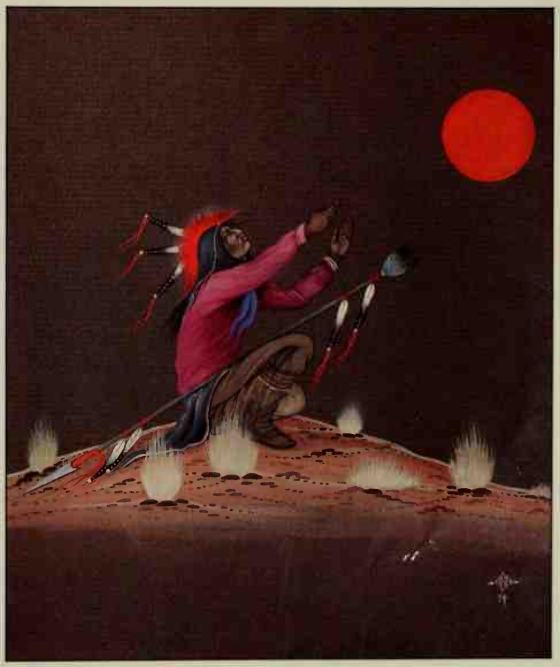
THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH

Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture



Walter L. Williams

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To my friends

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and to

the traditionalist Indian people who generously took me into their homes, and who gave me a deeper appreciation of the magic of life

Contents

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Los Angeles, 1985 *Walter L. Williams*

Introduction

Because it is such a powerful force in the world today, the Western Judeo-Christian tradition is often accepted as the arbiter of "natural" behavior of humans. If Europeans and their descendant nations of North America accept something as normal, then anything different is seen as abnormal. Such a view ignores the great diversity of human existence.

This is the case for the study of gender. How many genders are there? To a modern Anglo-American, nothing might seem more definite than the answer that there are two: men and women. But not all societies around the world agree with Western culture's view that all humans are either women or men. The commonly accepted notion of "the opposite sex," based on anatomy, is itself an artifact of our society's rigid sex roles.

Among many cultures, there have existed different alternatives to "man" or "woman." An alternative role in many American Indian societies is referred to by anthropologists as *berdache*. This book will take an anthropological and historical approach to understand this topic. The role varied from one Native American culture to another, which is a reflection of the vast diversity of aboriginal New World societies. Small bands of hunter-gatherers existed in some areas, with advanced civilizations of farming peoples in other areas. With hundreds of different languages, economies, religions, and social patterns existing in North America alone, every generalization about a cultural tradition must acknowledge many exceptions.

This diversity is true for the berdache tradition as well, and must be kept in mind. My statements should be read as being specific to a particular culture, with generalizations being treated as loose patterns that might not apply to peoples even in

nearby areas. Defining the character of the berdache tradition is the subject of Part I of the book.

Briefly, a berdache can be defined as a morphological male who does not fill a society's standard man's role, who has a nonmasculine character. This type of person is often stereotyped as effeminate, but a more accurate characterization is androgyny. Such a person has a clearly recognized and accepted social status, often based on a secure place in the tribal mythology. Berdaches have special ceremonial roles in many Native American religions, and important economic roles in their families. They will do at least some women's work, and mix together much of the behavior, dress, and social roles of women and men. Berdaches gain social prestige by their spiritual, intellectual, or craftwork/artistic contributions, and by their reputation for hard work and generosity. They serve a mediating function between women and men, precisely because their character is seen as distinct from either sex. They are not seen as men, yet they are not seen as women either. They occupy an alternative gender role that is a mixture of diverse elements.

In their erotic behavior berdaches also generally (but not always) take a nonmasculine role, either being asexual or becoming the passive partner in sex with men. In some cultures the berdache might become a wife to a man. This male-male sexual behavior became the focus of an attack on berdaches as "sodomites" by the Europeans who, early on, came into contact with them. From the first Spanish conquistadors to the Western frontiersmen and the Christian missionaries and government officials, Western culture has had a considerable impact on the berdache tradition. In the last two decades, the most recent impact on the tradition is the adaptation of a modern Western gay identity. This historical perspective is the subject of Part II of the book.

To Western eyes berdachism is a complex and puzzling phenomenon, mixing and redefining the very concepts of what is considered male and female. In a culture with only two recognized genders, such individuals are gender nonconformist, abnormal, deviant. But to American Indians, the institution of another gender role means that berdaches are not deviant—in-

deed, they do conform to the requirements of a custom in which their culture tells them they fit. Berdachism is a way for society to recognize and assimilate some atypical individuals without imposing a change on them or stigmatizing them as deviant. This cultural institution confirms their legitimacy for what they are.

Societies often bestow power upon that which does not neatly fit into the usual. Since no cultural system can explain everything, a common way that many cultures deal with these inconsistencies is to imbue them with negative power, as taboo, pollution, witchcraft, or sin. That which is not understood is seen as a threat. But an alternative method of dealing with such things, or people, is to take them out of the realm of threat and to sanctify them.[1] The berdaches' role as mediator is thus not just between women and men, but also between the physical and the spiritual. American Indian cultures have taken what Western culture calls negative, and made it a positive; they have successfully utilized the different skills and insights of a class of people that Western culture has stigmatized and whose spiritual powers have been wasted.

Many Native Americans also understood that gender roles have to do with more than just biological sex. The standard Western view that one's sex is always a certainty, and that one's gender identity and sex role always conform to one's morphological sex is a view that dies hard. Western thought is typified by such dichotomies of groups perceived to be mutually exclusive: male and female, black and white, right and wrong, good and evil. Clearly, the world is not so simple; such clear divisions are not always realistic. Most American Indian worldviews generally are much more accepting of the ambiguities of life. Acceptance of gender variation in the berdache tradition is typical of many native cultures' approach to life in general.

Overall, these are generalizations based on those Native American societies that had an accepted role for berdaches. Not all cultures recognized such a respected status. Berdachism in aboriginal North America was most established among tribes in four areas: first, the Prairie and western Great Lakes, the northern and central Great Plains, and the lower Mississippi Valley; second, Florida and the Caribbean; third, the Southwest, the

Great Basin, and California; and fourth, scattered areas of the Northwest, western Canada, and Alaska. For some reason it is not noticeable in eastern North America, with the exception of its southern rim.

In a recent tabulation of the distribution of berdachism north of Mexico, Charles Callender and Lee Kochems could not determine a correlation between the presence of berdachism and the type of social organization in a particular culture. None of the other anthropologists' commentaries accompanying their essay provided a satisfactory explanation as to why berdachism existed in one culture but not in another.[2] Why did the Pimas look down on berdaches while most of their neighbors in the Southwest respected it? Why did Apaches hold negative attitudes toward berdaches (if we can trust the ethnographic reports that say they did), in contrast to their Athapaskan cousins the Navajos, who practically deified berdaches? Supposedly the Iroquois and their relatives the Cherokees did not have a berdache status, yet Raymond Fogelson has discovered a document in which Cherokees told a white traveler about 1825, "There were among them formerly, men who assumed the dress and performed all the duties of women and who lived their whole life in this manner."[3] If such memories were accurate, then berdachism may have existed but it disappeared quite early among eastern Indians. All the evidence is not in. If other ethnohistorians can discover new documentary references in archives, they can add to our knowledge of the practice.

The published reports and documents that are known have been examined and reexamined; what is now needed is more fieldwork to see if further answers can be found. I have interviewed Indians who were raised in a berdache role, and are treated as such by their communities, among groups that the printed sources suggest have no berdache status. Other recent fieldworkers also report finding berdaches where they were not thought to be.[4] We cannot assume that berdaches were completely absent from any Native American culture, and we need to question statements that suggest its nonexistence.

While I am hopeful that further field studies will be done on this question, this book focuses on those societies which, at least aboriginally, provided berdaches a respected status. My purpose

is to examine how a culture can accommodate gender variation and sexual variation beyond man/woman opposites, without being threatened by it. Societies that do not provide a respected role for the berdache, if we were to trust the documents on them, are not within this book's subject matter. It remains for other ethnographers to investigate tribes other than the ones mentioned in this book, to add to or revise the story.

Early ethnographers sometimes interviewed berdaches, but did so within a single tribe, and almost always as a peripheral topic to their general tribal ethnography. With only a few exceptions, most of the writings of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries devoted only a few sentences or paragraphs to berdachism. Those ethnographers did not have a cross-cultural interest or expertise in sexuality or in gender variation. In an essay published in 1940, anthropologist Alfred Kroeber referred to the berdache tradition, saying that "the time is ready for a synthetic work on this subject."[5] Kroeber's essay was the first significant attempt to generalize about the tradition across tribal boundaries, followed by Henry Angelino and Charles Shedd, who in 1955 wrote a brief article in the *American Anthropologist*.[6] No other multitribal study was published until thirteen years later, when Sue-Ellen Jacobs wrote an essay reviewing the previously published literature.[7] Such has been the scarcity of writings on berdachism.

In 1976 historian Jonathan Katz reprinted numerous documents referring to berdaches, which greatly facilitated research on the topic.[8] These documents, many of which were located by researcher Stephen W. Foster, stimulated my and others' interest in berdaches. None of my anthropology teachers had ever mentioned the subject, and I had seen only a few brief citations on it. Though I had been teaching American Indian studies for several years before reading this book, I had no idea that so much documentation on it existed. Inspired by this work, a few anthropologists began to publish essays on the topic.[9] Yet despite their value in adding to a theoretical understanding of the berdache tradition, all of these essays published since 1940 have been based solely on the previously published anthropological sources. None of these post-1940 authors has had intensive fieldwork experience with berdaches. Because of this, and be-

cause of the limitations of the original sources that these theoretical analyses share, the berdaches themselves have been presented only abstractly, rather than as real people. They are seen from a detached, nonpersonalized perspective. We know little about their viewpoints and their feelings about themselves and their place in their community.

Dissatisfied with this deficiency in the literature, in 1980 I began doing research on the berdache tradition while on a fellowship at the UCLA American Indian Studies Center. I soon discovered the resources, nearby in Los Angeles, of the ONE Institute of Homophile Studies and of the International Gay and Lesbian Archives. The directors of these libraries, Dorr Legg and Jim Kepner, introduced me to Harry Hay, who had lived for years among Southwestern Indians. Hay put me in touch with Sue-Ellen Jacobs, and they led me to question the conventional wisdom among anthropologists that the berdache tradition had disappeared. I decided that this was a subject in which modern fieldwork needed to be undertaken. In 1982 I began the effort to locate a living berdache. The effort was much easier than I had thought it would be. The first reservation I visited in my trip westward from Chicago, in June 1982, was the Omaha. Shortly after my arrival, I was introduced to an elderly person who fulfills this role. From his family I made other contacts on a Lakota reservation, where I stayed with another berdache. This person put me in touch with berdaches on two other nearby reservations. I spent the major part of the summer on one of these reservations, living as part of the household of a traditional Lakota berdache I will refer to as Terry Calling Eagle. I participated with him in his ceremonial roles, and learned from him the Lakota religion. I also visited with other Lakota berdaches and traditional people. After leaving the Lakotas, toward the end of the summer I visited the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations in Montana, where I did more fieldwork and interviewing.

Emboldened by the success of this fieldtrip, I next decided to go to an entirely different area, in Yucatán, Mexico. There also I found a berdache tradition among contemporary Maya people. I spent the month of January 1983 in various Maya villages, interviewing berdaches and their relatives. Though my spe-

cialty is American Indian studies for the area north of Mexico, and I make no claim to full coverage of Latin America, I am including the information I found. My fieldwork in Yucatán was undertaken primarily as a comparative study, and should be seen as such.[10] Since that time I have also conducted more interviews with Indian people of various tribes of the Southwest, Great Basin, and California.

My usual approach with traditionalist Indians was to get to know them and let them feel comfortable with me before attempting an interview. If at all possible, I had another Indian introduce me to them. My interviewing strategy was to begin by telling them that I was trying to learn more about some of the old Indian traditions that were very different from white ways. I would mention the concept of the "Contrary," in which a person did things backward, as an example. I said the tradition that I was most interested in existed in many tribes and was referred to by early white explorers as berdache. Usually they did not know that word, so next I would tell them the name for berdache in their own language. It was crucial to use the native word before going any further. I told them that I had read what white people had written on this, but that I wanted the traditionalist knowledge so that my book would be more accurate.

When interviewing people, I tried not to sound pushy or disrespectful of the traditions, and I purposefully did not mention anything about the tradition or make any references to sexuality or gender variation. I wanted to hear their own definitions, and their own emphasis in explaining it. A major goal of this study is to allow Indian people to speak for themselves. There has been much too much theorizing without listening to what Native Americans themselves have to say. In an attempt to provide an additional body of empirical knowledge on which future writers may theorize, I have quoted liberally from the words of Indian people. The idea is to present the flavor of their attitudes as much as possible.

Although sophisticated literature has appeared on sexual and gender variance, prior to this book there was no major study that combined the historical documentation, anthropological literature, and direct fieldwork with American Indian berdaches of a number of different tribes. Why is it that, nearly half a

century after Kroeber said "the time is ready," his call for a synthesis was not fulfilled?

Part of the explanation reflects the limits of traditional historical and anthropological disciplines in dealing with questions of gender and sexuality. The greatest offenders have been historians. Until the last decade or so, historians paid precious little attention to any aspect of the internal history of Native American societies. Indians were seen as savages, foils for the great advance of Western civilization. They were of little interest to historians, other than in their role as adversaries of the frontiersmen. Similarly, on the question of sex, North American historians' writings at least until recently treated sex as an unmentionable topic. Even in our own time, historians of sexuality run up against the notion that sex in history is somehow less important in understanding the past than, for example, men's proclivity to kill each other in wars.

An American Indian custom like the berdache institution, with its overtones of sexual variance, was usually known about but was seen as something that was better ignored. Even in 1980, when I presented my first paper on the berdache tradition at a history conference, I was scolded by a leading historian. He had earlier complimented me on my publications in American Indian studies, and had written supportive letters of recommendation for me. He bluntly told me that if I pursued this topic I would threaten my scholarly reputation. Later, when I asked him to write another letter of recommendation, he refused with a homophobic comment. Academia has many ways to discourage certain research.

These kinds of restrictions have been much more forcefully applied to other academics. As a consequence, much of the historical research on berdachism has been done by researchers outside of universities. Jonathan Katz, a historian not employed in academia, has published work that provides a perfect example of the contributions that nonacademic researchers have made in this field.

Even where historians have pursued research on berdachism, they often run up against the inhibitions of informants. With relatively little material about berdachism finding its way into print, researchers working on this topic must depend heavily on

interviews. Interviewing has its own set of problems. In the early 1950s, for example, when Edith McLeod, a local historian, decided to collect information on a Klamath berdache named White Cindy, she followed the Indian custom of using the feminine pronoun. McLeod reported, "Old timers of Klamath Falls, Oregon, remember her well, as do I, for I well remember that as a child I always crossed the street when I saw her coming, being afraid of her from stories that I had heard." When McLeod contacted local whites for information for a story, they refused, saying, "I know considerable about her—but it is not exactly printable." Even a close friend of McLeod's, who had done extensive work with the Klamath Indians, said simply, "Yes, I know quite a bit about her—but I can't tell you."[11]

What was it about berdachism that made it such a taboo subject? A history of the word *bardache* gives us a clue. It is not a term from an Indian language, but was used by European explorers in North America. The word originally came from the Persian *bardaj,* and via the Arabs spread to the Italian language as *bardasso* and to Spanish as *bardaxa* or *bardaje* by the beginning of the sixteenth century. About the same time the word appeared in French as *bardache.*

Thorough research by linguist Claude Courouve has turned up a common meaning in these various languages. The 1680 edition of *Dictionnaire français,* for example, gives this definition: "a young man who is shamefully abused (Caesar was the *bardache* of Nicomedes)." The 1718 edition of P. J. LeRoux's *Dictionnaire comique* defines it more explicitly: "A young man or boy who serves another's succubus, permitting sodomy to be committed on him. These abominations are so common in France that women have rightly complained of them, and I could even name several individuals who keep *bardaches,* generally beautiful boys, as others keep [female] courtesans." This dictionary offers as a synonym for bardache the term *ganimede,* after the boy who was the lover of Zeus in Greek mythology.[12]

The dictionaries, however, make it clear that both *bardache* and *ganimede* refer to the passive homosexual partner. The French word *bougre* was used for the active male partner, akin to the English words *bugger* and *bougie man. Sodomy* was the other most commonly used term, but it was used to describe

specific sexual acts, usually but not always anal intercourse. Sodomy could describe sexual acts between man and woman as well as between man and man. In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, as evidenced by European songs, poems, plays, and literature, the terms *bardache* and *bougre* were the most commonly used to denote male homosexuality. The words clearly distinguished the active and passive roles. For example, in a satirical text, *Deliberations du Conseil general des bougres et des bardaches,* published in France in 1790, the author wrote "the *bardaches* dropped their trousers, and the *bougres,* becoming erect as satyrs, took advantage of them."[13]

When French explorers came to the New World, they used the term with which they were most familiar in describing aboriginal Americans. The term *bardache* had a clear homosexual implication in its European usage. But the Indians had another practice that puzzled the Europeans: the adoption of female dress by these males. Some of the Europeans incorrectly assumed that such individuals must be hermaphrodites, with both female and male genitalia. Joseph François Lafitau, a Jesuit missionary in French Canada from 1711 to 1717, knew of berdaches among the Illinois, the Sioux, and the natives of Louisiana and Florida. He reported: "The view of these men dressed as women surprised the Europeans who first encountered them in America. . . . They were convinced that these were people in whom the two sexes were confounded." Lafitau pointed out that the berdaches were not hermaphrodites, but were anatomically normal males.[14]

Nevertheless, there has continued to be confusion on this matter, with whites using the term *hermaphrodite* as a synonym for *berdache*. When anthropologists began doing fieldwork among American Indians in the late nineteenth century, inexplicably changing the spelling from *a* to *e* in *berdache,* even they sometimes incorrectly referred to berdaches as hermaphrodites. Interestingly, when I have asked modern Indian people about the practice, by asking them to define their languages' terms for berdache, some have explained it by using the English word *hermaphrodite*. When I asked them if this meant that the individual had the sexual parts of both sexes, they said no. I can only

construe that this is the word that they had heard whites use for berdaches.

Still another matter on which writers have confused the issue has to do with Indian women who take a nonfeminine role. The term *berdache* clearly was always used to apply to males until the twentieth century, when confusion arose because some anthropologists began talking about "female berdaches." Beyond the fact that the word originated as a term for a passive male homosexual, this is an improper usage as far as Indians are concerned. With a few possible exceptions, Native Americans conceptualize females who take on a hunter-warrior role separately from male berdaches. Female gender variation was recognized in a number of cultures, but it had a separate and distinct status of its own. Therefore, this study uses the term *berdache* solely for male (or, in rare cases, hermaphroditically ambiguous) individuals who take on a social role that is more or less feminine.

Recognizing that the female status needs a word of its own as a generic term comparable to berdache, I use the word *amazon*. For historical reasons explained in Chapter 11, I feel that this is the best English word to use. The chapter on amazons depends heavily on the ideas of Evelyn Blackwood, Paula Gunn Allen, and Beverly Chiñas. While my interpretation is closest to that of Paula Gunn Allen, herself an Indian and a professor of Native American studies, I realize that I as a male cannot address this topic as deeply as I have done with the berdache. Feeling strongly that fieldwork is at the base of such a study, and knowing as I do that much knowledge is only revealed by such persons to another of the same sex and orientation, I feel that the story of these amazons deserves its own study. What I have done is to present material that seems important to me, with the hope that this may be used by women researchers to aid their own fieldwork on American Indian women's roles.

Most of the writing that has been done about American Indians in the past century has been done by anthropologists. Given the masses of detail that anthropologists have churned out about Native American cultures, what is surprising is that no more has been written about the berdache tradition than there has been. Part of the reason for anthropologists' avoidance of

this topic is that few of them have felt genuinely comfortable in writing about sexual variance. Indeed, it sometimes seems that the first generations of anthropologists who associated on a personal level with berdaches (most of those who come to mind are women: Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Elsie Clews Parsons, Ruth Underhill, Margaret Mead, Ruth Landes), were an iconoclastic bunch who would dispassionately describe whatever they saw. They seemed more likely to be sympathetic than more recent scholars. On more than one occasion I have interviewed anthropologists who have written ethnographies of specific tribes, but whose books do not mention berdaches. When I specifically ask them about it, they often will admit to knowing about it. When I have asked them why this information was not included in their book, some have seemed rather proud to say, "Such things don't interest me."

Such an attitude is all too common among contemporary anthropologists. Despite their claims of objectivity, most anthropologists have been raised in Western cultural traditions which include those same taboos about sex that have inhibited historians. With Western aversions to the discussion of homosexuality, and the assumption—contrary to all the scientific data—that this behavior is relatively rare, many have avoided discussion of the topic. Anthropologist Kenneth Read has analyzed this avoidance, pointing out that many anthropologists evidently feel personally uncomfortable with the topic. Besides, they "could find no justification for homosexual behavior. It was far easier, for example, to excuse infanticide (a custom also abhorrent by Western standards) since it could be shown to have a rational basis in some demographic situations: it 'produced' something. But homosexual behavior did not 'produce' anything."[15]

Same-sex behavior, Read points out, is far more widely distributed throughout the world than would be assumed from reading that compendium of ethnographic knowledge, the Human Relations Area Files. He even suggests that popular international "gay guides," which list almost every nation in the world, often contain more accurate information than ethnographic reports. Since ethnographers have conducted research in many of these same places without reporting anything, Read

concludes that they were misled, were more or less blind, were morally queasy, or for other reasons refrained from reporting what they knew.

In 1975 the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association even voted "not to endorse anthropological research on homosexuality across national borders." Though that resolution was later repealed after protests from gay anthropologists, such an incredible effort at censorship, Read concludes, "is indicative of the persistence of Western attitudes toward homosexual behavior as a sensitive subject which, though it is probably as prevalent as witchcraft, is morally distasteful."[16] As a consequence, even when they do talk about it many anthropologists have simply not asked the right questions, and have been content to abandon the topic after a brief statement in imprecise language.[17]

Critical statements about the anthropological approach to sexuality have regularly appeared over the past decade in the newsletter of the Anthropological Research Group on Homosexuality. No doubt what I have written will offend some anthropologists who are defensive about their colleagues. This book will offend others as well, but those people I am most concerned about offending are Native Americans. Some American Indians—those who have accepted the Christian propaganda on sexuality, or those who are ashamed of their past customs—will no doubt wish that this topic be suppressed. But other Indians, who do respect the traditions, sometimes feel that information about their aboriginal cultures which whites find obnoxious should not be publicized. Some traditionalists feel antagonistic to outside researchers, having been exploited in the past. A Cheyenne elder told me, "I am not much interested in talking about our traditions to non-Cheyenne researchers. We want to keep our history within the Cheyenne people."[18] Such an approach is one of the ways that Indians have managed to keep their traditions hidden and protected. This argument has legitimacy.

The view that certain topics are best not discussed beyond the Indian community has in fact led me to hesitate about publishing some of the information I have learned. The berdache institution involves sacred matters for many tribes. I have followed

the wishes of traditionalists, and used their guidance with respect to people's privacy and by approaching the topic in a respectful manner. With regard to some ceremonial aspects, I have not included certain statements that were told to me in confidence and that, if related here, might violate Indians' sense of holiness.

But I have obviously decided to go ahead with publication, with the feeling that the importance of this topic outweighs such issues of privacy. It is important for non-Indians in our pluralistic society to learn how other cultures deal with gender variation. Even more important is the situation of Indian youth. On many reservations today the status of the berdache has declined, and younger individuals who would formerly have taken a respected position in their tribe are currently stigmatized and lost in a society that is no longer independent of colonial control. It is crucial for young Indian people to be able to have this knowledge about their past traditions. That is why traditionalists have explained these things to me, and that is why I feel a sense of responsibility to convey their message.

Rather than becoming secretive and defensive about their cultural past, Indian people need to consider the anguish that their defensiveness causes for young people who are struggling to understand themselves in a racist and homophobic society. By redeveloping and adapting the old traditions like those of the berdache, Indian people today can be committed to the preservation of their heritage and the establishment of a new sense of pride.

Part I

The Character of the Berdache

1 *Of Religions and Dreams: The Spiritual Basis of the Berdache Tradition*

When the French Jesuit missionary Joseph François Lafitau wrote his book on American Indians in 1724, he condemned berdaches for acting like women. Yet he admitted that this was not the Native American view. "They believe they are honored," he wrote uncomprehendingly. Lafitau pointed out that among the Indians of the western Great Lakes, Louisiana, and Florida, the berdaches "never marry, they participate in all religious ceremonies, and this profession of an extraordinary life causes them to be regarded as people of a higher order, and above the common man."[1] On his first voyage to America, the French explorer Jacques Marquette reported that among the Illinois and neighboring tribes, the berdaches were prominently present at all of the solemn ceremonies of the sacred Calumet pipe: "They are summoned to the Councils, and nothing can be decided without their advice. Finally, through their profession of leading an Extraordinary life, they pass for Manitous—That is to say, for Spirits—or persons of consequence."[2]

How is it that berdaches had such a prominent role in Native American ceremonialism? The French missionaries, coming from the Western Christian tradition with its condemnation of gender variations, could not even comprehend the relationship between berdachism and religion. Yet, it is the spiritual question that is, for most tribes, at the heart of the berdache tradition. Without understanding that, it is impossible to understand anything else about this aboriginal institution.

AMERICAN INDIAN RELIGIONS

Native American religions offered an explanation for human diversity by their creation stories. In some tribal religions, the Great Spiritual Being is conceived as neither male nor female but as a combination of both. Among the Kamia of the Southwest, for example, the bearer of plant seeds and the introducer of Kamia culture was a man-woman spirit named Warharmi.[3] A key episode of the Zuni creation story involves a battle between the kachina spirits of the agricultural Zunis and the enemy hunter spirits. 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.[4] The Zuni word for berdache is *lhamana,* denoting its closeness to the spiritual mediator who brought hunting and farming together.[5] The moral of this story is that the berdache was created by the deities for a special purpose, and that this creation led to the improvement of society. The continual reenactment of this story provides a justification for the Zuni berdache in each generation.

In contrast to this, the lack of spiritual justification in a creation myth could denote a lack of tolerance for gender variation. The Pimas, unlike most of their Southwestern neighbors, did not respect a berdache status. *Wi-kovat,* their derogatory word, means "like a girl," but it does not signify a recognized social role. Pima mythology reflects this lack of acceptance, in a folk tale that explains male androgyny as due to Papago witchcraft. Knowing that the Papagos respected berdaches, the Pimas blamed such an occurrence on an alien influence.[6] While the Pimas' condemnatory attitude is unusual, it does point out the importance of spiritual explanations for the acceptance of gender variance in a culture.

Other Native American creation stories stand in sharp contrast to the Pima explanation. A good example is the account of

the Navajos, which presents women and men as equals. The Navajo origin tale is told as a story of five worlds. The first people were First Man and First Woman, who were created equally and at the same time. The first two worlds that they lived in were bleak and unhappy, so they escaped to the third world. In the third world lived two twins, Turquoise Boy and White Shell Girl, who were the first berdaches. In the Navajo language the word for berdache is *nadle,* which means "changing one" or "one who is transformed." It is applied to hermaphrodites—those who are born with the genitals of both male and female—and also to "those who pretend to be *nadle,*" who take on a social role that is distinct from either men or women.[7]

In the third world, First Man and First Woman began farming, with the help of the changing twins. One of the twins noticed some clay and, holding it in the palm of his/her hand, shaped it into the first pottery bowl. Then he/she formed a plate, a water dipper, and a pipe. The second twin observed some reeds and began to weave them, making the first basket. Together they shaped axes and grinding stones from rocks, and hoes from bone. All these new inventions made the people very happy.[8]

The message of this story is that humans are dependent for many good things on the inventiveness of *nadle.* Such individuals were present from the earliest eras of human existence, and their presence was never questioned. They were part of the natural order of the universe, with a special contribution to make.

Later on in the Navajo creation story, White Shell Girl entered the moon and became the Moon Bearer. Turquoise Boy, however, remained with the people. When First Man realized that Turquoise Boy could do all manner of women's work as well as women, all the men left the women and crossed a big river. The men hunted and planted crops. Turquoise Boy ground the corn, cooked the food, and weaved cloth for the men. Four years passed with the women and men separated, and the men were happy with the *nadle.* Later, however, the women wanted to learn how to grind corn from the *nadle,* and both the men and the women had decided that it was not good to continue living

separately. So the women crossed the river and the people were reunited.[9]

They continued living happily in the third world, until one day a great flood began. The people ran to the highest mountaintop, but the water kept rising and they all feared they would be drowned. But just in time, the ever-inventive Turquoise Boy found a large reed. They climbed upward inside the tall hollow reed, and came out at the top into the fourth world. From there, White Shell Girl brought another reed, and they climbed again to the fifth world, which is the present world of the Navajos.[10]

These stories suggest that the very survival of humanity is dependent on the inventiveness of berdaches. With such a mythological belief system, it is no wonder that the Navajos held *nadle* in high regard. The concept of the *nadle* is well formulated in the creation story. As children were educated by these stories, and all Navajos believed in them, the high status accorded to gender variation was passed down from generation to generation. Such stories also provided instructions for *nadle* themselves to live by. A spiritual explanation guaranteed a special place for a person who was considered different but not deviant.

For American Indians, the important explanations of the world are spiritual ones. In their view, there is a deeper reality than the here-and-now. The real essence of wisdom occurs when one finally gives up trying to explain events in terms of "logic" and "reality." Many confusing aspects of existence can better be explained by actions of a multiplicity of spirits. Instead of a concept of a single god, there is an awareness of "that which we do not understand." In Lakota religion, for example, the term *Wakan Tanka* is often translated as "god." But a more proper translation, according to the medicine people who taught me, is "The Great Mystery."[11]

While rationality can explain much, there are limits to human capabilities of understanding. The English language is structured to account for cause and effect. For example, English speakers say, "It is raining," with the implication that there is a cause "it" that leads to rain. Many Indian languages, on the other hand, merely note what is most accurately translated as "raining" as an observable fact. Such an approach brings a freedom to stop worrying about causes of things, and merely to

relax and accept that our human insights can go only so far. By not taking ourselves too seriously, or overinflating human importance, we can get beyond the logical world.

The emphasis of American Indian religions, then, is on the spiritual nature of all things. To understand the physical world, one must appreciate the underlying spiritual essence. Then one can begin to see that the physical is only a faint shadow, a partial reflection, of a supernatural and extrarational world. By the Indian view, everything that exists is spiritual. Every object—plants, rocks, water, air, the moon, animals, humans, the earth itself—has a spirit. The spirit of one thing (including a human) is not superior to the spirit of any other. Such a view promotes a sophisticated ecological awareness of the place that humans have in the larger environment. The function of religion is not to try to condemn or to change what exists, but to accept the realities of the world and to appreciate their contributions to life. Everything that exists has a purpose.[12]

One of the basic tenets of American Indian religion is the notion that everything in the universe is related. Nevertheless, things that exist are often seen as having a counterpart: sky and earth, plant and animal, water and fire. In all of these polarities, there exist mediators. The role of the mediator is to hold the polarities together, to keep the world from disintegrating. Polarities exist within human society also. The most important category within Indian society is gender. The notions of Woman and Man underlie much of social interaction and are comparable to the other major polarities. Women, with their nurturant qualities, are associated with the earth, while men are associated with the sky. Women gatherers and farmers deal with plants (of the earth), while men hunters deal with animals.

The mediator between the polarities of woman and man, in the American Indian religious explanation, is a being that combines the elements of both genders. This might be a combination in a physical sense, as in the case of hermaphrodites. Many Native American religions accept this phenomenon in the same way that they accept other variations from the norm. But more important is their acceptance of the idea that gender can be combined in ways other than physical hermaphroditism. The physical aspects of a thing or a person, after all, are not nearly as

important as its spirit. American Indians use the concept of a person's *spirit* in the way that other Americans use the concept of a person's *character.* Consequently, physical hermaphroditism is not necessary for the idea of gender mixing. A person's character, their spiritual essence, is the crucial thing.

THE BERDACHE'S SPIRIT

Individuals who are physically normal might have the spirit of the other sex, might range somewhere between the two sexes, or might have a spirit that is distinct from either women or men. Whatever category they fall into, they are seen as being different from men. They are accepted spiritually as "Not Man." Whichever option is chosen, Indian religions offer spiritual explanations. Among the Arapahos of the Plains, berdaches are called *haxu'xan* and are seen to be that way as a result of a supernatural gift from birds or animals. Arapaho mythology recounts the story of Nih'a'ca, the first *haxu'xan.* He pretended to be a woman and married the mountain lion, a symbol for masculinity. The myth, as recorded by ethnographer Alfred Kroeber about 1900, recounted that "These people had the natural desire to become women, and as they grew up gradually became women. They gave up the desires of men. They were married to men. They had miraculous power and could do supernatural things. For instance, it was one of them that first made an intoxicant from rainwater."[13] Besides the theme of inventiveness, similar to the Navajo creation story, the berdache role is seen as a product of a "natural desire." Berdaches "gradually became women," which underscores the notion of woman as a social category rather than as a fixed biological entity. Physical biological sex is less important in gender classification than a person's desire—one's spirit.

The myths contain no prescriptions for trying to change berdaches who are acting out their desires of the heart. Like many other cultures' myths, the Zuni origin myths simply sanction the idea that gender can be transformed independently of biological sex.[14] Indeed, myths warn of dire consequences when interference with such a transformation is attempted. Prince Al-

exander Maximilian of the German state of Wied, traveling in the northern Plains in the 1830s, heard a myth about a warrior who once tried to force a berdache to avoid women's clothing. The berdache resisted, and the warrior shot him with an arrow. Immediately the berdache disappeared, and the warrior saw only a pile of stones with his arrow in them. Since then, the story concluded, no intelligent person would try to coerce a berdache.[15] Making the point even more directly, a Mandan myth told of an Indian who tried to force *mihdacke* (berdaches) to give up their distinctive dress and status, which led the spirits to punish many people with death. After that, no Mandans interfered with berdaches.[16]

With this kind of attitude, reinforced by myth and history, the aboriginal view accepts human diversity. The creation story of the Mohave of the Colorado River Valley speaks of a time when people were not sexually differentiated. From this perspective, it is easy to accept that certain individuals might combine elements of masculinity and femininity.[17] A respected Mohave elder, speaking in the 1930s, stated this viewpoint simply: "From the very beginning of the world it was meant that there should be [berdaches], just as it was instituted that there should be shamans. They were intended for that purpose."[18]

This elder also explained that a child's tendencies to become a berdache are apparent early, by about age nine to twelve, before the child reaches puberty: "That is the time when young persons become initiated into the functions of their sex. . . . None but young people will become berdaches as a rule."[19] Many tribes have a public ceremony that acknowledges the acceptance of berdache status. A Mohave shaman related the ceremony for his tribe: "When the child was about ten years old his relatives would begin discussing his strange ways. Some of them disliked it, but the more intelligent began envisaging an initiation ceremony." The relatives prepare for the ceremony without letting the boy know of it. It is meant to take him by surprise, to be both an initiation and a test of his true inclinations. People from various settlements are invited to attend. The family wants the community to see it and become accustomed to accepting the boy as an *alyha*.

On the day of the ceremony, the shaman explained, the boy

is led into a circle: "If the boy showed a willingness to remain standing in the circle, exposed to the public eye, it was almost certain that he would go through with the ceremony. The singer, hidden behind the crowd, began singing the songs. As soon as the sound reached the boy he began to dance as women do." If the boy is unwilling to assume *alyha* status, he would refuse to dance. But if his character—his spirit—is *alyha,* "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." After the ceremony, the boy is carefully bathed and receives a woman's skirt. He is then led back to the dance ground, dressed as an *alyha,* and announces his new feminine name to the crowd. After that he would resent being called by his old male name.[20]

Among the Yuman tribes of the Southwest, the transformation is marked by a social gathering, in which the berdache prepares a meal for the friends of the family.[21] Ethnographer Ruth Underhill, doing fieldwork among the Papago Indians in the early 1930s, wrote that berdaches were common among the Papago Indians, and were usually publicly acknowledged in childhood. She recounted that a boy's parents would test him if they noticed that he preferred female pursuits. The regular pattern, mentioned by many of Underhill's Papago informants, was to build a small brush enclosure. Inside the enclosure they placed a man's bow and arrows, and also a woman's basket. At the appointed time the boy was brought to the enclosure as the adults watched from outside. The boy was told to go inside the circle of brush. Once he was inside, the adults "set fire to the enclosure. They watched what he took with him as he ran out and if it was the basketry materials, they reconciled themselves to his being a berdache."[22]

What is important to recognize in all of these practices is that the assumption of a berdache role was not forced on the boy by others. While adults might have their suspicions, it was only when the child made the proper move that he was considered a berdache. By doing woman's dancing, preparing a meal, or taking the woman's basket he was making an important symbolic gesture. Indian children were not stupid, and they knew the implications of these ceremonies beforehand. A boy in the enclosure could have left without taking anything, or could have

taken both the man's and the woman's tools. With the community standing by watching, he was well aware that his choice would mark his assumption of berdache status. Rather than being seen as an involuntary test of his reflexes, this ceremony may be interpreted as a definite statement by the child to take on the berdache role.

Indians do not see the assumption of berdache status, however, as a free will choice on the part of the boy. People felt that the boy was acting out his basic character. The Lakota shaman Lame Deer explained:

> They were not like other men, but the Great Spirit made them *winktes* and we accepted them as such. . . . We think that if a woman has two little ones growing inside her, if she is going to have twins, sometimes instead of giving birth to two babies they have formed up in her womb into just one, into a half-man/half-woman kind of being. . . . To us a man is what nature, or his dreams, make him. We accept him for what he wants to be. That's up to him.[23]

While most of the sources indicate that once a person becomes a berdache it is a lifelong status, directions from the spirits determine everything. In at least one documented case, concerning a nineteenth-century Klamath berdache named Lele'ks, he later had a supernatural experience that led him to leave the berdache role. At that time Lele'ks began dressing and acting like a man, then married women, and eventually became one of the most famous Klamath chiefs.[24] What is important is that both in assuming berdache status and in leaving it, supernatural dictate is the determining factor.

DREAMS AND VISIONS

Many tribes see the berdache role as signifying an individual's proclivities as a dreamer and a visionary. Among the Papagos, for example, these qualities are accepted as a compelling gift from the supernatural world.[25] The Yumas also believe it is connected to dreaming. They see berdachism as a result of a child's dreams at the time of puberty. A dream about a particular mountain that is associated with transformation, or of the ar-

rowweed, which they believe to be capable of changing its sex, symbolizes berdachism. By Yuma belief, a person who has a particularly acute capability for dreaming has the potential for transforming his mind. According to a Yuma elder in the 1920s, speaking about an *elxá,* "his mind was changed from male to female."[26]

A Yaqui berdache, born in northern Mexico in 1950, gained a reputation as a dreamer by the time he was nine years old. He has extremely vivid dreams, in which he takes on identities of other people or creatures. This dreaming ability is valued by his traditionalist family, who see it as a reflection of his spirituality. By the time he was twelve his position as a dreamer was formalized in the ceremony that awarded him his adult name. The translation of his name is First Star Before Light or Morning Star. It signifies the bringing of illumination. He is the precursor of light, the way to get to the light, a guide through the darkness of ignorance. He does not provide the light itself (which is one's own realization of one's spiritual nature), but he helps others find the light that is individual to their own selves. He dreams for others, spiritually healing and sorting out a person's confusion.[27]

Some Indian groups in northern California have a ceremony similar to the Papagos', in which the boy is placed in a brush enclosure that is set on fire, and then the people watch to see if he runs out with the man's tools or the woman's. Stephen Powers, a journalist who visited California Indians in 1871–72 and wrote a series of articles on them, reported this brushfire ceremony on the Round Valley reservation. He met a Yuki *i-wamusp* ("man-woman"), and learned that the Pomo word for man-woman was *dass*. Powers pursued the topic in his interviews with the residents on the reservation.

> When questioned about it the Indians always seek to laugh the matter away; but when pressed for an explanation they generally reply that they do it because they wish to do it; or else with that mystifying circumlocution peculiar to the Indian, they answer with a long rigmarole . . .[that] the spirit moves them to do it, or, as an Indian would say, that he feels a burning in his heart which tells him to do it.[28]

The "long rigmarole" that Powers was so impatient to understand captures his informants' viewpoint exactly. In providing the Indians' words, Powers unwittingly furnished the Yuki explanation, in line with their view that people's character traits were directed by spiritual forces. These forces caused "a burning in his heart" which led an individual to become a man-woman.

The wide distribution of berdachism may indicate its antiquity. The Yuki explanation for berdachism seems to have prevailed among California Indians. Yokuts explained that their berdaches, *tongochim* or *tunosim*, were not delegated to their status, but entered it "in response to an irresistible call of their natures."[29] Other California tribes simply stated that berdaches were "made that way" from birth, "were born that way," or "acted upon a dream."[30]

Among the northern Plains and related Great Lakes tribes, the idea of supernatural dictate through dreaming—the vision quest—had its highest development. The goal of the vision quest is to try to get beyond the rational world by sensory deprivation and fasting. By depriving one's body of nourishment, the brain could escape from logical thought and connect with the higher reality of the supernatural. The person doing the quest simply sits and waits for a vision. But a vision might not come easily; the person might have to wait for days.

The best way that I can describe the process is to refer to my own vision quest, which I experienced when I was living on a Lakota reservation in 1982. After a long series of prayers and blessings, the shaman who had prepared me for the ceremony took me out to an isolated area where a sweat lodge had been set up for my quest. As I walked to the spot, I worried that I might not be able to stand it. Would I be overcome by hunger? Could I tolerate the thirst? What would I do if I had to go to the toilet? The shaman told me not to worry, that a whole group of holy people would be praying and singing for me while I was on my quest.

He had me remove my clothes, symbolizing my disconnection from the material world, and crawl into the sweat lodge. Before he left me I asked him, "What do I think about?" He said, "Do not think. Just pray for spiritual guidance." After a

prayer he closed the flap tightly and I was left in total darkness. I still do not understand what happened to me during my vision quest, but during the day and a half that I was out there, I never once felt hungry or thirsty or the need to go to the toilet. What happened was an intensely personal experience that I cannot and do not wish to explain, a process of being that cannot be described in rational terms.

When the shaman came to get me at the end of my time, I actually resented having to end it. He did not need to ask if my vision quest were successful. He knew that it was even before seeing me, he explained, because he saw an eagle circling over me while I underwent the quest. He helped interpret the signs I had seen, then after more prayers and singing he led me back to the others. I felt relieved, cleansed, joyful, and serene. I had been through an experience that will be a part of my memories always.

If a vision quest could have such an effect on a person not even raised in Indian society, imagine its impact on a boy who from his earliest years had been waiting for the day when he could seek his vision. Gaining his spiritual power from his first vision, it would tell him what role to take in adult life. The vision might instruct him that he is going to be a great hunter, a craftsman, a warrior, or a shaman. Or it might tell him that he will be a berdache. Among the Lakotas, or Sioux, there are several symbols for various types of visions. A person becomes *wakan* (a sacred person) if she or he dreams of a bear, a wolf, thunder, a buffalo, a white buffalo calf, or Double Woman. Each dream results in a different gift, whether it is the power to cure illness or wounds, a promise of good hunting, or the exalted role of a *heyoka* (doing things backward).

A white buffalo calf is believed to be a berdache. If a person has a dream of the sacred Double Woman, this means that she or he will have the power to seduce men. Males who have a vision of Double Woman are presented with female tools. Taking such tools means that the male will become a berdache. The Lakota word *winkte* is composed of *win,* "woman," and *kte,* "would become."[31] A contemporary Lakota berdache explains, "To become a *winkte,* you have a medicine man put you up on the hill, to search for your vision. You can become a *winkte* if

you truly are by nature. You see a vision of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe. Sometimes it varies. A vision is like a scene in a movie."[32] Another way to become a *winkte* is to have a vision given by a *winkte* from the past.[33]

In other Plains tribes, berdache visions are often associated with a moon spirit, like Double Woman, whose changes symbolize transformation. In the Omaha language, the word for berdache is *mexoga* (also spelled *mixu-ga* or *mingu-ga*), meaning "instructed by the moon." James O. Dorsey, one of the first ethnographers to do fieldwork on the Plains in the 1880s, described a berdache vision quest in detail. He reported that *mexoga* is considered sacred, because the Moon Being takes a special interest in him. When an Omaha boy sees the Moon Being on his vision quest, the spirit holds in one hand a man's bow and arrow and in the other a woman's pack strap. "When the youth tried to grasp the bow and arrows the Moon Being crossed his hands very quickly, and if the youth was not very careful he seized the pack strap instead of the bow and arrows, thereby fixing his lot in later life. In such a case he could not help acting the woman, speaking, dressing, and working just as Indian women used to do."[34] This type of vision, conferring high status because of instruction from the Moon spirit, was also reported by ethnographers who did fieldwork among the Winnebagos, Lakotas, Assiniboine, Pawnees, Mandans, and Hidatsas.[35]

By interpreting the result of the vision as being the work of a spirit, the vision quest frees the person from feeling responsible for his transformation. The person might even claim that the change was done against his will and without his control. Such a claim does not suggest a negative attitude about berdache status, because it is common for people to claim reluctance to fulfill their spiritual duty no matter what vision appears to them. Becoming any kind of sacred person involves taking on various social responsibilities and burdens.[36]

Hidatsa men expressed this reluctance. They believed that when a man looked at a coil of sweetgrass, the female spirit could "cause his mind to weaken so that he would have no relief until he 'changed his sex.' Often a man would tell of his experiences, how everywhere he looked he would see the coiled sweetgrass and how hard he was trying to keep from changing

over." Of those who became berdaches, the other Indians would say that since he had been "claimed by a Holy Woman," nothing could be done about it. Such persons might be pitied because of the spiritual responsibilities they held, but they were treated as mysterious and holy, and were respected as benevolent people who assisted others in time of starvation.[37]

A story was told among the Lakotas in the 1880s of a boy who tried to resist following his vision from Double Woman. But according to Lakota informants "few men succeed in this effort after having taken the strap in the dream." Having rebelled against the instructions given him by the Moon Being, he committed suicide.[38] The moral of that story is that one should not resist spiritual guidance, because it will lead only to grief. In another case, an Omaha young man told of being addressed by a spirit as "daughter," whereupon he discovered that he was unconsciously using feminine styles of speech. He tried to use male speech patterns, but could not. As a result of this vision, when he returned to his people he resolved himself to dress as a woman.[39] Such stories function to justify personal peculiarities as due to a fate over which the individual has no control.

Despite the usual pattern in Indian societies of using ridicule to enforce conformity, receiving instructions from a vision inhibits others from trying to change the berdache. Ritual explanation provides a way out. It also excuses the community from worrying about the cause of that person's difference, or the feeling that it is society's duty to try to change him.[40] Native American religions, above all else, encourage a basic respect for nature. If nature makes a person different, many Indians conclude, a mere human should not undertake to counter this spiritual dictate. Someone who is "unusual" can be accommodated without being stigmatized as "abnormal." Berdachism is thus not alien or threatening; it is a reflection of spirituality.

2 *Sacred People: Berdache Mystical Power and Ceremonial Roles*

By understanding the spiritual basis of the berdache tradition, it is easier to comprehend reports written by unaware whites who observed the reverence with which other Indians treated the berdaches. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, for instance, explorer Peter Grant wrote about his time among the Ojibwas of the western Great Lakes:

> They have the greatest faith in dreams, by which they imagine that the Deity informs them of future events, [and] enjoins them certain penances. . . . I have known several instances of some of their men who, by virtue of some extraordinary dream, had been affected to such a degree as to abandon every custom characteristic of their sex and adopt the dress and manners of the women. They are never ridiculed or despised by the men on account of their new costumes, but are, on the contrary, respected as saints or beings in some degree inspired.[1]

Such feelings were very widespread among the aboriginal peoples of the New World. Even in Peru, the Spanish explorer Cieza de León reported that among the Indians of Puerto Viejo:

> In each important temple or house of worship they have a man or two, or more, depending on the idol, who go dressed in women's attire from the time they are children, and speak like them, and in manner, dress, and everything else imitate women. With these, almost like a rite and ceremony, on feast and holy days, they have carnal, foul intercourse, especially the chiefs and headmen. I know this because I have punished two. . . . The devil held such sway in this land that, not satisfied with making them fall into so great sin, he made them believe that this vice was a kind of holiness and religion.[2]

The Europeans were not only aghast, but amazed and dumbfounded as to why berdaches were considered sacred.

The holiness of the berdache has to do with Indian views that everything that exists is a reflection of the spiritual. If a person is different from the average individual, this means that the spirits must have taken particular care in creating this person. If the spirits take such care, by this reasoning, such an individual must be especially close to the spirits. Thus, among the Lakotas a *winkte* is described as *wakan,* a term that means very sacred or holy and is incorporated in the name for the Greatest Holiness, *Wakan Tanka.*[3]

In a religion like the Lakotas', berdaches are seen as magical holders of unique ritual instructions. Since they are guided by a spirit, they are not bound by normal rules of conduct. This unusualness is an indication of their sacredness. According to Alfred Bowers, who did fieldwork on the Hidatsa reservation in the 1930s, "Berdaches comprised the most active ceremonial class in the village. Their roles in ceremonies were many and exceeded those of the most distinguished tribal ceremonial leaders. There was an atmosphere of mystery about them."[4] This mystery is what makes it so difficult to get traditional Indian people to talk about berdachism. According to a Cheyenne informant, "Like the military societies, it is kind of secret, and people don't talk about it much because they want to retain the secrecy and the magic of it."[5] Nevertheless, several anthropologists have managed to publish interesting information on berdaches. One of the earliest was Matilda Coxe Stevenson, who did fieldwork with the Zunis in the 1880s and 1890s. She became close friends with a *lhamana* named We'wha, who like many other berdaches had a reputation for high intelligence. We'wha was especially conspicuous in ceremonials and well versed in religious matters, often taking a leading part in dramatizations of Zuni myths.[6] We'wha was also known as the smartest person in the pueblo. Stevenson, using the feminine pronoun form, observed about this berdache that "Owing to her bright mind and excellent memory, she was called upon . . . when a long prayer had to be repeated or a grace was to be offered over a feast. In fact she was the chief personage on many occasions" (see illustration).[7]

These remarks on dramatization and performance are interesting in that they suggest parallels with other cultures. There seems to be a tendency for effeminate males in widely separated societies, from Indonesia to the modern United States, to gravitate to the acting profession. At a young age, these boys are unusually adept at role playing and stage presentation, often before they could possibly be familiar with the reputation of the theater as a social haven for effeminate males. Some scientists have suggested that this cross-cultural tendency indicates an inborn character trait for effeminacy among a set proportion of males, which will appear in any given population.[8]

SHAMANISM

In American Indian cultures, the occupation in which acting ability is most developed is the office of the shaman. Since so much of the shaman's work centers on ceremonial mystery and magic, theatrical qualities are of great use in the shaman's performances. But the shaman is much more than an actor. His or her role consists of duties that Western society accomplishes with priests, therapists, and medical doctors. This is why shamans are sometimes referred to as "medicine men." Shamanism is not a hereditary office, but is open to any man or woman who is effective. Despite the fact that tribal peoples are generally egalitarian, the shaman has a special status.

Shamans gain their high status on the basis of how well they can relate to the spirit world. Certain individuals are seen as having this skill, just as other individuals might be better at hunting, at gathering, or at making things. Everyone has his or her own contribution to make. To survive, tribal societies have to emphasize group solidarity rather than competition. So, instead of an individual gaining status by "getting ahead" of others, the tribal person who receives the most status is the one who does the most to benefit others. By putting the group's welfare before her or his personal welfare, the shaman receives the respect of others.

Among tribal peoples the shaman is the primary person responsible for the group's welfare. Since the aboriginal view sug-

gests that everything that happens is due to the spirit world, the way to keep bad things from happening is to pay attention to spiritual concerns. Health and success can be gained by knowing the proper ceremonies to placate the spirits. As with any population, a major disaster for people in small-scale societies is bad health. According to their view that sickness is caused by a violation of the spiritual harmony of the universe, the shaman is the person to whom one turns. If a person is sick, it might be that someone violated this harmony. They might have offended a spirit by forgetting to offer prayers, or they might have shown jealousy, possessiveness, or greed. These were some of the greatest crimes of aboriginal America.

Curing is closely connected to religion. But American Indian shamans do not ignore the physical aspects of disease. They are quite skillful in setting broken bones and using medicinal herbs for healing. In fact, many substances that pharmacists use today originally derived from plants that were first utilized by Indian shamans. But beyond this, shamans understand that a basic aspect of healing involves more than techniques for repairing bodies. They realize that a more important function of health is healing the mind.[9]

I can illustrate this by giving an account of a healing ceremony that I attended on a South Dakota reservation in 1982. The ceremony, led by a traditional shaman, was called in the Lakota language *Yuwipi*.[10] It was held to help an elderly Lakota woman. Those of us who were participating entered a room that had been carefully prepared. All the windows were covered so no light could get in. After the sick woman was helped into a chair, the shaman started elaborately stringing his sacred objects around the room. As he did so, another person started playing a drum and everyone began singing. When the shaman was finished preparing this shrine, he directed me to turn off the light. After the room was plunged into complete darkness, the shaman began a prayer. Next he began to sing a trancelike song that went on a long time. Then everyone sang. After that, the shaman began a long prayer in Lakota. Then there was more drumming and singing, then more prayers, then more singing. When the last prayer was over, there was silence. Next we heard

the hoot of an owl in the room, and felt the breeze as the owl's wings flapped near our faces.

By this time the ceremony was so intense and powerful that I felt as if I had left the rational world. I had never been so moved by a religious event. At the end, when the lights came on again, no one in the room had dry eyes. It was impossible not to be affected by the supportive feeling being demonstrated by the shaman and the others, all done for the woman's health. Though no medicinal treatment had been administered to the frail elder, she seemed greatly helped and comforted by this outpouring of concern.

By working for hours beside the sick person, in intricate and exact procedures, the shaman's effort and concern is obvious. A shaman understands that the body's healing process is facilitated by the ill person's belief that someone cares and is working hard for her or his health. Empathy with suffering, in and of itself, is a powerful psychic healing motivator; an important part of health *is* spiritual. That is, if a person's spirit is improved, they will more likely reach wellness. The shaman thus helps a person get well, physically and spiritually.

Shamans are not necessarily berdaches, but because of their spiritual connection, berdaches in many cultures are often considered to be powerful shamans. Among the Navajos, *nadle* shamans are considered particularly excellent as chanters. They have special chants for curing illness and insanity, and for aiding childbirth.[11] The same talents are ascribed to *winktes* among the Lakotas. They also have good powers for love medicine, which are related to their medicine for childbirth.[12] Some have more than others, but every *winkte* has at least some sacred powers to doctor illnesses. "*Winktes* made miraculous cures when they gave medicine."[13] Cheyenne war parties almost always had a skilled berdache curer along to care for the wounded.[14] An elderly Cheyenne man remembers his grandfather telling about how he got shot in the leg, and a berdache shaman put the leg together and it never hurt after that.[15]

The Mohaves believed that female shamans were spiritually stronger than male ones, but that berdache shamans were stronger than either women or men. This was true as well (at

least before 1940) with the Klamath, the Yurok, and many California Indian groups.[16] Since they were involved with the sick, California Indian berdaches also oversaw funeral rites. This role was also true of the Timucua berdaches sketched by Le Moyne (see illustration). Among the Yokuts, they alone prepared bodies for burial and conducted the singing and dancing rites at funerals.[17] Even today on a Lakota reservation, when someone dies, a *winkte* is the first person the relatives run to for help in preparing the funeral and the wake. *Winktes* will often do the cooking at the wake.[18]

SACRED ROLES

Many times, however, berdaches are not shamans, but are the special people from whom shamans request advice. A Lakota reveals, "*Winktes* can be medicine men, but [are] usually not because they already have the power. They are *wakan*."[19] Even when they are not shamans, berdaches often (but not in every culture) have important ceremonial roles. Navajo *nadle* are often responsible for preparation and cooking of sacred food at large ceremonial gatherings.[20] A *winkte* is asked to prepare the food whenever someone wants to do a thanksgiving ceremony.[21]

Among the Plains tribes, early ethnographic reports stated that it was a berdache who was responsible for blessing the tree used for the Sun Dance ceremony, the chief religious rite of Plains culture.[22] While I had read of this practice, I would not have predicted that I would experience it for myself. A month after my arrival on a Lakota reservation, the shaman who directed my learning was preparing a Sun Dance. When it came time to cut down a tree for the Sun Dance pole, he gave the axe to the *winkte* Terry Calling Eagle. Once the tree was felled, the people carried it to the middle of the dance grounds. Brightly colored pieces of cloth were tied to the upper branches. When the pole was fully prepared, emotions peaked as it was brought into place to be set up. The participants placed the lower end of the trunk next to a hole dug for the purpose. Then all action came to a stop. The shaman turned to Terry, who began to recite a prayer in Lakota. He was praying just as I had read in docu-

ments from the nineteenth century. But these are traditionalist people who have not received their ideas about their culture from an anthropology book. Their behavior represents an unbroken cultural tradition passed down through the generations. The berdache's role is set by tradition as much as the rest of the ceremony. It was no accident that Terry had been asked to bless the Sun Dance pole; this was the proper way of assuring a successful ritual. After he completed his prayer, the hands of the participants seemed to barely touch the pole, yet it shot up into the sky erect. Terry pushed dirt into the hole in which the tree trunk now stood so majestically. It was a beautiful sight, as everyone stood transfixed by the gently waving cloths on the branches above our heads. This part of the ceremony completed, there was a silent retreat before the dance itself would begin.

In a number of ceremonial instances, the role of the berdache was integrated into the procedure. There was a place for the special contributions of the berdache in the society generally, as represented ritually by his special role in the ceremonies. People would try to gain the spiritual assistance of a berdache in all sorts of matters, from the grandness of the Sun Dance to the mundaneness of minor ritual behavior. Among the Potawatomi, women normally groomed the men's hair before they left on a hunt. But if a berdache did this, then it would provide a special spiritual advantage and protection for the hunter.[23]

Among the Lakotas, a berdache can offer a boy a sacred *winkte* name. Having such a name provides spiritual protection for the male child and helps to insure good health and a long life. The boy's father goes to the winkte and flirts with him sexually. If he favors the father, the berdache will decide on a secret name, which is invariably erotic.[24] A *winkte* can do no more than four naming ceremonies per year. The *winkte* begins to prepare himself for a naming ceremony by fasting and undertaking a vision quest, to gain some insight into the child's future. The *winkte* must sacrifice to be fully sincere, and will work with the boy and his family for the entire year, making spiritual preparations and offering close guidance to the boy. After the ceremony is over, it is the *winkte*'s responsibility to help look after that child for life. He makes a medicine bag for

the child to carry with him always. Inside are some sacred objects that are closely associated with the *winkte*.[25]

This ceremony ties together the berdache with a boy, and this association continues in a way that is not unlike the institution of the godparent. The Lakota shaman Lame Deer remarked: "The secret name a *winkte* gave to a child was believed to be especially powerful and effective. . . . to bring its bearer luck and long life. In the old days it was worth a fine horse—at the least. The *winkte* told me that these names are very sexy, even funny, very outspoken names. You don't let a stranger know them; he would kid you about it. Having a *winkte* name could make a man famous. Sitting Bull, Black Elk, even Crazy Horse had secret *winkte* names."[26]

This power for ensuring luck and long life extended to the berdache himself. They were always believed to live longer than average men.[27] If they were not warriors, they obviously had a better chance of living longer, but even when they were confronted with a threat they were able to survive. The idea of luck and power for berdaches is a common theme in many tribal legends. In a Hidatsa oral history recorded in the 1930s, concerning a famous nineteenth-century warrior named Four Bears, one story recounted how Four Bears once made the mistake of attacking an Assiniboine Sioux berdache: "But the berdache was brave, saying 'You can't kill me for I am holy. I will strike coups on you with my digging stick.'" Then the berdache chanted a magical song and began to chase the warriors. They were afraid of the special power of the berdache so they ran. But Four Bears shot an arrow at the berdache, and though it hit the berdache it did not penetrate the skin. They realized that the berdache had great supernatural powers. Since Four Bears had been successful in other ventures up to that point and did not want to spoil his luck, he canceled his entire raiding party. As the story was told, the Indians concluded, "Four Bears used good judgment, for it was hard to kill a berdache since they were holy."[28] What is interesting in this story as it had been passed down for a century is the message that people should not bother berdaches. The fact that a culture hero like Four Bears learned this lesson, and could admit his mistake, was a clear example for others to follow. Such stories functioned as educational parables to teach people respect for berdaches.

RESPECT, FEAR, AND RIDICULE

By this time the skeptical reader may be suspecting that only the positive side of berdachism is being told. Surely attitudes could not be that supportive. Indeed, some aboriginal American cultures did not recognize berdaches as a respected status (for example, the Iroquois, Apaches, Pimas, and Comanches), and in others there existed a range of attitudes. Even in the societies that have been the focus of this study, there are periodic references to berdaches which seem to denote some negativism. Most of these derogatory statements are a result of the influence of white people and their Christian religion. Some anthropologists have been less than clear about recognizing these acculturative influences, and instead have blithely attributed derogatory statements to a supposed aboriginal heritage. Also, some anthropologists themselves have shown prejudicial attitudes toward the berdache.

Nevertheless, when all of these influences are accounted for, there still are some statements in the literature where Indians ridicule or joke about berdaches. To an outsider, this implies a lack of respect for the berdache. Unfortunately, when ethnographers have noted these statements, they rarely make it clear who is doing the talking and what their relationship is to the berdache. One of the most explicit statements of public taunting of a berdache was recorded by Ruth Landes among the Santees. The *winkta* was subjected to persistent teasing. Yet Landes makes it clear that this teasing was done by his cousins. In many Indian societies, there are certain relatives who have a joking relationship with one another. Joking relatives are properly maligned in public; indeed they expect it and might think something is wrong in its absence.[29]

When I was living on the Eastern Cherokee reservation in 1973–74, after a few months a man my age to whom I became closest began a joking relationship with me. The joking insults between us sometimes flew nonstop, and went to unrelenting and merciless levels. To an outsider it might seem as if we were intense rivals. At times it even became too much for me, and I had to back off, but when that happened he was puzzled at my reactions. We were very close friends, and the taunting was simply a mark of our close friendship and of his accepting me

into his family. Anyone who has lived with Indian people knows that once you are accepted into the group, joking and kidding abound. It is part of the glue that holds the society together.

Joking relationships often involve sexual themes, so with a berdache it is obvious that the taunting would focus on homosexuality. In a perceptive essay David Greenberg has concluded that much of this "ridicule" noted by white observers was in fact nothing more than joking relationships between relatives. There is no reason to believe, Greenberg suggests, that this taunting denoted a rejection of homosexuality, or that berdaches would have been teased any less if their sexual partners were women instead of men.[30]

Moreover, Greenberg notes, the ridicule may have been more directed at the berdache's prestige than at his sexuality or character differences. Persons of respect and prestige are more subject to ridicule than anyone else. While this gossipy aspect of Indian society can be frustrating to someone who takes the initiative, it does function to preserve a basic egalitarianism by taking potentially pretentious persons and reminding them that they had better not overestimate their self-importance. It is one among many mechanisms that Indians use to inhibit social stratification.[31]

It is in this context that I later understood one of my earliest fieldwork experiences on the northern Plains. When I first began doing research on the Omaha reservation I interviewed two Omaha men in their twenties, and I asked them to define *mexoga*. They laughed and said it was "like a faggot." Their joking manner at first led me to believe that they were typical homophobes. But after seeing that I was approaching the topic in a serious manner, they went on to say: "Indians accept it, and don't condemn it like white people do. I don't care what reservation you go to, you always find at least one among every group of Indians."[32] It soon became obvious that these men simply accepted it as part of life, nothing to get upset about. In fact, they later took me to meet a *mexoga*, and they treated him in a most respectful manner. Another Omaha man refers to a *mexoga*, saying "People leave him alone and don't tease him. He is an oddball, but that is his right. We respect a man for what he is."[33]

While there might be joking or ridicule, it never went beyond that. The literature does not show instances where a berdache was physically attacked because of his differences. As Terry Calling Eagle states, "*Winktes* are not hurt, because if someone did something bad happens to them."[34] Again, it is the spiritual element that protects the berdache.

This spirituality can also provoke fear, and that in itself leads to ambivalent feelings about berdaches in some tribes. An early twentieth-century Klamath berdache shaman named White Cindy, referred to by tribesmen as "she," outrivaled the chief in power. Indians told of their fear of her shamanistic power, as when she willed that a certain tree be struck by lightning, and it was struck. Many Indians were afraid of her, because when angry at someone she threatened to bring a curse on them. Yet, the Klamaths respected her, and she was not scorned but was generally well liked.[35]

Since berdaches were seen as possessed of unique ritual instructions secured directly from the spirit world, their conduct was often mysterious. Among the Hidatsas, berdaches surrounded themselves with many individual rules of conduct for people in contact with them. As with outstanding shamans surrounded by similar kinds of rules, people tended to fear and respect the berdaches, and this fear made for a nervousness that was sometimes alleviated by joking about it. People's ambivalent reactions were thus a reflection of the unique and special mysterious supernatural powers of the berdache.[36] Fear and respect is even more a theme in Lakota culture. A Lakota shaman sums up the ambivalence by saying, "Winktes were both joked about and respected at the same time."[37]

DOUBLE VISION AND PROPHESY

The berdache receives respect partly as a result of being a mediator. Somewhere between the status of women and men, berdaches not only mediate between the sexes but between the psychic and the physical—between the spirit and the flesh. Since they mix the characteristics of both men and women, they possess the vision of both. They have double vision, with the ability

to see more clearly than a single gender perspective can provide. This is why they are often referred to as "seer," one whose eyes can see beyond the blinders that restrict the average person. Viewing things from outside the usual perspective, they are able to achieve a creative and objective viewpoint that is seldom available to ordinary people. By the Indian view, someone who is different offers advantages to society precisely because she or he is freed from the restrictions of the usual. It is a different window from which to view the world.[38]

With this different perspective, this double vision, berdaches see themselves as unique. Jerry Baldy, a Hupa, expresses this idea about his childhood: "I knew I was different, being so attracted to men and being effeminate, but there was something else different about me beyond all that. I always wanted to explore the unknown."[39] Likewise, Michael One Feather, a Lakota *winkte,* specifies his differentness in growing up: "I always knew I had a different concept from what everybody else had. Of things, of life; how I saw things. Most people didn't see the way I saw. What I would call a way of looking at things. My ideas were always spectacular—overshooting, you know, and overachieving. I always had to do something more, to do it my way, based on my different view."[40]

Since they have such vision, many cultures hold that berdaches can also see into the future. As a consequence, they are respected as prophets. Winnebago berdaches were noted for their ability to foretell future events.[41] A Lakota berdache explains that a shaman helped to interpret his dreams: "He respected me, and said I could foretell the future. Since then I have often predicted things that would happen. For example, one time I had a feeling that a specific relative would die, and then later I found out that that relative did die suddenly with no warning right at the time I was having my vision. People realize that I am a seer."[42]

In 1971 the Sioux shaman Lame Deer interviewed a berdache: "He told me that a *winkte* has a gift of prophesy and that he himself could predict the weather. . . . He told a woman she would live to be eighty years old, and she gave him a fine pair of moccasins for that. He told me that if nature puts a burden on a man by making him different, it also gives him a power."[43]

It is this power, based on the spiritual origins of berdachism and in the context of ceremonial leadership, in which the respected status of the berdache is rooted. Proceeding from the view that a person's different character is a reflection of her or his closeness to the spiritual, berdaches are often associated with shamanism and sacredness. Such spiritual abilities mean that berdaches may take on specific ceremonial tasks that are recognized as specifically their own. Whether in blessing ceremonies, providing lucky names, offering spiritual protection, or predicting the future, berdaches are both respected and feared for their qualities of strength and power. They utilize their strength to be of special benefit to others, in particular to their own family.

3 *Family Matters: The Economic and Social Position of the Berdache*

A French explorer in the upper Mississippi Valley in the 1680s described berdaches as male Indians who are "Batchelours to their dying day, and never appear either at hunting or in warlike expeditions, as being either lunatick or sickly: But at the same time they are as much esteem'd as the bravest and hailest men in the country."[1] How is it that berdaches could be so highly esteemed without fulfilling a man's role? How could they fit into the family structure while remaining bachelors? Why might they be seen as "lunatick or sickly" and still be respected?

While the spiritual explanation of berdachism provides an important justification for acceptability, a supportive family structure allows berdaches to be raised as proud and productive members of society. American Indian societies are kin-based, so most of a berdache's personal interactions take place with relatives. The extended family and the clan serve many of the functions that governmental institutions provide in a society that is state-based. Because of the way berdaches are raised and the economic role they fulfill, many kinship systems provide a secure place for them.

The major factor affecting the role of the berdache within the family is the notion that the berdache is taking the role because of spiritual guidance. According to a Lakota traditionalist, it is because of directions from a spirit that "*Winktes* had to assume the role, because if they did not, something bad would happen to them or their family or their tribe."[2] This belief effectively restrained parents from trying to change a child who was showing berdachelike behavior.

On the other hand, a family might try to encourage one of their youngsters to take on a berdache role. In some cultures

berdaches are known to be from specific prominent clans. A few societies supposedly restricted berdache status to such clans.[3] More commonly, berdaches may come from any family, but it is sometimes said that a certain family will have a tradition of having several berdaches in their family line.[4] A Lakota berdache remembers that when he was about twenty years old his grandparents told him that one male in every generation of the family was a *winkte,* so they accepted it on those terms. The elders told him stories about several *winktes* in his family history who were chosen to do ceremonials in association with a shaman.[5] A family might have a special reputation for having gifted children, one of whom might be a berdache. For example, a famous Omaha *mexoga* had a brother who was a shaman. People told me about both of them: "That whole family was classified." When I asked what they meant, they explained that the family was prominent in the tribe and had special respected roles.[6] Having a berdache for a child is similar to having a shaman in the family; both are sacred.

ASSIGNED GENDER IN CHILDHOOD

It is unclear to what extent parents choose to raise a boy as a berdache. In some cases there does appear to be parental direction. Among the Aleut and Kodiak Islanders in southern Alaska, for example, a Russian explorer in 1812 described berdaches, called *shopan* or *achnucek,* as respected shamans: "A Koniag who has an Achnucek instead of a wife is regarded as lucky. A father or a mother design a son for an Achnucek from his infancy, if he seems to them to resemble a girl."[7] Kodiak parents would select their most handsome and promising boy to raise as feminine. His hair was styled like a woman's, he was dressed in women's clothing, and any facial hair was carefully plucked out. At the age of ten to fifteen years, he would be married to a wealthy man. The husband regarded his boy-wife as a major social accomplishment, and the boy's family benefited from association with their new wealthy in-law. Since the boy was treated with great respect, this practice seemed to provide a no-lose situation for easy social mobility among Aleut and Kodiak

families. It is thus not surprising that early observers reported the pride of the parents in having such a son, and the frequent appearance of berdaches.[8]

Likewise, a Spanish explorer among the Lache Indians of Colombia, South America, reported:

> It was a law among them that if a woman bore five consecutive male children, without giving birth to a female, they could make a female of one of the sons when he reached the age of twelve—that is to say, they could rear him as a woman and teach him the habits of a woman, bringing him up in that wise. In their bodily form and manners they appeared so perfectly to be women that no one who beheld them could distinguish them from the others, and these were known as *cusmos* and they performed womanly tasks with the strength of men, as a result of which, when they had attained the proper age, they were given in wedlock as women. And indeed the Laches preferred them to true women, whereby it follows that the abomination of sodomy was freely permitted.[9]

In California, Spanish priests writing in the 1820s implied that a similar practice existed among the Luiseño and Gabrielino Indians. One wrote that the chiefs greatly valued berdaches as auxiliary wives. While still young, berdaches "were selected and instructed as they increased in years in all the duties of the women—in their mode of dress, of walking, and dancing; so that in almost every particular, they resembled females."[10]

What is interesting in these references is the implication for gender flexibility. But we should not let these sources imply that berdache status would be imposed on any young boy against his will. Indian children generally have wide latitude to live where they are comfortable, and in a manner that is compatible with their inclinations. I have observed instances, in several tribes, where a child decides to live in a different household. Their wishes are respected, and no one tries to coerce them. Children are allowed to live where and how they wish.

If children feel manipulated, in a direction other than the one they are inclined to take, they refuse to cooperate. Refusal is interpreted as a reflection of the child's "spirit." The more likely pattern with the youngsters is that such boys as are "chosen" by families to be raised as berdaches would already have evidenced an inclination for nonmasculine behavior. A Tewa boy nick-

named Missy was allowed to develop in this role beginning when he was nine years old. Yet, even before then, according to older people in his pueblo, "There had never been any doubt in anyone's mind, who remembered him at six years old, as to where he would be heading." He had by that age begun to act nonmasculinely, and his mother let him wear his sister's dresses when he asked for them.[11]

In a reference that may denote a similar practice, a pueblo berdache now in his sixties remembers that when he was six years old his family told him that he would become a "substitute woman," and that they were not going to raise him as an ordinary man but as someone special. They stated this simply and as a matter of fact, based on their observations of his character. The boy accepted it in the same spirit. He feels special, as an especially chosen one. He values his specialness, and is happy in his secure position in the Pueblo traditional community.[12]

AVERSION TO MASCULINITY

The variation of the family origins of berdachism is evidenced by a Lakota man's statement: "*Winktes* come from families where they are raised with lots of sisters and no brothers. They come from different ways—it could be how they are brought up."[13] Perhaps, it has been suggested, berdachism is related to cultural expectations of masculinity. Some anthropologists see berdaches as boys who in childhood have a strong aversion to the ultramasculine male role. Many Indian societies, especially those of the nineteenth-century Plains, placed extreme pressure on males to achieve individual prestige through warfare. Boys had to be prepared for the warrior role from early childhood, to learn toughness and physical endurance. They were expected to take life-threatening chances. The mechanism in Plains culture for conditioning boys to face pain and death was through extremely rough team games. Even young boys were prepared for warfare through the "Fire-throwing Game," in which boys struck each other with burning sticks. A variation on the game involved throwing at each other mud balls with live coals in the middle. The object for another such game, called "Swing-

kicking," was kicking those on the other team in the face until they bled.[14]

It was not only on the Plains that extreme demands were placed on boys to compete in brutal games of physical competition. By the time they reached their late teens boys were participating in both the hunt and the fight. Mohave males, for example, were expected to be exceptionally warlike and to participate in raids. Cowards were despised. Mohave men, like men in many tribes, prized bravery above most other virtues. Yet despite these values, no demands for demonstrations of bravery were placed on berdaches. *Alyha* were known as "rather peaceful persons" and were respected as such. While bravery was valued, power obtained in a dream was even more highly prized. The Mohave explanation was spiritual; berdaches, after all, had received their instructions from a vision.

Taking a Western perspective, ethnographer George Devereux considered the possibility that such aggressive masculinity pressures might have had something to do with the inclination of a "faint-hearted boy" to opt out of the system by becoming a berdache.[15] The problem with this interpretation is that it is not sufficient in itself. It might have prompted some boys in warlike cultures of the Plains, but if this interpretation is correct, why do we not find berdaches in all warlike tribes? Among tribes that value some of the most aggressive male roles, like the Comanche or the Iroquois, references to berdaches are notably absent. And, more important, why does a berdache tradition exist in native cultures that are not warlike? There is no simple correlation between aggressive male roles and berdachism.[16]

Another problem is that this explanation lends itself to a theory of causation by "overmothering." Using Freudian terminology, Donald Forgey concluded that "Overmothering produced a child neurotically anxious about his own masculinity. . . . A 'mama's boy'—when finally confronted with the period in which he is expected to adopt the ultramasculine, aggressively individualistic and often dangerous role of the adult male—might instead identify with the principal source of his childhood dependency and protection—his mother." Forgey's view that berdachism is a "flight from masculinity," and his use

of terms like "neurotically anxious" are merely Freudian value judgments.[17] Berdaches seem anything but neurotic, and their peaceful inclinations would be honored in many gentler cultures. Furthermore, a boy's relation with his mother has been shown not to be the determining factor in gender variance in Anglo-American society. The basic propositions of the thesis have been rejected by most psychologists.[18]

INBORN CHARACTER AND CHILDHOOD ACTIVITIES

Rather than being seen as due to outside causes like overmothering or a "flight" from masculinity, the main emphasis of American Indian explanations is that berdachism is a reflection of the child's individual character. This recognition of an inborn character is at the heart of the Indian spiritual explanation. For example, among the Navajos, a people who place great value on individual freedom, becoming a *nadle* is considered to be solely a reflection of the basic nature of the individual child. Parents would not try to impose such a role on a child, without the child's initiative.[19]

The Zapotec Indians of Oaxaca, Mexico, would never consider that the berdache has chosen to live as he does, because the idea that someone could freely choose her or his character is as ludicrous to the Zapotecs as the idea that someone could freely choose eye color. They defend the right of *ira' muxe* to their different gender and sexual roles simply because "God made them that way." Both characteristics are accepted as integral to the character of berdaches.[20] It is this emphasis on a person's character, or "spirit," that is one of the most important elements of berdachism.

Indians claim that such a future role is easily observed by families. A Lakota traditionalist says, "It is obvious from infancy that one is a *winkte*. He is a beautiful boy, and the sound of his voice is effeminate. It is inborn. The mother realizes this soon, and allows the boy to do feminine things (how to prepare meat and other foods). They all end up being homosexual."[21] Tewa Indians claim that a *kwih-doh* child's nature of doing things

in his own special way nearly always begins to show by about age three to five. Only after then will such a child be singled out as special.[22] A Hupa berdache recalls, "I was real feminine as a child, from as early as I can remember. Noticing how I liked to do cooking and cleaning, my grandmother said I would grow up as a woman. Within the family, Indians believe you can be whatever you choose."[23]

Descriptions by anthropologists of preberdache children support this viewpoint. Margaret Mead, writing about a boy who later became a berdache, said that even as a small boy he showed "marked feminine physical traits."[24] In the 1910s Elsie Clews Parsons knew three adult berdaches at Zuni, but also a six-year-old boy whom she felt was likely to become a berdache. She wrote about him, "His features are unusually fine and delicate. . . . Whenever I saw him playing about he was with a girl."[25]

Among the Crows in the 1850s Edwin Denig remarked about the numerous "berdeches" who, as young children, "cannot be brought to join in any of the work or play of the boys, but on the contrary associate entirely with the girls. . . . When arrived at the age of 12 or 14, and his habits are formed, the parents clothe him in a girl's dress."[26] Half a century later, S. C. Simms met a Crow berdache who was "almost gigantic in stature, but was decidedly effeminate in voice and manner. I was told that, when very young, these persons manifested a decided preference for things pertaining to female duties." Even if parents tried to invite such children to take a standard male role, they invariably resisted.[27] It was more a matter of the family adjusting to the child than vice versa.

The consistency of reports from various culture areas over the centuries is amazing. Even as early as 1702, a French explorer who lived for four years among the Illinois Indians noted that berdaches were known "from their childhood, when they are seen frequently picking up the spade, the spindle, the axe [women's tools], but making no use of the bow and arrows, as all the other small boys do."[28] Among groups like the Papagos, who designed a brushfire test for a berdache, it was only after a family noticed that "a boy liked female pursuits" that he was put through the test.[29] A modern Indian of the Southwest in the

1970s indicated that throughout his life he had "no interest in being a male, in taking over aspects of male roles, or in daydreaming of pleasurably masculine experiences." He remembered that he preferred playing with girls and in games played only by girls. While schoolteachers had forced him to participate in boys' games, he did this unwillingly. He was interested in girls' roles from his earliest memories.[30] Faced with masculinizing pressures, it is not surprising that some boys who were nonmasculine in their disposition would avoid rough and brutal play, and might instead seek the gentler play of girls. It is this characteristic that is most commonly noted about the childhood of berdaches.

While the published literature does not suggest it, my own interviewing turned up a pattern that is more individual and unique than strictly feminine. A Lakota *winkte* remembers his childhood, being raised by his grandparents on the reservation, as unlike other children's:

> I was different. I never played with the boys. I played with the girls a little, or off in my own little world. There were other things I had to do besides play. I did drawings and things. I hung around my grandparents a lot. My grandfather taught me the traditions, and my grandmother taught me how to sew and cook. I was the only child there and they basically responded to my interests. I loved things like beadwork. I was mostly involved in doing artistic things. It isolated me from the other kids, so I took a liking to it. I did all the isolating things. You do beadwork and you're not bothered with other kids.[31]

Likewise, a Hupa berdache remembers, "I was always into something else, things that were never expected of me. I did what I wanted to do, and I liked that."[32]

This pattern of uniqueness was also observed by the family of a Yaqui berdache, who characterized him as having always been more androgynous than feminine. This is a distinction that white observers, used to thinking in either-or opposites, are likely to miss. By the time he was eight or nine years old he manifested extreme noncompetitiveness and lived with a cooperative approach to life. He had an unusual proclivity for dreams. His family certainly recognized that he was not typical, but rather than look down on him they valued and understood

his uniqueness. According to his cousin, who was raised with the berdache, the boy lived as if he had some higher understanding of life.

> He is a very wise old young man. He can draw out of people their feelings. One time we kids got down on him for not being typically masculine, but my Great Aunt, who is the clan matriarch, came down on us *real* strongly. She said it was part of his character and we should respect him. After that, we protected him when he was around *mestizos* [those of mixed indigenous and European heritage]. They were typically machismo, but we did not let anyone trouble him. I have really learned to value him. His being my cousin made me question the homophobia in society, similar to my great aunt's leadership with questioning women's roles.[33]

This tendency for a family to feel protective toward a berdache member has also been observed among the Hopi. In 1978 Richard Grant, an ethnographer, met a fifteen-year-old Hopi boy whom he described as quite androgynous. He wrote that in the boy's family "everyone manifests a special kind of protective attitude toward him." Four years later, at a ceremonial dance, Grant began to chat casually with the young man after not having seen him for a while. At that point, Grant wrote in his fieldnotes, other Hopis "sort of moved in around him and I had a distinct impression of threat coming from them. It was very clear that they were strongly committed to protecting him. So I backed off. . . . I was able to continue observing, and I noted that his companions continuously formed a protective ring around him while he, in his turn, was quite flagrant in his behavior (what we would call a real 'queen')."[34]

Grant described the young man's speech patterns as part of this flagrancy, saying "He consistently uses 'female talk' forms in his speech. This is especially obvious in the frequent tongue smack (a kind of click formed by the middle of the tongue against the soft palate). Also, his inflection pattern is definitely female speech."[35] This use of women's speech patterns is often mentioned in the sources. In many Native American languages, female and male styles of speech are distinct, in some cases being practically different dialects. Elsie Clews Parsons saw this at

Zuni, where she noticed that a boy was using "the expressions of a girl, their exclamations and turns of speech."[36]

This female speaking style also carried over into singing events, a popular Indian form of entertainment. A nineteenth-century observer at a Navajo night singing reported that the *nadles* sang in falsetto.[37] Hupas today still have such singing roles for berdaches.[38] Even though the Cherokees did not have a recognized berdache status, I remember quite clearly how popular a male falsetto singer was at a 1973 traditional Cherokee songfest on the North Carolina reservation. He was from Oklahoma, quite openly effeminate, and without a doubt the star of the singing. While his sexuality was never mentioned, Indians of all ages were fawning over him the way elderly women do for Liberace or youth in the United States have done over androgynous rock stars like Little Richard, Michael Jackson, and Boy George.[39] Even today on the Crow reservation a *badé* will go for "Forty Nines" singings, in which the young people get together after ceremonies to sing love songs. He takes a leading role in these singings, and always stands with the women and sings a woman's role. People appreciate his singing, so he is always invited.[40]

Western psychiatrists seem most interested in finding a "cause" that will supposedly explain why a boy becomes effeminate. The motivating factor in much of this research seems to be to find a way to prevent such behavior. American Indians, in contrast, seem most interested in the social position of the berdache. Whether taking an active role in encouraging a child to become a berdache, or accepting it as a reflection of an innate spiritual character, Indian parents have no motive to discourage such a child. Seeing such gender variation as an acknowledged reality, they provide a recognized social alternative and simply admit that this is the way their son will be.

Families take a role in accepting a child as a berdache even today. One Lakota *winkte* now in his twenties remembers that when he was about twelve years old, "My mother explained *winkte* to me, and asked me if I was going to be that way. By then I had decided I was the way I was, so she never tried to change me since then."[41] Another says, "*Winktes* have to be born

that way. People know that a person will become a *winkte* very early in his life. About age twelve, parents will take him to a ceremony to communicate with past *winktes* who had power, to verify if it is just a phase or a permanent thing for his lifetime. If the proper vision takes place, and communication with a past *winkte* is established, then everyone accepts him as a *winkte*."[42]

BERDACHES AS FAMILY MEMBERS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

The family of a berdache is more interested in accepting the contribution the child can offer to the family than in finding a supposed cause. Not being stigmatized and alienated, a berdache can offer positive advantages to a family. I stayed with an elderly berdache on the Omaha reservation, in his scrupulously clean house. Even though he lives by himself, he often has members of his extended family over for dinner. They bring their children, who appreciate the care and attention he shows to them. He has provided a home for most of his teenage nephews when their parents' house has gotten too crowded, and he has assisted various relatives financially with school expenses and helped them get established in a new job.

Jerry Baldy, a berdache on the Hupa reservation, says, "You live your life around your family. My aunt says, 'I'm counting on you.' What she means is that someone like me has a special responsibility to help care for the elders."[43] Likewise, a Navajo woman whose uncle was a well respected *nadle* healer says:

> They are seen as very compassionate people, who care for their family a lot and help people. That's why they are healers. *Nadles* are also seen as being great with children, real Pied Pipers. Children love *nadles,* so parents are pleased if a *nadle* takes an interest in their child. One that I know is now a principal of a school on the reservation. . . . *Nadle* are not seen as an abstract group, like 'gay people,' but as a specific person, like 'my relative so-and-so.' People who help their family a lot are considered valuable members of the community."[44]

Thus it is in the context of individual family relations that much of the high status of berdaches must be evaluated. When

family members know that one of their relatives is this type of person, and when they have positive cultural reinforcements that account for such individuals, then barriers are not placed inside the family. Without interference from outside religious groups claiming that there is something wrong with parents who raise such a child, unprejudiced family love can exert itself.

Berdaches are recognized as having a special talent in educating children. Part of this recognition is due to the berdache's reputation for high intelligence. A Kwakiutl chief in the 1930s said that a berdache he knew was the wisest man in the community: "All the stories from the beginning of the world he knows, and he makes songs."[45] Upon visiting the Yuki and Pomo reservation at Round Valley, California, in 1871–72, Stephen Powers met a Yuki *i-wa-musp* ("man-woman") and a Pomo *dass:* "They are set apart as a kind of order of priests or teachers. . . . [They] devote themselves to the instruction of the young by the narration of legends and moral tales . . . spending the whole time in rehearsing the tribal history in a sing-song monotone to all who choose to listen."[46]

Berdaches in the twentieth century have continued to be reputed as effective teachers of the young. In the 1930s ethnographer Ruth Landes met a Potawatomi young man who was a teacher in the primary school on the Kansas reservation. He was admired by the other Indians because "he loved to care for the children, to advise their parents, and to scrub the schoolhouse till it shone."[47] Landes's description could be used word for word to describe a *winkte* I met in 1982. He is recognized as the best teacher in the elementary school on his reservation. A very spiritual person, active in traditional Lakota religion, his great interest is his teaching. He loves children, and seems more animated when discussing his students than any other topic. He wants to have his own children someday. That will undoubtedly be possible through adoption.

A berdache can easily take a parental role, since adoption of children is commonly accepted in most American Indian societies. Adoption may involve orphaned children or children from overcrowded families. The ease with which children above their fifth year move from one household to another, often to distant kin and on their own initiative, is remarkable.

When children were captured in warfare they were almost always adopted as a family member by someone related to their captor. It was very seldom that children would be left to starve if their parents were killed. Believing that the essence of a person is the spiritual character rather than the physical body, Indian shamans of many tribes commonly invoked a ceremony that incorporated the spirit of a departed relative into the body of the captured child. By this means adopted individuals were accepted into the family as a full-fledged member, without any stigma that they were alien or not "really" a member of the family. This ease of adoption is also extended to non-Indians, which is why so many white captive children on the frontier became socialized as Indians and refused to return to white society if later recaptured.[48] In this context it was quite common for berdaches to adopt older children and adolescents, either as orphans or as captives.[49]

Even today berdaches are known to be very good with children. Terry Calling Eagle, a Lakota berdache, states, "I love children, and I used to worry that I would be alone without children. The Spirit said he would provide some. Later, some kids of drunks who did not care for them were brought to me by neighbors. The kids began spending more and more time here, so finally the parents asked me to adopt them."[50] After those children were raised, Terry was asked to adopt others. In all, he has raised seven orphan children, one of whom was living with him when I was there. This boy, a typical masculine seventeen-year-old, interacts comfortably with his *winkte* parent. After having been physically abused as a young child by alcoholic parents, he feels grateful for the stable, supportive atmosphere in his adoptive home. The two of them live in a close extended family household, along with Terry's mother, sister, and nephew. A male cousin also lives with them off and on, when he does not have an off-reservation job, and his grandmother's sister stays there part of the time. During the summer I was living there, various other relatives were coming and going in a rather bewildering pattern of changing residence. In this Lakota family at least, people seem almost as nomadic as they were in their days on horseback. In the midst of all this

hubbub, however, Terry and his mother are the central persons of the household, looked up to by all.

Thus, an individual who in Western culture would be considered a misfit, an embarrassment to his family who would likely be thrown out of the household, is instead made central to the family. Since other relatives do not feel threatened, family disunity and conflict are avoided. The berdache is not expected to suppress his tendency for feminine behavior. Neither does he internalize a low self-image. He thus avoids the tendency of those considered deviant in Western culture to engage in self-destructive behavior. Berdaches who value their traditions do not tend to be alcoholic or suicidal, even in tribes where such problems are common. They are too valued by their families. In Native American lifestyles, seldom is anything thrown away unused—including people.[51] A Crow traditionalist says, "We don't waste people, the way white society does. Every person has their gift."[52]

ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE BERDACHE

Instead of being discarded, the unique energies of the berdache are put into productive labor, work of benefit to the family. As already noted, it is an interest in female pursuits that often indicates a developing berdache. For example, among the Yurok the first sign of a *wergern* proclivity is when a boy begins to show interest in weaving baskets and grinding acorn meal, as women do.[53] Or a boy might, as among the Maricopa and Yuma, enjoy playing with women's tools.[54] In most aboriginal Indian economies, there were two divisions of work roles. Men hunted and participated in warfare; while women did most of the work near the village. If a boy did not go out on the hunt or the warpath, and stayed near home, about the only thing to do besides craftswork was women's work. Boys who had from childhood stayed around the house and preferred women's work were expected to make a work decision by puberty.

Matilda Coxe Stevenson reported about the Zuni in 1901: "If they are to continue woman's work they must adopt woman's

dress; and though the women of the family joke the fellow they are inclined to look upon him with favor, since it means that he will remain a member of the household and do almost double the work of a woman." Sometimes the men grumbled about the boy assuming berdache status, but this had more to do with the fact that they were losing a male from the men's work group, than with disrespect of the berdache role. Among the women's work group, female family members would take time off from their work, due to menstruation, pregnancy, or nursing of a baby. But the berdache "is ever ready for service, and is expected to perform the hardest labors of the female department." They were known as the finest potters and weavers in the pueblo. Stevenson noted that the Zuni *lhamana* named We'wha "most willingly took the harder work from others of the family. She would not permit idleness; all had to labor or receive an upbraiding from We'wha, and nothing was more dreaded than a scolding from her."[55]

Berdaches were known among the Winnebagos as doing women's tasks "better than any normal woman could perform them."[56] This has also been stated by informants from groups as diverse as the Hopi, Lakota, Mohave, Assiniboine, and Crow.[57] They were almost universally known to be hard workers, doing good beadwork, pottery, weaving, saddlemaking, and tanning, and being good providers for their family. Pete Dog Soldier, an elderly Lakota *winkte* who died in the 1960s, is remembered by other Indians as able to do "anything and everything better than a woman: cooking, crocheting, everything women do. He was neat and *very* clean."[58] In 1903 the Crow *badé* were reported as being famous for having the largest and best-decorated tipis, being the best cooks and sewers in the tribe, and being highly regarded "for their many charitable acts."[59] Berdaches among the Guajiro Indians of Venezuela are noted for the quality of their weaving.[60]

While they help the women in their work, berdaches also provide women company. Since the boy has already been in the girls' play group, he is socialized to feminine concerns and can offer psychological closeness. One Papago woman spoke fondly of a "man-woman" named Shining Evening, who "was very pleasant, always laughing and talking, and a good worker. She

was so strong! She did not get tired grinding corn. . . . I found the man-woman very convenient."[61] The man-woman was a clever potter and basketmaker, and a tireless gatherer on plant-foraging expeditions. The women of a family appreciated such a productive member of their work group.[62] Among the Zapotecs "Women especially feel close to and trust nonrelated *ira' muxe*. They are often referred to and addressed as 'niña' (little girl) by women and seem to enjoy this form of address."[63]

Despite considerable variation in the institution among different cultures, every tribe with a recognized berdache status has reported the individual doing at least some women's work. Since some cultures do not emphasize berdache spirituality, anthropologists recently have stressed that taking a woman's occupational role is the most important aspect of defining berdachism.[64] Along with a nonmasculine character, this seems to be a universal characteristic of berdachism, and it denotes the important economic role of a berdache within the family.

Part of the berdaches' economic productivity is due to their freedom from child-care responsibilities. Without having an infant to nurse, berdaches could put all their efforts into production. But the high-quality work is also a result of rising to one's level of expectations. With religious or social ideas propounding the view that berdaches will be successful, this is a powerful inspiration for young berdaches to become so. Among the Zapotecs, for example, *ira' muxe* are believed to be the brightest, most gifted children. As a consequence, Zapotec parents value them as the best bet for education, and will keep them in school for a longer time. During her two decades of fieldwork there, Beverly Chiñas has observed that many of the *ira' muxe* do fulfill this image.[65] On the Plains, the spirit of Double Woman was associated with skill in craftwork, so a youth who saw a vision of her would be considered skilled as well.[66] A young woman who saw such a vision would be as highly respected as a berdache. To tell a woman that her craftwork is as good as a berdache's is not sexist but rather the highest compliment—a recognition that she and the berdache have had similar visions.[67]

Exceptional ability itself can be an indicator of supernatural power. The expectation of one contributes to the other. It is not clear as to what extent people value a berdache's crafts because

they are physically superior, or because they carry some of the spiritual power of the maker. Likely it is a combination of both, but whatever the reason berdaches have a reputation for outstanding work. Explaining this reputation, a contemporary Lakota *winkte,* says simply, "I feel feminine, and enjoy doing women's things."[68]

Striving for Prestige

But more is involved than enjoyment. Whether helping to heal people through their shamanistic abilities, serving as teachers for the young, working hard for the well-being of their family, showing their generosity, or displaying their talents in superior craftwork, the theme that unites all of these endeavors is a striving for prestige.

As a male child the berdache is subjected to the standard male socialization that emphasizes competition for prestige. He may not demonstrate bravery in warfare or success in the hunt, the usual means for gaining masculine prestige. But instead of feeling defeated, and abandoning the effort for prestige, the berdache merely redirects it into other areas. If he does not wish to count coup (gather honors) as a warrior, he can still gain renown for spiritual, intellectual, and artistic skills. Moreover, the berdache role offers a way to gain notable material prosperity through the production of specialized crafts.[69] Because of the high valuation and prestige of women's craftwork products, a male who engages in such production need not accept a lower status. Berdaches in California might reap prosperous rewards thanks to the particular skills they possess. Tolowa berdache shamans (see plate 13) were the most prestigious curers of illnesses, and Yokuts *tongochim* prepared the dead for burial and were entitled to keep for themselves the property that was placed with the body.[70]

The economic opportunities for berdaches to gain wealth are especially evident for the Navajos. *Nadle,* unlike average men or women, can participate in economic activities that are open to both sexes. The only masculine activities in which they do not participate are warfare and hunting, but they do raise sheep. They direct the farming, supervising the other family members in planting and working the fields. *Nadle* also tan hides and

make pottery, baskets, and woven goods. Since crafts production is restricted, and with their reputation as outstanding craftworkers, *nadle* products are always heavily in demand as trade goods. Beyond all this, because they are believed to be lucky in amassing wealth they usually act as the head of their family and have control of the disposal of all the family's property.[71]

With their opportunities for gaining wealth being greater than those of ordinary persons', it is easy to justify the belief that *nadle* ensure prosperity. In 1935 ethnographer W. W. Hill published an interview with a Navajo *nadle* named Kinipai. Before my own research, it was the most recent extensive quotation of a berdache's own words. As such it is a most valuable historical document. We can see the self-confidence and spirit of the berdache, as Kinipai told Hill:

> A family that has a *nadle* born into it will be brought riches and success. . . . I have charge of everything that my family owns. I hope that I will be that way until I die. Riches do not just come to you; you have to pray for what you get. . . . My parents always took better care of me. . . . The family, after I grew up, always gave me the choice of whatever they had.[72]

While desire for material wealth cannot be seen as a cause for otherwise masculine boys becoming berdaches, it certainly does make it easier for both the nonmasculine boy and his family to accept his assumption of an alternative status.[73]

DEALING WITH THE UNUSUAL

Beyond the argument that berdachism reflects the standard male drive for prestige, there is a psychological factor involved in the berdache's striving for excellence. Atypical children, soon recognizing their difference from the usual person, easily absorb a negative self-image. As the huge caseload of U.S. psychiatric therapy testifies, severe damage can result from these feelings of deviance or inferiority. The way out of this self-hatred is either to deny any meaningful difference ("I am the same as you except for this one minor difference"), or to construct an appreciation for the gifts of one's uniqueness. Difference is trans-

formed from "deviant" to "exceptional." The difference is emphasized, becoming a basis for respect rather than stigma. American Indian societies are able to utilize the talents of berdaches precisely because they offer prestige rewards beyond what would be available for the average person.

Having the best-decorated tipi or being noted for one's cleanliness and neatness is amazingly similar to the emphasis on personal looks, clothing style, and interior decoration in the contemporary urban gay subculture. Both trends manifest a sense of individual pride in oneself for doing well in a cultural system where one is not typical. The difference is that Anglo-American society and family structure gives only a grudging tolerance to the nonmasculine male, at best, while in American Indian cultures, to use the words of a Lakota, "If a *winkte* is in a family, that family would feel fortunate."[74] As an example of this attitude, Ruth Landes knew a Potawatomi berdache who was the son of highly traditional parents. "His mother, a noted shamaness, set the old-fashioned standard for him; his whole family appreciated him and encouraged him." The berdache was looked upon as "tradition's enshrinement of a unique personality, with admirable gifts."[75]

The position of the berdache in the extended family, and from that base into the community as a whole, varies of course depending on the personality and talent of particular individuals. But for the category as a whole, those cultures that recognize it generally accord it a respected status. This respect is clearly indicated by Matilda Coxe Stevenson, who described the family position of the Zuni *lhamana* named We'wha.

> His strong character made his word law among both the men and the women with whom he associated. Though his wrath was dreaded by men as well as by women, he was beloved by all the children, to whom he was ever kind. . . .
>
> He was always referred to by the tribe as "she"—it being their custom to speak of men who don woman's dress as if they were women. . . . She was perhaps the tallest person in Zuni: certainly the strongest, both mentally and physically. . . . She possessed an indomitable will and an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Her likes and dislikes were intense. She would risk anything to serve those she

loved, but toward those who crossed her path she was vindictive. Though severe she was considered just.

In 1896 We'wha became seriously ill. Stevenson movingly described the reactions of the pueblo. From the moment people realized that We'wha had heart disease, they remained with her constantly. "The writer never before observed such attention as every member of the family showed her." Despite their concern, a few days later We'wha went into a coma and died.

> Darkness and desolation entered the hearts of the mourners. . . . We'wha's death was regarded as a calamity, and the remains lay in state for an hour or more, during which time not only members of the clans to which she was allied, but the rain priests and theurgists and many others, including children, viewed them. When the blanket was finally closed, a fresh outburst of grief was heard. . . . [It was] a death which caused universal regret and distress in Zuni.[76]

There are few documents like this one. Because it was written by a person who had more than just a perfunctory acquaintance with a berdache, Stevenson's text is all the more important.

Another ethnographer who talked with berdaches in depth was W. W. Hill, and he also emphasized the extremely favorable attitudes of families toward berdaches:

> The family which counted a transvestite among its members or had a hermaphrodite child born to them was considered by themselves and everyone else as very fortunate. The success and wealth of such a family was believed to be assured. Special care was taken in the raising of such children and they were afforded favoritism not shown to other children of the family. As they grew older and assumed the character of *nadle,* this solicitude and respect increased. . . . This respect verges almost on reverence in many cases.[77]

Hill quotes from several Navajo informants to illustrate these attitudes:

> They know everything. They can do both the work of a man and a woman. I think when all the *nadle* are gone, that it will be the end of the Navaho.
>
> If there were no *nadle,* the country would change. They are responsible for all the wealth in the country. If there were no more left,

the horses, sheep, and Navaho would all go. They are leaders just like President Roosevelt. A *nadle* around the hogan will bring good luck and riches. They have charge of all the riches. It does a great deal for the country if you have *nadle* around.

You must respect a *nadle*. They are, somehow, sacred and holy.[78]

Spiritual justification, ceremonial roles, and a secure place in the economic and social life of the extended family combined to give berdaches a firm footing upon which to construct their lives and around which they could build a proud and unique identity.

4 *Men, Women, and Others: The Gender Role of the Berdache*

On his first voyage down the Mississippi River in the 1670s, the Jesuit Jacques Marquette was mystified by the fact that berdaches were treated with respect by other Indians. He wrote back to France, "I know not through what superstition some Illinois, as well as some Nadouessi, while still young, assume the garb of women, and retain it throughout their lives. There is some mystery in this, For they . . . glory in demeaning themselves to do everything that the women do."[1] Four decades later, another French missionary in French Canada reported that there were "men cowardly enough to live as women. . . . debasing themselves to all of women's occupations."[2] These Frenchmen were alarmed that men would "demean" and "debase" themselves to be like women. In the European view, such persons were giving up their male privilege by lowering themselves to the level of mere women. Why did this not similarly concern the Native Americans? How could berdaches be doing this, and still be regarded as "persons of consequence"?

We have to understand berdache gender status, especially their economic role in the family, as a reflection of the fact that women also were persons of consequence. Exceptions exist, mainly in areas where the majority of the food is supplied by male hunters or fishers, but American Indians offer some of the world's best examples of gender-egalitarian societies. Anthropologists have debated whether male dominance is universal, and while such dominance clearly exists in many parts of the world, most specialists in North American Indian studies emphasize that at least aboriginally many societies operated on a gender-equal basis. Native American women were (and are still, to a great extent) independent and self-reliant personalities,

rather than subservient dependents. Traditionally, women had a high level of self-esteem for they knew that their family and band economically depended on them as much as or more than it did on men. They were centrally involved in the society's economy, controlling distribution of the food they grew or gathered.[3]

Since women had high status, there was no shame in a male taking on feminine characteristics. He was not giving up male privilege, or "debasing" himself to become like a woman, simply because the position of women was not inferior. It may be accurate to suggest that the status of berdaches in a society is directly related to the status of women. In societies with low status for women, a male who would want to give up his dominant position would be seen as crazy. But where women have high status, there is no lowering of social role for a male to move in a feminine direction. For example, among the Navajos, women have very high positions of respect, and this is reflected in the virtual deification of the *nadle*. The status and interests of nonmasculine people, whether female or male, are closely related.

Many cultures that recognize berdaches, the Keres Pueblos, for example, believe that masculine qualities are only half of ordinary humanness. But feminine qualities are seen as automatically encompassing the masculine as well as many other characteristics that go beyond the limits of masculinity. Consequently, there is a recognized enhanced status for those males who have the ability to transcend the limits of masculinity.[4] As we will see in chapter 11, women of many cultures have sporadically participated in activities normally associated with men, without leaving their female gender role. But for a male, it is not as easy to be feminine while remaining within the confines of the man's role. If a male wants to incorporate feminine aspects, he has to move beyond masculinity.

An important aspect of gender in American Indian societies is the performance of certain duties: hunting and warfare usually done by men, farming and gathering wild plants usually done by women. Though there might be considerable overlap and flexibility, the specialization of tasks by gender means that women and men are tied together in an interdependent system

of reciprocity. A berdache would, especially in an economic sense, take on a role that was similar to that of women, but his prestige in women's work does not mean that he thereby "dominates" females by becoming a "superior woman."[5] After all, the berdache is not a woman. There has been much confusion on this matter because white observers often have not recognized the distinctions between the feminine and the nonmasculine, assuming instead that nonmasculinity automatically means femininity.

DIFFERENT FROM WOMEN

From American Indian perspectives, berdaches are not women, not even socially defined women. We can understand this by realizing that berdaches do certain things which women do not do, and vice versa. There are several aspects of berdachism that differ from the standard roles of women. In the first place, even though berdaches remain around the home and perform women's work, they are not much involved in infant care because they cannot breastfeed. Berdaches may be domestic, but it is economic involvement in home production rather than child care. They reserve their attention for older children and youths, in their capacity as teachers. Even when they adopt children, it is evidently older children. They are different from women, who spend much of their young adult years as nursing mothers of small children.

Berdaches have been noted as being physically different from women. In fact, in a number of instances their robust stature is emphasized. The Zuni We'wha was the tallest person in the pueblo.[6] Crow berdaches were reported as being "of large build" and "almost gigantic in stature," and a similar statement was made about a Potawatomi berdache.[7] A modern investigator had this to say about "a feminized Indian": "To me, his appearance is neuter, not feminine, effeminate, or masculine. He is tall and thin, with long straight black hair. . . . muscular, bony, and strong."[8]

The Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca, writing about Florida Indians around 1530, reported similar descriptions of the many

berdaches he saw: "They are more corpulent than other men and taller; they bear very heavy burdens." De Vaca also noted that while these "effeminates" dressed like women and did the work of women, they also did hunting like men.[9] Another traveler among the Timucua Indians of Florida, a Frenchman in 1564 named René Goulaine de Laudonniére, wrote that there were many persons, whom he mistakenly called "hermaphrodites," who cared for the sick and infirm and carried heavy loads. Why these two duties were combined is suggested by an artist on the same expedition. Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues drew a sketch of berdaches and noted that they were quite common. "As they are strong," they carried the provisions when a chief went to war. They carried the dead for burial, and transported the sick on their shoulders so as to care for them until they got well. Le Moyne (see illustration) was impressed with their strength as well as their curing abilities.[10] This special role for berdaches was different from the usual role for women.

Sometimes berdaches participated directly in warfare, and were noted for their bravery. One Crow berdache was named Osh-Tisch, which means "Finds Them and Kills Them" (see plate 12). He got this name in 1876, when he turned warrior for that one day. He put on men's clothes and attacked a Lakota party in the Battle of the Rosebud, and was distinguished by his bravery.[11] Among the Osage, a successful warrior had a vision that enjoined him to become a berdache, which he did. But he loved warfare so much that he periodically put on men's clothes and led a raid.[12] While exceptional, this example does show that berdaches did not take on the status merely to avoid fighting. When engaged in raiding, however, they were expected to dress as men.

Another with a reputation for bravery was a Saulteaux (Chippeway) in Manitoba who was called Berdach by the French. In 1801 he was referred to by some Hudson's Bay Company traders as being the best runner among the Saulteaux. Years before, the traders were told, when a group of Lakotas attacked his band, he ordered the others to escape "without minding him, as he feared no danger. He then faced the enemy, and began to let fly his arrows." By doing this several times, Berdach successfully covered the retreat, thus keeping off a

whole Lakota war party by himself until everyone else was safe. Berdach's feat of bravery, the traders remarked in their journal, was often recounted by the Indians.[13]

Berdaches would often be taken along on a hunting expedition, but usually not as a hunter. A French explorer in the Missouri Valley wrote in 1805, "If they are taken along, it is only to watch over the horses, to skin or carry the pelts of game that are killed, to carry the meat, cut the wood, light the fire, and, in the absence of women, to satisfy a brutal passion abhorrent to nature."[14] What applied to hunting parties applied to war parties also. A Lakota traditionalist recounts: "Most *winktes* did not go to war, but some did. My grandfather told me stories about how this *winkte* did the cooking, taking care of camp, and curing wounds of the warriors."[15] This also was a position for berdaches that was distinct from what a woman would do.

Especially among the Cheyennes, *he man eh* (berdaches) were closely associated with the warfare complex. When a raiding group was organized, one of them was asked to join. George Grinnell's informants told him: "Large war-parties rarely started without one or two of them. They were good company and fine talkers. When they went with war-parties they were well treated. They watched all that was being done, and in the fighting cared for the wounded."[16] Their presence on war parties was also desired because of their special spiritual powers. While *he man eh* had rejected the usual kind of male power, they had other kinds of power that might lead to good luck on the raid.[17]

When a successful Cheyenne war party returned to the village, the best scalps were given to the *he man eh*. They placed the scalps on poles and led the triumphant war party into the camp. That evening they led the village in the Scalp Dance. This was one of the major ceremonies of the Cheyennes. The entire village lined up in four rows, making a square: drummers and singers on the west, young men on the north, young women on the south, and older people on the east. Grinnell's informants noted, "The halfmen-halfwomen took their places in the middle of this square and were the managers of the dance. No one was allowed in the middle of the square except these persons."[18] Among the Papagos, berdaches played an important role in the dances commemorating the taking of scalps. This may have

been a way of insulting the enemy scalps, by having a nonwarrior taunt them.[19]

In most tribes' social dances, women dance in one section and men dance in another. Berdaches usually dance in the women's section. This is true among the Navajos,[20] as well as the Lakotas. One informant told me, "Pete Dog Soldier always danced with the women. He danced at the head of the circle, leading the women."[21] This is also the case among the Creeks and Seminoles. Berdaches in those groups wear turtle-shell leg rattles worn by the women, and lead the female turtle-shell dancers.[22]

In other groups, however, there is variation. Among the Zapotecs, men do not dance at all, except for a rare dance like the *zandunga*. However, *ira' muxe* dance openly with the women and each other. This is considered very improper behavior for men, but is quite natural for *ira' muxe*.[23] In contrast to this, Omaha *mexoga* Pollack Parker (c. 1900–1943) was a member of the warrior society, and thus danced with men. He did not dance with the women.[24] In Zuni the *lhamana* moved back and forth between the male and the female dance lines,[25] perhaps signifying the between-the-sexes status of the berdache.

GO-BETWEENS FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Because of their in-between status, berdaches in many cultures serve as "Go-Betweens" for women and men. If a problem arises, a person will let a third party know this, and it is the social duty of the third party to go tell the other person in the dispute. The third party goes back and forth between the two until they have reached a settlement. Usually the settlement involves some sort of compromise, with perhaps some payment or favor being done. The Go-Between thus has an important negotiation role, similar in technique to a real estate agent in Western business practice. In trying to ensure that each side overcomes any resentment and feels satisfied by the settlement, a skillful Go-Between is a valuable community asset.[26] Because they can move freely between the women's and men's groups, berdaches are a natural Go-Between for disputes between the sexes. Navajo *nadle* are asked by married people to resolve

spousal conflicts, and at least among the Omahas such services by *mexoga* are paid for.[27]

A Go-Between also performs services on joyous occasions. The Navajo, Omaha, and other cultures employ berdaches to facilitate budding romances between young women and men. Among the Lakota, the *winkte* is customarily the woman's cousin.[28] This role reached its highest development among the Cheyennes. At the end of the Scalp Dance, the *he man eh* who were directing the dance would match up all the unmarried young men with the young women. Cheyenne informant George Bent said "These halfmen-halfwomen . . . were very popular and especial favorites of young people, whether married or not, for they were noted matchmakers. They were fine love talkers. . . . When a young man wanted to send gifts for a young woman, one of these halfmen-halfwomen was sent to the girl's relatives to do the talking in making the marriage." They were valued in these efforts for their spiritual power as well. Hoebel's informants told him, "Young people like them because they possess the most powerful of all love medicines. A suitor who is able to get their help is fortunate indeed, for no girl can resist the power of their potions. They are especially sought out as intermediaries to lead the gift-laden horses to a girl's household when a marriage proposal is being made."[29]

BERDACHISM AND TRANSVESTISM

We can also see the Go-Between role reflected in the dress of berdaches. In many of the early sources berdaches are referred to as wearing women's clothes, and much of the anthropological writing refers to them as transvestites. This is not an accurate term to use for several reasons. First, there are instances in which men dressing as women were not berdaches. A few Midwestern tribes forced some men who behaved cowardly in battle to wear women's clothing as a mark of disgrace. These instances were not spiritually derived, and were not seen to be a reflection of the basic character of the man. In the Indian view this kind of transvestism had no relationship to berdachism.[30]

Second, if we define transvestism as dressing in the clothes of

the opposite sex, then we find (in cases where the dress is explicitly described) that berdaches wore all women's clothing no more often than they wore a mixture of female and male dress. We have already seen that berdaches usually wore male clothes on those occasions when they participated in hunting or warfare, and in other cases they dressed practically depending on the activity in which they were involved. Navajo *nadle* dressed sometimes as men and sometimes as women, depending on their inclination and their marital status.[31]

Variation in clothing marked the berdache from childhood, when boys first began to show signs of femininity. In 1916 Elsie Clews Parsons reported a six-year-old feminine Zuni boy. In response to his femininity, his parents began to treat him differently. "He is still dressed as a male . . . but his shirt is of a considerably longer cut. . . . Around his neck is a bead necklace . . . not altogether commonplace for either little boys or girls. His haircut is the usual all round short cut for boys."[32] By dressing him distinctly, the parents were recognizing his unique personality, distinct from both boys and girls.

Margaret Mead described in detail an Indian youth, probably of the Omaha tribe, just at the time when he was making his berdachism explicit in terms of dress. She referred to the boy as a "congenital invert" who since childhood had showed "marked feminine physical traits." As he reached puberty, she remarked,

> he began to specialize in women's occupations and to wear female underclothing, although he still affected the outer costume of a male. He carried in his pockets, however, a variety of rings and bangles such as were worn only by women. At dances in which the sexes danced separately, he would begin the evening dressed as a man and dancing with the men, and then, as if acting under some irresistible compulsion, he would begin to move closer and closer to the women, as he did so putting on one piece of jewelry after another. Finally a shawl would appear, and at the end of the evening he would be dressed as a berdache, a transvestite. The people were just beginning to speak of him as "she."[33]

Even though Mead refers to this boy's dress as making him "a transvestite," it is unclear from the description if he was still

wearing men's pants after he put on the shawl. And even if he had completely dressed like a woman for the dance, we do not know if he always dressed that way in daily life.

The degree to which a berdache might dress in female clothing would vary. Some dressed completely as women, all the time. Pierre Liette, a French explorer who lived among the Illinois Indians from 1698 to 1702, wrote that berdaches "are girt with a piece of leather or cloth which envelops them from the belt to the knees, a thing all the women wear. Their hair is allowed to grow and is fastened behind the head. They are tattooed on their cheeks like the women and also on the breast and the arms, and they imitate their accent, which is different from that of the men. They omit nothing that can make them like women."[34] A Crow elder remembers the berdache named Osh-Tisch, who died about 1928, saying: "She dressed as a woman, and associated with women. She would not do men's dances, but stayed with the women."[35] Elsie Clews Parsons described a Zuni *lhamana* named Kasineli in 1916, saying "his dress was in every particular as far as I could see like a woman's."[36] And certainly, anyone who looks at the photographs of We'wha in the 1880s (see plate 10) would be hard pressed to tell much difference between his style of dress and that of a Zuni woman.[37]

On the other hand, there are some subtle differences. One cannot look at the Le Moyne sketches (see illustration) of the Timucuan berdaches without recognizing that they are men. And Cheyenne *he man eh* "usually dressed as old men."[38] Today, one Omaha *mexoga* dresses as a man, but is known by his relatives to wear women's underwear. His nephew, who had observed these undergarments in the wash and in the closet, asked his uncle about it. His uncle replied that he had been directed by a spirit to wear these clothes, and that if he did not wear at least one article of different clothing something bad would happen. Given this spiritual explanation, the nephew of course accepted his uncle's nonmasculine behavior.[39]

While whites would most likely notice a berdache when he was dressing in women's clothing, we cannot always trust their judgment that he was dressing just like a woman. There may have been subtle differences that whites would not recognize.

So even though I will argue that there have been changes over time in berdache patterns of dress, it is also possible that there were mixed styles earlier. As in other aspects of berdachism, there is much cultural and individual variation.

It could also be that a berdache sometimes dressed as a woman, in which case white writers would notice him, and at other times would dress like a man. Among Lakotas, *winktes* dress differently for ceremonials. One says: "Sacred pipe people [traditionalists] would not object if a *winkte* dresses as a woman in ceremonies. They would only see it as the *winkte* getting more spiritual power."[40] In ceremonials, *winktes* dance like women and wear an article or two of women's clothing, but otherwise dress as a man. In daily life, they mostly dress like a man.[41] Pete Dog Soldier, an elderly traditionalist *winkte* who died in the 1960s, is remembered as having worn a woman's breastplate, shawl, and undergarments, but always men's pants.[42]

This pattern of a mixture of both women's and men's clothing was very common. A nineteenth-century Kutenai male who was described as *stammiya,* "acts like a woman," was remembered as wearing "a woman's dress, below the bottom of which his masculine-type leggings were visible. He was described as a large, heavy-set person with a deep voice with which he attempted to imitate a woman's way of speaking." Among the Omahas, a *mexoga* named Richard Parker, who died about 1943, sometimes wore women's blouses and his hair in long braids. But since women's and men's hairstyles and clothing styles were not well known by non-Indians, Omahas feel that an outsider would not have been able to tell he was different.[43]

In preparation for ceremonial dancing, Terry Calling Eagle made a special costume that was purposefully distinct from either men's or women's clothing. An ethnographer observing him said he was dancing with the women and wearing his hair long like a woman, but that he was wearing "men's clothes."[44] Terry's view, that he was dressing differently, was seen by the anthropologist as men's clothing. Whites, trained to look at all clothing as either "women's clothing" or "men's clothing," are not always the best witnesses to observe what Indians may feel

is distinct from either. Thus, we get ridiculous statements like this one from W. W. Hill about *nadle:* "Transvestites wear the garb of either sex."[45]

Modern berdaches emphasize that they dress in a way that is distinct from either sex. At my first meeting with Terry Calling Eagle in 1982, the words of Lame Deer came immediately to mind: "I wasn't even sure of whether I was talking to a man or to a woman."[46] Terry wears his hair long and pulled back in a ponytail, but this is a hairstyle that some Lakota men might wear. At the same time, it is the style of women. Similarly, he wears clothing that looks consciously designed to be unisex. His features and his whole bearing suggest androgyny rather than femininity per se.

The other aspect of this distinctiveness is its flamboyance. Zapotec *ira' muxe* "dress is more masculine than feminine but is distinct from either. On occasion some wear cosmetics and such feminine attire as high-heeled pumps, neither of which is used by Zapotec women."[47] If berdaches' dress is more exaggeratedly "feminine" than women's dress, is it really proper to call it feminine? The Klamath berdache named White Cindy was remembered from the 1890s as having "an abnormal love of color" that made her different from Klamath women, "even to the extent of being unusual in a tribe loving bright colors. She would wear a green and white striped skirt, a pink waist, and a hat brightly bedecked with brilliantly colored flowers. Two or three red or orange bandanas often graced her neck."[48] Perhaps flamboyance is too mild a word to use. Likewise, Michael One Feather remembers his feelings growing up on the reservation:

> I always dressed differently. I never liked the clothes they [other people] wore. I always created my own clothes. I designed my clothes to be *very* flamboyant. I looked at magazines a lot to design my own clothes. Sometimes in the privacy of my own home I would dress like a girl. I knew that I looked like one. I used to get mistaken for a girl all the time when I was little. That intrigued me because I knew I could always use that as an asset later on in life. I knew that I did not look like the rest of the boys, and I was glad I did not look like them. I dyed my hair and curled it. It was different from either girls or boys—unique, that's what I wanted.[49]

For berdaches, the particular clothing one wears is less important than one's basic character, one's spirit. If we only listen to what Indian people say, we realize that "transvestite" is not an accurate description; the style of dress is less meaningful than the androgynous character. A Kwakiutl chief knew berdaches in his tribe who wore "women's earrings, and all kinds of women's brooches . . . and women's rings," but otherwise dressed like a man. In the chief's words, such a person "played the part of women but didn't dress like that. We call men like that 'Act Like a Woman.' One was a man from Quatsino, and the way he acts when he works is the way women do when they do anything. . . . The way his body acts is like a woman."[50] To put it simply, as Ronnie Loud Hawk says with a quiet assured dignity, "I accept my feminine nature as part of my being."[51] His nature, rather than his style of dress, is crucial to the understanding of berdachism.

BERDACHISM AND HERMAPHRODITISM

There is much controversy among anthropologists about the nature of the gender status of the berdache. Is it crossing from the male to the female ("gender crossing" or transsexual), a mixture of female and male traits, or the establishment of a third, alternative gender? The berdache tradition contains elements of each of these alternatives, which is why the scholarly debate is so lively. Not only are there variations between tribes, but among individuals as well. This is in keeping with American Indian tolerance for individual difference, but it makes for imprecise generalizations.

When asking traditionalist Indian people to define their word for berdache, certain phrases appear over and over. Among the Cheyenne, the most common description for *he man eh,* or *a-he-e ma' ne',* is "halfman-halfwoman." When I asked informants what that explanation meant, they said "a man who acts like and fits in like a woman" and "a man who does not like to do man things."[52] Among Lakotas, *winktes* are consistently described as "sacred people," "halfmen-halfwomen" and "half and half people."[53] If asked for clarification, they may use the word

hermaphrodite, but their meaning is different from that of whites. If we analyze closely what they are saying, we can gain a more accurate definition of berdachism.

An elderly Lakota shaman typically defined *winkte* as "a half-man-halfwoman; a man who acts like a woman. He does not have breasts or female genitals, but is a hermaphrodite. It is his nature. He was born that way." This comment seems contradictory, in that it implies *winktes* do not have female sexual organs but are hermaphrodites. Because the term means different things to Indians than it does to whites, *hermaphrodite* is not a useful word.

Whites have believed that a person called "halfman-halfwoman" must have the physical attributes of both sexes. This shows the emphasis in the English language on the physical attributes of a person (skin color, sexual organs), and the limitations of English in acknowledging gender role variations. But American Indians see physical body parts as much less important than a person's spirit or character. So when Indians say a berdache is a "hermaphrodite, it is his nature," they are referring to the person's spiritual essence.[54]

Whenever there is clear physical evidence by bodily examination, the report is that berdaches are anatomically male. Stephen Powers, who surveyed California Indians in 1871–72, met a Yuki *i-wa-musp,* whom he had heard was a hermaphrodite. "At my instance the [government] agent exerted his authority and caused this being to be brought to headquarters and submitted to a medical examination. This revealed the fact that he was a human male without malformation." Matilda Coxe Stevenson recalled her mistake upon moving to Zuni, when she initially referred to *lhamana* as hermaphrodites. She was led into this mistake, she wrote, because the Indians would say, "She is a man." A respected Crow medicine man examined the body of Osh-Tisch when he died in 1929, and saw that the berdache had normal male genitalia.[55]

Though there are a few other questionable examples,[56] the Navajo is the main culture in which physical hermaphrodites are classified as *nadle,* along with berdaches. But even Navajos make a linguistic distinction between those born with ambiguous genitalia (the presence of fully developed genitalia of both

sexes is extremely rare; more likely cases are males with very small penises, females with very large clitorises, and boys with undescended testicles),[57] and those who have normal genitals but whose behavior is androgynous. Navajos define hermaphrodites as "real *nadle*" and nonhermaphrodites as "those who pretend to be *nadle,*" but both inhabit the same gender category. Navajos are also the only tribe in which the same berdache terminology applies to morphological males and females.[58]

One might speculate that the reason the Navajos emphasize hermaphroditism is that their group's genetic code contains a tendency toward ambiguous genitalia. If families with a hermaphrodite do well financially, they would tend to have more children and thus pass along such a trait through the reproductivity of the sisters and brothers of the hermaphrodite. This hypothesis has not been investigated, but there are other examples of populations elsewhere with such tendencies.[59]

The Navajos, in using the word *nadle* for women, men, and hermaphrodites alike, are clearly an exception in North America.[60] Among most groups, the word *hermaphrodite* is used because it has been commonly used by whites. Used by Indians themselves, the word does not imply genital difference. For example, the traditionalist Omaha chief defines *mexoga* as "different, unusual, halfman-halfwoman. Then we called them hermaphrodites, but today they would be called homosexuals. Sometimes he was a full man, but at other times his other side would come out."[61] The Indian view emphasizes behavioral, not physical, traits. As a consequence, anthropologists since the 1950s have defined berdaches as persons of definite physiological sex, with hermaphrodites being distinguished as a separate group.[62]

Another difference between berdaches and hermaphrodites is that berdachism is not necessarily a permanent condition. Although most berdaches take on the role at puberty, and continue it for life, the exceptions to this rule further frustrate attempts to define berdachism. Since the status is usually seen as permanent, the community accepts it as such: "People take for granted they aren't going to change him, that's his life and they accept him." Still, there are cases where berdaches will change their status, to become like regular men.[63]

Sometimes a man known for his masculinity will change and become a berdache as an adult, like one Lakota man "who was a good bronc rider and a roughneck; after he got wounded in World War II, when he came back he had a vision and became a *winkte*. He was well regarded as a war hero, and also as a *winkte* he had a lot of respect from people. He helped people, liked children, and was well respected."[64] There is one *winkte* today on a Lakota reservation who goes in and out of the *winkte* role.[65] These unusual exceptions point out the strong sense of individualism in the berdache tradition, and the inherent problems in formulating blanket theories about berdaches' gender status.

BERDACHISM AND TRANSSEXUALISM

With so much variation, how do we define the gender role of the berdache? In 1955 Henry Angelino and Charles Shedd tried to provide a workable definition. They clarified once and for all that berdachism is different from hermaphroditism and transvestism. But they confused things further by defining a berdache as an individual "who assumes the role and status of the opposite sex."[66] They had built on the analysis of Alfred Kroeber, who labeled berdaches "institutionalized women. . . . Born a male he became accepted as a woman socially."[67] This view has led recent theorists like Harriet Whitehead to characterize berdaches as "gender-crossers . . . becoming a member of the opposite sex." The analogy she finds for berdachism in our society is the transsexual, which she defines as a person who assumes "the behavior and public identity of the opposite sex." Whitehead calls the phenomenon "a psychological orientation in its own right, distinct from homosexuality."[68]

It is easy to see why scholars have moved in this direction. Many words that define berdache mention women; for example, the Hidatsa word *miati* translates as "to feel an involuntary inclination to act like a woman."[69] When reading definitions like this one, it is easy to make the assumption that berdachism is "crossing" the gender line from male to female, becoming a transsexual institutionally equivalent to a woman.

However, while berdaches certainly do women's work and

are nonmasculine in character, their social role is not the same as that of women's. In terms of their physical body, lack of involvement with nursing infants, special roles in warfare, participation in dances, status as Go-Betweens for women and men, variable dress, and ability to abandon berdache status, these males need to be seen as something other than the institutional equivalents of females.

The concept of a "transsexual" is a Western one, clearly linked with a medical procedure and based on the notion that there are two "opposite sexes." It is therefore not an apt description of berdaches. Within Western thought, with its numerous dichotomies of paired opposites, there is little tolerance for ambiguities outside of the categories of "women" and "men." As a result, people who are dissatisfied with their gender role will often feel that they have only one alternative, to *trans*fer themselves from one sex to the other. Many transsexuals, as products of our culture, make this transfer completely, by surgical reassignment and hormones. Many lead happier lives, once they do not feel that they are a "female trapped in a male body." But others do not make so happy an adjustment, and may feel no more comfortable as a woman than as a man. Their unhappiness, I would suggest, is the result of a restricted social value, which sees only two opposite possibilities.[70]

The Western notion of two opposite sexes is akin to the idea I grew up hearing in the South: that there were only two races and they were opposites. By this view, all the world is divided into black and white, and the only choice for a "mongrel" is to be assigned to one race or the other, or to try to "pass" for white. It was only when people began to be exposed to the larger reality of the world that they could challenge this notion. It is worth noting that many transsexuals may pass for women because there is no respected alternative to masculinity in this society. Bodily mutilation is a heavy price to pay for the ideology of biological determinism.

American Indian cultures, through the berdache tradition, do provide alternative gender roles. Indians have options not in terms of either/or, opposite categories, but in terms of various degrees along a continuum between masculine and feminine.

A MIXTURE OF FEMALE AND MALE AS AN ALTERNATIVE GENDER ROLE

In the Navajo language, *nadle* means "one who is transformed," and the individual would be addressed by male or female kin terms depending on whether she or he was wearing men's or women's clothing.[71] When W. W. Hill was interviewing the *nadle* in the 1930s, Kinipai preferred to be addressed as "she," but in the course of the interview sometimes referred to herself with male as well as the female terminology.[72] Among the Lakotas, a *winkte* may be referred to as "she" in some instances, as "he" in others, but "he-she" is also commonly used.[73] It is the mixture that is important, with categories less rigid and gender concepts more fluid. Just as berdaches can physically move freely between the women's group and the men's group,[74] so the lack of boundaries marks their gender status as well. They are mixing the attributes of both female and male, and adding alternative aspects that are unique to the berdache status.

Berdaches are seen as a distinct association. Among the nineteenth-century Crows, berdaches did not have a special ceremonial role, but they were respected as a social group. While they spent much of their time with women, they also had their own separate group within the village. They had their own tipis, and set them near each other in camp so that they could be together. They called each other "sister," and saw Osh-Tisch as their leader.[75] In 1889 the Crow reservation physician, A. B. Holder, interviewed a *badé,* who told him of a group of berdaches among the Gros Ventres, Lakotas, Flatheads, Nez Percés, Crows, and Shoshonis, who all associated together beyond their own tribe. Holder concluded, "There seems a species of fellowship among them." This separate status implies a third category, like the Crow translation for *badé:* "not man, not woman."[76]

Some anthropologists have seen this type of evidence as indicating that berdaches occupy a third gender. Beverly Chiñas concludes that among the Zapotecs *ira' muxe* are perceived as innately different: "not as either women or men but as *muxe,* i.e., male-female. I have referred to them as the third sex, which seems to reflect most accurately Zapotec reality." They do both

women's and men's work, dress closer to the masculine manner, participate in religious ceremonials as men, but unlike men develop especially close friendships with women.[77]

Ethnographer Sue-Ellen Jacobs also rejects the concept of gender crossing, in favor of the term "third gender." Among the Tewa Pueblos, Jacobs's recent fieldwork has turned up interesting information about a berdache role, pronounced *kwihdoh* in men's speech[78] but spelled *quetho* by Jacobs. No one before Jacobs has published anything on the Tewa berdache, leading anthropologists to assume that such a role did not exist. *Quetho* are designated as a third gender, distinct from women and men. *Quetho* are identified quite young, as having "Special relationships to deities or supernatural forces; a mid-gender or androgynous personality with 'gentle' qualities prevailing; and resistance to full adolescent socialization into traditional men's or women's roles. . . . A *quetho* should be raised 'to be who they are.'" Tewa elders would not assign a male or female sex to *quetho,* and only became exasperated as Jacobs tried to get them to assign individuals on the basis of their genital anatomy.

On this basis she criticizes the definition of berdache offered by Charles Callender and Lee Kochems in 1983, which continues the Angelino and Shedd view that berdaches "assumed the dress, occupations, and behavior of the other sex."[79] By their definition, Jacobs argues, the *quetho* would be excluded from consideration because they did not dress like the opposite sex. Yet, she does see *quetho* as berdachism, and suggests that "We are still asking the wrong questions because in Euroamerican culture we have a difficult time accepting that there can be a genuinely conceptionalized third gender." Jacobs and I both feel that too much emphasis has been placed on style of dress and occupational choice, and not enough on the personality and character of the berdache.[80] I also feel that spirituality and sexuality are more important than recent writers suggest.

In what directions are berdache studies going with regard to gender status? Scholars now seem in agreement that berdachism is not a complete shift from man to woman, but is "a movement toward a somewhat intermediate status."[81] Callender and Kochems have now moved even further away from the "institu-

tionalized woman" view, seeing it as a mixed-gender status that they call "men and not-men."[82] There are some continuing disagreements about berdache sexuality and about the survival of berdachism up to the present, but these are matters of degree rather than of kind. What is needed now is not more armchair theorizing, but more fieldwork in other reservations to get a clearer perspective of Indian peoples' thoughts.

Whether berdaches are seen as a third gender or as a mixture of female and male, with some distinctive elements added, there is perhaps no crucial difference. The Indian languages themselves are in a sense imprecise about this. For example, the Cree word for berdache, *ayekkwew,* can be translated as "neither man nor woman" or "man and woman."[83] If those languages are intentionally vague on this matter, perhaps we should not split hairs. Man-woman, halfman-halfwoman, notman-notwoman—all convey the same idea. In Manitoba in 1801, two Hudson's Bay Company traders were probably most accurate in not categorizing a berdache whom they had met, beyond saying that he was "a curious compound between a man and a woman."[84] The real problem that scholars have been facing is that there is no good label in the English language to communicate a complex concept like berdachism. Perhaps the closest synonym is *androgyne,* which at least incorporates both gender-mixing and third gender concepts, as well as implying mystical and sexual ambiguity.

The fact that berdaches are not simply "institutionalized women" or "transsexuals" can be seen most clearly in their rite of passage into the afterlife. After the death of the Zuni *lhamana* We'wha in 1896, Matilda Coxe Stevenson beheld the family preparing We'wha for burial by dressing her in female clothes, but then pulling on a pair of white trousers over the legs, "the first male attire she had worn since she had adopted women's dress years ago." Carried thus for interment in a mixture of female and male clothes, the *lhamana* were always buried on the men's side of the cemetery.[85]

A Plains Cree berdache was named Piecuwiskwew because, according to Cree informants, Piecuw was a man's name and Iskwew was a woman's name—"half and half just like he was."

It was said that Piecuwiskwew died from wearing a dress that had been worn by a menstruating woman. He had been killed by the power of the woman's menstrual blood just as the Cree believed a man would have been. Only if he had been a woman would he not have been harmed. Piecuwiskwew straddled both the separated worlds of women and men. He was both female and male, but he was not entirely either.[86] The Lakota shaman Lame Deer recounted a conversation with a *winkte* who told him that "In the old days *winktes* . . . had a special hill where they were buried. I asked him when he died . . . what he would be in the spirit land, a man or a woman. He told me he would be both."[87]

DIFFERENT FROM BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

Berdaches get a special recognition in native society not because they become social females, but because they take a position between the genders. They serve a mediating function as Go-Between for women and men, in more than just a social sense. Because they are not considered the same as men or as women, their emphasized difference is a way of defining what women are, and what men are. Their androgyny, rather than threatening the gender system, is incorporated into it. Berdaches seem to symbolize the original unity of humans, their differentiation into separate genders, and the potential for reunification as well. Ironically, by violating gender norms, berdachism enhances the society's definition of what is woman and what is man.[88]

A metaphor for the berdache's position is seen in the Cheyenne Scalp Dance. It is no accident that in the dance, the *he man eh* moved in the middle of the square, circulating between the row of women and the row of men. Their position symbolizes their status as halfmen-halfwomen. Each of them had both a woman's name and a man's name, and "even their voices sounded between the voice of a man and that of a woman."[89] There may be feminine things about berdaches, but in the Indian view that does not make them women. Vincent White Cloud says: "*Winktes* talk in woman's dialect, using women's speech patterns. But they are different from both men and

women."[90] Ronnie Loud Hawk, a Lakota berdache, explains, "I would be terribly scared to be a man or a woman. . . . *Winktes* are two spirits, man and woman, combined into one spirit."[91]

Terry Calling Eagle reiterates that his character *is* his spirit. That is what ties his whole gender role into a spiritual realm. It is not a case of berdaches assuming the status because of childhood interests versus having a vision, or doing women's work versus being a sacred mediator, or dressing differently versus being sexually involved with men. It is all of these things interacting, as part of their basic androgynous character. One contributes to the other; they are not in opposition or hierarchically related. In taking an *etic* viewpoint, a perspective outside of the culture, most recent theorists on the subject have ignored the *emic* perspective, the Indians' own perceptions. As I have reiterated thus far in this book, we need to listen to the words of the berdaches themselves. Only then do we realize that understanding the spiritual dimension is crucial to understanding the position of the berdache in society. Only after I lived with him for a month did Terry Calling Eagle agree to tell me his personal story. This is what he said:

I have always filled a *winkte* role. I was just born this way, ever since I can remember. When I was eight I saw a vision, of a person with long grey hair and with many ornaments on, standing by my bed. I asked if he was female or male, and he said "both." He said he would walk with me for the rest of my life. His spirit would always be with me. I told my grandfather, who said not to be afraid of spirits, because they have good powers. A year later, the vision appeared again, and told me he would give me great powers. He said his body was man's, but his spirit was woman's. He told me the Great Spirit made people like me to be of help to other people.

I told my grandfather the name of the spirit, and Grandfather said it was a highly respected *winkte* who lived long ago. He explained *winkte* to me and said, "It won't be easy growing up, because you will be different from others. But the spirit will help you, if you pray and do the sweat." The spirit has continued to contact me throughout my life. If I practice the *winkte* role seriously, then people will respect me.[92]

A Lakota traditionalist explains this respect as arising from the vague and undefined gender role that berdaches fill in the social

order: "It is easy to pick out a *winkte*. They act and talk like women, but are really half and half. . . . *Winkte* is different, neither man nor woman. It is a third group, different from either men or women. That is why *winkte* is regarded as sacred. Only the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka, can explain it, so we accept it."[93]

5 *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Aspects of the Berdache Tradition*

Another important aspect of the berdache tradition involves sexual behavior. Berdaches are recognized partly by their sexual contacts with men. This is one of the first things about them that European explorers noticed. There is an amazing degree of uniformity in the explorers' reports from various areas of the Americas. The Spanish chronicler Oviedo reported about the aboriginal peoples of Middle and South America: "Very common among the Indians in many parts is the nefarious sin against nature. Even in public the Indians who are headmen or principal who sin in this way have youths with whom they use this accursed sin, and those consenting youths as soon as they fall into this guilt wear 'naguas' [skirts] like women."[1] For the Lache Indians of Colombia, Fernandez de Piedrahita, explaining that the men preferred a berdache over a woman, concluded that "the abomination of sodomy was freely permitted."[2]

In North America, Pedro Fages, the Spanish colonial governor in California, wrote about berdaches among the natives there:

> I have substantial evidence that those Indian men who, both here and farther inland, are observed in the dress, clothing, and character of women—there being two or three such in each village—pass as sodomites by profession (it being confirmed that all these Indians are much addicted to this abominable vice) and permit the heathen to practice the execrable, unnatural abuse of their bodies. They are called *joyas,* and are held in great esteem.[3]

Many of the European observers were mystified by these practices, saying only that the American Indian tribes "are strangely given to sodomy."[4] One imagines the Indians won-

dering why the European men were strangely restricted in their sexual behavior to women only. On La Salle's exploration in the upper Mississippi Valley in the 1690s, Henri de Tonti described Illinois men as being sexual toward women "with excess, and boys above women, so that [those boys] become by that horrid vice, very effeminate."[5]

Likewise, a priest with La Salle characterized the Indian men as "lewd, even unnaturally so, having boys dressed as women, destined for infamous purposes." Berdaches, he said, were numerous.[6] The French explorer Pierre Liette, after four years living among the Illinois Indians, concluded in 1702 that "The sin of sodomy prevails more among them than in any other nation." Since the young men were not satisfied in their passions by women alone, Liette wrote, "There are men who are bred for this purpose from their childhood. . . . There are men sufficiently embruted to have dealings with them."[7]

Two decades later, a Jesuit missionary wrote that berdaches among the Indians of the Mississippi Valley "abandon themselves to the most infamous passions." He declared: "Effeminacy and lewdness were carried to the greatest excess in those parts; men were seen to wear the dress of women without a blush, and to debase themselves so as to perform those occupations which are most peculiar to the [female] sex, from whence followed a corruption of morals past all expression; it was pretended that this custom comes from . . . religion. . . . If the custom I speak of had its beginning in the spirit, it has ended in the flesh."[8] Native Americans, of course, saw no opposition between matters of the spirit and of the flesh.

While there is much variation in sexuality across Indian cultures, we can draw certain conclusions. First, berdaches usually participate in sex with men, but homosexual acts are not limited to berdaches. Second, sexuality in many Native American societies is not seen as solely for the purpose of reproduction, and is not restricted by the institution of marriage. It is instead conceived as a gift from the spirit world, to be enjoyed and appreciated. In a society without many cultural proscriptions repressing human sexual variations, there is an attitude of comparative casualness regarding sexuality. What Ruth Underhill wrote about Papago sexual attitudes applies to many groups: "There

was considerably less scope for sexual offenses than in modern society and a man, particularly, had a great deal of freedom."[9] Stigmatizing people because of their sexual behavior, or restricting people's choices generally, is not seen as a valid function of society. Personal freedom is too highly regarded for such an approach to exist.

How such a society operates is best seen by looking at traditional Mohave culture as an example. This Colorado River people's aboriginal heritage was explored by ethnographer George Devereux, who lived among them in the 1930s. While Devereux's writings are controversial to some anthropologists, contemporary Mohaves who know their traditions tell me that what he had to say about sexuality is accurate.[10] Devereux concluded that the Mohave have an "easy" culture, providing "a rational, supportive, lenient and flexible upbringing" for children. This easygoing pattern of child rearing does not of course entirely eliminate domestic conflicts or psychological stress, but Devereux found that it does diminish the incidence and severity of mental illness.[11]

The Mohave attitude toward sexuality fits in with this carefree way of life. Devereux noted that "Mohave sex-life is entirely untrammelled by social restraint." The people felt that sexual activity was an enjoyable and humorous sport, a gift from nature to be freely indulged. Without social restrictions, and hearing the incessant sexual talk of adults, Mohave children grew up with an adventuresome attitude toward sex. Young children remained completely naked, and boys did not begin to wear clothing until puberty. Among boys, urinating competitions were a favorite game, as were contests to see who could reach orgasm most quickly by masturbating. Casual same-sex relations from early childhood were frequent, and "there is little or no objection to homosexuality among the Mohave."[12]

Though the ease of sexual experimentation, with both sexes, was enjoyed in a lighthearted way, Devereux wrote, "Even the most casual coitus implied, by definition, also an involvement of the 'soul': body, cohabiting with body and soul with soul. . . . Many children cohabited with each other and even with adults long before puberty; the [nonsexual] latency period was conspicuous by its absence. Children were much loved,

brought up permissively, and looked after at once generously and lackadaisically." Children spent their prepubertal years exploring their environment with their age mates, playing, swimming, indulging in sexual play and in sex itself. Because the society placed a high value on kindness to children, the Mohave child learned to like and trust everyone. Children interacted, sexually and otherwise, with a number of people of different ages, and did not restrict themselves to an "overintense and exclusive emotional attachment" to a single person. Devereux wrote, "This explains why the adult Mohave is so highly 'available,' both sexually and for friendship."[13] Sexual patterns tell much about the shape of the society in general. The Mohaves' casual attitude toward sexual variance reflects their general carefree and freedom-loving attitude toward life. In such an atmosphere, same-sex relations can take place in an open manner.

This is especially notable with regard to children, whose sexual play was seen as an important element in growing up and learning adult roles. The adult attitude toward a child's sexual experimentation was more likely to be one of amusement rather than alarm. Most males in many different tribes probably had experience with same-sex behavior beginning in childhood.[14] Richard Grant, an ethnographer among the Hopi Indians in the 1970s, reports that even today informants told him, "Everyone considers homosexual behavior normal during adolescence and nearly all boys form special bonds which include sexual behavior. It is expected that all will 'grow out of it,' however, so that by adulthood marriage and the production of children will occur." But until they reach their twenties, males might participate in this form of homosexuality without social disapproval.[15]

Among the seventeenth-century Mayas, these homosexual relationships among boys and young men were institutionalized. The Franciscan friar Juan de Torquemada, in Guatemala before 1615, wrote of the Mayas telling him a story of a god who came down to earth and taught the males how to have sex with each other: "Convinced therefore that it was not a sin, the custom started among parents of giving a boy to their young son, to have him for a woman and to use him as a woman; from that also began the law that if anyone approached the boy [sexually], they were ordered to pay for it, punishing them with the same penalties as those breaking the condition of a marriage."[16]

This custom of an adolescent having a younger boy as a "wife" negates the idea of homosexuality being "abnormal," simply because it was normal for that culture. The norm was for a boy to be a boy-wife in his youth, then to graduate in the teenage years to being a husband of a younger boy, and then in his twenties to get married to a woman. This custom also shows that the inclination of many if not most males is—in the absence of social taboos—to interact sexually with both males and females during at least part of their lifetime.

Among the Zapotecs of Mexico, homosexual behavior among males is common for all age groups. Since it is so common, the sexual behavior itself is not a means of classifying people. Only the nonmasculine *ira' muxe* are seen as different. A masculine man may have sex with *ira' muxe,* another masculine man, or a boy, and none of this will mark him as deviant. Boys commonly become sexually active with men during early puberty if not earlier.[17] Though they have been having sex with other males, when they are between ages twenty and thirty, masculine men almost always marry women and have children. But gossip suggests that some continue to have sexual experiences with males even after they are married. Such a pattern is not too different from that of married men who are completely heterosexual, since they will often have an illicit relationship with a female.[18]

Similarly, among traditionalist Navajos, persons who are married do not experience much limitation on their sexual and affectional life with other people, of whichever sex. Marriages traditionally are primarily economic arrangements, so they are not expected to fill all of one's sexual desires. The whole emphasis of Navajo culture is to provide all persons independence in making decisions about their own lives.[19]

MAN-MAN HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR

A person did not restrict close bonding to her or his marriage partner. In fact, among both women and men, individuals in American Indian cultures generally were emotionally closer to those of their own gender than to the other. Among men, this commonly took the form of an especially warm friendship be-

tween two males. A nineteenth-century army officer who studied Indian customs closely reported on these "brothers by adoption." Speaking of Arapaho male pairs, he stated: "They really seem to 'fall in love' with men; and I have known this affectionate interest to live for years." The union of two men was often publicly recognized in a Friendship Dance that they would do together.[20]

One of these friendships among Lakotas was described by Francis Parkman, who met the two men during his journey on the Oregon Trail in 1846. They were, he wrote, "inseparable; they ate, slept, and hunted together, and shared with one another almost all that they possessed. If there be anything that deserves to be called romantic in the Indian character, it is to be sought for in friendships such as this, which are common among many of the prairie tribes."[21]

This is not to suggest that these special friendships should be equated with homosexuality. The emphasis is on a close emotional bond, which might well be nonsexual in many of these friendships. But for those males who feel erotic attraction for another male, these recognized relationships provide a natural place for homosexual behavior to occur. The sexual behavior would not be publicly mentioned, but as reported among the Yumas during the 1920s, "Casual secret homosexuality among both women and men is well known. The latter is probably more common. This is not considered objectionable."[22]

In the event that a man is known to have been the passive partner in sex with another man, this has no effect on his gender identity. As long as he retains his masculine personality, he will not be considered a berdache.[23] White frontiersmen even reported being sexually approached by Indian warriors; this expression was in public and had no impact on the attitudes of other Indians toward these warriors.[24] After a lifetime of direct study interviewing traditionalist Indians of various tribes, anthropologist Omer Stewart concludes, "My impression is that the American Indians were fairly unconcerned one way or the other regarding homosexual behavior."[25]

Even in cultures without a recognized berdache status, homosexual behavior may occur without stigma. Among both the

Kaskas and the Ingalik, for example, men sometimes engaged in anal intercourse, though avoiding oral-genital sex acts.[26] It is important to point out that same-sex eroticism is not limited to the berdache role. When I was living on reservations in the Dakotas, several masculine Lakota men made sexual advances to me. They clearly wanted to take the active role. I asked each one if this homosexual involvement meant that he was a *winkte*. Each man seemed surprised by my question. They answered in the negative, explaining that *winkte* is defined by androgyny, which they are not. Since they did not consider me to be a *winkte,* they were interacting as one male to another.

Yet it is on the berdache that Indian male-male sexuality is mainly focused. Because traditional cultures assume that androgynous males are homosexual, berdaches become the most visible practitioners of that behavior. For example, in the Lakota language the word for male-male anal intercourse (regardless of the participants) is *winktepi,* showing Lakotas' close association between homosexual behavior and berdachism.[27]

BERDACHE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND THE INCEST TABOO

Interestingly, most tribes (but not all) do not see it as proper behavior for two berdaches to have sex with each other. Among Lakotas, while masculine men might have sex with each other in secret, berdaches never do. A Lakota berdache states, "'Homosexuals' are two he-men who live together as a couple. That is not done here; it is an effeminate and a he-man." I asked him if the man having sex with a berdache could be gay-identified, and he explained that whether or not the man was exclusively homosexual does not matter. What matters is that the man must be masculine. It is the character difference, the gender identity, that is important in establishing a relationship.

Because of a sense of sameness, which operates like a family relation, for a berdache to have sex with another berdache is like incest. Asked about sex with another like himself, a Pueblo berdache "regards the idea as laughable." He does not look down

on androgynous males, but he thinks of them indulgently as "sisters."[28] The incest taboo operates to restrict sexual relations between males in the same way that it does heterosexually; rather than proscribing all homosexual behavior, this taboo restricts sexual relations to persons outside of one's kin group. Berdaches, with their sense of sisterhood, are in essence a fictive kin group.

All societies are to some degree exogamous; that is, they specify that sexual behavior should occur outside the defined family group. While modern industrial society specifies exogamy only with respect to the nuclear family of parents, children, and siblings, many American Indian societies extend incest rules to a much broader network of kin. By expecting people to marry and form affectional relationships with other people outside the kin-group, additional "in-laws" become allied. The number of "kin," upon whom one can call for help, is increased.

Some of the supposed condemnation of berdaches in the anthropology literature is in reality a statement about this incest taboo. In this context we can understand an instance of a Santee berdache who was exiled from his village. Some anthropologists have cited this text as evidence of negative attitudes toward homosexuality, but it is not that at all. Ruth Landes recorded the story of a *winkta* who had been accepted in his village without condemnation until he attempted to seduce several of the men in his village. The people were so upset by this that they held a formal ceremony, exiling the *winkta* for life. This is a very severe penalty, which to Western eyes seems to be a condemnation of homosexuality.

Yet, in this case the *winkta* moved to a neighboring Santee village, where he was freely accepted and the men were happy to partake of his "hospitality." Why was the reaction of the two villages so different? It is important to note that each village was made up of persons in a single clan. Since clans were exogamous among the Santees, it was forbidden for anyone to have sex with another person in their clan. This exile is not evidence of anti-homosexual feelings, but of the *winkta*'s violation of the incest taboo. The men of his own village were like brothers, and so the *winkta* was treated no differently than a man who attempted sex with his sisters. The people of the other village were of a

different clan, and therefore were acceptable marriage partners, so it violated no incest taboo for them to indulge in sex with the *winkta*.[29] Rather than reflecting opposition to homosexuality, this exile demonstrates its acceptance into the sexual system.

Likewise, among the Navajo, marriage rules for a *nadle* are exactly the same as for heterosexual marriage. One cannot marry a person from the same clan as one's father or mother, or from the same clan as any of their parents. To do so would be seen as bringing harm on oneself. In traditional Navajo culture, marriages were often set up as economic arrangements by the two families. In this case, it was common that one might have sexual affairs outside of the marriage. Clan rules of exogamy apply also for casual affairs, for *nadle* as well as heterosexual couplings, but sometimes those rules are ignored in the case of casual sexuality. The point is that *nadle* sexual behavior is integrated as a part of the sexual system, with the same rules applying.[30] It is striking that most anthropologists who have written about berdachism did not ask about the kinship relations of the berdache's partners. David Greenberg suggests that an ethnocentric view of homosexuality as psychotic prevented some of these ethnographers from examining the normative structures of homosexual relationships in a culture that does not stigmatize it.[31]

BERDACHE SEXUAL TECHNIQUES

The association made by the Europeans between androgyny and what they called "sodomy" is also made by American Indians. The difference is that the Indian view does not have the negativism evident in European accounts. What many Native American societies try to do is regulate same-sex relations by focusing them on the berdache rather than outrightly prohibiting them to all males. While casual same-sex behavior might still occur between masculine men, the society puts pressure on individuals (to a greater or lesser extent) to follow the accepted, institutionalized form. When men desire male-male sex, they are encouraged to have it with a berdache. The emphasis in traditional culture is on homosexual behavior that in a social sense

is not homosexual; it is most accurately described as *heterogender.* The berdache and his male partner do not occupy the same recognized gender status.

These heterogender roles are clarified by looking at the sexual techniques of berdaches and their partners. But gaining accurate knowledge about specific sexual practices is difficult, given the reticence of many Euroamericans on this matter. Many of the sources go no further than vaguely referring to the "heinous crime against nature," "perverted sin," or "unnatural acts." Early anthropologists, who would have been able to get more uninhibited statements from traditionalist Indians, often were reluctant to ask specifics. Alice Fletcher, for example, writing in the late nineteenth century on the Lakota berdache, referred only briefly to sexual behavior, saying nothing more specific than that *winktes* "become subject to gross actions."[32]

On those rare occasions when ethnographers did gather specific information about sex acts, we find that native languages have special terms for lovemaking between males, and the terms used for berdaches are not the same as those used for man-woman sex. For example, the fact that the Lakotas have a special term for male-male intercourse, *winktepi,* is further evidence that berdaches are not simply institutionalized women.

Fellatio is sometimes among the sexual practices of berdaches. Among the Crow Indians in the 1880s, Dr. A. B. Holder, the reservation physician, knew five *badé.* He found out that they produced "sexual orgasm by taking the male organ of the active party in the[ir] lips. . . . Of all the many varieties of sexual perversion, this, it seems to me, is the most debased that could be conceived of."[33] Whether or not this was the only technique among the Crows is unclear, but a Crow berdache in 1982 told me that performing fellatio is his favored sex practice. Among the Mohaves, fellatio is popular with heterosexual couples as well, so the fact that the *alyha* performs fellatio on his partner does not make him stand out as different.[34]

Sometimes there is an exchange of roles in sexual behavior. A Lakota man heard stories from his grandfather, telling him that when a *winkte* has sex with a man, it was usually the *winkte* performing oral sex on the man or being the insertee in anal sex. But sometimes they would reverse roles, and the man would take the passive position. This would be kept private between

them, but it did occur. A Hupa berdache says of his partners, "As far as it was publicly known, he was the man. But in bed there was an exchange of roles. They have to keep an image as masculine, so they always ask me not to tell anybody." A Haliwa-Saponi male who plays the passive role in sex told me that the men of his community come to him wanting to take the active role. But there is a phrase that they use—"Everybody wants to wear an apron sometimes"—which signifies when the man wants to be in the passive position. It has been his experience that practically every macho man with whom he has established a relationship will wish to take the passive role at times, but only after the man trusts the berdache not to reveal this fact.

Still, it is clear that the usual sexual behavior of the berdache is to take the insertee position in anal intercourse. Given this preference, it is even more understandable why two berdaches would not have sex with each other. At the beginning of the century, Alfred Kroeber wrote about a Cheyenne berdache who lived and dressed like a woman but "had the voice and genitals of a man." "She" was known to have sexual intercourse with men "by lying on her back and putting her penis on her stomach, permitting access into her anus."[35]

The most dependable sources on sexual techniques are of course berdaches and their mates. George Devereux interviewed several Mohaves who had had sex with berdaches. The *alyhas'* favored sexual act was anal intercourse performed on them. They had erections during intercourse, but resented it if their partner touched their erect penis. Informants told Devereux that intercourse with an *alyha* is surrounded by an etiquette to which the partner had better conform, or else the man could get into all sorts of trouble. Kuwal, a Mohave man who had had several *alyha* as wives, said that they insisted that their penis be referred to as a cunnus (clitoris). He spoke freely and without embarrassment about their sexual behavior:

> You may play with the penis of your wife when it is flaccid. I often did it, saying "Your cunnus is so nice and big and your pubic hair is nice and soft to touch." Then my alyha wife would loll about, giggling happily like this "hhh." She was very much pleased with herself and me. She liked to be told about her cunnus. When *alyha* get an erection, it embarrasses them, because the penis sticks out between the loose fibers of the bark-skirt. They used to have erections

when we had intercourse. Then I would put my arm about them and play with the erect penis, even though they hated it. I was careful not to laugh aloud, but I chuckled inwardly. At the pitch of intercourse the *alyha* ejaculate. . . . I never dared touch the penis in erection, except during intercourse. You'd court death otherwise, because they would get violent if you play with their erect penis too much.[36]

With the Mohaves having such a strong desire for humor, they would kid the berdaches about these erections. Devereux quoted a Mohave story: "A certain man passing by the house of an *alyha* said to him in jest, 'How is your penis today?' 'Not penis, cunnus,' replied the *alyha* angrily. 'Well then, how big is your cunnus?' the man replied, using the word 'erection' instead of 'big.' The *alyha* picked up a club and for one or two weeks tried to assault the man whenever he saw him."[37]

Another man who freely reported sex with a berdache was a Kwakiutl chief interviewed in the 1930s. He remembered several berdaches, only one of whom wore women's clothing. The one that he knew best he first met in the 1880s when he was an unmarried young man. Upon seeing him, the berdache said "You, young fellow, I'm going to have you for my sweetheart." Later on, the berdache asked him to come visit her at her house: "When I went there, she caught hold of me, and she throwed me right into her bed. My, she was strong—awful strong! . . . She opened her legs and pulled me in, taking hold of my pecker and putting it in. I didn't work; she done all the work." Having enjoyed the experience, the next time he saw her "I called her to come to my bed and lie with me." But she refused him that time. Nevertheless, they did get back together for sex on later occasions, and he described his attempts to touch the berdache's penis: "While I was laying with her, I feel for her privates, but she just take my hand and squeeze it until I couldn't move my hand." The other men told him she did the same with them.[38]

These statements accord with my own fieldwork. A number of Lakota *winktes* confided to me that the only sexual role they have ever taken is in passive anal intercourse with a man. They have never had sex with a woman, and have never taken an inserter role in sex with a man. They do not generally care much for oral sex, and have no desire to do anything other than have

a man enter them anally. They will sometimes have orgasms from the excitement of this act, but even if they do not they told me that they will often feel that they have had "an internal orgasm." Men who have been their sexual partners told me that berdaches do not wish to have their penis touched, or to take the inserter role in anal intercourse even if the masculine partner wants to exchange roles.

Berdache Promiscuity

Boys who later became berdaches often began their sexual experiences before puberty. Feminine-acting boys are sought out for sex by older masculine boys. One androgynous male from a Southwestern reservation remembers that after his seventh birthday older boys expressed their attraction to him and to other boys like himself. He was participating in sex with other males well before puberty, always taking "the feminine role." After puberty he would get erections and ejaculate solely from the pleasure of being anally penetrated.[39] Likewise, a Crow Indian told me that when he was a young student at boarding school, the other Indian boys approached him secretly at night for sex. Though he enjoyed the sex, he did not like the furtive and impersonal nature of these encounters.

Others have more pleasant memories, of an ongoing relationship. A Lakota *winkte* states matter-of-factly that he began to be sexually active when he was eight years old, when he had an affair with a forty-year-old man. "Since he was good to me and for me, it was considered by my family to be okay and my own private business—no one else's." Another recalls that when he was eight years old his uncle, who was in his thirties, would give him body rubs in which he would rub the boy's genitals. "I never knew if it was right or wrong. I was too afraid to know what was happening. They'd call it molestation today, but I don't think it had any bad impact on me in the long run one way or the other. There was no harm done. It intrigued me that I could do this. And then my feelings started to awaken inside of me as I got older and I began sexual intercourse with men."

When the same person was ten, two heterosexual Indian men

picked him up when he was hitchhiking, got him intoxicated, and raped him. Despite this bad experience, he went on to have sex with a number of men: "I was never connected to women, never any sexual attraction at all. . . . I knew I liked the male sex, but I didn't like it to be that intense. I didn't like the rape. But then at age ten I began a whole string of involvements in sex, from ministers to tribal presidents to government officials. Mostly Indian, but white as well. I never was attracted to someone my age." Sometimes he took the initiative in beginning an affair, and other times it was the man. These experiences were just sexual involvements rather than a full-time relationship, since most of the men were married. This pattern continued until he was sixteen, at which time he met a thirty-two-year-old masculine construction worker, and they became lovers for six years.

Upon reaching adulthood, some berdaches would themselves take adolescent boys as lovers. These would be masculine boys and young men who were unmarried, who otherwise did not have a socially accepted sexual outlet. One Shoshone *ma ai'pots* was married to two young men at the same time, sleeping with each on alternate nights, while another *ma ai'pots* (who owned a large herd of horses) always had a group of half a dozen teenage boys who would stay with him.[40] Omer Stewart observed a berdache at Zuni in 1939: "He wore woman's dress and arranged his hair in the style of women, and was known in the community as providing an attractive hangout for young men. . . . The Indian governor of Zuni and other members of the community seemed to accept the berdache without criticism, although there was some joking and laughing about his ability to attract the young men to his home."[41]

Sex with Married Men

Berdaches seem to have had no problem attracting partners, including married men. There were certain times when sex with a berdache was more socially accepted and convenient than sex with a woman. Though some *winktes* were the second or third wife for a warrior, according to my informants those *winktes* who were not married had their own tipi where men would visit

during the time that they were not having sex with their wives. This would be when the wives were menstruating, pregnant, nursing an infant, or during religious days when heterosexual contact was taboo.

Among the Lakotas at least, there was some subtle discouragement for a man to marry a *winkte,* and encouragement for a *winkte* to remain single and take multiple men as sexual partners. One elderly informant remembers, "None of the *winkte* I knew were married to men; they lived alone and men would visit them." A Lakota *winkte* told me that he greatly prefers this pattern. He lives with his parents and his men friends visit him: "Married men are the best. . . . I want to lie with all the men. I used to keep a list of how many men I had been with."

Similarly, a Pueblo berdache prefers married men who have at least four or five children as proof of their virility. He always takes the passive role in anal and oral sex. His partners are the men of the pueblo whose wives are absent, ill, or ill-disposed toward them. They come knocking on the door of his large house at night.[42] A Kwakiutl man who had an affair with a berdache said that the one he knew "used to go around with quite a lot of boys." Another one "had a lot of chums among our people around here. Some of them says they used to lie in bed with him." Among each other, the men compared their sexual experiences with berdaches.[43]

Not only do the lovers of berdaches not mind being seen with the berdaches, they may serve as a public following for them. Even today among the Hopi, a twenty-year-old berdache, "a real 'queen,'" was observed by an ethnographer at a recent ceremony: "He was accompanied by four other young men, all of whom were *very* good looking while simultaneously looking rather tough." Other Hopis assumed automatically that they were his sexual partners.[44]

Traditionalist Indian men do not have a reluctance to be seen with an androgynous male, in the way that whites often do. One evening when I was with a berdache in a local bar near the Crow reservation, some Indian men recognized my friend and approached him in a quite friendly manner. One of them put his arm around the berdache, gave him a little squeeze on the thigh, just as one might see a man do toward a woman in a bar.

My friend made no advances; it was the man who made all the moves. The man did this without hesitation or embarrassment in front of his friends.

In traditional times, a Lakota informant told me, higher-class *winktes* had up to twelve regular partners. On his reservation even today, he says, "Straight Indian guys will go sexually with a gay here, in a way that whites don't. A man will go out with *winktes* and with women, but he is not considered to be a *winkte*." Another informant, an attractive androgynous young man, estimates that about half of the "straight men" of his community have approached him for sex. One of these masculine men admitted to me that if he had lived in traditional times, he would have wanted to have a *winkte* as a spouse.

What we can see from this pattern is that berdaches serve as a socially recognized outlet for male sexual release beyond the marriage bond. With berdaches serving this function for both unmarried adolescents and married men, they do not need female prostitution. W. W. Hill concluded that, "No stigma is placed on the irregular sex activities of the *nadle*. . . . Their promiscuity is respected rather than censured." Hill interviewed a *nadle* who told him, without a trace of embarrassment, that she had had relations with more than a hundred Navajo men.[45]

Special Occasions for Sex

Beyond all this, there were certain occasions in the aboriginal male life-style when a berdache was especially convenient for sex, such as on hunting expeditions and in war parties. How the berdache interacted with the men on one of these trips away from home is suggested by what happens among modern groups of Indian men. Ethnographer Harald Broch, living among the Hare Indians of Canada's Northwest Territory in 1973, went with a group of men on a firefighting expedition. There were thirty Hare men in this group, plus a twenty-three-year-old male cook whom Broch calls Sony. In contrast to the shabby blue jeans of the men, Sony wore tight-fitting purple or turquoise bell-bottom trousers and fancy colored silky shirts. He always kept his clothing neat and clean, and his shoulder-length hair thoroughly combed. Broch describes Sony as speaking with "a gentle flowing voice, sometimes interrupted by high

pitched thrills of laughter. His speech was usually underlined with well controlled movements of arms, hands and fingers. His speech and behaviour formed a sharp contrast to the much rougher appearance of the rest of the crew."[46]

As soon as the tents were erected in the camp, a "mock fight" started between two of the men: "'Me, I want to sleep with Sony,' one of them shouted. 'No way,' the other cried, 'it's going to be me!' A third guy put his arm around Sony's narrow shoulders: 'Come let's go and sleep.' Sony shook him off laughing." Sony decided who he wanted to sleep with, and the other men acted sullen. At the end of each day, when the men returned from fighting the fire, they would tease any man who had stayed in camp, saying "How is Sony in bed? Tell us?"

His special role was understood and accepted by all the men in the camp. Even though there was another cook present, only Sony held the berdache role. Sony was consistently called "mother" or "auntie" as a term of endearment. Unlike the other cook, "he was always very eager to hear whether they liked his cooking or not. . . . If the response was good, Sony shone like the sun." His behavior was in sharp contrast to nonberdache cooks, who did not mother the men the way Sony did. He was always examining the men to see if they looked healthy, saying to them:

> "My dear, you look sick, let me treat you. I think you should stay home tomorrow. I will treat you." And, what is important, he was most persistent. Other people could also propose that a man should stay home to rest for a day, but nobody would repeat such a proposal except Sony. And nobody ever became angry or irritated with him. Instead an arm would be put around him: "Thanks for caring for me, mom."[47]

Though he liked these female kin references, Sony sometimes got upset at the men for their constant teasing about his femininity. At times he would kick or hit someone, whereupon the others would just laugh. Broch pointed out how exceptional this response was: "All that was done was to try to keep him at a distance. Carefully he was pushed away. He is the only Hare Indian man I have ever seen hit another man while sober." The men treated him indulgently because of his many kindnesses to

them. He was often seen to stroke their hair, dirty with sweat and ashes, and say, "I think you should wash; you would be much handsomer then."[48]

In the camp, Broch observed, "A homosexual aspect seems to be present all the time, and proposals by others to go to bed with Sony were constantly recurring. In some respects this is not too unique. In other instances a man could be teased by another who said he wanted to make love to him because he was so handsome. But this would just be said once and never repeated over and over again as were the proposals directed to Sony. Also Sony halfway accepted such invitations by letting the suitors embrace him." Having said all this, Broch then concludes that there is no reason to believe that homosexual acts occurred in the camp: "It never went further than mockplay."[49]

I do not trust Broch's conclusion. Despite the value of his essay in reporting the homoerotic interaction of the men that he observed in the camp, I do not think he can accurately conclude that there was no sex going on. He does not specify why he concluded that no sex occurred. What Broch's statement does not account for is that the specific sexual behavior might not have been talked about, as a form of politeness or from a sense of privacy.

Broch surely did not get accurate information from Sony himself. The ethnographer did not sleep in Sony's tent, and when he was gone with the firefighters during the day he did not know what went on with a man who stayed in camp with Sony. Such confident statements of denial by ethnographers are responsible for a distorted image of the sexuality of the berdache. It is almost as if Broch is bending over backwards (no pun intended) to make this denial. Broch seems to feel that because Sony had a "girlfriend" back in town, he was not sexual with the men. Was Sony's relationship with this "girlfriend" sexual, or were they just close friends?

The ethnographer admits that he could not get much data about Sony. When he asked others about him, they were protective and "would only reply that it was well known that Sony was quite feminine. Any further information on that topic was hard to obtain."[50] Furthermore, it is obvious that Broch did not

have Sony's confidence. At one point he reported that he followed the Hare men's practice of addressing Sony as "auntie." Upon hearing this, the heretofore cheerful berdache "closed his fists and cried out: 'I am not your aunt and don't forget it.'"[51] Broch could not figure out why Sony had gotten so mad. Are we to trust a statement about something as private as sexual behavior from a reporter who so obviously was not familiar with the berdache? When Broch concludes from his fieldwork that the majority of American Indian berdaches were not homosexual, I find his conclusion dubious.

My research leads me to question ethnographers' statements about the supposed nonhomosexuality of berdaches. All of the berdaches I have interviewed eventually specified their sexual activities with men, but only after I had gained their confidence. Many of the people I interviewed mentioned that they would not confide in a heterosexual researcher. In an example that is similar to the Hare firefighting team reported by Broch, I interviewed a Micmac Indian who fulfilled a similar role. As with the Hare, berdaches have not been previously reported among the Micmac, yet my informant is so well accepted among his people that he was twice elected chief of his reservation in the 1970s. He told me that everyone on his reservation realizes that he is sexual with men, and there is no prejudice. There are others like him who are likewise recognized and accepted.

In the 1960s he followed the common pattern for men on his reservation by being a migrant laborer in the "high steel" construction industry in Boston and New York City. A group of four to seven Micmac men would go as a group and work together as a team. He would always do the cooking and take care of anyone who got sick. They would rent a house or apartment together, and he would choose which man he wanted to sleep with him. He never had a man refuse him. In the privacy of his room, they would sleep in the same bed and would make love often. Though all of those men considered themselves heterosexual, on these trips they were eager for sexual involvement with him. He says, "I didn't talk about having sex with any of the others; they didn't talk about me among themselves. I just chose which one I wanted to sleep with me, and that was that." Concerning his favorite partner on these trips over the years, he

says, "I really feel in love with him. He married a woman, but we have sex periodically. We're still the best of friends."

If I had been the typical ethnographer, because of the fact that such private behavior is not talked about, I might have concluded that nothing sexual was occurring among these men. I doubt that I could have gotten the men to admit to their sexual activity with the berdache. The assumption of heterosexuality unless there is explicit evidence to the contrary is very suspect in the literature on berdachism. Even with abundant evidence of affection and caring between the berdache and the men in a group like a raiding party, a firefighting unit, or a construction crew, some observers will still conclude that there is nothing homosexual going on.

In a valuable article published in a gay magazine in 1965, a thirty-five-year-old Mohave described his place in tribal society. The author, who stayed with the berdache on the reservation, wrote, "The Indian boys tease each other about sleeping with him, yet their teasing is somehow not ridicule of him. Among the Indians he is accepted with equanimity. . . . They often talk about making love to him (in a crowd which includes him), yet it is understood that they don't really mean it. Men being men, however, more than a few of them actually do share his bed when they're sure none of the others will catch them at it." Asked about all the sexual teasing, the Mohave replied, "I just go along with it. I'm not crazy about it. But, for the most part, we all get along. They don't mean any harm by it. . . . Some of the boys run around with me. We have a good time. Oh, I don't mean like sex all the time. I mean we have a good time like friends—singing Mohave songs and dancing."[52]

Far from being "mockplay," the sexual teasing universally engaged in serves as a smoke screen that preserves the privacy of the men who do have sexual involvement with a berdache. Because all the men are doing the teasing, it means that the man who is actually erotically attracted to the berdache does not stand out. Maybe all the men are having sex, or maybe not, but because the teasing is open and general, and it is understood that no sexual contact is necessarily implied, this practice allows for same-sex affection without suspicion. Such a custom is in sharp contrast to Western society, where any physical touching be-

tween men raises eyebrows, and where the result is a pervasive fear among many men (even exclusively heterosexual men) that others will think they are "a homosexual." The sexual teasing of the Indians allows for everyone to be comfortable. It is a mechanism to keep people from invading others' privacy, and reactions like Harald Broch's prove that such a tactic is effective.

Sex with a berdache is by no means limited to times away from the village. Lakota men were known to visit a *winkte* sexually before embarking on a raid, as it was said to increase their ferocity.[53] There were other specific reasons, besides traveling in a male group, which were offered as justification for sex with a berdache—for example, men who wanted a *winkte* to give their son a sacred name would often engage in sex with the *winkte*.

Among the Papagos, the berdache bestowed obscene nicknames on his favored sexual partners. The men were very proud of these names, and since having one was prestigious, they would publicly boast about them. From fieldwork in the 1930s, Ruth Underhill observed that berdaches might marry a man, but since they generally prospered by themselves they tended to live alone and be visited by different men. Underhill concluded, "No scorn was felt for the berdache. He was respected and liked by the women and his sex life with the men was a community institution."[54] During the Drinking Feast and the Maiden's Dance, the usual proprieties were dispensed with as Papagos engaged in a general sexual orgy. At these "official nights of saturnalia . . . homosexual tendencies were openly acknowledged and sanctioned." Moreover, since all men could participate but only unmarried women could attend, there were considerably more males than females present. In such a context the berdache was likely to be quite sexually active.[55]

Another reference to a ceremonial recognition of the sex life of the berdache was recorded by George Catlin, who spent eight years traveling among Western Indians during the 1830s. Among the Sauk and Fox, Catlin attended a feast to the *I-coo-coo-a*. "For extraordinary privileges which he is known to possess, he is . . . looked upon as *medicine* and sacred, and a feast is given to him annually; and initiatory to it, a dance by those few young men of the tribe who can, as in the sketch (see plate 6),

dance forward and publicly make their boast (without the denial of the Berdashe), that . . ." Here Catlin switches to writing (ostensibly) in the Sauk and Fox language. However, linguistic analysis shows the lettering to be meaningless gibberish.[56] Nevertheless, it is clear from the context that Catlin means only those men who had had sexual relations with the berdache could dance. "Such, and such only, are allowed to enter the dance and partake of the feast. . . . It will be seen that the society consists of quite a limited number of 'odd fellows.'"[57]

Catlin concludes his discussion with a condemnatory statement, claiming that the Indians made the berdache "servile and degrading." In imposing his own values on the Sauk and Fox, Catlin missed the significance of the event he had witnessed. While some anthropologists have used Catlin as evidence of the berdache's low status, there are many contradictions in his claim. Simply by virtue of being offered a feast, the berdache was accorded a high status. And the men who voluntarily got up to dance did so because there was a certain status in being the sexual partner of the *I-coo-coo-a*. But an even more important element of this dance is that it offered the berdache an opportunity publicly to humiliate any man who dared to dance. Simply by denying past sexual relations, the berdache could make a man's dance seem an empty boast. This surely served as a powerful weapon whereby the *I-coo-coo-a* could ensure that his partners would not mistreat him. All he had to do was to *deny* having sex with them!

As with the Papago men who would boast of having an obscene name given them by the berdache, the Sauk and Fox Indians had to stay on the good side of the berdache or risk public humiliation. This kind of response from the masculine partners tells us much about the status of berdaches themselves. Sexual behavior with men is thus an important element in the berdache tradition. Homosexual behavior may occur between nonberdache males, but the cultures emphasize the berdache as the usual person a man would go to for male sex. With the role thus institutionalized, the berdache serves the sexual needs of many men without competing against the institution of heterosexual marriage. Men are not required to make a choice between being

heterosexual or being homosexual, since they can accommodate both desires. Nevertheless, for that minority of men who do wish to make such a choice, a number of cultures allow them the option of becoming the husband to a berdache.

6 *A Normal Man: The Berdache's Husband and the Question of Sexual Variance*

In 1542, one of the earliest Spanish explorers in Florida, Cabeza de Vaca, reported on his previous five years among the Timucua Indians: "During the time I was thus among these people I saw a devilish thing, and it is that I saw one man married to another."[1] The sources are extremely unsatisfactory in describing these relationships, but the fact that these relationships exist is noted for several tribes, usually by a brief statement saying that the berdache "lived together with a man, as his wife." This was noted as the socially accepted practice for some berdaches among the Ojibwa, Winnebago, Lakota, and Yuma.[2] It was said that the only male homosexual behavior among the Quinault Indians involved those who had relationships with the *keknatsa'nxwix* ("part woman male").[3]

In a massive survey of northern California Indian cultures conducted in the 1930s, all but one of the groups who recognized a berdache status also recognized his marriage to a "normal man."[4] Next to doing women's work and acting androgynously, sexual behavior with a man is the most commonly noted characteristic of berdache status. This aspect is even more widespread among berdaches than a special ceremonial role.

An ethnographer of the Omahas wrote in the 1880s: "*Mingu-ga* [*mexoga*] took other men as their husbands. Frank La Fleche knew one such man, who had had several men as his husbands. . . . [They] are publicly known, and do not appear to be despised or to excite disgust."[5] Among the Southern Maidus, a traditionalist informant in the 1920s explained in a respectful manner about *osa'pu:* "They just grew that way, being half-man and half-woman," and in a similar matter-of-fact way said "he lives with a man. . . . No contempt was shown them."[6] The berdache's sexuality is accepted in the same way as his an-

drogyny; both are seen as reflections of his spirit, his basic nature.

THE ROLE OF MARRIAGE IN NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES

Marriage between a berdache and a man existed in the context of the general position of marriage in aboriginal American Indian society. Although wide ranges of activities are open for both women and men, there is in most Native American societies a basic division of labor into two halves. This is usually referred to as a "division of labor by sex." By dividing the necessary tasks into "men's work" and "women's work," each person has to learn only half of the jobs available. This is important in small-scale societies that do not have much role specialization. It is, however, more accurate to call this pattern a division of labor by *gender,* because people can take on a gender role that is divergent from their genital sex.

Within a marriage in a gender-divided economy, there can be only two roles: husband and wife. The sex of the person who takes these roles may vary, but the roles generally do not. This is an additional reason that two berdaches would not marry, and two masculine men would not marry. Masculine men might have sex, which is their private business, but marriage is a public matter and an economic concern.

Each person has something to gain by entering a marriage. They gain the expertise of the other in tasks that are different from their own skills. Why should two hunters marry, if neither of them is good at gathering plants? The closest exception to this rule is among the Navajos. When *nadle* marry, they dress like men. A Navajo informant explains, "If they marry men, it is just like two men working together."[7] Yet it must be remembered that *nadle* also do women's work, so such a marriage is still viable. Economically, the husband has both a wife and a husband, which partly explains the reputation these marriages have for economic success.

When people get married, they gain another advantage: the economic security that comes with a wider circle of relatives. Nothing is worse in a kin-based society than to be without kin.

Marriage creates an alliance of families, whereby one has twice as many relatives on which to draw for support. In the context of a subsistence economy, with a division of labor by gender, it makes sense that such an economy would be family centered. Families provide extra productive labor and take care of the aged.

Marriages between men and berdaches fit into this pattern. In such a marriage, the man takes the husband role, and the berdache takes the wife role. Recognizing the fluidity of women's and men's roles and the mixed-gender status of the berdache means that there can be considerable variation from this simply stated dichotomy. The Navajo example just cited illustrates the variation in spousal relationships and the mixed-gender status of *nadle*.

In a marriage between a man and a berdache, the berdache supplies women's work and a network of kin, like any other wife. Lakota chief Crazy Horse, for example, had one or two *winktes* for wives, along with his female wives.[8] A berdache wife offered the same economic advantages of any other polygynous marriage. While it is true that a berdache cannot reproduce, many of the reports of such marriages mention that the husband already had children, either through a previous marriage or by taking a berdache as a second or third wife. But with adoption being so commonly accepted, children may even be gained by the berdache. Thus, the same advantages of heterosexual marriage also accrue to the man who marries a berdache.

The two roles of husband and berdache are not to be confused. After I had been living in the household of a well-known *winkte* on a particular reservation for a while, a medicine man told me in private, "People say ——— is a 'he-she' and you must be his lover." They did not say I was a "he-she," because he was clearly the androgynous one. Personal character and gender role, not sexual behavior per se, distinguish the *winkte* role.

THE HUSBAND OF THE BERDACHE

Sexual behavior of berdaches is often considered a serious reflection of their spiritual natures. But for other people, it can be

an object of humor. A Pueblo *kwih-doh,* who has sex only with men, participates in this humor. He is a member of the Clown Society; their job is to provide comic relief during the serious religious ceremonies. His references to homosexual behavior are guaranteed to elicit good-natured giggling—such as during a ceremony when he performed a mock wedding ceremony between two unsuspecting men. His humor is not self-critical or malicious; same-sexuality lies comfortably within the expectations of the culture.[9] The attitude expressed in many Indian societies is that sex in general is funny. It is not considered gross or sinful, so there is not an undercurrent of hostility as there often is in the joking that occurs in Anglo-American society.

In some cultures the husband is treated with the same respect as any other husband, but in others he is not. Some tribes do considerable kidding of the husband of the berdache. While part of this simply arises from a joking attitude toward sex in general, it seems especially directed toward anything that varies from the usual. A Lakota traditionalist told me that the humor is similar to that surrounding a young man who has an elderly woman for a spouse. It is not a matter for social condemnation, but the participants open themselves to humorous barbs simply because their relationship is unusual.

Kidding is often directed more toward the husbands than toward berdaches themselves. According to a Crow berdache, "If a Crow man moved in with me, other men would tease him. They wouldn't tease me, because they all know what I am." The joking toward the husband could also be due to the reputation that berdaches have for being highly productive workers. Since the berdaches are very good providers, a Crow traditionalist pointed out to me, and give many gifts to their boyfriends, the man could get a reputation for being lazy. One of the common taunts that Plains Indians might aim at the husband of the berdache is that he wants a wife who not only keeps house but hunts for him as well.[10]

Why would a man go against all this teasing and marry a berdache anyway? Most of the early ethnographers who interviewed berdaches never asked this question. When I have asked Indians this, I get a mere shrug of the shoulders and a vague statement like "I don't know, he just wants to do it." Mohaves

attribute the ability of an *alyha* to attract a man to their shamanistic powers of love magic. More concretely, they consider *alyha* to be lucky, and their luck extends to their husband. Such beliefs can predispose some men to marry berdaches.[11]

This belief is realistic, in the sense that a husband benefits from the much-publicized prosperity of a berdache household. Among the Hidatsa, for example, berdaches did all the work that women did for their husbands. Yet beyond this, they were noted as being stronger than women, and never burdened with pregnancy or nursing an infant. Hidatsa statements from the 1930s tell of berdaches working harder than the average wife and exceeding the usual productivity of women in many activities.[12] This was the reason given for chiefs and other prominent men among the California Mission Indians wanting to marry *cuit, uluqui,* or *coia*.[13] A *lhamana* that Matilda Coxe Stevenson knew at Zuni was one of the richest persons of the pueblo. In the 1880s he "allied himself to a man" and until the time when Stevenson left the pueblo in 1897 "this couple were living together, and they were two of the hardest workers in the pueblo and among the most prosperous."[14]

Another reason for a man to be attracted to marriage with a berdache has to do with marital stability. In contrast to Western notions of feminine "nest building" and masculine promiscuity, among the Mohaves the stereotypes are reversed. Young women are known for their licentious habits and their disinclination to stick with one man for long. Men, who more likely crave a stable home, will often turn to an older woman or an *alyha*.[15]

Berdaches are not generally courted like virgin females, but are flirted with like older women. Either the man or the *alyha* might initiate this flirtation. Given the high value that Mohaves place on jesting, such a dalliance is often done with humor in mind. According to ethnographer George Devereux, a Mohave man might go through formal courtship with an *alyha* "for the sake of creating a comical situation, a thing paramount in the Mohave pursuit of sexual pleasure. . . . It appealed to his sense of the preposterous. . . . At dances even boys who had no intention of marrying an *alyha* played around with them, as though they were flirtatious women. In the end some of them

made up their minds to become the husbands of *alyha*. Once they were married the *alyha* made exceptionally industrious wives. . . . The certitude of a well-kept home may have induced many a Mohave to set up house with an *alyha*."[16]

The other reason that berdaches attract husbands is simple sexual attraction. Since the favorite methods of sex for Mohave men are as inserter in anal intercourse and receiving fellatio, these acts can be done by an *alyha* as well as by a woman. For the men, sex with an *alyha* is in fact little different from the kind of sex they have with women. That, combined with an incessant search for new thrills, encourages Mohave men to establish such relationships. Some men become so used to having *alyha* spouses that they show no interest in women. But because many men will marry an *alyha* for at least a short time, *alyha* have no difficulty in obtaining husbands.[17]

Some men develop a sexual preference for berdaches. They may be less attracted to women, or they may in fact enjoy the prosperity of the productive berdache. People seldom make choices for only one reason. Perhaps we should merely accept that, as a Nisenan man said, he was simply "much attached" to his berdache wife.[18] But it is pointless to try to explain away the homosexual element in such a man. Unlike the berdache, he is not androgynous, and he does not identify himself as different from other husbands. We cannot account for his sexuality by psychoanalytic theories of "inversion" or "deviancy." His preference is simply evidence of the potential within many "normal" men for sexual enjoyment with another male.

Sexual preference and gender identity are two independent variables, which the distinction between berdaches and their husbands shows quite clearly. One can be homosexual in behavior without being gender nonconformist, and without having an identity different from other men's. American Indian values recognize these differences, which Western culture confuses by labeling anyone who participates in same-sex relations as "a homosexual." By socially constructing only the berdache as different, with their partners as "normal," Indian cultures avoid categorizing people into two opposed categories based on sexual behavior.

COMPARABLE EXAMPLES IN WESTERN CULTURE

We can even see some ambivalence about sexual orientation in Western culture. It is difficult to make comparisons between Indian and Anglo-American cultures because Anglo thought is restricted by the idea that there are only two genders. Nevertheless, there is some resistance among working-class people to dividing all people into opposite orientations based on the anatomical sex of their partners. In an attempt to gain additional insight into the feelings of the husband of the berdache, I have interviewed non-Indian males who have opted against transsexual surgery, but who prefer to dress and live their daily lives as women. They do not identify as gay, but more as androgynes: "like a woman, but not a woman," as one told me.

Some of them are asexual, but most have boyfriends. Their usual method of meeting men is in daily activities at work, or in heterosexual social settings. The men they meet, who are usually working class, believe the person they are relating to is a woman. The feminine male does not bring up sex, but focuses on social compatibility with the man to see if they get along well as a couple. The feminine male resists sexual involvement before he has had time to get to know the man well. When the man eventually does press for sex, what happens is some variation on the following account, told to me by one of these males. Though he dresses and looks like a woman, he does not identify as transvestite or transsexual, but these are the only terms that he knows. He explains:

> When I have been going with a man for several weeks, and we have really gotten to know each other, I show him a notebook of newspaper clippings I have collected over the years on transvestism and transsexualism. They ask me why I'm showing them this, and I calmly tell them that I am sort of like that. Most of them go into total shock; they can't believe that I am really a man. They say things like, ". . . but you're so feminine!" None of these men identify as gay, or even bisexual. They have been attracted to me entirely as to a woman. But after a period of surprise, I would say over nine out of ten do not break it off. They will go ahead and develop a sexual relationship with me, with them taking the usual man's role.

Another person I interviewed had been so nervous about telling the boyfriend about his morphological sex that he said nothing. He was afraid that revealing such information would break up the relationship, so he did not reveal his sex even when the boyfriend proposed marriage. The man's family liked their son's "girlfriend," and the man wanted to wait for sex until marriage, so the feminine male kept procrastinating until the wedding. After a long engagement they were married. The first night of their honeymoon the new wife could put it off no longer and told the husband. This informant reported, "He went into total shock, and left me there alone in the motel room. I didn't know what to do, so I just stayed there. A day later he came back, and told me he had thought about it a lot, and he had decided he loved me and it really didn't make any difference." The couple has remained together, and after sixteen years are still happily married. The sex of the wife is not talked about, nor does the husband's family or friends know of the male sex of the wife. The husband does not identify himself as gay or homosexual, though they have a monogamous relationship. They fit in well with their suburban neighbors.

This ability of men who identify as heterosexual to adapt to sex with a morphological male demonstrates a fluidity in sexuality not accounted for in theories of "homosexual orientation" or "heterosexual orientation." These men are responding to the femininity of their partner, and the partner's genital equipment is not crucial. Of course, there are significant differences between these instances and a relationship with a berdache. The husband of the berdache knew of the sex of his partner from the beginning, and established a sexual relationship anyway. This genital difference has no bearing on the man's identity.

Since the partner of the berdache is not considered a homosexual,[19] it is easy enough for him to leave the relationship and begin another one with a woman. No matter how long a man is in a marriage with a berdache, there is no stigma that follows him after his male relationship is ended. The man has always been a husband, and the fact that he was husband to a berdache makes no difference to his suitability as a husband for a woman. Heterosexual marriage is thus not ruled out as an option, any

more than male marriage is ruled out for men married to women. One of the former husbands to a Klamath berdache was interviewed by an ethnographer in the 1920s, who described him as "a normal old man who has since raised a family of his own" in a heterosexual marriage.[20]

Of course the berdache might resist such a breakup. Among the serially monogamous Mohaves, divorcing an *alyha* is not always an easy matter. Kuwal, a man who had several *alyha* wives, noted that when men try to leave *alyha,* "They are so strong that they might beat you up." This happened to Kuwal himself when he left his *alyha* spouse, who got very angry: "One day he came to the house and beat me so hard it almost laid me out." Later, the *alyha* got in a fight with Kuwal's new wife: "The alyha was stronger than she was, being a man, but he pretended to be a weak woman and fought like women do. He did not use all his strength. He could have beaten up my wife quite easily, but he let my wife throw him several times."[21] What is interesting in this domestic spat is that the *alyha* restrained himself with the wife, but had no inhibitions toward the errant husband. Mohaves of course saw the *alyha*'s resistance to divorce as incredibly funny, because society encouraged breakups.

In this context we can understand why some tribes that accept same-sexuality nevertheless carry the teasing of the husband of a berdache to an extreme. Among the Lakotas, said one of my informants, "the *winkte*'s husband may get some kidding that he will become a *winkte*. Therefore, he will hide his sexual activities—but he will continue in secret, unless he feels so strongly about it that he continues publicly." On the face of it, this explanation makes no sense. Believing as they do that *winktes* are sacred people, and that their androgynous nature is an inborn character trait or a result of a vision, or both, how could they believe that the husband could become a *winkte?*

Actually, this explanation does not express the real reason for the kidding. Traditionally, Lakota culture accepted the *winkte* only as a secondary spouse, to be married after a man already had a female wife and children. Since Lakotas no longer have plural marriages, if a man takes a *winkte* for a spouse that means

there would be no heterosexual marriage and progeny. A way to discourage this exclusive homosexuality on the part of men is to make them an object of laughter. The berdache is exempt from the kidding because he is not seen as a man. The culture, after all, is not objecting to the homosexual behavior. If a man wishes to have sexual relations with a berdache, there is no objection among the Lakotas as long as he does not settle into a permanent relationship. What society objects to is behavior that might prevent reproduction. Still, despite this discouragement, some men will go against the norm and marry a berdache.

The laughter among the Mohaves is a case in point. Any kind of sexual matter is an occasion for humor among them, but the jokes about the husband of the *alyha* fly so thick around him that many of the men will eventually leave the berdache. Despite the fact that the berdache provides a stable home and is more likely to be faithful than a female wife, such marriages are not stable.[22] Rather than see the laughter as a condemnation of homosexuality, we should understand it as a balancing mechanism. With all the advantages that marriage with an *alyha* offers for Mohave men (prosperity, stability, luck, sex), if there were not some disadvantages then too many men might marry berdaches and the population growth might be threatened. But by keeping the majority of male marriages short-term, the joking ensures that most men mate with women at some point and have children.

Other cultures accomplish this same goal by restricting male marriages to those men who have already had children. Thus, it is only acceptable for a berdache to become a second or third wife in a polygynous family where the female wife has already reproduced. Among the Hidatsas, berdaches usually marry older men who are beyond their childbearing years.[23] None of these patterns of marriage threatens the reproduction of the population.

The Zapotecs are typical of a culture in which men customarily marry a berdache only after they have married women and produced children. While boys may participate in homosexual behavior before their marriage, by the time Zapotec men are thirty years old almost all of them (not including berdaches, of course) marry women and have children. Yet it is not uncom-

mon for men to leave a heterosexual marriage after a time. According to ethnographer Beverly Chiñas, "A middle-aged man with a grown family may leave his wife and move in with a male lover and generally this scarcely raises an eyebrow. Over the nearly two decades since my fieldwork began several prominent citizens with grown children have left their heterosexual mates to live with same-sex lovers." One case involved a former mayor of the town. People might talk about this for a little while, but they soon adapt to the change in the same way they would to a new heterosexual pairing after a divorce. There is no ostracism of a same-sex couple.[24]

In the case of a wife's death, berdaches will be praised for stepping in to rescue a family. Among the Zapotecs a famous case occurred when a man's wife died while their several children were still young. The man married a *muxe* who became a substitute mother. The berdache cooked, laundered clothes, and did the shopping for the family. Other Zapotecs admired the *muxe* greatly for the sacrifices he made, saying "every one of those children got an education and was sent to school clean and well-fed." He and the widower lived together as a respected couple, until the *muxe*'s death many years later.[25] Zapotecs judged him by his sacrifices for the children, rather than by his sexual behavior.

HETEROSEXUAL BEHAVIOR OF THE BERDACHE

While Zapotecs define *irá muxe* as males who are androgynous and homosexual, there is no stigma against a *muxe* marrying a woman and having children. In this case such a person is the father, the same as other fathers.[26] Given the emphasis on sex with men, such a heterosexual marriage seems an incongruity. Because of instances of berdaches marrying women, recent writers on berdachism have paid much attention to the berdache's supposed heterosexuality. But several of these statements are vague and of uncertain reliability. It is not clear with most cases whether a berdache might have been married to a woman *before* assuming berdache status. Such statements also are based on examples from Indians of the Northwest Coast,

where the institution of berdachism seems to have been only sporadically established.[27]

The uncertain sources aside, some berdaches clearly have been married to women. This fact has led some anthropologists to assume that this means those berdaches were heterosexual. If the experience of the Kwakiutl is typical of the Northwest Coast, we cannot make that assumption. A Kwakiutl chief in 1940 remembered that most berdaches in his society did not get married but some did. The chief reported on one who got married, but he and his wife separated after only a year: "She was telling her second husband that this man never touched her [sexually] at all—only by his hands." Another berdache also got married because of pressure from his brother, but "they only lived together one month and then they parted. This woman also tells others this man never touched her."[28] Most of the published sources that speak of the marriage of a berdache to a woman do not describe the sexual behavior of the couple. Since the published sources do not really explain this incongruity, it is necessary to get clarification from Indian people themselves.

During my fieldwork I met a Lakota woman whose grandfather was a *winkte*. He was exceptional in that he not only married but also fathered children. But, she pointed out, he did not have sex with his wife other than for the purpose of procreation. While he was married he continued to have sex with men. He was discreet about his male lovers, and the fact that his wife and other members of the family knew of his homosexual inclinations was not a disruptive factor in his marriage. He died in the 1960s, and his granddaughter remembers him as "quiet, easy-going, effeminate, and very philosophical." He gave people sacred names, and fulfilled a respected *winkte* role on the reservation.

Why would a *winkte* marry a woman, if his sexual desires are largely for men? In traditional Navajo culture, where *nadle* could marry either sex, male marriages come about because of the wishes of the two males; but man-woman marriages are often set up by families as economic arrangements.[29] The desire for children seems to be the crucial consideration. One twenty-seven-year-old *winkte* with whom I stayed for a while in the summer of 1982 has this intention. He has never had a girlfriend

or had sex with a woman, and has no sexual attraction toward women. His only sexual experiences have been with men. Yet he says, "I eventually want to settle down and have children." When I asked if this meant marrying a woman he said yes, but his emphasis was on children rather than on heterosexual desire.

This may explain some of the confusion that exists in the published sources. Even where there is marriage to a woman, there is very little hard evidence to suggest that a berdache is entirely heterosexual. In the Navajo language, *nadle* or *nadleeh* can also refer to animals. It is defined as an animal that does not participate in heterosexual reproduction. For example, a male sheep may be observed not to mount female sheep. He is thereby seen as having "feminine characteristics" because he does not participate in heterosexual acts. Nonreproductive sexuality is thus an important element in the definition of *nadle*.[30]

A Lakota berdache explains, "A few *winkte* marry women and have children, and still fulfill the *winkte* role. But most others are not permitted by the spirits to be married. It varies from one person to another. . . . It would be unholy for me to have sex with a woman, or with another *winkte*. That would be wrong, and would violate the role set for me by the Sacred Pipe." Among the Papagos, a common joke was for the men to tease the women that since the berdache was always among women, he had plenty of opportunity for sex with them. The women thought this was great fun, because of the absurdity of the suggestion. In terms of sex, a Papago woman of the 1930s explained, "We have forgotten he is a man."[31] Among the Papago, as with many other tribes, berdaches are either exclusively homosexual or asexual.

Allowing for cultural and individual variation, we can still safely conclude that, in an institution that defines itself around gender role rather than sexual behavior, sex with men is the most obvious erotic behavior of berdaches. It is probably accurate to conclude that most berdaches who are sexually active are exclusively so with men. And for those who marry women, the majority likely have heterosexual contact in order to produce children. It is hard to say how many are asexual, but the amount of direct evidence of homosexual behavior by berdaches leads me to question facile generalizations by heterosex-

sexually identified ethnographers—not based on direct observation of berdache behavior—that berdaches of a tribe are nonsexual.

Many times berdache status itself is seen as defining a person as nonheterosexual. As an Omaha man explained to me, "A *mexoga* cannot be married to a woman, if he is that way." After describing his sexual experiences with a berdache, a Kwakiutl chief explained why berdaches do not marry women: "He never gets married, and neither do most of them. Two of them that did get married, died soon after. I don't know if it is because they got married or not."[32] Such statements would function to inhibit further heterosexual relations by berdaches. But even when there is marriage to a woman, this does not constitute "heterosexuality" and should not be taken to imply that the berdache is avoiding sex with men.

HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR OF THE BERDACHE

Understanding this, it makes little sense to try to discount the association of berdachism with homosexuality, as some recent writers have done. In reacting against the view of George Devereux and others that berdachism was "institutionalized homosexuality," Henry Angelino and Charles Shedd defined the institution on the basis of its gender role. This provided an improved understanding in certain respects, but in so doing they deemphasized sexual aspects, relegating "homosexual" or "heterosexual" to mere adjective modifiers.[33] They assumed transvestism to be an integral part of the role, which I have shown not to be the case, while implying that homosexuality and heterosexuality are more or less equal variables.

This tendency to dismiss the homosexual element of berdachism is most evident in a 1980 essay by James Thayer, who concludes that sexuality "is the least predictable variable concerning their behavior." While correctly pointing out the importance of the religious aspect of berdachism, Thayer makes the mistake of opposing spiritual issues to sexual issues. This is a false dichotomy, and it is a vast distortion to claim that sexuality is the *least* predictable variable. Perhaps Thayer's denial of

berdaches' sexual involvement with men is a reflection of homophobia. It certainly seems that way given such language, as when he writes: "A psychofunctional explanation tends to *reduce* the institution to a socially acceptable form of *perverted* sexual activity" (italics added).[34]

More fair-minded essays have recently been written by Harriet Whitehead, and by Charles Callender and Lee Kochems.[35] These writers make the important point that berdaches should not be equated with the idea of "the homosexual" in Western culture, since masculine males might also have sex with berdaches or other males and not be considered berdaches. But Whitehead, Callender, and Kochems go beyond that, to argue that sexuality is a distinctly secondary consideration in berdachism. They overemphasize hetero-homo variation in the berdache's sexuality. As should be clear from the preceding chapters, religious, occupational, and gender roles are extremely important in defining berdache status. But having lived with traditional berdaches, I am aware that it is futile and arbitrary to segregate these roles from a berdache's sexuality. There is no hierarchy of primary and secondary.

Sexual attraction to men is accurately assumed by Indian people to be an important part of berdache status, in the same way that androgyny and spirituality are assumed to be related. I think it instructive that those ethnographers who have had direct fieldwork connections with berdaches (among the earlier generation, Kroeber, Hill, Devereux, Underhill, and others; among more recent fieldworkers, myself, Beverly Chiñas, and Sue-Ellen Jacobs) stress the homosexual aspect of berdaches more than do those anthropologists who have written on berdachism based only on the published literature. Interacting with living people, we see the personalities who give different meanings to the printed accounts. This paean to fieldwork is nothing new to anthropology, but in the case of berdache studies it is time to stress the importance of more fieldwork before additional theorizing engulfs the subject.

What, then, can we conclude about the character of the berdache? By paying more attention to the associations that Indian people themselves make between the various aspects of berdachism, we can bring some balance to the question of the sex-

uality of the berdache. In attacking the facile equation of homosexuality and berdachism promoted by earlier writers, recent writers have gone to the other extreme in their emphasis that berdaches are not "homosexuals." I am not trying to deny the considerable cultural differences between the status of Indian berdaches and that of American gays. There is no religious connotation in the Western heterosexual and homosexual identities, which categorize people entirely on the basis of their sexual preference. Anglo-American society recognizes only two genders, and "gay people" as a group are not a distinct gender status.

If we must make a comparison, what modern group provides the closest analogy to the berdaches? Harriet Whitehead suggests that transsexuals offer a better comparison than homosexuals. I have explained in a previous chapter why I do not agree with this comparison. Still, Whitehead is on the right track. We cannot make many valid comparisons with Western homosexuals generally, because this category includes many masculine men whose only difference from average men is their sexual involvement with other men. In traditional American Indian societies such a man would more likely be the husband of the berdache.

Cross-cultural comparisons are difficult, but if we attempt to do so for reasons of clarity, it is perhaps more accurate to compare berdaches to a subgroup of homosexuals, those whose character is very androgynous. Since the Indian viewpoint does not divide people by sexual behavior but by character, they view berdaches as comparable only to those gender-mixing males known in the vernacular of the gay community as *queens*. Like berdaches, "drag queens" are known to dress like women, or with a mixture of male and female clothing, but they are still queens even if they dress like men. They often have special occupational choices seldom associated with men, and (most importantly) have androgynous character traits. Masculine gay men are not queens, any more than the berdache's husband is a berdache. In terms of sexual behavior, there might be queens who are celibate, or even involved in some heterosexual behavior, but as a group they are usually homosexual. They are socially defined as gay. Even in Western society, with its rigid

sexual distinctions, a man might have sex with a woman and still retain the gay label.

While not denying tribal diversity, the major difference between the berdache and the queen is the religious role of the berdache. But even in Western culture, which at least until recently has systematically denied a respected role for androgynous males, drag queens often exhibit a sense of mystery and a theatricality that is close to the religious role of sacred people. In the Indian view, spirituality is the prime consideration, but this spiritual aspect is reflected in the androgynous character of the berdache. Homosexual attraction is an important aspect of the berdache character, one that Indians do not deny but accept along with the other personality elements in berdachism.

A Navajo woman spoke to me about the homosexual behavior of a *nadle* without hesitation and also without controversy: "Everyone knows that he and the man he lives with are lovers, but it is not mentioned. They help their family a lot and are considered valuable members of the community. Their sexuality is never mentioned; it is just taken for granted." I heard such expressions repeatedly in my interviews with Indian people of different tribes. From 1920s fieldwork, ethnographer C. Daryll Forde concluded that Yuma *elxá* likewise were accepted and their marriage with a man recognized: "Such a pair often remains together permanently. It is considered unwise to interfere with them for the *elxá* has more power than the ordinary man and is thought to have a peaceful influence on the tribe."[36]

Getting berdaches to talk about their sexual acts is sometimes awkward, but not because they are embarrassed to admit to being involved in same-sex relations. Even though sex is seen as humorous, its expression is a private matter. Terry Calling Eagle does not deny his exclusive sexual attraction toward men, but he emphasizes that it is his character that is most important in defining himself. He accepts his sexuality as part of his character.

Once I asked the spirit if my living with a man and loving him was bad. The spirit answered that it was not bad because I had a right to release my feelings and express love for another, that I was good because I was generous and provided a good home for my children. I

want to be remembered most for the two values that my people hold dearest: generosity and spirituality. If you say anything about me, say those two things.

Generosity and spirituality, not homosexual behavior, are what underlie the social prestige of the berdache from the Indian viewpoint, but these qualities are emphasized without denying the sexuality of the berdache. Spirituality, androgyny, woman's work, and sex with men are equally important indicators of berdache status. They are all seen as reflections of the same basic character of a person; this is what Indians mean when they talk about berdaches being "spiritually different." This assured sense of balance and interconnectedness has been sadly lacking in writings on the sexual diversity of American Indians. How ironic that homosexual behavior has been either denied, or most emphasized, by the Europeans. The Western fixation on sex has, from the sixteenth century to the twentieth, had a tremendous impact on the American Indian berdache.