six basic gender styles among Native Americans, i. e. men and women, not-men and not-women, gays and lesbians.

This characterization gives substantial grounds to suppose American Indians more varied and free-to-judge about gender analysis and its significance. Western culture views these particularities senseless reducing them to four or even two elements. It is due to the influence of morale and historical background outlining bigotries as of berdaches. It is important that American Indians view a man and a woman as two beginnings or halves to give further

life to a tribe. These incorporations are done to prescribe a divine nature of gender in its spiritual patterning.

All in all, indigenous people are apt at coming up with the alternative gender style in their society. Despite Western people, Indians, therefore, reduce an extent of tribal conflicts due to a right understanding of different genders in people. For instance, in Santee Dakota and Lakota tribes, gender styles are in most points associated with particular cultural norms as for berdaches and fetishism as a term which unnecessarily linked to two-spirit people (Brown, 1997). These particularities gave American Indians more freedom to choose their social niche within a tribal society.

Nevertheless, one should see a sociological prerequisite for diminishing a degree of controversial, frequently conflict, situations. Native American gays and lesbians is another aspect of the discussion. These people feel no prejudice or blame because of their gender style. In fact, two-spirit people are concerned with some magical power being with them, as healers or even as associates to witchcraft (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997). In this respect American Indian people do not feel like hating two-spirit people. One should notice a distinct use of the word " spirit."

This is where a respectful attitude toward Native American berdaches starts. What is more, it is largely considered that indigenous people in the United States are unique for their own views on life and manners of social existence.

This goes along with the anthropological features of two-gendered spirits of some people living in a tribe. As a matter of fact, in the contemporary discourse gays and lesbians among Native Americans are really different

from those of other ethnical belongings (Western people, in particular) (Brown, 1997).

Century-long history of American Indians and their unbreakable strong traditions in fulfilling their destinies does not give them a chance to drop a hint of doubt concerning their spirituality. It is remarkable that two-spirit people are also endured with force.

This one is appreciated among tribal society to bear a healing power and a so-called ' mascot' for the rest of the society. Thus, these people are largely considered to be involved into spiritual connections with the Great Spirit as well as with Manitou and wakan.

Once again, it is significant to admit that the main difference of shaping gender identities between Native Americans and Western people is in their cultures. Culture is a multilevel system bearing the identity of a community or even society of individuals.

The anthropological issue is that cultural belonging exemplifies itself in gender attitudes (Wood, 2008). As was mentioned before, two-spirit people are a particular calque for gays and lesbians in the rest of the world. However, this notion is incomplete, as it bears no connection to how American Indians treat it.

Thereupon, one should be careful and accurate in explaining the fact that two-spirit people are not similar to gays and lesbians in a simple conception. Two-spirit people are admired among Native Americans (Wood, 2008).

Intersexuality means something special for American Indians. It is an aspect of a sacred features in a man incorporated with spirits being of different

genders. Therefore, people should not treat it wrong that two-spirit people of Native Americans have nothing to do with something else but gay or lesbian attitudes and way of life.

The features of acceptance and belonging for two-spirit people today are critical, as there is a collision of two cultural backgrounds, namely Native American and traditional gay cultures (Gilley, 2006).

Two-spirit American Indians are so by their initial realization of their place among people and in terms of spiritual features corresponding to their Indian identity. It is hard to talk on this topic due to the increase of current gay culture dampening genuinely sacred understanding of two-spirit implementation among Indians.

Recent studies on being a two-spirit individual within Native American communities show that it is impossible for indigenous people to impose surgery for making the prevailing feeling as of gender physically apparent (Gilley, 2006).

This is a silly thing for those who knew about two-spirit people long before the scientific and technological progress and the development of medicine and plastic surgery. It is a state of spirit, a state of soul, thus, a state of mind for Native Americans.

Nonetheless, it is not a big secret that in contemporary tribal rites and priorities two-spirit people encounter some problems with the overall acceptance and further belonging to American Indian society (Wood, 2008). Historically, the cultural tradition of two-spirit people among different tribes has its specific definitions. Lev (2004) provides a set of different notions for



two-spirit people in different tribes: “ winkte (Lakota), nadleehi (Navaho), bote (Crow), lhamana (Zuni), and haxu’xan (Arapaho) for males, and hwame (Mojave) for females” (59).

Dual-gender states are explained differently but all of them derived from the precious for Indians cultural framework and strong connection to their indigenous beliefs in spirituality of any individual within Native American society. The hegemonic Western culture is a great impediment for two-spirit people among Native Americans. The question is that these people cannot but be nearby the trends and features of traditional gay and lesbian culture. Thus, dualism of genders seems to be on the edge of having no genuine spiritual coloring for Indians.

In this respect it is interesting that Native American berdaches are not traditionally concerned with homosexuality in terms of gender relationships, but just physically (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997). This evaluation comes out to be a critical and quite contradicting as explained on the part of Native Americans. The idea is that everyone having an intercourse with two-spirit people is never considered to be a gay or a lesbian: If you are a man and you have sexual relationship with a ‘ berdache,’ you’re not having sex with another man. You’re having sex with a ‘ berdache.’

And if you’re a woman who has sex with a ‘ berdache,’ you’re not having sex with a woman, you’re having sex with a ‘ berdache. ’ So the partners of the ‘ berdache’ technically are never homosexual because they’re not having sex with their same gender” (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997, p. 104-105) This truth (apparently, an assumption) by Native Americans illuminates a sticking point for Western mentality and rationale of what being a gay or a lesbian

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means at large. Cultural prospects are above all for indigenous people in the North America.

In fact, there is a feature of admiration in evidence. Many anthropologists refer Native Americans in their understanding of two-spirit people to some Asian cultures which have full-fledged settings of beliefs similar to duality of genders among American Indians. As might be considered, these implications are for a reason. They drop a light on the century-long communication within Indian peoples. In turn it was reflected on every feature of social life and further adaptation for living with "white" neighbors. This is why gender relationships are widely anticipated nowadays.

To say more, American Indians are likely to personify deities in terms of their duality and reference to both genders. Two personifications of gender types from the spiritual point of view are eagle for a male part and coyote for a female part (Leeming & Page, 2000). Embodiment of two genders associated with nature and animals, particularly, brings a new understanding of homosexuality in. It has many things to do with neutrality and supremacy when individuals bear different feelings and preferences in life as for individuals of the same gender.

It is almost impossible to speak about a two-spirit man or woman, as a bearer of some particular gender type. Here comes a dilemma in judging American Indians. They are never considered to be of the same values as pursuant to European people.

Not-men and not-women are likely to be discovered out of men and women but as those having some magic power at their disposal (Brown, 1997).

Among six gender styles, one should be attentive and quite rational not to mix not-men and not-women with gays and lesbians. This is why there is another incorporation of gender belonging as constituted by Native Americans.

At a glance, it is hard to believe it, but it needs a proper look at how socialization takes place among American Indians. Hence, it is impossible to identify two-spirit people similar to current gays and lesbians.

This would be a particular anthropological and sociological mistake. Different researches proved it to be right and full of rationality if only looking at the historical, cultural, and religious background of indigenous peoples living in America. Looking at what has been discussed previously, one can make up his/her mind about how to explain two-spirit people among Native Americans.

It is apparent that the main difference between two-spirits and gays with lesbians is in the spiritual and cultural background. It is a niche which provides a place for further dimensions in gender styles and gender treatment among American Indians. In the milieu of “ Native American gender diversity” most of the scholars refer all two-spirits to bearing more male features than female ones (Gilley, 2006). This is why, since the colonial era until present it is documented that both not-men and not-women are basically characterized through features of masculinity.

This assumption provides a scope of differences to consider two-spirit people not the same as traditionally understood homosexual minorities, as long as the European gay culture presupposes men to be like women in manners

and other features and women to be more like women, as they can understand each other better than men could. This makes a constraint between two types of cultural and social ways of perceiving the reality. Westerners and Native Americans delineate initially different beliefs which are inseparable from gender identities and attitudes toward them.

The thing is that homosexuality among Westerners is in most points a reflection of Ancient Greek attitudes toward gender relationships. This idea got through different philosophical and social theories and explanations leading toward present identification of gay culture, as something transcendent and magnificent. Conversely, the evaluation of two-spirit homosexual identity among Native Americans begins on the moment when Indians came to the American continent long before the Europeans discovered it.

Thus, it is rational to state two-spirit tradition of American Indians, as purely inscribed into the cultural background of these peoples. Hence, it has no Western or some other alloys of cultural intrusions, as Indians were isolated for many years continentally and by sea. This is why both cultures do not fit in what they mean for people belonging to them. A civilized life and seemingly old-fashioned traits in traditions are like a medal with two different edges. Strict and quite elaborated norms in tribes of American Indians did not exclude homosexuality.

This provides an assumption that transgender versatility should be taken into consideration in every culture in the world. As concerned with Native Americans, their predominantly genuine coloring in provision of the same sex relationships among some few people in a community are functionally

defined. In this respect Lev (2004) identifies three core-features among two-spirit people within Native Americans, namely: "(1) a cross-role specialization in social, productive, and domestic roles; (2) spiritual sanction and associated powers; and (3) gender variation often denoted by cross dressing behavior" (60).

This classification of the basic functions as of two-spirit people assumes implication of the key-features hierarchy. Just as they are listed above, these features should be understood by means of the ascending scale.

Two-spirit people, as described in the several tribes in the United States since the colonial time, were obliged to commit with both male and female social worlds (Gilley, 2006). It corresponds to the fact that social taboos were not possible for those who could not give birth to a child. Moreover, it becomes so until now.

Two-spirit people are no longer appropriate to be claimed as having something of a man or of a woman. These people shared labor of both gender types inside Native Americans. This is why in Zuni, Cherokee, and other tribes two-spirit people were respectful for being good craftsmen or highly apt at social work within the tribal community.

In fact, men could do weaving and potting alongside with hunting big game and building wigwams (Gilley, 2006). Two-spirit men were not separated from the male part of the community, but rather appreciated and adored. This constituted the same for two-spirit women.

Notwithstanding, two-spirit people are widely said to be another, third, type of gender relationships among Native Americans. This statement gives

enough space to consider two-spirits economically and socially profitable for their communities.

However, it is possible for those representatives of such gender type who position themselves as Jacks-of-all-trades. Nevertheless, experts are apt at characterizing the two-spirits as rather valuable individuals who are even believed to predict different events and to speak directly with spirits. This cannot but suppress ardency of the rest of a tribe.

However, there were evidences when two-spirit people were widely suspected in witchcraft and bad will of spirits (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997). Not for nothing, it was something like hatred to witches in a medieval Europe. Wood (2008) is inclined in her studies to state that two-spirit people of indigenous tribes of America are the result of the prior matrilineal system established among American Indians. In this respect everything, social, property, or inherited things, were for women, not for men. Perhaps, this was a real pivot around which a symbiosis of two genders appeared and was applied to be another kind of gender relationships.

To date, it is taken for granted that two-spirit people embody mostly cultural features and consequences in the evolution of Native Americans' social life and development. Some experts still show perseverance in identifying two-spirit people through their spiritual estimation. However, the historical and ethno-sociological points of view give grounds to make sure Native American two-spirit people emerged as a result of some social privileges and appropriate changes in the social system and in stratification of individuals inhabiting a definite tribe.

Different biases are concerned with some assumptions on the divine and culturally original personification of two-spirit people. This provides further discussion or debate, so to speak, in order to evaluate the social and cultural insights into the essence of what people call Native Americans.

Contemporary talks on the theme of two-spirit people among indigenous tribes and peoples living in America including Inuit and Siberian Chukchi are all about transgendered people (being so few within communities) who are concerned women if they are two-spirit men and vice versa (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997).

This is in evidence until now, and no Western intruder can explain indigenous people the gist of such doing or, perhaps, its amoral side. Moreover, culture is a strong and quite dynamic unity of states and relationships between individuals of the same cultural terrain. This is why there is plenty to talk about social factors impacting cultural growth or decline. Now, it is vital to distinguish between the main dimensions to explain the nature of two-spirit people.

It was aforementioned that this is a social and physical mixture of feelings inside an individual grounded on the cultural and the religious features. Lev (2004) gives a holistic idea on how an observer should think of two-spirit people taking into consideration everything highlighted earlier, namely: “ Though physically Two-Spirit people were not commonly known to be hermaphroditic or intersexed, they are considered to have the social characteristics of both men and women and - consistent with the Indian worldview - they are thought to possess the visions of both sexes” (60).

This is, perhaps, the most appropriate in terms of the social discourse. The main obstacle as well as means to survive for two-spirit people is that they should adapt to two social systems with different settings of values and morale, i. e. American and American Indian (Brown, 1997). Getting through the diversity of likes and dislikes in both systems, these people managed to save their culture despite their gender inappropriateness with traditionally marked borders.

This is the gist of what makes indigenous people living in the United States so scrupulous and up-and-coming in social or everyday activities. Another applicable feature of two-spirit people is that they do not separate themselves out of the society and their own communities (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997). Traditional Western culture presupposes that gays and lesbians should gather together in special places during some thematic parties and on love parades, in particular.

Western gays and lesbians are more likely to isolate their community out of the heterosexual majority. Obviously, some features corresponding to morale and political situation in a country have caused such behaviors. On the other side, isolation is a kind of pride suchlike people manifest to the rest of the society. By contrast, two-spirit people never neglect their direct participation in social services and things to be done at the moment. They feel their responsibility to be nearby the majority and help as they can.

This is why two-spirit people are full-fledged individuals among the heterosexual peers. Conclusion/recommendations Based on the investigation and analysis done in this research paper, it is clear now that indigenous people have a set of peculiarities about those individuals who mate with the



same sex partners. One should not mix it with the traditionally implemented notions of gays and lesbians. Two-spirit people are true members of their tribal communities and of the American Indian society on the whole.

It is said that dual-gendered people among Native Americans are the representatives of the third gender which presupposes both male and female views incorporated with suchlike individuals. Historically, the anthropological analysis proves direct sociological links within which the formation or emergence of two-spirit people began. Even though, the study bears an analytical and descriptive evaluation of two-spirit people among Native Americans, it provides a framework for further recommendations.

First of all, the study serves as a direct stimulus for would-be sociologists and anthropologists. Thus, it is vital that practitioners in these fields take a look at the overall analysis of gender issues among indigenous peoples of America. It would be a great precursor for further deeper insights in the subject matter. However, the research would be incomplete if observers or young scholars found out more up-to-date sources on the problem itself and its place in social affairs maintained and developed throughout the American society.

Hence, the overall representation of the research paper covers exhaustive information on two-spirit peoples among American Indians. Its value and its significance for sociology cannot be underestimated for further implications in the Native American studies at schools and in colleges.

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