

(and boys and foreign tourists) along more Mediterranean or pederastic lines will develop.

Apart from caste and family obligations, however, Indian society is remarkably tolerant of individual eccentricities, and it is quite possible that when the curtain finally lifts on Indian sexuality one may find the patterns of homosexuality in India distinctively Indian.

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Lingānanda

## INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA

Like many societies around the world that accepted homosexual behavior as a common and normal activity, North American Indian aboriginal cultures often incorporated same-sex activity into their way of life.

### *Underlying Cultural Attitudes.*

This acceptance was owing to several factors, especially the fact that sex was not seen as sinful in their religions. With some exceptions, sex was not restricted to its reproductive role, but was seen as a major blessing from the spirit world, a gift to human beings to be enjoyed freely from childhood to old age. Among the matrilineal tribes, women were particularly free in their behavior, since their child's family status depended on the mother's relatives rather than on the father. In general, North

American Indian religions emphasized the freedom of individuals to follow their own inclinations, as evidence of guidance from their personal spirit guardian, and to share generously what they had with others.

Children's sexual play was more likely to be regarded by adults as an amusing activity rather than as a cause for alarm. This casual attitude of child-rearing continued to influence people as they grew up, and even after their marriage. Yet, while sex was certainly much more accepted than in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it was not the major emphasis of Indian society. The focus was instead on two forms of social relations: family (making ties to other genders) and friendship (making ties within the same gender). Since extremely close friendships were emphasized between two "blood brothers" or two women friends, this allowed a context in which private homosexual behavior could occur without attracting attention. Simply because this role of sex in promoting bonds of friendship was so accepted, there is relatively little information about this kind of casual same-sex activity. It demonstrates that the role of sex in promoting close interpersonal ties is just as important for a society as the role of sex as a means of reproduction. While Christian ideology emphasizes that the purpose of sex is only for reproduction, that is clearly not the view of many other religions.

*Institutional Forms.* Beyond its role in same-sex friendships, homosexual behavior among many aboriginal tribes was also recognized in the form of same-sex marriages. However, the usual pattern among North American Indians (as well as in many areas of the Caribbean, Central and South America) focused not on two masculine men getting married, or two feminine women, but to have a typical man or woman marry an androgynous person who takes on a different gender role. Traditionally in many tribes, the feminine male had a special role as a berdache and the masculine female took on

an Amazon role.

These androgynous roles were different and distinct from the regular roles of men and women. Some scholars suggest that this pattern is "gender mixing," while others see such roles as forming their own unique "alternative genders," but almost all specialists currently doing research reject the older notion that berdaches and Amazons were hermaphrodites, transsexuals, transvestites, or "gender-crossers," for the simple reason that Indian cultures allowed more than two gender options. Though the early sources are incomplete and unclear, probably most cultures that recognized such alternative genders assumed that such a person would have sex with a person of the same biological sex. While there are isolated examples of heterosexual marriage, the usual assumption is that a feminine male berdache would marry a man, while a masculine female Amazon would marry a woman. The complementary advantages of persons filling different genders, meant that two hunters would not get married, nor would two plant-gathering/farming women. In aboriginal economies, a husband-wife team needed to do different labor roles to provide the household with a balanced subsistence.

Accordingly, the husband of a berdache was not defined as a berdache, merely because he had sex with a male. The community defined him on the basis of his gender role as a "man," being a hunter and/or warrior, rather than on his sexual behavior. Likewise, the wife of an Amazon was not defined as a lesbian, but continued to be defined as a woman because she continued to do women's labor roles of plant-gathering, farming, cooking, and craftwork. This gender-defined role did not categorize people as "heterosexual" versus "homosexual," but left a certain fluidity for individuals to follow their sexual tastes as they were attracted to specific individuals of whichever sex. In tribes that accepted marriage for the berdache or the Amazon, the clan membership of one's intended spouse was much

more important than their sex.

This fluidity also meant that a person who had married a berdache or an Amazon was not stigmatized as different, and could later easily marry heterosexually. In fact, many tribes that accepted same-sex marriages did considerable kidding to the husband of the berdache, and the wife of the Amazon, which likely had the function of helping to break up these marriages after a time, so that the person would be heterosexually married at some point in his or her life. With the exception of the berdaches and Amazons, who were relatively few in number in a tribe, social pressure emphasized for most people that they should beget children. After they had done so, to help insure the continued population of the society, the sex of the lover did not matter much. Indeed, even the berdaches and Amazons contributed toward population growth through their important role as adoptive parents for orphaned children.

In many tribes' conceptions of spirituality, the person who was different was seen as having been created that way by the spirit world. Berdaches and Amazons were respected, even though they were recognized as different from the average tribal member. They were considered to be exceptional rather than abnormal.

#### *The Encounter with Europeans.*

This view changed drastically, however, after the arrival of the Europeans. Bringing with them their homophobic Christian religion, Spanish conquerors in Florida, California, and the Southwest, as well as in Latin America, emphasized the Indians' acceptance of "sodomy" as a major justification for European conquest and plunder of the New World. Likewise, the English settlers brought a similar condemnation, and the United States and Canadian governments followed a policy of suppressing Indian peoples' sexuality as well as their native religions. The berdache and Amazon traditions went underground, and sex became a secret matter as it was perse-

cuted by reservation officials and Christian missionaries.

In the twentieth century, while European condemnation of homosexuality has had an influence on many modern Indians, those who have retained their traditions continue to respect berdaches and Amazons even today. This attitude had a significant impact on the white founders of the homophile and gay liberation movements in the United States and Canada. With a recent renaissance in Indian culture, younger gay and lesbian Indians have in turn been influenced by the gay community to stand up openly and take pride in their accepting Indian traditions. Like traditionalist Indians, they feel an appreciation for the strength and the magic of human diversity, and they accept people as they are rather than expect everyone to conform. This respect for the different gifts that gay people can provide as a benefit for society, and a respect for women and for androgynous men, is having an impact on Western culture as a whole.

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Walter L. Williams

## INDO-EUROPEAN PEDERASTY

Indo-European is the name given to a family of languages extending from Old Irish and Old Norse on the northwestern periphery of Europe to Old Persian and Sanskrit in the Middle East, together with the modern descendants of these tongues. The discovery by western European scholars that this set of languages was interrelated in the same way as the members of the Semitic family led to the hypothesis of a primordial anthropological (ethnic) unity of the speakers of the proto-language, of-

ten designated as Aryans in opposition to the Semites and Hamites of the Near East. Further study of the original common vocabulary of Indo-European pointed to a cultural and institutional legacy of the preliterate past which some investigators sought to reconstruct in meticulous (though often speculative) detail.

*Sergent's Thesis.* Recently Bernard Sergent has claimed that Indo-European warriors practiced initiatory pederasty until after their dispersion in the second millennium B.C. Before a youth proved his manhood by a feat of valor, he was feminized and reduced to the passive sexual role. Sergent thus went beyond the nineteenth-century German scholars who ascribed pederasty to the Dorian tribesmen invading Greece ca. 1200 B.C., after the Achaeans and other Greeks who had no such institution had arrived there from their *Urheimat* (primitive homeland) on the Eurasian steppes (or wherever else a particular hypothesis located it).

Nothing, however, proves that pederasty was institutionalized among the *kshatriyas* (warrior caste) of India, the ancient Persians, or the *grave patres* of early Rome. Just as the theory of "Dorian invasions" and of their transformation of the material culture of Greece by introducing iron and other innovations has been discredited by twentieth-century archeology and linguistics, the whole concept of the dispersion of an Indo-European speech community by nomadic conquerors during the second millennium B.C. has also been called into question. Colin Renfrew argues that the Indo-Europeans dispersed as early as 6000 B.C. as peaceful farmers. The institutionalization of pederasty in Greece belongs to historic time, not to prehistory.

*The Greeks.* Although Erich Be- the argued in a celebrated 1907 article that the Greeks believed that they transferred their manliness to their boys through their semen, many would still like to claim that the original "Dorian" pederasty was "pure," i.e., devoid of overt sexuality. Like