We'wha was a specialist not just in women's work but in cultural work in general. Bridging genders meant drawing from the economic, social, and religious roles of both men and women to create a unique synthesis, neither male nor female.

also wears a woman's dress and, at the same time, a man's dance kilt over the shoulder. The hair is done half up in the female style and half down in the male style.

The ability to hold these opposites together is what makes Ko'lhamana supernaturally potent and, by extension, what makes the actual *lhamana* extraordinary as well.

The Problem of Terms

Harriet Whitehead has argued that the cross-gender features of berdache roles were society's way of constraining individuals to one or another role, by re-integrating variance into gender norms with the requirement that male berdaches pretend they are female. In this way, society prevents a potential opportunism—individuals who seek both male and female sources of prestige and power.[24]

The Zunis did indeed expect berdaches to contribute to the community—as all individuals were expected to do—but their contribution actually derived from their variance. They were valued precisely because they contributed something neither men nor women offered. Their variance was not ignored or disguised by the social fiction of gender crossing. The Zunis always acknowledged the biological gender of berdaches. At the same time, they looked for the positive potentials of berdache variance and encouraged berdaches to apply these potentials for the good of all.

We might conceptualize berdache status as a distinct gender. If we do so, we should talk of *four* genders, not three, since the many tribes with both male and female berdaches used distinct terminology for the two cases—a point that anthropologist Evelyn Blackwood stresses.[25]

Why do I refer to the berdache as "a traditional gay role"?

Discussing alternative gender roles in the English language is difficult. The question is, what English words best describe Indian berdaches? The earliest European accounts called them sodomites or hermaphrodites. But these terms already force us to choose between sexuality and gender. In fact, in the twentieth century this same dichotomy has been perpetuated by the choice between homosexual and transvestite or transsexual.

The meaning of transvestite has been smudged by anthropologists. This term was coined in 1910 by the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfield to refer to men with an erotic desire to wear female clothing—an act usually performed in private by men who, in daily life, fulfilled normal roles. This is still the meaning of the term today as it is used by those who call themselves transvestites. Given this definition, we can see that We'wha's perfunctory cross-dressing does not qualify.

Was We'wha a transsexual? This is an even newer category, introduced in 1948 to refer to individuals who wish to change gender permanently. But if this were the motivation in We'wha's case, why didn't he attempt to act and look more feminine? As I've shown, We'wha's behavior was not typical of Zuni women.

Finally, there is homosexual. We do know that some Zuni berdaches married non-berdache men and that others enjoyed more casual relationships with men. In Kinsey's terms, this qualifies as homosexual behavior. Such contact was not pseudo-heterosexual, in the sense that berdaches were substitute women, because, as I've shown, the Zunis did not deny the biological gender of berdaches. The problem with homosexual lies elsewhere. In American Indian societies, berdaches were viewed in terms of their religious, economic, kinship, and social—not just sexual—roles. There are simply no Zuni equivalents for our single-dimensional categories of homosexual and heterosexual.

In short, we need a term which connotes *more* than sexuality and, for that matter, more

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We'wha holding child

than gender variance—a term that refers to a multi-dimensional social role, not just a single dimensional trait. I believe gay is the closest equivalent in English. Even so, the berdache category was broader than any of our categories. Some of the individuals who once filled this role might today identify themselves as transsexuals, bisexuals, or transvestites—as well as homosexuals. However, even if the Zunis had had such a thing as transsexual surgery, they still would have had a berdache role, because the social, economic, and religious contributions of berdaches were unique, different from those of either men or women.

A second reason for my use of gay is the evidence I've found of continuity between traditional berdache roles and contemporary gay American Indians. By the mid-twentieth century, Zuni boys considered "berdache material" no longer adopted women's dress. According to John Adair, they often moved to Gallup and did "women's work" in the white world—cooking, cleaning, laundry, child care, etc.[26] At this juncture, Indian men who might have become berdaches begin to look and act like gay men in today's terms.

But the most interesting evidence regarding this transition is the testimony of Zunis themselves. While at Zuni recently, I was told that as the berdache role has changed, so has the Zuni word for berdaches. Instead of *lhamana*, people now say *lhalha*, and the word is used to mean "homosexual." Zunis discuss the subject among themselves all the time, I was told, but talking about it with Anglos is considered "dirty" or "pornographic"—i.e., sexual.

A final reason that I refer to berdache status as "a gay role" is the result of my conversations and dialogues over the past four years with gay and lesbian American Indians. I found that some knew about the berdache as a living tribal tradition, while others have learned about the role the same way I have—through research. But all affirmed a continuity between the berdache tradition and their own lives as gay Indians today. They never used the terms transvestite or berdache, and they disliked homosexual because of its narrow focus. All preferred gay.

For example, I asked Beth Brant, a Mohawk, "What does the berdache have to do with gay roles today?" She said, "It has everything to do with who we are now. As gay Indians, we feel that connection with our ancestors."[27] Randy Burns, a Northern Paiute and cofounder of Gay American Indians, told me, "We are living in the spirit of our traditional gay Indian people. The gay Indian person is probably more traditional and spiritual and more creative than his or her straight counterpart because that was the traditional role we played."[28]

Berdaches were not branded as threats to gender ideology; they were viewed as an affirmation of humanity's original, pre-gendered unity—a representation of collective solidarity that overcomes the division of male and female.

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Drawing from the wisdom of her Navajo background as well as a contemporary feminist perspective, Erna Pahe best explains the special contribution of the gay role—and her comments provide a fitting closing to this discussion:

> In our culture, in our little gay world, anybody can do anything. I mean, you find some very good mothers that are men. And you find very good fathers that are women. We can sympathize, we can really feel how the other sex feels. More so than the straight community. The straight community is so worried about staying within their little box and making sure that I look like a female when I'm out there, or that I really play the role of the male image.
>
> I think that society is ready for that kind of atmosphere where we don't have to compete against each other over sexual orientation, or we don't have to feel like the men play a bigger role in society than women do. I think it's time for that neutralness, where people can understand just how to be people....
>
> There's a lot of caring in gay people that is towards all lifestyles, from children, all the way up to grandparents. Society is getting used to it now because of this sensitivity. I think it might wear off after a while—we'll get everybody thinking like us. Even dealing in politics, we're a lot more aware of everything....We are special, because we're able to deal with all of life in general. It's very special.[29]

As Paula Gunn Allen points out, in seeking political and cultural recognition today lesbians and gay men are only restoring to America the gayness it once had. ▼

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Sacred Dance Plaza of the Zuni, circa 1879.

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Harry Hay first drew my attention to the berdache in 1982, when he shared with me his extensive research and notes compiled thirty years earlier. In 1983, he arranged a trip to New Mexico, to explore its pueblos, ruins, villages, and people, inaugurating my love affair with that fascinating and beautiful land. Bradley Rose has also shared this odyssey and knows its joys and frustrations. Paula Gunn Allen, Clifford Barnett, Evelyn Blackwood, Randy Burns, John Burnside, John DeCecco, Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Erna Pahe, David Thomas, and Mark Thompson all deserve thanks. I cannot name them here, but I would also like to acknowledge the individuals and groups throughout the country that have sponsored my slide-lecture and shared their homes and hearts with me. I have benefited as well from my work with Gay American Indians of San Francisco. In 1987 I received a fellowship from the Van Waveren Foundation, and this made it possible for me to present my work at Zuni and begin writing a book. Finally, thanks are due to the tribal council and the people of Zuni.

[1] Matilda C. Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians: Their Mythology, Esoteric Societies, and Ceremonies," *Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report* 23 (1904), 311-12.

[2] See Will Roscoe, "A Bibliography of Berdache and Alternative Gender Roles Among North American Indians," *Journal of Homosexuality* 14, no. 3/4 (1987), 81-171.

[3] Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians" 20; Elsie Clews Parsons, "Notes on Zuñi," *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association* 4(3-4) (1917):253; Robert Bunker, *Other Men's Skies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956), 99-100.

[4] Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians" 37, 311.

[5] One of the common misconceptions regarding berdaches is that they always or completely cross-dressed. A closer look at the evidence from many tribes reveals that berdaches often combined male and female clothing, or dressed in a unique (neither male nor female) manner.

[6] Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians" 310.

[7] George Wharton James, *New Mexico: The Land of the Delight Makers* (Boston: The Page Co., 1920), 63-64.

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Zuni pueblo, circa 1895.

[8] Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians" 310. In fact, Stevenson used both male and female terms in referring to berdaches.

[9] Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians" 37.

[10] Frank H. Cushing, "Nominal and Numerical Census of the Gentes of the Ashiwi or Zuni Indians," ms. 3915, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Weaving was a men's activity among most Pueblo Indians, although less strictly so at Zuni.

[11] Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians" 130.

[12] *Evening Star* (Washington), 15 May 1886.

[13] Stevenson to Daniel S. Lamont, 18 June 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress.

[14] *Evening Star* (Washington), 12 June 1886.

[15] Edmund Wilson, *Red, Black, Blond and Olive* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 20.

[16] Ruth Bunzel, "Zuni Texts," *Publications of the American Ethnological Society* 15 (1933), 49.

[17] I have researched these events in Pueblo Agency Records, RG 75, National Archives, Denver and Records of the United States Army Continental Commands, RG 393, National Archives, Washington.

[18] Robertson to DeSette, 19 August 1892, Pueblo Agency Records.

[19] Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians" 312-13.

[20] Elsie Clews Parsons. "A Few Zuni Death Beliefs and Practices," *American Anthropologist* 18 (1916):253; Elsie Clews Parsons, "The Zuñi La'mana," *American Anthropologist* 18 (1916):528.

[21] Parsons, "The Zuñi La'mana," 527.

[22] Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians" 37.

[23] This ceremony lapsed when the caretaker of key songs and prayers died without an apprentice.

[24] Harriet Whitehead, "The Bow and the Burden Strap: A New Look at Institutionalized Homosexuality in Native North America," in *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, pp. 80-115 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[25] Evelyn Blackwood, "Review of *The Spirit and the Flesh* and Beyond," *Journal of Homosexuality*, forthcoming.

[26] Personal communication, 29 September 1986. See also, Elsie Clews Parsons, "The Last Zuñi Transvestite," *American Anthropologist* 41:338.

[27] Will Roscoe, "Living the Tradition: Gay American Indians," in *Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning*, ed. Mark Thompson, pp. 69-77 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 74.

[28] Ibid., 75.

[29] "Speaking Up: An Interview with Erna Pahe," *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology*, ed. Will Roscoe (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).