# **Two Spirit Video Transcript**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, gender non conforming, and two spirit.

You probably haven't heard the last one, right? Well, Two Spirit is a Native American term used to described people who are believed to be blessed with both male and female spirits. And while the word itself is relatively new, Two Spirit people have actually been around for centuries. So, let us explain.

For the hundreds of tribes who lived in what is now known as the United States, Two Spirit people were individuals who took on both traditionally female and male roles. For example, a Two Spirit man might be both a weaver and a hunter. Or a Two Spirit woman might excel at crafting and combat. Their tribes celebrated them- not because of their gender identity, but for their range of skills. They were respected as healers, seers, and medicine people. They were considered lucky in finding love. And they could help others by matchmaking and creating love potions.

Two Spirit people were often referred to in a third or fourth gender, but each tribe had  their own interpretation and word for it. And while being Two Spirit was more about the natural fluidity of gender roles than about sexual orientation, they did tend to have same-sex relationships.

Two Spirit people were honored within their communities. They were celebrated, embraced, normalized. But ignorant European settlers not only treated them poorly, but they were also perplexed by their same-sex relationships. And not surprisingly, over time, American missionaries and government agents  did all they could to stamp out these cultural practices among natives. They forced relocation, enforced mandatory boarding schools to culturally assimilate into white society, and required Christian conversion. So as you can imagine, Two Spirit traditions began to fall by the wayside. Luckily, a small number of people were able to preserve them.

Native American activists in the 1960s unearthed this tradition. And slowly, knowledge about indigenous gender non-conforming people began to spread. So in the late 1980s, Native American activists began referring to queer members of their community with a new term- Two Spirit.

Because it was in English, the term united hundreds of Native tribes and communities under a language and culture they all knew and shared. And unlike other modern terms like LGBTQ, the term Two Spirit emphasizes spiritual and historical heritage as opposed to the sexual and biological aspects of gender identity.

Although Two Spirit is in English, its origins are rooted in Indigenous language. The term became official at the 1990 inter-tribal Native American conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Today, while Two Spirit people continue to deal with the effects of colonizers' attempts to wipe out Native culture- the term is being used by the indigenous queer community to help them claim not just their gender identity, but their ethnic and spiritual heritage, too.

Every time you hear about the need to break away from the binary, every time you hear the need to fight for gender fluidity, do remember, that it's a term that is not a new fight, it's actually a return to our roots.