

dered responses and therefore gendered societies. Degendering society will require compensatory gendered socialization and compensatory gendered opportunity structures.

The second type of implications from my propositions affects research. Demographers and social scientists continue to ascribe all gender findings to gendered socialization and gendered opportunity structures. Although this might be attributed to their desire to be politically correct, such attribution is an injustice to social scientists. They merely have an inadequate theory.

With an improved theory, the demographer and social scientist can see gender in new ways.

First, the existence of gendered social structure is not evidence for gendered behavior norms.

Second, gender norms may be consequences, not causes, of sex differences.

Third, the existence of gendered social structure is not evidence of sex discrimination.

Fourth, parental socialization may bear little responsibility for differences in gendered behavior.

Fifth, if demographers and social scientists don't want to tangle with biological predispositions in their models, they can focus on explaining social change and macrocomparative studies.

Now, I should add the warnings. Work on the biology of gender and how it can be integrated with the demography and social science of gender has just begun. My work is only another step. It needs to be replicated; it needs to be remodeled

and tested on males; other implications need to be examined. Demographers are not the most likely people to carry out this work. The empirical support or modification will accumulate only gradually. As we examine the issues further, they will always turn out to be more complicated than our simple models. Even so, we should not be surprised that our own human pattern of gender shares fundamental causes with the sex dimorphism of our animal relatives. The interesting questions will turn out to be not *whether*, but *how much*, and *in what ways*. There is nothing embarrassing about being a primate.

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# NO

Will Roscoe

## HOW TO BECOME A BERDACHE: TOWARD A UNIFIED ANALYSIS OF GENDER DIVERSITY

What has been written about berdaches reflects more the influence of existing Western discourses on gender [and] sexuality ... than what observers actually witnessed.

Typically described, in the words of Matilda Stevenson, as men who "adopt woman's dress and do woman's work," male berdaches have been documented in nearly 150 North American societies. In nearly half of these groups, a social status also has been documented for females who undertook a man's life-style, who were sometimes referred to in the native language with the same term applied to male berdaches and sometimes with a distinct term. Although the existence of berdaches has long been known to specialists in North American anthropology, the subject has been consigned to footnotes and marginal references. In the past twenty years, however, berdaches have become a subject of growing interest. An expanding base of empirical data concerning the social, cultural and historical dimensions of berdache status has become available. ...

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Until quite recently, serious investigation of berdaches has been confined to the most basic problems of description and definition. Throughout five centuries of contact, a bewildering variety of terms has been employed by Europeans and Americans to name this status, with new ones introduced in almost every generation. Such practices have created doubt not only about the nature of berdache roles but also concerning their very presence in cases in which confusing terminology makes it difficult to know whether different writers were referring to the same phenomena. The difficulty is that Euro-American cultures lack social and linguistic categories that can translate the pattern of beliefs, behaviors and customs represented by North American berdaches. Instead, writers have chosen between mutually exclusive terms that emphasize either gender variation or sexual variation—"hermaphrodite" and "sodomite," for example, or, more recently, "transsexual" (gender) and

From Will Roscoe, "How to Become a Berdache: Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender Diversity," in Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (Zone Books, 1994). Copyright © 1994 by Gilbert Herdt. Reprinted by permission of Zone Books. Notes omitted.

"homosexual" (sexuality). *Berdache* was originally an Arabic and Persian term for the younger partner in a male homosexual relationship, synonymous with "catamite" or "Ganymede." Used in North America since the seventeenth century, the term was not generally adopted until the nineteenth century, and only then by American anthropologists....

Although the principle of cultural relativity has been central to twentieth-century anthropology, its application to differences in gender and sexuality has been slow. Perhaps this is because most discourse on sexuality and gender in Euro-American societies during this period has been dominated by psychology and sexology. Perceiving the relativity of sexuality and gender patterns requires the simultaneous perception of the cultural basis of the knowledge produced by these disciplines. Not recognizing the importance of culture in constructing the desires, roles, identities and practices that constitute gender and sexuality, anthropologists and other observers have paid little attention to local beliefs, focusing instead on a much grander story, one that holds enduring fascination for the Western imagination—how culture confronts nature (and the individual confronts society) and all the possible outcomes that these givens can produce.

Above all, it took the emergence of feminist theory and its critique of biological determinism to make a serious reevaluation of the berdache role possible. This can be traced back to the work of Elsie Clews Parsons and Ruth Benedict, whose insightful, if brief, discussions of berdaches in the early twentieth century were informed by a feminist understanding of the social construction of gender roles. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, a similar perspective can be traced in

references to berdaches by Ruth Landes, Ruth Underhill, Gladys Reichard, Nancy Lurie, Omer Stewart, Harry Hay and Sue- Ellen Jacobs. A less direct but just as significant influence has come from the field of literary criticism and the methods of discourse analysis. The degree to which poststructuralist theory has sensitized scholars to the relativity of the categories and taxonomies they use cannot be underestimated. In the field of anthropology, analyzing the "rules of discourse" that shape the texts readers rely on, whether anthropological, historical, literary or native, has become a key tool of cultural analysis.

In the 1970s, these intellectual developments combined with a social climate in which gender and sexual differences had become topics of broad public interest to produce a fluorescence in berdache studies....

As a result of these diverse contributions, a consensus on several points has begun to develop. The key features of male and female berdache roles were, in order of importance, *productive specialization* (crafts and domestic work for male berdaches and warfare, hunting and leadership roles in the case of female berdaches), *supernatural sanction* (in the form of an authorization and/or bestowal of powers from extrasocietal sources) and *gender variation* (in relation to normative cultural expectations for male and female genders). In the case of gender variation, cross-dressing was the most common and visible marker, but it has proven a more variable and less reliable indicator of berdache status than previously assumed.... [I]n some tribes male berdaches dressed distinctly from both men and women. In other cases, berdaches did not cross-dress at all, or only partly. In the case of female

berdaches, cross-dressing was even more variable. Often, female berdaches wore men's clothes only when hunting or participating in warfare.

The sexual behavior of male and female berdaches was also variable. Where data exist, they indicate that the partners of berdaches were usually nonberdache members of the same sex—that is, berdaches were homosexual, if we define that term narrowly in terms of behavior and anatomy. Some berdaches, however, appear to have been bisexual and heterosexual. This was most often the case when adult men entered berdache status primarily on the basis of visions or dreams.... Berdaches participated in both casual encounters (reported for male berdaches) and long-term relationships (reported for both male and female berdaches)....

In sum, the most reliable indicators of berdache status were its economic and religious attributes and not gender or sexual difference alone. Further, the variation of berdaches in terms of occupational and religious pursuits *surpassed* rather than fell short of social norms. Again and again one finds berdaches attributed with exceptional productivity, talent and originality....

A second point of agreement is that berdaches were accepted and integrated members of their communities, as their economic and religious reputations indeed suggest. In many cases, berdaches enjoyed special respect and honors. In a few cases they were feared because of the supernatural power they were believed to possess. If berdaches were scorned, hated or ridiculed by their tribespeople, however, it was likely for individual reasons and not a function of their status as berdaches. In yet other cases, Indian joking relationships have been mistak-

only interpreted as evidence of nonacceptance. In fact, in many tribes, individuals were subjected to teasing precisely *because* they enjoyed high status or prestige. Finally, many reports attributing American natives with hostility toward berdaches have been shown to reflect the Euro-American author's values and not native judgments. Indeed, what is missing at this point is an analysis of a confirmed case of a tribe *lacking* such a role or genuinely hostile to it.

A third area of consensus involves the abandonment of deterministic hypotheses concerning the "cause" of berdache behavior. Viewing berdaches as wholly determined products of social forces has a long history.... [A]nthropological... etiological theories... account for berdaches in terms of external forces alone—for example, the suggestion that the berdache role was a social status imposed on men too weak or cowardly to measure up to stringent tribal standards of masculinity. This suggestion has been convincingly disproved by evidence of males uninterested or unsuccessful in warfare who, nonetheless, do not become berdaches and by the actual participation of berdaches in warfare. Indeed, a good part of the prestige of berdaches was due to the belief that they enjoyed the same kind of supernatural sanction as successful hunters and warriors. Consequently, most recent work on berdaches acknowledges the role of individual motivations, desires and talents in determining who became a berdache. Berdaches are finally being recognized as historical subjects—individuals who actually desired to be berdaches because of the rewards that life-style offered.

A fourth area of emerging consensus addresses the problem of translation referred to above. Whereas berdaches

have been traditionally conceptualized as crossing or exchanging genders, as the terms *transvestite* or *transsexual* imply (or exchanging object choice, as *homosexual* suggests), several investigators (including myself) have begun to argue that berdaches in fact occupied a third gender role, or, in the case of tribes with both male and female berdaches and distinct terms for each, third and fourth genders. A multiple-gender paradigm was first proposed by M. Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies, whose 1975 book, *Female of the Species*, included a chapter titled "Supernumerary Sexes." They noted that "physical sex differences need not necessarily be perceived as bipolar. It seems possible that human reproductive bisexuality establishes a minimal number of socially recognized physical sexes, but these need not be limited to two." In her 1983 commentary on [Charles] Callender and [Lee] Kochems, Jacobs referred to berdache status as a third gender, a characterization she considers more inductive than the Western paradigm of gender-crossing. The first definitive argument for a multiple-gender paradigm was put forward by [Evelyn] Blackwood, who proposed the "rigorous identification and labeling of the berdache role as a separate gender." "The berdache gender . . .," she concluded, "is not a deviant role, nor a mixture of two genders, nor less a jumping from one gender to its opposite. Nor is it an alternative role behavior for nontraditional individuals who are still considered men or women. Rather, it comprises a separate gender within a multiple gender system."

Both positive and negative evidence supports the argument that berdache status constituted a culturally acknowledged gender category. On the one hand, it can easily be shown that a dual-gender

model fails to account for many of the behaviors and attributes reported for berdaches—for example, berdaches who did not cross-dress or attempt to mimic the behavior of the "opposite" sex or those who engaged in a combination of female, male and berdache-specific pursuits. On the other hand, the consistent use of distinct terms to refer to berdaches, a practice that prevented their conceptual assimilation to an "opposite" sex, is positive evidence that berdache status was viewed as a separate category. Such native terms have various translations, from the obvious "man-woman" (e.g., Shoshoni *tanowaip*) to "old woman-old man" (e.g., Tewa *kwidó*) to terms that bear no relation to the words for "man" or "woman" or simply cannot be etymologized (e.g., Zuni *lhamana*).

In many tribes, the distinction of berdaches from men and women was reinforced by sartorial practices and the use of symbols, such as the distinct color of feathers worn by Floridian berdaches. . . . In other cases, as I have shown in *The Zuni Man-Woman*, the religious functions of berdaches and the life-cycle rites they underwent were specific to their status while paralleling the kind of functions and rites pertinent to men and women. Similarly, among such tribes as the Zunis, Navajos, Crows and others, myths accounting for the origin of berdache status placed that event in the same context in which male and female gender categories were defined (stating, in so many words, "when the spirit people made men and women, they also made berdaches").

Although the points made so far apply equally to male and female berdaches, it is clear that female roles were not simply mirror opposites of male berdache roles. Unfortunately, the study of fe-

male berdaches lags behind that of male berdaches, and several features of this status await clarification. Medicine concluded that "warrior women," like male berdaches, occupied "socially sanctioned role alternatives." These were "normative statuses which permitted individuals to strive for self-actualization, excellence, and social recognition in areas outside their customary sex role assignments." Some researchers, however, have concluded that female berdache roles were less viable and female berdaches less tolerated than were their male counterparts, and others have argued that the term *berdache* should not be applied to women at all. Callender and Kochems found documentation of female berdaches in only thirty tribes. [Harriet] Whitehead concluded that "when women did the equivalent of what men did to become berdaches, nothing happened." On the other hand, Blackwood has argued that the female berdache role was socially and ontologically on par with male berdache status in the sense of being a distinct alternative identity. At Zuni, I found that the female berdache role was less visibly marked than the male role (i.e., there are no reports of cross-dressing by women) and may have been more variable from individual to individual, but linguistic and religious practices still countenanced a distinct status for women who combined male and female pursuits, as evidenced by the use of the same term, *lhamana*, to refer to both male and female berdaches.

#### WHERE DO BERDACHES COME FROM?: THE THEORETICAL CHALLENGE

Derived from the Latin *genus*—meaning "kind, sort, class"—"gender" has come

to be used by researchers in several fields to distinguish socially constructed roles and cultural representations from biological sex. Indeed, throughout Western history, popular belief and official discourse alike have acknowledged the role of social learning in sex-specific behavior, but biological sex has always been considered both the point of origin and natural limit of sex roles. What we call gender, in this view, *should* conform to sex, a belief that is rationalized alternately on moral and naturalistic grounds. The study of non-Western cultures, however, reveals not only variability in the sociocultural features of sex roles but also . . . wide variation in beliefs concerning the body and what constitutes sex.

If gender can be multiple, and potentially autonomous from sex, it becomes crucial to clarify exactly what it denotes. (In fact, definitions of *gender* are rare in the literature of "gender studies.") For the purposes of cross-cultural analysis, therefore, I define *gender* as a multidimensional category of personhood encompassing a distinct pattern of social and cultural differences. Gender categories often draw on perceptions of anatomical and physiological differences between bodies, but these perceptions are always mediated by cultural categories and meanings. Nor can we assume the relative importance of these perceptions in the overall definition of personhood in a given social context, or that these differences will be interpreted as dichotomous and fixed, or that they will be viewed as behavioral or social determinants (as opposed to, for example, a belief that behavior might determine anatomy). Gender categories are not only "models of" difference (to borrow Clifford Geertz's terminology) but also "models for" difference. They convey gender-specific social expectations

for behavior and temperament, sexuality, kinship and interpersonal roles, occupation, religious roles and other social patterns. Gender categories are "total social phenomena," in Marcel Mauss's terms; a wide range of institutions and beliefs find simultaneous expression through them, a characteristic that distinguishes gender from other social statuses. In terms of this definition, the presence of multiple genders does not require belief in the existence of three or more physical sexes but, minimally, a view of physical differences as unfixed, or insufficient on their own to establish gender, or simply less important than individual and social factors, such as occupational preference, behavior and temperament, religious experiences and so forth.

Since the work of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, anthropological studies of sex roles have focused on the relationship between sex and gender—a relationship that has been described as both motivated and arbitrary. A multiple-gender paradigm, however, leads us to analyze the relationship between the body and sex as well. Although morphological differences in infants may motivate a marking process, in a multiple-gender paradigm the markers of sex are viewed as no less arbitrary than the sociocultural elaborations of sex in the form of gender identities and roles. North American data, for example, make it clear that not all cultures recognize the same anatomical markers and not all recognize anatomical markers as "natural" and, therefore, counterposed to a distinct domain of the "cultural."

In traditional Zuni belief, for example, a series of interventions were considered necessary to ensure that a child has a "sex" at all. This began before birth, when the parents made offerings at

various shrines to influence the sex of the developing fetus. In fact, the infant's sex was still not fixed at the time of birth. If a woman took a nap during labor, for example, the Zunis believed the sex of her child might change. After birth, interventions intended to influence physical sex continued. The midwife massaged and manipulated the infant's face, nose, eyes and genitals. If the infant was male, she poured cold water over its penis to prevent overdevelopment. If the child was female, the midwife split a new gourd in half and rubbed it over the vulva to enlarge it. In this context, knowing the kind of genitals an individual possesses is less important than knowing how bodies are culturally constructed and what particular features and processes (physiological and/or social) are believed to endow them with sex. . . .

As Whitehead argues, "A social gender dichotomy is present in all known societies in the sense that everywhere anatomic sexual differences observable at birth are used to start tracking the newborn into one or the other of two social role complexes. This minimal pegging of social roles and relationships to observable anatomic sex differences is what creates what we call a 'gender' dichotomy in the first place." Callender and Kochems echo this when they state that gender "is less directly tied to this anatomical basis, although ultimately limited by it." Unpacking these formulations reveals two propositions: social gender is based on the "natural facts" of sex, and, since there are only two sexes, there are only two genders. It follows that, if an individual is not one, then she must be the other. The only variation possible is an exchange of one gender for its "opposite" or some form of gender-mixing; but there are no

possible variations that cannot be defined by reference to male or female. It also follows that in such a system there can be only one sexual orientation, namely, heterosexual.

The assumptions of a dual-gender system have been criticized in recent years on both empirical and theoretical grounds. It may, indeed, be arguable that all societies have *at least* two genders and, as suggested above, that these two genders are linked to perceptions of physiological differences. What constitutes anatomical sex, however—which organs (or fluids or physiological processes) are considered the signs of maleness and femaleness—has been shown by scholars in several fields to be as much a social construction as what has been termed *gender*.

Deconstructing the sex/gender binary reveals a hierarchical relationship between the two terms. That is, anatomy has primacy over gender, and gender is not an ontologically distinct category but merely a reiteration of sex. This is apparent in Whitehead's comments on female berdaches. "For someone whose anatomic starting point was female," she argues, "the infusion of an official opposite sex component into her identity was by no means so easily effected," because, "throughout the continent, the anatomic-physiological component of gender was more significant in the case of the female than in the case of the male, and was thus less easily counter-balanced by the occupational component." But this raises the question: If gender differences are to be viewed as anchored to an "anatomic-physiological component," then on what grounds can we argue that gender roles are not, in fact, "natural" (i.e., mirroring and/or determined by biology)? And if we accept the contention that having a

female body makes it more difficult to become a berdache, then have we not conceded that the difference that defines women also makes them inferior?

In sum, if berdaches are to be understood as simply exchanging one gender for another, then they can indeed be interpreted as upholding a heterosexist gender system. If they are to be understood as entering a distinct gender status, however, neither male nor female, then something more complex is occurring. A multiple-gender paradigm makes it possible to see berdache status not as a compromise between nature and culture or a niche to accommodate "natural" variation but as an integral and predictable element of certain sociocultural systems, not a contradiction in Native American beliefs but a status fully consistent with them. . . .

## CONCLUSION

Berdache status was not a niche for occasional (and presumably "natural") variation in sexuality and gender, nor was it an accidental by-product of unresolved social contradictions. In the native view, berdaches occupied a distinct and autonomous social status on par with the status of men and women. Like male and female genders, the berdache gender entailed a pattern of differences encompassing behavior, temperament, social and economic roles and religious specialization—all the dimensions of a gender category, as I defined that term earlier, with the exception of the attribution of physical differences (the Navajos may be one exception. . .). But physical differences were constructed in various ways in Native American perception, and they were not accorded the same weight that they are in Western belief. Social learning

and personal experiences (including ritual and supernatural experiences) were considered just as important in defining individual social identity as anatomy. Viewing female and male berdache roles as third and fourth genders, therefore, offers the best translation of native categories and the best fit with the range of behaviors and social traits reported for berdaches. Conversely, characterizations of berdaches as crossing genders or mixing genders, as men or women who "assume the role of the 'opposite' sex," are reductionist and inaccurate. . . .

There are no definitive variables for predicting the presence of multiple genders, but I believe we can specify a set of minimal conditions for the possibility of such statuses. First is a division of labor and prestige system organized in terms of gender categories, so that the potential exists for female specialization in production and distribution of food or exchange goods. Second is a belief system in which gender is not viewed as determined by anatomical sex or in which anatomical sex is believed to be unstable, fluid and

nondichotomous, and, therefore, an autonomous third category is viable. Third are the occurrence of historical events and individuals motivated to take advantage of them in creating and shaping gender identities. If these conditions are present, then multiple gender roles can develop—and it becomes possible to become a berdache. Conversely, I would hypothesize that, for a given society in which multiple genders were present, it would take not only the elimination of the economic dimension of such statuses but a lapse in the belief systems rationalizing them and the introduction of a dual-sex ideology to effect a full collapse of such roles.

The next step in berdache studies will be the recognition that gender diversity is not an isolated feature of North American societies but a worldwide phenomenon, represented in most culture areas as well as in certain historical periods of Western societies. Gender diversity will become one more part of the story of human culture and history that is anthropology's job to tell.

## POSTSCRIPT

### Are Humans Naturally Either Male or Female?

Nature versus nurture? Biology versus social determinism? Just as some anthropologists argue that we need to move beyond gender binaries to better understand human complexity, we must also move beyond neat either/or propositions about the causes of sex and gender. Traditional thought dictates that biology affects or determines behavior. But behavior can also alter physiology. Recent advances explore the complex interaction between biology (genes, hormones, brain structure) and environment. We have learned that it is impossible to determine how much of our behavior is biologically based and how much is environmental. Moreover, definitions of gendered behavior are temporally and culturally relative. Yet why do researchers continue to try to isolate biological from environmental factors?

Advancements in the study of biological bases of sex and critiques of applications of biological theory to human behavior challenge some of Udry's assertions. Is sex dimorphism universal? Biologists recognize species diversity in hormone-brain-behavior relationships, which makes the general application of theories based on animal physiology and behavior to humans problematic. Moreover, species diversity challenges male/female binaries. The validity of the presence/absence model of sex dimorphism has been challenged. In embryonic development, do females "just happen" by default in the absence of testosterone? No, all individuals actively develop through various genetic processes. Moreover, the sexes are similar in the presence and need of both androgens and estrogens; in fact, the chemical structures and derivation of estrogen and testosterone are interconnected.

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