In Search of the "Berdache": Multiple Genders and Other Myths

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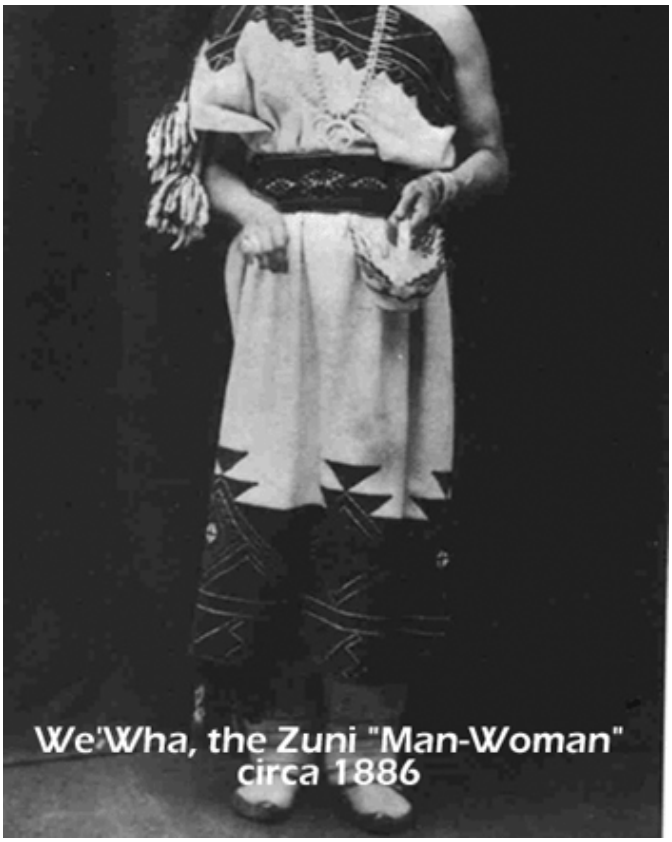
Spring 1998

Contents



Introduction

As Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender rights movements grow to maturity in America during the post-Stonewall era, they bring a new awareness into popular culture which, in concert with the voice of modern medical science, forces a reconsideration of certain basic cultural assumptions. Confronted with a combination of scientific evidence and social activism, Americans have begun to question the nature of maleness and femaleness, femininity and masculinity. Gender, it seems, is a cultural construction, one which has, in fact, been constructed differently by other cultures (Bullough and Bullough 1993:322; Kochems and Jacobs 1997:259; Woodhouse, 1989:136; Zavarzadeh 1994:295). The indigenous peoples of North America, often cited as primary evidence to support this assertion, are said to have sustained systems of gender classification which varied considerably from the paradigm of mutually exclusive dualism utilized by modern industrial societies. Some systems, apparently tripartite, allowed for the existence of a "third gender," thusly casting a stone at the great Goliath of obligatory sexual dichotomism (Bullough and Bullough 1993:5; Jacobs 1983:459).

In a form referred to most commonly as "berdache," this "third gender" is said to have been seen in well over one hundred native North American tribes (Callender and Kochems 1983:445). Most generally a man dressed in women's clothing and/or performing female tasks, the "berdache" was assumed, by early explorers, anthropologists and queer scholars alike, to have been an homosexual, depicted as such by eighteenth and nineteenth century observers as something of a curiosity somewhere between the comic and the monstrous. It was with great irony, then, that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered scholars seized upon these early and unfavorable reports only to claim the "berdache" as their own, explaining that certain native North American peoples had created a safe, sometimes honorable space for homosexuals and other alternative sexualities.

Rediscovered and reclaimed as an ancestor to the queer tradition in North America, the "berdache" has come to symbolize an American past of tolerance and respect for queers. Rather than being shunned or hated, the "berdache" was often a powerful and valued member of the community; not simply male nor female, he or she was of a third or perhaps even a fourth distinctly different gender, free from the ordinary confines of a strictly male or strictly female "gender box" (Bullough and Bullough 1993:312) and at liberty to behave in concert with his or her own desires, to associate romantically and sexually with same-sex partners in relationships that were supposedly free of social stigma. Put simply, it was a wonderful life in a more enlightened age. Homosexuality was "institutionalized" (Benedict 1934:74; Devereaux 1937:498), cross-dressing was supernaturalized (Hauser 1990), and cross-gender role behavior was normalized.

These are indeed attractive propositions, for in presenting a past more pleasant than the present, they hold out positive hope for the future. In the spirit of willful belief, then, this paper set out to seek confirmation; to assess, through an anthropological lens, the relative truth or untruth of the view put forth above. Sadly, the critical re-reading it required revealed a tapestry of sweeping generalizations and mistakenly conflated, unrelated assumptions. But, while separating the strands that had been woven together revealed a fabric that was not quite as beautiful as at first imagined, its value had increased by virtue of its closer proximity to the truth.

Part One: Separating the Strands

Sex and Gender

Used interchangeably in both anthropological research and popular conversation, the words "sex" and "gender" are usually handled as synonyms. They are in fact two different things, and each incorporates multiple aspects. *Sex* itself refers to the biological manifestation of gender as well as to sexual activity; a person's *sex* is usually determined by the genitalia that are present at birth, while *sex* refers to the physical activity that involves the stimulation of these genitals. That these two things, radically different, are represented in the English language by one word is a potent fact in itself, indicating the closeness of their relationship. Likely this is a reflection of the belief that the former bears a causative relationship to the latter: In the normative case, one's genitals are held to determine one's sexual partner through a general rule of opposition, wherein most Americans expect a person with female genitalia to desire a sexual partner of the opposite *biological sex*, and vice-versa.

Sex assignment may be the single most important event in a person's life, forming the foundation for nearly all of what occurs thereafter. It happens at the moment of birth if not beforehand, based even today upon a visual evaluation of the infant's external genitalia despite the fact that there are several other variables which are usually not evaluated or evaluatable at the time, such as chromosomal sex, hormonal sex, pubertal maturation, and internal reproductive mechanisms (Woodhouse 1989:2). Americans use, as do many others, a binary system of ones and zeros wherein a "one" -- the presence of a penis -- indicates male, while a "zero" -- the absence of a penis -- indicates female, and an existential condition of Lacanian lack. Children who are born with ambiguous genitalia are hastily assigned to one or the other category, subjected to surgery and supplemented with the appropriate chemical hormones at puberty. By contrast, the native peoples of North America, obviously lacking such alternatives, did not always attempt to assign genitally ambiguous infants to "one or the other" sex; rather they allowed for the ambiguity by placing such children into a third gender category which nonetheless combined elements of the other two (Epple 1997:183; Lang 1997:103; Thomas 1997:159).

Gender assignment is construed by most Americans to be precisely the same as *sex assignment*, because sex and gender are held to be synonymous. Certain cultures do, however, draw a distinction between the two, where sex is determined by biological manifestation and gender by social expression. The Navaho classification of *nádleehé*, or "two-spirit," applied definitively to biological hermaphrodites in

both the biological and social spheres, was also used to refer to those whose gender expression or identity appeared to differ from their sex assignments. A *nádleehé* born with an unambiguous set of male genitalia would have been assigned the sex status of male at birth, but later in life, when traits and preferences became evident, he might be gendered socially as female. While Americans can conceive of only two genders (the hermaphrodite's status remaining as ambiguous as his or her genitalia), the Navaho system allows for at least five: (1) male sex/male gender, (2) female sex/female gender, (3) *nádleehé* sex/*nádleehé* gender, or biological hermaphroditism, (4) male sex/*nádleehé* gender, or both male and female spirits embodied in male form, and (5) female sex/*nádleehé* gender, or both female and male spirits embodied in female form (after Jacobs, et al. 1997).

Unlike *sex assignment*, *gender identity* is unassigned. It is the "total perception of the individual about his or her own gender," including a "basic personal identity as a boy or girl, man or woman, as well as personal judgments about the individual's level of conformity to the societal norms of masculinity and femininity" (Bullough and Bullough, 313). Being, in essence, self-ascribed, the "only way to ascertain someone's gender identity is to ask" (Kessler and McKenna 1978:8-9). While one's *sex assignment* is generally fixed by society, *gender identity*, as a component of the self, is determined by the individual. As such, it may experience change over time. Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna point out that g*ender identity* should not, however, be confused with *gender-role identity*, which "refers to how much a person approves of and participates in feelings and behaviors, which are seen as 'appropriate' for his/her gender" (10). Many people feel comfortable crossing gender roles occasionally, and some are simply attracted to the traditional tasks of the opposite sex; this does not necessarily imply that they are confused about either their gender identity or their sexuality. Most accounts of female "berdaches" or "manly-hearted" women fail to recognize this fact in assuming that the warrior women they encountered were cross-gendered lesbians when, in fact, they usually considered themselves to be female-identified heterosexual women (Williams 1986:243).

Like sex assignment, *gender role*s are fixed by society and are not subject to individual manipulation, although they may change over time. As concrete sets of expectations for appropriate behavior (Kessler and McKenna 1978:11), they encompass a myriad of qualities including personal interests, attitudes,

aspirations, body language and dress. *Sexual orientation*, too, can be thought of as a component of gender role, assumed by most to be a direct result of sex assignment according to the rule of heterosexual opposition. The *gender role* makes social demands upon the individual, whose personal identity may be in conflict with such demands. While the gender role is itself not subject to change by individual whim, one does have power to react against the role by refusing to grant it expression.

A Word about Anthropological "Knowledge"

Observers, anthropological and otherwise, can only see so much; they cannot read minds, nor can they see through walls. Of *sex assignment*, *gender identity*, *gender role*, and *sexual orientation*, only two can be ascertained by observation in the field. The other two must be determined through direct questioning or personal experience, which are usually impossible as well as inadvisable. In the absence of first-hand testimony, an anthropologist can never be certain of an individual's *gender identity* or *sexual orientation*; only *sex assignment* and *gender role* can be determined with any degree of certainty. Observers have, however, shown little reluctance to assume that which they do not know, and have often drawn unsubstantiated conclusions about the former based on the latter. As concerns largely determined by the individual, *gender identity* and *sexual preference* belong more properly to the discipline of psychology; without first-hand information, neither can be guessed at by the anthropologist.

The Significance of Dress

As with any other aspect of physical appearance, dress is generally proscribed by gender role. It "operates as a code," signaling a "whole range of meanings about oneself, about the relationship of self and others, and about the expectations one has of others and what their expectations in turn might be" (Woodhouse 1989:9). Communicating gender, rank, occupation, occasion and mood, to name but a few things, dress conveys one's relationship to power and status, and dressing "up" implies a proportionate increase in both. Theoretically, a woman in a suit and tie is trespassing on male territory; the threat lies not so much in her attire as in its potential to facilitate her access to power. Even today certain types of employ require women to dress daily in skirt and heels, symbolically reminding all of her status as female despite her presence on male turf.

Conversely, while today a woman can walk down the street in a suit, a man in a dress will still find the practice to be largely unacceptable. He may be designated a *transvestite*, a label packed with erotic connotations indicating the derivation of sexual pleasure. It says nothing, however, of his gender identity or sexual orientation, and many transvestites are in fact heterosexual men who simply enjoy wearing female garments (see Talamini 1982). To refer to someone as *cross-dressed* carries less of an erotic charge and may be more appropriate where one has adopted such attire for functional purposes. But since it has become acceptable in America for women to wear pants in most contexts, the designation of female transvestites and cross-dressers has become fairly meaningless. On the contrary, so long as a woman's bearing is feminine, she is often perceived as especially sexy when dressed in men's clothes, as countless fashion spreads will attest. Cross-dressing in itself is not a reliable index of either gender identity or sexual orientation. Certain ceremonial roles may call for men to wear somewhat "feminine" garb -- witness the dress of the Pope -- while tasks at hand may help to determine when a woman may dress as a man. A man or a woman who dresses in clothing appropriate to the opposite gender because he or she *identifies* as a member of that gender is, however, referred to as *transgendered*, and one who takes artificial measures to make one's sex assignment match one's gender identity is usually referred to as *transsexual*.

The Case of the Kaska Girl Raised to be "Like a Man," or "Dress Takes a Holiday"

In 1954, J. J. Honigmann published *The Kaska Indians: An Ethnographic Reconstruction*. Widely cited by scholars such as Charles Callender and Lee M. Kochems (1983:445), Walter L. Williams (1992:235) and Richard C. Trexler (1995:86, via Blackwood 1985), it is the primary source of evidence that the status of "berdache" existed among the Kaska of British Columbia. Of particular interest is the fact that the "berdache" in this case was one of a scant few documented females. Williams says,

> Among the Kaska Indians of the Subarctic, having a son was extremely important because the family depended heavily on big-game hunting for food. If a couple had too many female children and desired a son to hunt for them in their old age, they would simply select a daughter to "be like a man." When the youngest daughter was about five years old, and it was obvious that the mother was not going to produce a son, the parents performed a transformation ceremony. They tied the dried ovaries of a bear to a belt which she always wore. That was believed to prevent menstruation, to protect her from pregnancy, and to give her luck on the hunt. According to Kaska informants, she was dressed like a man and trained to do male tasks. . . She would have relationships only with women, achieving sexual pleasure through clitoral friction, 'by getting on top of each other'." (Williams 1986:235)

Recognizing queer optimism when he sees it, Jean-Guy A. Goulet (1996) presents us with the original document which Williams has here paraphrased, brilliantly exposing the writer's inaccuracy via direct contrast:

> *Female homosexuals* simulated copulation by 'getting on top of each other'. Such women *were often transvestites*, but *no male transvestites could be recalled*. Sometimes if a couple had too many female children and desired a son to hunt for them in later years, they selected a daughter to be 'like a man'. When she was about five years old the parents tied the dried ovaries of a bear to her inner belt. She wore this amulet for the rest of her life in order to avoid conception. The girl was raised as a boy. She dressed in masculine attire and performed male allocated tasks, often developing great strength and usually becoming an outstanding hunter. She screamed and broke the bow and arrows of any boy who made sexual advances to her. 'She knows that if he gets her then her luck with game will be broken'. Apparently such a girl entered homosexual relationships. (Honigmann 1954:129-30, as quoted in Goulet 1996:686-687; Goulet's emphases added.)

Comparing the two excerpts above, one finds that Williams has cut Honigmann's statement about female homosexual activity and pasted it on to his subsequent description of the girl raised as a boy; while Honigmann assumes, quite on his own, that such a girl would become a homosexual, there is really no basis for concluding, as Williams does, that "she would have relationships only with women." The dried bear ovaries were worn, according to Honigmann, to "avoid conception," indicating that she did in fact engage in heterosexual sexual activity; if she did not, such "birth control" would be unnecessary (Goulet 1996:690). With Williams this amulet takes on magical qualities, conferring both amenorrhea -- a detail completely absent from Honigmann's report -- and luck in the hunt on the girl. The simple act of tying on the ovaries is rendered as a "transformation ceremony," imparting a ritualistic and sacred air to a procedure which may have been matter-of-fact.

Goulet points out that Honigmann himself never reported that he had met Kaska parents who had selected a daughter to be "like a man," nor did he ever encounter a woman who had been so selected. "He was simply told that, in the past, this sometimes occurred" (686). Williams then assumed, as did many others, that the status of female "berdache" did exist among the Kaska despite the fact that not a single case had actually been documented. Additionally, Honigmann's original assumption -- that the girl raised as a boy would become a homosexual -- mistakenly conflates gender role with both gender identity and sexual orientation, two things which, even had he actually met a female "berdache," Honigmann could not have known.

But perhaps the greatest flaw in William's argument is the fact that Honigmann contradicts himself in his own account. While claiming that the girl "dressed in male attire and performed male allocated tasks" he elsewhere states that the Kaska clothing for both males and females was nearly identical and hardly a significant marker of gender (Goulet 1996:688). Additionally, both girls and boys hunted for small game; the only "difference between the girl raised to be 'like a man' and other girls not so raised is that the former accompanied her father on longer journeys away from home, and engaged in big game hunting at a relatively younger age than other Kaska women" (Goulet 1996:688, citing Honigmann 1954:68,70). The fact that she "resisted boys who made sexual advances to her," too, was typical of feminine response patterns in general and cannot be said to have been of any deeper significance (689). This case, based upon second-hand information yet cited so often as primary evidence for the existence of female "berdaches," cannot be substantiated, and the "facts" we are left with simply cannot cross the bridge from hearsay to evidence.

The Native North American "Berdache"

What then, was a "berdache"? Applied as a label fairly indiscriminately to a wide range of individuals (male, female, hermaphroditic, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, cross-dressed, transgendered, etc.), the only concept with which it can be consistently connected with is transgression against the normative -- from the point of view of the European observer -- gender role, specifically with regards to the

appropriation of dress. Where clothing was sexually differentiated, cross-gender role preference was usually signaled to the community by the adoption of dress associated with that role -- assuming the proper uniform, so to speak. Since assumptions regarding gender identity and sexual orientation cannot be confirmed in the absence of personal testimony or direct observation, many cases that have been cited as evidence of "institutionalized homosexuality" may be nothing more than institutionalized gender role transgression, or cross-dressing. Some individuals taken to be "berdaches" may in fact have been cross-dressed only temporarily for practical or ritual purposes.

The eminent anthropologist Alfred Kroeber told us that generally "a berdache was not judged by his erotic life but by his social status. 'Born a male, he became accepted as a woman socially'" (1940:210, as quoted in Jacobs 1997b:29). But Goulet pointed out that the "fashionable distinction between sex (the biological givens) and gender (the sociocultural roles ascribed to individuals on the basis of their sex) wrongly assumes that culture interprets or assigns social significance to natural (biologically given) distinctiveness. The historical and anthropological record, however, shows much variability in European and non-European taxonomies of sexual organs" (Goulet 1997: 65n). All cultures do not perceive the same set of genitals in quite the same way; some, such as the Navaho, see all genitalia ambiguously. As the traditional Diné Navaho scholar, D. B., told Carolyn Epple, all of the sexual organs are both "male and female, inseparable and distinct. At the tip of the penis is a little vagina, while on the vulva is a little penis. That is how it is said in Navaho" (*ibid*., citing Epple 1993:19). Sweeping overviews of the "berdache" such as that provided by Charles Callender and Lee M. Kochems ignore these cultural differences in gender conceptualization, so that the simple exercise of counting "berdaches" is really meaningless.

The designation "berdache" has been applied most frequently to males perceived to be taking on aspects of the female gender role. Establishing conclusively the existence of female "berdaches," however, proves to be difficult. Many such cases are based upon a woman's active participation in battle, in hunting, or in the leadership of her tribe. Sue-Ellen Jacobs responds:

> I am intrigued by the frequency with which male writers masculinize females as the result of some observed or purported behavior. It appears, for example, that because of their daring and alleged unfeminine qualities (by privileged Western male standards) some observers assumed that Plains warrior women were the Native North American counterpart to the mythical Amazons of Scythia (as described in Greek and, subsequently, Western mythologies). Strong women -- independent, brave, courageous warriors entering battle astride horses -- they were certainly not the genteel ladies of the worlds from whence came the learned white men of religious orders, world travels, anthropology, and other fields. What the early male observers failed to notice was that courageous, strong, daring, warrior women existed worldwide (cf. Weigle 1982) without emic attributions of masculinity. Such traits and behaviors are part of the range of female characteristics within and across many cultures." (Jacobs 1997b:31-32).

Gender roles, then, differ culturally, and occasional transgression may be, in and of itself, both commonplace and inconsequencial, particularly with regard to women. A brave woman can be an asset to a culture of warriors, and a woman who can hunt well will help to feed her family. Is a woman who fights to defend her village necessarily an "amazon" (cf. Williams 1986), or a "berdache"?

There are far more male "berdaches" present in the literature than there are females for a multitude of other reasons as well. The activities of women are, in general, documented less often than those of men, which are deemed to be of greater importance by the men doing the documentation. Gender role transgression, from the point of view of the European or American male observer, may in fact have been more noticeable in men, by men. Such observers are culturally sensitized to see male gender role transgression more clearly than female transgression, for while women take a symbolic step up the gender hierarchy by doing male-allocated tasks, men take a symbolic step down by allowing themselves to be feminized. Such a man stands out in negative contrast to other men, but a woman who does men's work may in fact be respected for her attempts at "bettering" herself by behaving like a man

work may in fact be respected for her attempts at "bettering" herself by behaving like a man.

One is forced, then, to seek more conclusive evidence to confirm the existence of female "berdaches." Only those women deemed to consistently cross-dress (in cultures possessing clearly differentiated clothing), to consistently do tasks that are regarded as being within the exclusive purview of men, or establishing sexual or marriage relationships with other women can be unambiguously designated as gender role transgressors. These behaviors in themselves may not have been easily recognized by male observers, who have managed to remain ignorant about such matters even within their own cultures. Many American women established same-sex romantic relationships that went unnoticed as such during the sexually repressive Victorian era; those who were writers and artists with the financial means to do so have sometimes constructed women-centered lives despite cultural expectations that they be dependent on men; still others have gone about marrying other women, raising families and working jobs, successfully passing as men all the while (cf. Miller 1980; Faderman, 1981). If American men do not notice such women in their midst, then there is little chance that they will be noticed among others. There is, in fact, at least one documented case of a female Kutenai from northwestern Montana who dressed in male clothing and managed to evade detection at Fort Astoria for an entire month. Her charade would have gone completely unnoticed had she not been exposed by an acquaintance (Cromwell 1997:127-128, citing Claude Schaeffer).

The term "berdache," problematized by quotation marks throughout this paper, has itself come under scrutiny. From the French word *bardash*, it follows a chain of ancestry back through Italian, Arabic and Persian variants meaning, in all cases, "kept boy" or "male prostitute" (Jacobs 1983:459). It is not difficult to understand, then, why contemporary gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered native North Americans have rejected the label, and why its application with regards to women makes no sense at all. The term *two-spirit* was coined as an alternative in 1990 by an organization known as Gay American Indians, during the third Native American/First Nations gay and lesbian conference in Winnipeg, Ontario. It is used to refer to:

> * contemporary Native Americans/First Nations individuals who are gay or lesbian;
>
> * contemporary Native American/First Nations gender categories;
>
> * the traditions wherein multiple gender categories and sexualities are institutionalized in Native American/First Nations tribal cultures;
>
> * traditions of gender diversity in other, non-Native American cultures;
>
> * transvestites, transsexuals, and transgendered people; and
>
> * drag queens and butches (cf. Tietz 1996:205).
>
> (Jacobs, et al. 1997:2)

Being, then, a catch-all designation similar to the word "queer" as it is used in current American parlance, its meaning is not precisely the same as "berdache," which refers more specifically to cross-dressed, cross-role identified or gender-role transgressing individuals. Coined originarily in English, it is not intended to be translated into native languages where its meaning may be radically altered by culture-specific connotations of the word "spirit" (Jacobs, et al. 1997:3). As a direct translation of the Navaho word *nádleehé*, the Lakota *winkte*, and the Tewa *kwidó* or *kweedó* (Kochems and Jacobs 1997:260), it reflects a conception of queer identity as being composed of both male and female spirits.

But rather than comprising a distinct third gender, the *two-spirit* represents a combination of the two we already know. Research for this paper has failed to uncover an indigenous term for a third sex or gender that identifies itself as distinct from both "male" and "female." Just as the English *hermaphrodite* can be loosely rendered as "man-woman," indigenous terms also translate as "man-woman," "two spirit," "not-

man" or "not-woman," but never "third spirit" or something entirely different. Goulet points out that Kessler and McKenna (1978), and Williams (1986), have provided "definitive evidence that such persons were not regarded as having somehow moved from one sex (or in Kessler and McKenna's terms, gender) category to the other, but were only metaphorically 'women' (or 'men')." "In other words," he continues, paraphrasing Scheffler (1991:378), "we need not imagine a multiple gender system. Individuals who appeared in the dress and/or occupation of the opposite sex were only metaphorically spoken of as members of that sex or gender" (1996:685). The third gender being sought out here consistently shows up in the guise of the other two, and it is difficult to rationalize these systems as anything other than dualistic conceptualizations making concessions to ambiguity.

Part Two: Case Studies

The Navaho Nádleehé

In traditional EuroAmerican discourse, there are but two normative sex/gender/role constellations: male/man/masculine and female/woman/feminine, where the former has primacy. Navaho culture, matrilineal in focus, grants primacy to the latter while recognizing an ambiguous third, or *nádleehé* (Thomas 1997:156). According to Willard Hill's 1935 article, a "real" *nádleehé* was born with physically ambiguous genitalia (273). If this is indeed the case, then the traditional *nádleehé* differed from the modern biological hermaphrodite only by virtue of the fact that the infant's sex assignment was allowed to remain ambiguous. As the real existence of genitally ambiguous *nádleehé* in traditional Navaho society cannot be confirmed, what follows is necessarily theoretical, following Lang (1997:105) and Thomas (1997:167).

While Navaho males are gendered socially as boys and men, and females as girls and women, the *nádleehé's* social gender is, theoretically, one of *two-spirit*s, both male and female, rather than simply one or the other. Being at once both male and female, a genuine *nádleehé* might be free to engage in sexual activity with either an heterosexual man or woman under the auspices of heterosexuality. But since the Navaho consider sexual activity between two persons of the same gender or closely related genders to be homosexual (Lang 1997:105), relationships between two *nádleehé* -- assuming there were ever two in the same place at the same time -- were probably discouraged. This tolerance for ambiguity may be explained to a large degree by traditional Navaho cosmology. Navaho understandings of the world "speak of all things, including humans, as a dynamic process" (Epple 1997:175). Everything in the universe is connected through a continuous process of cyclical movement on the order of dawn-day-dusk-night-dawn, and everything, individually distinct, is together, inseparable (176). As such, all things are both male and female (183), as D. B.'s statement, cited earlier, attests. The *nádleehé* is perhaps the clearest physical manifestation of this reality, an embodiment of the universal ideal. And while many scholars have suggested that the Navaho *nádleehé* comprises a "genuinely conceptualized" and distinct third gender (Jacobs 1983:460), D. B. disagrees, explaining, "When is there anything that is not both male and female? Everything is two, so how can you have this as a third? You don't have man, woman, and another" (Epple 1997:183).

One did not necessarily require ambiguous genitalia, however, to be a *nádleehé*. In contrast to the EuroAmerican system in which sex assignment always directly determines gender, the Navaho system allowed a person assigned to the male sex at birth to be gendered socially as a woman, and someone with female genitalia to be gendered socially as a man. Referred to as *nádleehé*, these people were held to be of "two spirits," both male and female. But while the Navaho used the same word to refer to all three, they were gendered differently. The male bodied two-spirit, while admittedly of a dual nature, ordinarily adopted the dress and behaviors associated with the female gender role. While such a person may have performed both female- and male-allocated tasks, it was the female aspect that was

may have performed both female- and male-allocated tasks, it was the female aspect that was emphasized, both by attire and sexual object choice. Likewise, a female bodied two-spirit would have been expected, despite the dual nature, to don male attire and take a wife. As Lang explains, "Navaho male *nádleehé* (two-spirit males) generally confine their sexual relations to heterosexual men (that is, men who otherwise exclusively enter into relationships with women), and female *nádleehé* may generally confine theirs to heterosexual women. (The statement concerning female *nádleehé* is only hypothetical, however, because no female-bodied *nádleehé* have yet been interviewed). All other kinds of sexual relationships might be considered inappropriate" (Lang 1997:105). Only the "true" *nádleehé's* duality may have been so thoroughly ingrained that either a husband or wife might be chosen. (See Appendix.)

In making the decision to become *nádleehé* or to raise one's genitally unambiguous child as a *nádleehé*, emphasis was placed on occupational activities; an assigned male may have been allowed to grow into the role if, as a young boy, he showed a marked preference for activities that were defined as being within the purview of women (Lang 1997:105). Closely associated with important mythological figures -- the genitally ambiguous twins born to First Man and First Woman -- Navaho *nádleehés* were sanctioned by a spiritual precedent (Hill 1935:273-274; Callender and Kochems 1983:452); Hill says they were regarded as holy and sacred (297). He also claims that they were "permitted any form of sexual intercourse with either sex" (276; Callender and Kochems 1983:454), an assertion disputed by both Lang's and Thomas' assessments.

While Lang and Thomas both claim that for a male bodied *nádleehé* to engage in intercourse with women was considered homosexual activity and therefore inappropriate, other sources state that such males did take wives on occasion. The fluid construction of the Navaho universe would seem to argue for a continuous shifting back and forth; perhaps a *nádleehé* was at times more male, and at times, more female. In any event, married male *nádleehés* were expected to dress as men, whether their spouses were male or female (Hill 1935:276). Male *nádleehés* were generally well off, perhaps because of their ability to provide for themselves by doing both female and male allocated tasks (Callender and Kochems 1983:448), and Hill claims that a family containing an unmarried *nádleehé* was regarded as particularly fortunate (274).

Dene Tha Cross-Sex Reincarnation

The modern-day Dene Tha of Northern Alberta, Canada are worth discussing, not because they provide a gender category for the "berdache," but because their normative culture maintains a *two-spirited* conception of gender: A belief in cross-sex reincarnation causes them to constitute some individuals as females in male form and others as males in female form (Goulet 1996:693, 1997:60). Such an individual is referred to as *Dene andats'indla*, "a person who was made again by others" (1997:60). The belief has its basis in traditional Dene Tha cosmology, which draws a distinction between "this land," or "our land," as the physical plane of the everyday, and the "other land," or "the plane of heaven". According to Jean-Guy A. Goulet, people "live in both of these lands, and communication through dreams and visions between those who live in 'our land' and the deceased in the 'other land' is possible and normal" (1996:693; 1997:60). A person who develops the ability to travel at will between the "this world" and the "other world" through dreams and visions is known as a *ndatin*, which Goulet translates as "dreamer" or "prophet," but communication between the dead and their living relatives can occur spontaneously when female kin become pregnant. At this time, the soul of the deceased "seeks on its own to enter the womb of a woman to be born again in 'this land' in a sex of his or her choice" (1996:694; 1997:60).

Parents usually know before the birth of the child who it is that is going to be "done again." As one Dene Tha woman put it, "There is always somebody who knows who it is going to be, they see the spirit going into you" (1997:60). The spirit seeking rebirth always has a clear sexual identity, but when the child is born, its sex may not coincide with that designation; this reflects the spirit's wish to be recast in the opposite gender, and while that wish is respected, the previous sex determines the terms of address that will be used by kin. Therefore a man could refer to his daughter as "my brother" because he knows that

will be used by kin. Therefore a man could refer to his daughter as "my brother" because he knows that the child is really his brother, "done again." These terms of address in turn trigger a wide range of responses in others that tend to reinforce that identity in the child; while being raised as a girl, adults may reminisce about a child's exploits as a grown man, reminding her of the things *he* once felt, said, or did (61).

Kin recognize certain behaviors, birthmarks, preferences and a whole range of attributes as evidence that a particular person holds the spirit of someone deceased. Close kin may occasionally ask such people to cross-dress for a short period of time so that they may more closely resemble their spiritual parent, but contemporary Dene Tha generally expect the child to grow into complete acceptance of the gender role associated with their present incarnation and get on with "the procreative business of life" (63). Contemporary *Dene andats'indla* therefore support a *dual gender identity* (Goulet 1996:693) which does not preclude an integrated, normative existence.

The Mohave Alyha and Hwame

George Devereaux's 1937 article, "Institutionalized Homosexuality of the Mohave Indians," is perhaps the most commonly cited primary resource on the Mohave "berdache," if not on the "berdache," in general. It is worth examining in depth, as Will Roscoe explains, not only because of its prevalence in the literature, but because it may well present "the strongest evidence *against* [the] multiple gender paradigm" that, in the same volume, Gilbert Herdt uses the Mohave to illustrate (Roscoe 1993:360; Herdt 1993:65). Devereaux's original account is startlingly direct, particularly when contrasted with other academic literature of the day. He did not (nor did his informants, one is encouraged to assume) shrink back from candid discussions of sexuality, nor from the elucidation of specific details. The modern reader, confronted with a text that reads nearly like a pornographic novel, may sometimes hear a small voice questioning Devereaux's motives for making such a vivid presentation; unusual in its own day, it is somewhat shocking even by today's standards, its tone shifting between fetishism, amusement and disgust. One has no way of knowing whether the judgments issuing from the mouths of his informants are his own or theirs, whether they have told him what he wished to hear or if he has simply heard it that way, or whether or not his translations are accurate (is there a Mohave word for "institutionalization"?).

To Devereaux, "homosexuality" and "transvestism" were one and the same thing; the latter was merely a physical manifestation of the former. Gender role, gender identity, and sexual orientation are, in his presentation, tangled together in a largely inseparable mass, and one cannot be certain whether this is the doing of his Mohave informants or of Devereaux, himself. He presents the Mohave as sex-obsessed fornicators, "entirely untrammelled by social restraint" (498), claiming that "homosexuality is tolerated in all its forms" (500). According to him, the Mohave recognize "two definite types of homosexuals," male "transvestites," known as *alyha*, who take on "the role of the woman" in sexual intercourse, and females, known as *hwame*, who performed "the role of the male" (500). In a single sentence he equated cross-dressing with passive homosexuality in men and active homosexuality in women, and gender role transgression with both. Thusly were all *alyha* and *hwame* homosexual, gender role transgressing cross-dressers, and apparently one could not make the choice to cross gender roles without becoming an homosexual as well. And, while he asserted that the sexual partners of the *alyha* and *hwame* were not considered to be homosexuals, it is clear from his account that they were, nevertheless, subject to a prodigious amount of ridicule.

Devereaux's primary informant, Ñahwera, was a "senile and toothless old singer" said to be the last person alive to know the transvestite initiation songs. He told Devereaux:

> "From the very beginning of the world it was meant that there should be homosexuals, just as it was instituted that there should be shamans. They were intended for that purpose." (501)

Of course, not every shaman was an "homosexual," and not all "homosexuals" became shamans, but "transvestites," when they did pursue the occupation, "were exceptionally powerful shamans, especially the hwame" (516). When a woman is pregnant, Devereaux was told, she has dreams forecasting the biological sex of her child. Males bring dreams of arrow-feathers and bows, while females inspire visions of beads and other feminine accoutrements; this is so regardless of the child's status, later in life, as *alyha* or *hwame*. While the dreams of a pregnant woman may contain certain "hints" about this anticipated change in status, the young child is encouraged to grow into the role associated with its assigned sex. But any person "who dreamt about becoming a transvestite while in the maternal womb may turn into one. They then attend to the occupation-pattern of their adopted sex, except that female transvestites may not be tribal or war-leaders" (502).

The Mohave were certain, according to Devereaux, that an individual's homosexual proclivities will have come to the fore by the onset of puberty, at which time children become "initiated into the functions of their sex, such as hunting or cooking, respectively. None but young people will become berdaches as a rule. Their tendencies will become apparent early enough to cause them to be tattooed in accordance with the tattooing pattern pertaining to their adopted sex" (501). Ñahwera told Devereaux that such children begin to "act strangely" just as puberty becomes imminent. "When there is a desire in a child's heart to become a transvestite that child will act different. It will let people become aware of that desire. They may insist on giving the child the toys and garments of its true sex, but the child will throw them away and do this every time there is a big gathering" (503). At puberty, when other youths begin to take a greater interest in the activities of adults of their own biological sex, these children show a distinct preference for the tools, activities and dress of the "opposite" sex. Parents soon notice this conduct and usually take pains to redirect it; girls, especially, are often bullied "into normal behavior." Eventually, if the child is persistent enough, the parents will "realize that nothing can be done about it. 'If our child wishes to go that way, the only thing we can do is make it adopt the status of a transvestite.' They are not proud of having a transvestite in the family, because transvestites are considered somewhat crazy" (502-503).

An individual's gender identity, gender role, and sexual preference were, for the Mohave, securely in place by the age of ten or eleven. The "status of transvestite" was then conferred through a ritual of initiation, of which Devereaux provided three accounts including the following culled from Kroeber:

> Four men who have dreamed about the ceremony are sent for, and spend the night in the house, twisting cords and gathering shredded bark for the skirt the prospective *alyha* will thereafter wear. The youth himself lies, with two women sitting by him. As they twist the cords, the men sing. . . songs the singers dreamed when they were with the god Mastamho, and during the night they tell and sing of how they saw him ordering the first performance of this ceremony. In the morning the two women lift the youth and take him outdoors. One of the singers puts on the skirt and dances to the river in four steps, the youth following and imitating. Then all bathe. Thereupon the two women give the youth the front and back pieces of his new dress and paint his face white. After four days he is painted again and then is an *alyha*. . . Sometimes, but more rarely, a girl took on man's estate, among both Yuma and Mohave, and was then known as *hwami*, and might marry women. There was no ceremony to mark her new status. (Devereaux 1937:506, citing Kroeber 1925:748-749)

Another account relates an initiation ceremony that is notable for its inclusion of the entire community. Preparations were made in secret by the boy's family so that the potential *alyha* would be taken by surprise; this was essential, since the ceremony was "considered both an initiation and an ultimate test of his true inclinations. If he submitted to it he was considered a genuine homosexual" (508). Word was sent round to all the neighboring settlements that the people should assemble on the appointed day to witness the boy's transition, so that they might all "see it and become accustomed to seeing the boy in a woman's dress" (508). Once the crowd was assembled, a singer chosen beforehand drew a circle on the ground at their center. Two women, usually the boy's mother and maternal grandmother, led the boy into the circle. Devereaux's informant states that women were allotted this task because they "have more to do with

children," but an alternative explanation might suggest that they were acting as emissaries of their gender, welcoming the child into the fold, so to speak. Willingness to remain in the circle was itself construed as an indication that the child was prepared to go through with the ceremony. The singer, hidden behind the crowd, began to sing the traditional initiation songs. "Were the boy unwilling to become a homosexual officially," Devereaux's informant states, "he would refuse to dance. As it is, the song goes right to his heart and he will dance with much intensity. He cannot help it. After the fourth song he is proclaimed a homosexual. The same women who led him into the circle, accompanied by other women, take him down to the Colorado River. After a bath he receives his skirt. He is then led back to the dance-ground, dressed as a woman and the crowd scatters. The same ceremony is enacted for the hwame who then dons the breech-clout" (507-508).

Once the transformation was complete, the individual was expected to conform completely to the new gender role so that "normal" individuals of the same biological sex will "feel toward him as though he truly belonged to his adopted sex" (501-502). The gender identity of the *alyha* and *hwame* extended from social being to physical body, and they are said to have resented any "normal nomenclature applied to their genitalia." Devereaux explained:

> Alyha insisted that their penis (modar) be called a clitoris (havalik), their testes (hama), labia minora (havakwit), and their anus (hivey), vagina (hiqpan). The hwame equally resented any reference to the fact that they had vulvae, but it was not stated that they insisted on a corresponding male terminology. (510)

In addition, the *alyha* often made considerable efforts to mimic both menstruation and pregnancy (511-512) through the use of both herbs and pretenses. As adults the *alyha* and *hwame* were expected to take spouses of the same biological sex who, being considered heterosexual, were of the opposite gender. Devereaux notes that while the *hwame* never gave birth, some women became *hwame* after doing so, perhaps inspired by the pain of the ordeal.

Devereaux's discussion of the Mohave "berdache" casts the *alyha* and *hwame* as tragico-ridiculous characters acting in a farcical situation; generally "not courted like ordinary girls," sometimes a man might go through the motions of "courting" an *alyha* "because it appealed to his sense of the preposterous." Once married, both the *alyha* and *hwame* were said to make excellent, industrious spouses. "At any rate the certitude of a well-kept home may have induced many a Mohave to set up house with an *alyha*" (513). While in English all Mohave referred to an *alyha* as "she" and a *hwame* as "he" (511),Devereaux referred to them both by the pronouns associated with their biological sex. Having never himself seen or met an *alyha* or *hwame*, his entire presentation calls attention to itself as biased and sensational, based almost entirely upon hearsay and conjecture. It indicates as well that neither Devereaux nor his informants ever believed an *alyha* to be anything but a man, or a *hwame* to be anything but a woman, and that the Mohave had neither three genders nor any particular respect for homosexual practices, which the transformation of gender forestalled.

The Zuni "Man-Woman"

Perhaps the most famous "berdache" of all time was We'wha, the Zuni "man-woman." She came to Washington, D. C. for six months in 1886 as a guest of the anthropologist Matilda Coxe Stevenson. There she met President Grover Cleveland and Speaker of the House John Carlisle, demonstrated Zuni weaving at the Smithsonian Institution, and appeared in an amateur performance at the National Theatre, captivating polite Washington society. No one, including the anthropologist who counted her as a friend, knew at the time that she was a biological male (Miller 1995:29-31). Stevenson, herself, was never short of praise for We'wha, whom she referred to as "the most intelligent of the Zuni tribe," possessing an "indomitable will and an insatiable thirst for knowledge." His "strong character made his word law among both the men and women with whom he associated. Though his wrath was dreaded by men as well as women, he was beloved by all the children, to whom he was ever kind." Despite being gendered as a

women, he was beloved by all the children, to whom he was ever kind." Despite being gendered as a woman, "he was said to be the father of several children" (Stevenson 1976:314).

It is Stevenson's 1904 report that provides most of the first-hand information available on the Zuni "berdache." Mistaking these people at first for biological hermaphrodites, closer association with her friend We'wha eventually proved enlightening. The Zuni "berdache" can only be confirmed as a cross-dresser and perhaps as a gender role transgressor, but information on sexual activity is scant and, where conclusive, indicates bisexuality, if not heterosexuality. While Stevenson states that *ko'thlama* (men who have permanently adopted female attire) frequently "ally themselves to men," Pilling asserts that there is no firm evidence that any male Zuni cross-dresser ever married a man (1997:72). There are several Zuni male cross-dressers documented, but no confirmed reports of cross-dressing women exist (Roscoe 1993:341).

According to Stevenson, men who adopted female attire did so "of their own volition, having from childhood hung about the house," "usually preferring to do the work of women" (1976:314). Elsie Clews Parsons described a six-year-old Zuni boy who was dressed distinctively by his parents in response to his "feminine" temperament, indicating that variations in clothing were probably used to mark the "androgyne" from early youth (Williams 1986:72). Upon reaching puberty a final decision was made, and if the youth chose to continue functioning within the female gender role, he had to adopt feminine garb. Fathers and grandfathers were usually displeased with such a choice and may have endeavored to shame the boy out of it (Stevenson 1976:314). The women of the family are said to have joked about it but to have been supportive at heart, for they knew that it meant the youth would remain a resident of the matrilineal household. Such a person did "almost double the work of a woman," who necessarily refrained from such work at certain times to give birth to and care for children. The *ko'thlama*, however, was "ever ready for service, and [was] expected to perform the hardest labors of the female department" (Stevenson 1976:314).

According to Pilling, the Zuni are predominantly uxorilocal and matrilineal, with women holding the household reins. Daughters usually remained in the homes of their birth, bringing their husbands into the household upon marriage, and older relatives depended upon them to fulfill household tasks. Pilling notes that all male cross dressers among the Zuni, with the exception of one, who was mentally disabled, lacked an elder sister. "It seems that the emergence of a cross-dresser in a Zuni household was nearly always a response to the lack of a sister or female matrilateral cousin in the household. The cross-dressing occurrences seem, in part, to have been a reaction to a gap in the multigenerational Zuni household structure" (1997:72).

The Zuni *lhamana* (the generic term for cross-dressers) appears to have made the choice to be *lhamana* largely by himself, without ceremony or dramatics. Sensitive parents may simply have facilitated the decision, while others were likely indifferent. Cross-dressing among the Zuni did not have any special ties to shamanism (Williams 1986:73), and it was not precipitated by dreams or visions. A visionary experience would have been entirely inappropriate for the Zuni in this context, for, as Will Roscoe reminds us, Ruth Benedict noted that "If a Zuni Indian has by chance a visual or auditory hallucination it is regarded as a sign of death" (Roscoe 1996:352). Instead, the role of *lhamana* was culturally sanctioned by a Zuni creation story. Walter Williams explains:

> Every four years an elaborate ceremony commemorates this myth. In the story a kachina spirit called *ko'lhamana* was captured by the enemy spirits and transformed in the process. This transformed spirit became a mediator between the two sides, using his peacemaking skills to merge the differing lifestyles of hunters and farmers. In the ceremony, a dramatic reenactment of the myth, the part of the transformed *ko'lhamana* spirit, is performed by a berdache. The Zuni word for berdache is *lhamana*, denoting its closeness to the spiritual mediator who brought hunting and farming together. (1986:18)

The *lhamana*, then, was created by spirits to help humanity by uniting the practice of hunting with that of farming. Further, since hunting is associated with men and farming with women, the *lhamana* acted as a

farming. Further, since hunting is associated with men and farming with women, the *lhamana* acted as a mediator between the sexes as well. This function finds metaphoric expression in the fact that, while most "berdaches" usually danced among the women, the Zuni *lhamana* moved back and forth between the male and female dance lines, signifying perhaps, their liminal status (Williams 1986:70).

Gender Transformation and Social Acceptance

One may indeed have been born a *two-spirit*, or "berdache," but with the exception of the Dene Tha, one generally had to undergo some sort of transformation, usually involving dress, during one's lifetime in order to inform everyone else of the fact. Once recognized, social acceptance was predicated on the religious worldview of the people, a fact obvious even today as the religious right in America continues to justify its persecution of queers by citing biblical verses. The "berdaches" discussed above all share in common a cultural tolerance for gender ambiguity which is sanctioned by a spiritual precedent.

The duality of the Navaho *nádleehé's* nature as *two-spirit* was understood through a paradigm of inseparability and distinctiveness than ran deeply throughout the Navaho consciousness. Theoretically, persons born with ambiguous genitals would not have been required to make a transition to signal a preference for cross-role behavior, since they would have been conceived of as always already embodying both roles. The *nádleehé* who was born with unambiguous genitals made a decision to take on the role allocated to persons of the "opposite" gender, signaling the choice to the community by adopting the dress appropriate to that gender. Like the *nádleehé*, the Mohave *alyha* and *hwame* made their own decision to transform, but much earlier in life. At the age of ten or so, the child voluntarily underwent a ritual of transformation with the support of concerned kin and the recognition of the entire community. The child's own behavior was perhaps the greatest factor in the decision to provide her or him with an opportunity to transform, but visions or dreams may have played a role. As with the *nádleehé*, status as an *alyha* or *hwame* found spiritual precedent in the Mohave worldview, in the creation myth of First Man and First Woman, who gave birth to a set of twins with ambiguous genitalia. The Zuni *lhamana*, also finding religious precedent in a creation myth, transformed his status quietly and without ceremony through cross-dressing and cross-role behavior. Sanctioned by the spirits as a mediator between hunters and farmers and, by association, men and women, the role of *lhamana* was more closely associated with cross-role behavior than with homosexuality.

A religious belief in cross-sex reincarnation sets the stage for the Dene Tha *two-spirit*, whose transformation apparently occurs somewhere between the "other world" and "this one," perhaps in the womb of the mother. This role is not specifically associated with either cross-role behavior or homosexuality, and the child is in fact encouraged to agree with her or his biological sex assignment/gender role. While close kin may ask such people to cross-dress for a brief period of time, the Dene Tha *two-spirit* is not expected to be an habitual cross-dresser, nor an homosexual. One may conclude that no transformation ceremony would be necessary should an individual actually decide to cross-dress or engage in homosexual activity because she or he would already be understood to be composed of both sexes. As a thoroughly acculturated contemporary society, however, it is likely that such a decision would be met with resistance.

Other transforming rituals include a south-central Arizona Papago procedure wherein the child was placed into a brush windbreak containing both men's and women's implements, which was then set on fire. A male child who came running out with women's tools emerged as a "berdache" (Callender and Kochems 1983:451, citing Underhill 1969:186-187). The story of the Kaska girl raised to be "like a man," while disputed convincingly by Goulet, suggests the possibility that some peoples might have selected a child to fulfill an opposite-sex role under conditions of necessity, a notion which finds some support in Pilling's conclusions about Zuni culture. Still other peoples, such as the Lakota, speak of adults having visions or dreams which require them to take on the gender role of the opposite sex despite their generally unified, heterosexual nature (Williams 1986:28).

The "Berdache" Revisited

In 1934, Ruth Benedict described the "institution of the berdache, as the French called them":

> These men-women were men who at puberty or thereafter took the dress and the occupations of women. Sometimes they married other men and lived with them. Sometimes they were men with no inversion, persons of weak sexual endowment who chose this role to avoid the jeers of the women. The berdaches were never regarded as of first rate supernatural power, as similar men-women were in Siberia, but rather as leaders in women's occupations, good healers in certain diseases, or, among certain tribes, as the genial organizers of social affairs. In any case, they were socially placed. They were not left exposed to the conflicts that visit the deviant who is excluded from participation in the recognized patterns of his society. (65)

While troublesome in several aspects, her description remains fairly apt. It does not mention women because the most consistent feature of the "berdache" is indeed the fact that he is, in an overwhelming number of cases, a biological male. Whether this is an existential actuality or an artifact of research may never be ascertained, but one thing is certain: if complimentary male and female roles did exist, they were not mirror images. If there really was a female "berdache," -- an oxymoron in itself -- she was probably quite different from the character cited above. Extant literature speaks of "manly-hearted" women (Williams 1986:243), and even of a Crow Woman Chief (Denig 1976:308 -311; Williams 1986:245), but these women were not "berdaches." They were strong, courageous females who identified as such, whose peoples identified them as such, who usually took husbands and raised families, taking on men's tasks *in addition to* doing the work of women, cross-dressing rarely, and only when necessary.

To be sure, there are many unconfirmed, second- and third-hand accounts of female "berdaches" floating about, such as Devereaux's rather exceptional Mohave *hwame*, but first-hand reports appear to be unavailable. The female "berdache" seems to have existed always in some past time, only to be known through others. Even if their rumored existence is eventually confirmed, still one cannot assume that their lives were lived in precise emulation of the male paradigm. Culture, having dictated separate and distinct roles for men and women, likely enables separate and distinct ways of flouting its dictates. Scholars all too easily make "intuitive" leaps that generalize from the male to the female case, but there is no reason to assume their veracity. The reader must be wary of any account that ends with the words, "and the same was true of women."

Benedict, in her light-handed way, relates that some male "berdaches" "married other men and lived with them." The modern reader may laugh at such guardedness; surely this statement was compacted by the anthropologist's reluctance to discuss sexuality directly? Current sensibilities encourage one to assume that such married couples were of course practicing homosexuals. But could it not be the case that such couples were establishing strategic domestic, economic and kin relationships, just as do heterosexual marrieds? One may still admit the possibility of homosexual activity to the union, so long as it is not the defining characteristic. Indeed, it is not even the defining characteristic of the "berdache," for, as Benedict herself states, not all "berdaches" were "inverts."

What then, is the defining characteristic of the "berdache"? Benedict provides it in her first sentence: women's dress and occupations. The "berdache," then, is definitively a *gender role*, which may or may not be inclusive of sexual orientation. With this information in hand, a re-examination of George Devereaux's paper proves enlightening. According to him, the Mohave had somehow "institutionalized homosexuality." But the *alyha* and *hwame* were gender roles that were sanctioned by a shift in *gender assignment*, and it would be more accurate to say that the Mohave had institutionalized *gender assignment transformation*. Homosexuality in itself was neither legitimized nor institutionalized. And sadly, even Benedict's comment

that "berdaches" were "not left exposed to the conflicts that visit the deviant who is excluded from participation in the recognized patterns of his society" is not precisely true, as Devereaux's account makes clear.

Conclusions

The cultural role of "berdache" was not, as Devereaux would have it, "institutionalized homosexuality," nor was it necessarily related to sexual orientation. As an "institution" it legitimized only the transformation of gender, but it did not even begin to address issues of homosexuality among women, homosexuals who did not cross-dress, or people whose sex assignment and gender identity were unified. The "berdache" did not constitute a distinctive "third gender" or "third sex," but rather was viewed in the main as an ambiguous combination of both male and female, the one manifesting itself biologically while the other found social expression. Many accounts cite parental reticence to allow a child to make the *gender assignment transformation* to "berdache," and while most children were likely cajoled into accepting their gender assignments, adults were virtually barred from questioning theirs. Once transformed, the "berdache" may have gained the limited protection of legitimization, but as Devereaux pointed out, it did not free him or his partner from the taunts and abuse of others. Homosexuality was never, in itself, validated, because the "berdache" was in fact *not* an homosexual; his or her gender was *transformed* precisely in order to avoid that designation. This must be the case if heterosexual men were able to engage in sexual activity with male "berdaches" under the auspices of heterosexuality.

The sexual partner of a male "berdache" engaged in sexual activity with someone of his own biological sex, but neither his behavior nor his partner's was considered to be homosexual because they were of different genders, i.e., *heterogendered*. By a definition based solely on biological sex assignment, homosexuality was indeed legitimized; the problem is that such a definition is completely inapplicable. A EuroAmerican conception of "homosexuality" which equates biological sex with gender is totally incompatible with the far more complex native reality. The fact is that cultures providing a "berdache" status likely did so in order to avoid the designation of homosexuality by shifting genders, and did in most cases prohibit the equivalent of "homosexual" behavior: Homogendered sexual activity was not acceptable, and two males who both identified as men could not freely engage in sexual activity under any circumstance. Therefore, if homosexuality has ever been "institutionalized," and if there have ever been more than two genders, it has apparently not been among the peoples native to North America.

Appendix

The "Western" Sex/Gender/Sexuality Spectrum

Sex/Gender	Sexual Partner	Classification
male/man	female	heterosexual
male/man	male	homosexual
female/woman	male	heterosexual

female/woman	female	homosexual

The Navaho Sex/Gender/Sexuality Spectrum

Biological Sex Assignment	Gender Assignment	Sexual Partner	Classification
male	man	female	heterosexual
male	man	male bodied two-spirit	heterosexual
male	man	nádleehé	heterosexual
male	man	female bodied two-spirit	homosexual
male	man	male	homosexual
male	male bodied two-spirit	male	heterosexual
male	male bodied two-spirit	female	homosexual
male	male bodied two-spirit	nádleehé	homosexual
male	male bodied two-spirit	male bodied two-spirit	homosexual
male	male bodied two-spirit	female bodied two-spirit	homosexual
nádleehé	two-spirit	male	heterosexual
nádleehé	two-spirit	female	heterosexual
nádleehé	two-spirit	nádleehé	homosexual
nádleehé	two-spirit	male embodied two-spirit	homosexual
nádleehé	two-spirit	female embodied two-spirit	homosexual
female	woman	male	heterosexual
female	woman	female embodied two-spirit	heterosexual
female	woman	nádleehé	heterosexual
female	woman	male embodied two-spirit	homosexual
female	woman	female	homosexual
female	female bodied two-spirit	female	heterosexual
female	female bodied two-spirit	male	homosexual
female	female bodied two-spirit	nádleehé	homosexual
female	female bodied two-spirit	female embodied two-spirit	homosexual
female	female bodied two-spirit	male embodied two-spirit	homosexual

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