

Arnauciq – TWO-SPIRIT

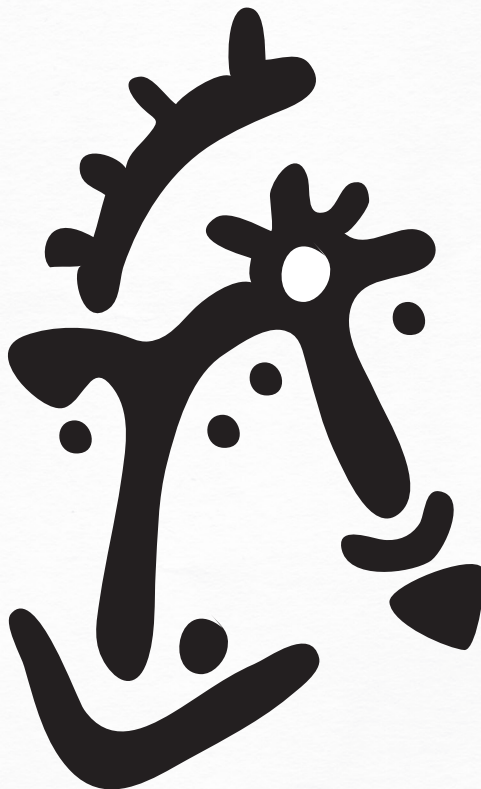


Many societies recognize a difference between biological and social gender. Most people are born physiologically male or female. Yet people live and experience gender in different ways, and concepts of gender vary greatly between cultures. Throughout history, and across the globe, societies have acknowledged three, four, or even more genders. Many cultures define gender beyond the biological dichotomy, accepting a broad range of identities.

Native American societies commonly celebrate people of two spirits. Such people may be seen as a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics or as gender neutral. They may also hold special or esteemed roles in their communities.

Explorers recorded the presence of cross-gendered people in Alaska Native societies. Historic sources indicate that parents could give a girl a boy's name, or a boy a girl's name, when a child of a particular sex was desired. Or if the child appeared to better fit a different gender role, parents could raise the child in the traditions associated with that gender—with the skills, clothing, tattoos, and social roles. Transgender individuals were valued members of their communities who could marry and become cultural specialists like shamans.

The Alutiiq/Sugpiaq word for a two-spirit or transgender man, *arnauciq*, translates as “a male who is sort of female.”



Petroglyph from Cape Alitak, Kodiak Island.