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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

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Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8hc9196c

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 38(2)

ISSN
0161-6463

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Publication Date
2014-03-01

DOI
10.17953/aicr.38.2.l874w4216151vp23

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Joyous Discipline: Native Autonomy and Culturally Conservative Two-Spirit People

Brian Joseph Gilley

Every few months I am contacted by a media outlet, usually a radio station or a newspaper, asking me to comment on some happening surrounding Two-Spirit people, same-sex marriage among Natives, or to react to some new wave of discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer (GLBTQ) Indians. The specific context of these inquiries differs, but the usually non-Native journalists want to know the same few things: were Natives really "accepting of homosexuals" before contact? And, "are there any tribes that accept homosexuals today?" My initial response is usually carefully constructed and prefaced with the phrase, "it's incredibly complicated." For various reasons most of the journalists are impatient with the complications I cite, such as the ways sexuality, gender, and society were seamlessly integrated in historic times and remain so in very few closely knit societies. What they mostly want to know is whether "gays are accepted or not."

This question, as annoying as it is to me, is a legitimate one. Non-Natives, particularly non-Native GLBTQ activists, are confused by "Two-Spirit" as an identity, as well as the more recent intellectually activist term "queer indigenous." Both terms allude to a historically fluid sex/gender culture and resist

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contemporary Native society that, most often, holds heteropatriarchical views of gender and sexuality. Non-Natives hear Native activists say that they live under the same heteronormative conditions as their non-Native GLBTQ sisters and brothers, yet simultaneously Native activists invoke a culturally specific form of acceptance. Additionally, non-Native GLBTQ activists themselves confuse the situation by looking for non-western examples of social acceptance in order to scaffold their own sociopolitical agendas.

The invocation of gay liberation counter narratives, particularly the idea of "acceptance," creates a dilemma for GLBTQ and Two-Spirit (GLBTQ2) Natives' involvement in their own local emancipation and their desire to be active and contributing members of their communities. The community attitudes from which they seek relief are contained within the communities they also seek to be accepted. Why they seek acceptance is as much about the historical existence of gender diversity as it is about a general Native commitment to social and cultural practices. In posing the question of whether or not GLBTQ2 people are accepted today, what is lost are the negotiations required of people who identify as GLBTQ2 and who seek a social and cultural participation unique to the history of indigenous North Americans. That is, the complexity of the multiple subjectivities required to be GLBTQ2 does not allow for easy answers to questions about gay liberation, same-sex marriage, HIV/AIDS discrimination and the hundreds of other related problems faced by individuals disenfranchised by heteropatriarchy.

The other complicating factor relates to acceptance: the a priori assumption of an outright and blatant homophobia, heteropatriarchy, and discrimination within American Indian communities that look very much the same as in American society generally. No doubt the evidence for heteropatriachy is everywhere and documented. Complicating our naming of Native peoples' attitudes, reactions, and beliefs as discriminatory is the possibility, and probability, of the influence of their particular cultural perspectives on how they interpret sex, sexuality, gender difference, and disease. Many Native cultures, as they situate GLBTQ2 people and guide the community members who are asked to accept or assumed to deny them, do not readily produce answers to the straightforward question about whether or not "gays are accepted." Actually the question of "acceptance" itself does not readily fit into any notion of historic Native social organization or the ways in which contemporary culturally conservative Native communities specify membership and orient participation.

Throughout my more than ten years of research with GLBTQ2 people and HIV/AIDS I have witnessed multiple forms of outright hostility and exclusion which, analytically, are fairly straightforward moments of nonacceptance and discrimination. Interstitial spaces are incredibly more complicated and far less understood: spaces where individuals who are thought of as different by the community or themselves intersect local values within conceptual territories that have little to do with acceptance, denial, or hostility. These spaces, I argue here, are less framed by acceptance and more so by ancient conceptions of participation, commitment, and trust—conceptions derived from the broadly defined category of autonomy.

CONSERVATIVE AUTONOMY

Anyone familiar with the work of Chippewa sociologist Duane Champagne will recognize his influence in my work. For the analytical goals I have set out here, Champagne provides some of the most workable and insightful perspectives incorporating a broadly conceived indigenous approach wedded to social theory. Additionally, I find the work of Gerald Vizenor particularly insightful when attempting to puzzle out the implications of social and political agendas for Natives. Vizenor refuses ideas such as tradition in favor of a kind of continuity of mind among Natives, one that finds distinct representations in specific tribal communities.[1] Champagne also seeks to guide knowledge production about Native peoples away from concepts such as tradition by drawing analytical attention to the ways in which Native societies are dynamic in their social history.

Autonomy is the fundamental value that allows cultural change while simultaneously preserving sociocultural practice. The roots of individual, as well as community, autonomy are found in the way in which many American Indian societies view humans as but one of many animate beings of the universe. Autonomy manifests itself in various culturally specific ways among the many different tribes, societies, and ceremonial communities, yet it is easily recognizable in its diversity. Champagne tells us, "Because every individual is a power or spirit being with a calling in the cosmic order, challenging the motivations or actions of individuals who are seeking to fulfill their sacred life tasks is considered unruly." Therefore each individual as an autonomous power being has the right to access, partake in, and inform the social community without interference. Decision-making ideally comes from deliberation and consensus, without which there are no binding decisions. Individuals disagreeing with decisions have the autonomy to remain inactive in responding to a particular decision or to depart from the group without retribution or interference. Likewise, individuals who prevail in negotiations are considered responsible to the rest of the community for the outcomes of a decision. In this way, autonomy does not derive from human beings' natural right but from the need to insure harmony and balance within the cosmic community: "In this view social groups and individuals exercised considerable autonomy as part of the plan of the Great Spirit. Cosmic harmony and order were preserved by maintaining respectful relations with all spirit beings, including human groups and individuals." [2]

Predictably, two problems emerge from using a concept of autonomy taken only from American Indian cultural history and socioreligious contexts. The first is the danger of relying upon an overly romanticized vision of American Indian sociopolitical organization both historically and in the present. To focus on values such as consensus oversimplifies the ways autonomy negotiates the conflict, jealousy, and competitiveness embedded in any political system. This dilemma is somewhat resolved by my desire neither to use autonomy as a descriptor for an imagined lack of social conflict in history, nor to smooth the contentiousness of contemporary tribal politics. I will not focus on consensus and other sociopolitical legacies of settler interpretations of tribal organization.[3] While political and social decisions in a system supported by autonomy do require more communal consent and support than hierarchical systems and competitive democracies, at the same time, a focus on consent and other consensual outcomes inevitably overlooks the relationship between individual desire and comportment in a social system supported by autonomy. Consensus as a model of autonomy does not allow us to recognize the inevitable ways communities have historically addressed and continue to engage human differences as well as how individuals have a responsibility to find a social and spiritual space within existing cultural practices to express their difference.

A more significant issue is autonomy's association and confusion with individual "free will." The notion of freedom among the indigenous peoples in the Americas goes back to the times of Rousseau and the notion of the noble savage. Although there is debate as to whether Rousseau was the originator of the noble savage idea, the earliest portraits of Natives do celebrate an aborigine unburdened by social conventions and prone to fulfill impulse, a form of freedom that Americans and their most prominent thinkers associated with the land.[4] By the nineteenth century, however, the notion of the noble savage became what Stelio Cro refers to as an "allegory of freedom."[5] As symbols of freedom from tyranny and an exception from moral servitude, Natives helped construct America as a counterpoint to feudal Europe. Reproduced over time, the semiotic of the noble savage's freedom became relatively unquestioned in folk ideas as well as in academic knowledge production. From the outside, the autonomy witnessed by early explorers, colonists, and United States Indian agents appeared as a form of freedom. However, what settlers were witnessing reflected a more egalitarian social system that sought to locate power and possibility in the collective and the social practices of the society. Their focus on freedom further overlooked the highly rigid socioreligious structure of Native society, which functioned as the parameters of social and individual will.

As Phillip Deloria points out, by the nineteenth century the concept of the Indian as naturally free transformed the Native into an individualist, which became useful for various American attempts to distinguish themselves from Europeans.[6] The Natives who were constructed as the first American individualists were admired for their expression of human nature, which made them a model of resistance against rigid feudal social contracts and binding arrangements.[7] The construction of the "free" Indian has had enormous ramifications in the ways indigenous peoples were and are constructed as the allegorical first liberals of American liberal humanism, misinterpreting Native social elements. The tangible products of this allegory are many throughout social and intellectual history. The most important to my work, and one of the most recent, is the discursive edifice of Native societies as historically *tolerant* of homosexuality and *accepting* of gender difference. Tolerance and/or acceptance has entangled autonomy with either a naturalistic orientation of indigenous sexual otherness or within the politically oriented construction of historic "free to be" sex/gender individualism.

A small number of scholars have attempted to address the confusion between individual free will and autonomy in Native society. As Sara Trechter has found, free will and its construction of individualism runs counter to local values among the Lakota, who are consistent in "referring to backgrounded whiteness as mere individualism and dialogically opposing it to community, [so that] the encroachment of whiteness is always placed in distinction to Lakhotaness."[8] Colin Scott further critiques the tendency to view autonomy as a simple "counter-hegemonic" response to settler colonialism.[9] Rather, he has found that among Arctic and Subarctic peoples autonomy is expressed by a respect for the individual as a person within a community, as well as a respect for the variability among a community's members.[10] In North American Native societies, social relations that limit one's actions are not seen as oppositional to one's individual autonomy as they are in western notions of individuality. Among the Northern Cheyenne, for example, self-actualization is not nearly as important as the ways in which one's individuality make a supporting contribution to the community.[11] Among the Blackfoot, in another example, "Competence is the outward justification of the exercise of autonomy."[12] Cumulatively these ideas challenge the analytical use of the liberal idea of independence as a form of freedom from social commitment and support autonomy among Native societies as a form of *interdependence*—of social complementarity among human differences. Furthermore, the idea of autonomy calls on us to complicate the ways in which we understand freedom and individuality, and the ways we conceive limits on individual expression when conceptualizing significant social issues such as GLBTQ2 rights, same-sex marriage, and the treatment of Natives living with HIV/AIDS.

Champagne refers to those who practice autonomy in their daily lives as "cultural conservatives." The cultural conservatives are those community-based people who locate social affiliation according to a person's commitment to the social practices and values of the socioreligious order of which autonomy is a critical component. Most scholars have referred, and continue to refer, to cultural conservatives and their values as "traditional." Champagne objects to the word's association with the antiquated, the unchanging, and the backward. *Traditional* does lack an analytical power; at the same time, however, most Natives use *traditional* to describe individuals and practices inspired by culturally conservative communities. *Cultural conservative* will be used in this article in analytical discussions; when necessary, *traditional* will be used to describe ethnographic contexts. However, Champagne's refusal of the term *traditional* is the basis of his articulation of a culturally conservative Native world that emphasizes "retaining cultural integrity, whether worldview, ceremonies, religion, art, dress, identity or kinship groups," and specifically is not an "antiquarian or ad hoc interest or merely created in defiance of colonial assimilation efforts, but is deeply seated in the values and orientations of Indian cultures and in the organization of Indian social orders." Native social orders organized according to conservative values are more durable because they change more slowly due to the prioritization of low societal differentiation. Societies with high societal differentiation, such as most Euro-American institutional orders, are those "where culture, polity, economy and community are relatively more specialized and insulated from the activities of the others." Undifferentiated social orders change more slowly and at a greater cost because the relations between institutions overlap and "any group seeking to present an innovation or change in institutional relations … must legitimate and gain the affirmation of the new relations from most members of the community."[13]

Autonomy, in the ways of the culturally conservative, is supported by the continual attempt to preserve as much of an undifferentiated approach to social practices and relations between institutions as possible. Low societal differentiation is recognizably more difficult in the contemporary era of global economies, settler states, and tribal administration. Autonomy supported by low societal differentiation may be difficult for scholars to locate among material and sociopolitical interactions within the macrostructures of tribal administration and life outside of communities. However, among cultural conservatives, autonomy is most often preserved in the socioreligious commitments of kinship, ceremony, and intracommunity relations. For example, those Lakota adhering to the pipe religion will most likely see many of their values, social and familial commitments, and understanding of their intracommunity relations according to the fundamental ethics of the Seven Rites. In contemporary American society, will these Lakota be able to function within these values at all times when dealing with tribal bureaucracy or a cashier at a convenience store? They will not. However, they will conduct themselves in ways informed by their commitment to the pipe religion by making decisions through those values—decisions about the way they treat other people and their understanding of the ways things should be. Cultural conservatism, as well as the autonomy it supports, emanates from a set of community logics with ancient roots that are preserved through their use in available undifferentiated social elements.

As a broadly recognized value within specific tribal cultural manifestations, autonomy also scaffolds the contemporary politics of self-determination, and cultural conservatism finds a place in those social movements. Yet often, the political autonomy desired by nationally oriented tribal governments and the autonomy afforded to individuals in community contexts are similar only in the values they seek to represent. We have seen numerous examples of the ways tribal governments depart from allowing individual autonomy, such as the Cherokee laws banning Freedmen from the tribal rolls and the numerous "defense of marriage" laws adopted by tribal governments over the last decade. These violations of others' individual autonomy are the result of increased degrees of societal differentiation as an impact of political agendas at the national level. Thus, high levels of societal differentiation reorient Native social orders' treatment of human differences into hierarchical ideologies such as race and gender. Native feminists have been crucial voices in critiquing the limiting of human rights through the socially differentiating presence of heteropatriarchy in their communities. Heteropatriarchy, they argue, continues to structure society in the name of tribal sovereignty, raciality, and tribal national agendas through naturalizing a gendered sense of tribal unity: "we find it important to interrogate the process by which the politics of sovereignty are being built on the backs of women and those who are not gender- or heteronormative."[14] With the feminist critique in mind, I seek to separate the sovereignty-based autonomy desired by tribal governments from the kinds of autonomy circulating among culturally conservative communities. Many cultural conservatives are involved in national-level cultural politics; however, the majority of conservatives represented in this article see their local socioreligious values as distinct and often in opposition to the values of tribal governments. Even though the legal battle for governmental autonomy in the United States is inspired by the social history of culturally conservative ideals, the state-level autonomy sought by tribal governments further disorients analytical engagement with local interactions founded on mutual respect and the rights and responsibilities of community membership.[15]

The danger in critiquing nationalist use of autonomy is the possibility of our analysis reverting to a model of individualism in which individual differences must be recognized and celebrated. To conflate an acknowledgment of individualism with an acknowledgment of individual autonomy inevitably places irresolvable expectations on conservative community social orders. That is, expecting a culturally conservative community to acknowledge a person's individual free will runs counter to the very premises upon which the conservative community is established and has maintained a semblance of continuity. Autonomy is an orientation of respect for other individuals' right to live as they wish insofar as it supports the community and does not disrupt the social order. Thus, autonomy as a value supported by cultural conservatives extends an indigenous conceptual understanding to the realm of analysis and provides an opportunity to counter certain constructed assumptions of alienation and disaffection.

Culturally Conservative Two-Spirit Men

My ethnographic research with two multitribal Two-Spirit societies, one in Oklahoma and one in Colorado, began in the spring of 1999 and continued through 2008.[16] These societies were predominantly made up of male-bodied Native persons and, as a result, males predominate in the data presented here. In the late 1990s the Two-Spirit concept was just emerging out of the academic literature and into the stream of GLBTQ Natives who were using the Internet to connect with and support one another. For individuals who identify with the term in its simplest form, Two-Spirit references "two essences" of a person, both male and female. "Two essences" is the best approximation of a general historic trend among Native societies having categories of persons who, from a western and nontribal perspective, seem to be gender-mixed in their community-constructed status. This form of personhood was known as the "berdache" in early colonial contact accounts and early anthropological writings. In the 1980s, accounts of the berdache helped inspire social activism within groups such as Gay American Indians in San Francisco. Meant to replace *berdache* as the established ethnographic moniker and decolonize the anthropology of gender mixing into historic Native North America, *Two-Spirit* sought to recognize an explicit connection between present GLBTQ Native sexuality and American Indians' socially autonomous past. The Two-Spirit concept provided a second-wave intellectual and political response to the ubiquitous hostility experienced by GLBTQ Natives living on reservations and in urban communities.[17] From the mid-1990s to the present, Two-Spirit, as a term and identity, has produced a nationwide network of social groups known as Two-Spirit societies, annual national and regional society-sponsored gatherings, and a thriving Two-Spirit arts and literature movement.

By 2005 every US state and Canadian province had at least one Two-Spirit society, and some states, such as California, have multiple societies based on regional, urban, and reservation localities. For many GLBTQ Natives, Two-Spirit as it was widely understood—gender-fluid, sexually ambiguous, multitribal, and activist—allowed them to identify with their sexuality and tribal identity in ways previously unavailable. However, many GLBTQ Natives from traditional or more remote reservation upbringings had difficulty relating to the constructedness of Two-Spirit. Many of the culturally conservative traditionalist men I consulted had come to know their sexuality through local cultural contexts, which did not emphasize the acknowledgment of sexuality as identity. Some saw a division between their local ceremonial and social identifications and the ways they acted on their sexual desires within gay community social contexts or in the privacy of rural sexual circulation. As the idea and term *Two-Spirit* caught on among their peers and gained an increased presence on the Internet, culturally conservative traditionalists had difficulty relating to the individualistic and public gay pride aspect of Two-Spirit. Many culturally conservative GLBTQ Natives are drawn to Two-Spirit as a way to reclaim historic gender practices, but to access it in ways endorsed by Two-Spirit activism requires people to engage in an identity politics that is not in sync with local ideas about community participation and responsibility.

From the outside we may conflate, as do many Two-Spirit men, the lack of mixed-gender roles and assumed hostility toward same-sex relations among culturally conservative people with the adoption of heteropatriarchy among social practices. We may also conflate historic and academic images to what is seen as "no longer present" among contemporary culturally conservative communities. At the same time that they recognize heteropatriarchy among their fellow tribespeople, some GLBTQ2-identified Native people consent to the parameters set out by cultural conservatives through their participation and personal commitments. My concern all along is that the creation and initiation of concepts such as the "queer indigenous" may accuse Two-Spirit men—who do not publicly question the sexuality and gender arrangements expressed in contemporary cultural conservative practices—of some form of "false consciousness."[18] Unlike Two-Spirit-specific social events where gender categories were always being challenged and redefined, the men's participation in nongay social practices among their tribal communities usually strictly followed local sex and gender rules. When I brought up this fact to Two-Spirit men, they were critical of any notion of their adherence to community rules and custom as complicit with heteropatriarchy. They further connected any "destabilization" of community norms to various acts that would require monumental self-reflection by the members of their nongay social groups, such as remaking roles for Two-Spirit traditions in ceremonies.

A clear dilemma began to emerge. On the one hand, Native and non-Native intellectuals as well as activists were using Native GLBTQ2 people to show the ways that sexuality, desire, eroticism, gender, and every other category of the body is made contingent through sociocultural history and practice.[19] I use *contingency* to describe the poststructuralist argument that heteropatriarchal beliefs, discourses, and values surrounding gender and sex should be revealed as unstable by means of political and social disruption or acts of renaming.[20] On the other hand, GLBTQ2 people do in fact use unified forms of local discourse to sort out what it means to be a member of a community based on highly specific and stable-seeming categories of race, ancestry, and cultural practice. I saw men placing the interests and values of their communities before their need to have their sexuality and gender difference acknowledged in positive or historically traditional ways by the community. This dilemma inspires a problematization of the contradictory contingencies embodied in the co-construction of GLBTQ2 emancipatory political ideas and the culturally conservative views of Native custom to which many indigenous GLBTQ2 people subscribe. Culturally conservative GLBTQ2 people embody a political position not of their own making in ways that reveal American Indian gender diversity, but also make this position one that is all the more difficult for them to engage.

Queer Indigenous as a Conceptual Tool

The concept of queer indigenous represents the emergent confluence of multiple academic and sociopolitical conversations seeking to decolonize gender, sexuality, sexual embodiment, and the human rights of sex/gender-others within Native communities. According to Andrea Smith, in its most basic sense queer indigenous is an attempt to "unsettle settler colonialism" as it "provides the framework for interrogating and analyzing normalizing logics within disciplinary formations," such as those within anthropology and the history of American Indians.[21] Positioning itself as more than a moniker for GLBTQ2 Natives, the conceptual use of queer indigenous has produced a body of literature attaching academic practices and knowledge production to the disruption of heteropatriarchy as it is embedded in Native communities' social and political practices. The disruption of heteropatriarchy arrives hand in hand with decolonization, according to scholars such as Smith and J. Khaulani Kauanui: "At a time when tribal nations have begun to pass bans on same-sex marriage in the name of 'Indian tradition,' we find it important to interrogate the process by which the politics of sovereignty are being built on the backs of women and those who are not gender- or heteronormative." [22]

Quintessential to the academic-cum-activist reality of queer indigenous is its ability to deconstruct the imposition of colonial logics in representations of Native sexuality and gender-others[23] and colonial agendas built into the policies and goals of tribal governments and nationalists.[24] As a methodological and conceptual tool, queer indigenous seeks to undermine normativity in the spaces where queer Native peoples are marginalized in their communities as well as within an influential anthropological and historical literature.[25] When operational in academic contexts, queer indigenous attempts to navigate the difficulty of disrupting heteropatriarchal essentialism at the same time as it seeks to emphasize Native sociopolitical sovereignty and the anticolonial politics of tribal identity.

Unlike the culturally conservative Native queer subject, the subjectlessness and blurred borders of the queer theory tradition all rely on a continual challenging of norms.[26] At the basis of queer theory and the queer indigenous subject is "*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer,' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative."[27] Queer, as both an analytical position and as acknowledgment of positions, is an interrogation of normative values and practices that place individuals, as well as entire communities, in disenfranchised sociopolitical localities.[28] In its most recent manifestations, a general queer theory also seeks a form of knowledge production allowing nonnormative voices to challenge domination at the same time that it refuses to reproduce normativity through research, writing, and representation. Adopting the challenge to normativity is an essential aspect of queer indigenous as a sociopolitical and academic position. Queer indigenous, both as a group of people and as an analytic perspective, is positioned by the same normative institutional and discursive practices as other GLBTQ people in America.

The presumption of the disunity of identity in queer theory and politics becomes problematic when applied to locally and culturally committed individuals who do not view their racial, tribal, and cultural conservative community identities as open for disruption and resignification. Any critical intervention precludes the fact that a commitment to culturally conservative values requires individuals to obligate themselves to orthodox social and cultural practices. At the outset this contrasts with a gay activist theoretical construction of the GLBTQ2 subject as politically and morally autonomous.[29] For GLBTQ2 people, agency may not translate as an incentive to disrupt discursive practices. In fact, the actions of GLBTQ2 people I observed relied on the idea that agency is derived from "capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions" as it is "bound up with the historically culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed."[30] To this notion Womack adds the paradox of Native agency: "[Natives] may want the freedom to imagine themselves anew, to act in ways that intervene in their destinies, to view themselves as more than the victims of Western dystopias or the happy inhabitants of a communal lark."[31] Negotiating this paradox requires a degree of "self-discipline" within a set of unified boundaries established by sociohistorical circumstance and collective memory; in turn, resolving this paradox requires a form of docility.

Mahmood offers some insight into the nature of docility: "Although we have come to associate docility with the abandonment of agency, the term literally implies the malleability required of someone in order for her to be instructed in a particular skill or knowledge—a meaning that carries less a sense of passivity than one of struggle, effort, exertion and achievement."[32] A GLBTQ2 subjectivity emanating from docility to culturally conservative practices—the struggle to obtain knowledge, the effort needed to learn and preserve, and the commitment to achieve for one's community—is one that is embodied in "specific gestures, styles, and formal expressions that characterize one's relationship to a moral code [and] are not contingent but a necessary means to understanding the kind of relationship that is established between the self and structures of social authority . . . and what kind of work one performs on oneself in order to realize a particular modality of being and personhood." The culturally conservative docility that locates agency in the "work one performs on oneself" to show commitment to cultural conservative practices—learning songs, prayers, being present at ceremonies, sacrificing in the name of participation and continuity—lies in contrast to queer forms of agency that rely on the disruption of norms.[33] In community contexts, acts of culturally conservative GLBTQ2 autonomy are not that of a queering in its theoretical sense but of a community-derived expression of balancing individual desire—sexuality, bodily sex, gender—with community and cosmic order.

Some Two-Spirit men commit themselves to culturally conservative practices within their ancestral communities because it provides a form of freedom that is not found anywhere else in their social world. That is, making oneself docile to community values through fulfilling expections is about undertaking the difficult tasks of being a committed cultural conservative for oneself and community. To do this one makes use of the available cultural meanings and time-tested practices in culturally conservative social contexts. Culturally conservative GLBTQ2 people do not attend ceremonies and social events among their fellow tribespeople to reconfigure, disunify, or disrupt. Continuity, preservation, and cultural commitment are the goals of their participation. While at events attended by Two-Spirit men there may be people present who hold homophobic, heterosexist, and misogynist sentiments, to call these events homophobic or heterosexist flies in the face of the desired continuity between past and present, as well as the possibilities for revitalization.

Over a period of ten years I observed a Creek GLBTQ2 man I will call "Sean" move from nervously leading one stomp dance song at his community grounds to taking on a leadership role and making an effort to revitalize dormant ceremonial grounds. This Creek Two-Spirit man was doing the work required by maintaining undifferentiated social elements, the primary goal of cultural conservative social and religious practices. As an active stomp grounds member he views the practices, or the work, as a vehicle through which he expresses all forms of his identity as well as a form of continuity. He explained this through his desire to shake shells, usually a woman's role:

> If I wanted to shake shells I could. Certain people at the grounds would object because they would assume that I was working against tradition. But there are people I know, who know me, that would support me doing it. Their concern would be that I was doing it in the "right way" and that I knew all of the songs, prayers, traditions. I don't know how they would feel about a man shaking shells and wearing a skirt though [laughs]. I'm not called to wear women's clothing, but if a Two-Spirit knew their stuff there are people that would support them no matter what.

I often thought of the support, assumed and real, given to culturally competent GLBTQ2 people as what Womack calls a "communal lark" or imaginary utopia.[34] Only with some temporal distance from my initial ideas, the interviews, and Two-Spirit men themselves have I become able to reconcile in my analysis an understanding of the people who were the most accepting of Two-Spirit men—active cultural conservatives within their communities—and find my way to parse the differences between a fear of disrupting community social practices with queer politics and a legitimate fear of discrimination. For all the stories of homophobia that I heard, I was also told many stories of accepting grandmothers who already knew through a "traditional gaydar." I came to think of this as a hopeful cliché circulating among Two-Spirit social circles. Some men were overly sanguine or even dishonest, but I witnessed firsthand familial and communal acceptance for Two-Spirit men who had long familial ties to culturally conservative practices. I have come to think of the traditional exceptionalism that I witnessed as more than acceptance or tolerance, but rather an extension of principles to which the men's families and communities are committed. For the grandmothers, other family members, and community participants it is within the cultural logic of fulfilling the work that they incorporate difference and social change into their practices. When talking to people who have lived their lives committed to the work, one realizes that this incorporation of difference and social change is a core principle of actually undertaking the work physically, socially, and spiritually, as is being present.[35] For GLBTQ2 people or community members to allow sexual ideologies to disrupt the act of being present to one another and of doing the work would act against the principles to which they are committed.

JOYOUS DISCIPLINE

I showed "Robert," an Osage Two-Spirit man, a rough draft of a publication in which he appeared under this same pseudonym. When I spoke with him about what I had written, I was surprised by Robert's anger. He felt that he was portrayed in ways that challenged his claim to traditionalism, Two-Spiritedness, and tribal identity. In particular he felt that I overemphasized his fear of being outed among his tribe. He felt that my presentation of his story mischaracterized decisions he had made about being closeted out of fear of being alienated from community participation. At issue for Robert was the connection I had made between his fear of discrimination and his decision not to dance in his community's annual war dances. When I first met Robert, he told me that he was going to "remain in the closet within the tribe" until he had undergone the requisite naming rituals. His logic—so I thought—was that after being inducted into the society through naming that he would have the social capital to resist social alienation. I had also initially interpreted Robert's continued delay of his naming ceremony as an extension of his fear that there was hostility toward Two-Spirit people among the ceremonial leadership.

Robert's reaction to my interpretation inspired a return to his story and the stories of two other Osage Two-Spirits from the same ceremonial district. The stories of Robert, "Jill," and "Jason" are particularly relevant in understanding how a commitment to cultural conservatism allows for a specific kind of freedom not acknowledged in politics and theories of queer subjectivity. Jill is a male-bodied person who has been living as a woman since her thirties. Jason and Robert identify as tribally affiliated Two-Spirit men. All three are out to their families and are to one degree or another out within their community. In the participation of Robert, Jill, and Jason in the Osage war dances I witnessed the ways that docility to cultural authority and a sense of personal empowerment can intersect. Thinking through their participation and moving away from an analysis based on rooting out discrimination toward one that recognizes the negotiations required for a sustained commitment to community values, a more nuanced and complex portrait emerges.

Osage cultural conservatives hold a three-weekend series of dances in June. Their name, I'n-Lon-Schka, means "in the playground of the eldest son," which reflects a tribal tradition of always turning to the oldest for advice, inspiration, and guidance. The ceremonies themselves are derivative of the Plains-style war dance which is similar in regalia and affect to the straight dance category in Southern-style powwows. As Osage writer Alice Callahan tells us, "I'n-Lon-Schka sets standards of conduct and ways of living for the tribal members; it is religious in context, revealing many of the beliefs and ideals of the tribe in the prayers, songs and ceremonies." Preparation for the June dances takes place throughout the year through a series of ceremonies, committee meetings, preparations of the dance arbors, and accumulation of goods for the massive giveaways for which the Osage are known. The ceremony, according to an Osage elder, "is the joyous discipline of the dance. . . . It's a joyous time, yet it's a disciplined joyous time for those that participate."[36] The discipline is not only the physical energy and stamina required to dance in full regalia in an Oklahoma summer for four days, eight hours a day, but also the personal discipline required to adhere to the various rules governing preparation of oneself, one's relatives, and the ceremonial grounds for the dance.

Rules governing individual comportment and obligation are set by and reinforced through a continual reference to tradition—"doing things the right way"—and strict supervision by community members. Engaging the ceremony properly relies on being disciplined but also a willingness to be disciplined by the expectations of elders, family members, and the practice of dancing. The practices become the vehicle for individual autonomy in that individuals choose whether to dance or not, the degree to which they will participate, their own levels of responsibility, and whether or not to commit themselves to the practice. Everyone who engages the community is aware of the consequences of using their individual will in ways that disrupt the continuation of the ceremony and their family's position within the ceremonial structure. There is no "critical freewill" in the ceremony, but rather an individual autonomy within the accepted boundaries of community custom and values. For Jason, Jill, and Robert the autonomy they experience and seek is the "unacknowledgment" of their gender and sexuality differences among the possible ways to be a member of the ceremonial complex. By insisting on acknowledgment of differences, one would be seen as individualistic, arrogant or disruptive—all things I saw these three consultants avoid.

The first time I attended the war dances with Robert I was introduced to Jill, who was sitting in the bleachers that surround the square ceremonial dance arena. Jill was wearing a wig, flamboyant costume jewelry, heavy makeup, and a woman's blouse. She was also wearing men's pants and men's shoes and made little effort to effeminize her behavior or voice. Robert and I sat with Jill in the bleachers and watched her socialize with passersby, many of whom were recognizable community elders, leaders, and people holding positions of responsibility in the ceremonial organization. Some people addressed her in the feminized form of her first name, or by her given male name, while others avoided using pronouns and gendered forms of address. Jill's presence obviously made some community members uncomfortable and it showed in their interactions with her. But as Robert told me on the way home, "All of the important people know who she is, they know who her family is, and they respect that she comes to the dance and takes part like she's supposed to." When I interviewed Jill about her experiences as a Two-Spirit person in her very small tribal ceremonial society, she reiterated that her family's status and social commitments protected her from discrimination. When she spoke of a role in the annual ceremony, she said, "I'd go out there and dance, just like this. Maybe I'd dance with the men or the women, probably the women with a shawl, but if my uncle weren't here I'd be leading the giveaway because I am the next in line. I'n-Lon-Schka is the dance of the oldest son, so that's who I'd need to be right then. We used to have a more defined role for people like me. I'd still be the role of the Mizu-ga but it's not called that anymore and most of the official ways I would do that are gone." The Mizu-ga is a historic word for a mixed-gender man in the Osage Dhegi-ha dialect. "Are you reviving the Mizu-ga by dancing in women's regalia?" I asked. Jill replied, "I guess so, but it's not this trans thing you're always talking about. I'm in women's regalia, so it's kind of being seen as a different kind of woman or different kind of man."

Given Jill's unapologetic self-presentation and her recognition of the disappearance of the official ways one would fulfill the Mizu-ga role, it would be easy to interpret Jill in the category of a courageous gender warrior standing up to a homophobic community by being out and proud with her manner of being. From a contemporary queer theoretical perspective, it is difficult not to think of some form of performative gender transgression when seeing Jill dance in her female ceremonial regalia. Part of the problem with reading Jill's participation in terms of gender performativity stems from queer theory's development in the context of, and in relation to, Euro-American or settler culture, which does not have a gender diversity tradition. When I saw Jill dress as a female dancer she adhered to all of the rules and responsibilities governing Osage women's ceremonial dress: she carried a small eagle fan and wore a ribbon work skirt, moccasins, and a shiny silk ribbon shirt. The potential disruption or reconfiguration of being widely known as a male-bodied person seemingly did not register in any significant way. Despite having gone through the childhood process of naming as a male, Jill has also acquired the proper approvals from the heads of her family, clan, and district to dance as a woman. The process was not meant to approve a male-bodied person dancing as a female, she emphasized, but rather approval comes from a process of ritual and expression of commitment that all dancers, regardless of bodily sex and gender presentation, must go through. The "structures of authority" did not approve her "cross dressing"; rather they approved her ability to fulfill women's roles in the community, her ability to properly function in the I'n-Lon-Schka and her commitment to learn women's songs, prayers, and responsibilities. They respected her autonomy to interact with the creator, the ceremony, and the community in ways that she felt in her heart. Her autonomy to dance as a male-bodied person in female regalia comes not from a critical pushback and an insistence on being acknowledged as queer, but instead from her repeated expression of docility to the practice.

Jason and Jill share an unbroken chain of family community participation since at least the days of Indian Territory. Jason's family is often referred to as prominent among the community, and members of his family have held positions of high social, ceremonial, and political authority. When I asked how it felt to "hide" his sexuality from the people to which he was so committed, he replied that his sexual preferences had little to do with the work he was doing on behalf of his family, tribespeople, and young people. After many conversations and time spent with Jason, it became clear that he did not see his community or his sense of Osage personhood through his sexuality but saw his sexuality through community values and practices. That is, his desire for other men meshed with his desire to be a contributing member of the ceremonial community. Despite being politically active in the broader Oklahoma gay community and the movement for Native GLBTQ rights, he did not feel the need to "represent for Indian gays" within the ceremonial community, he said.

Jason was not naïve about anti-GLBTQ Native sentiment among his fellow tribespeople and Osage national policies. He knew that a few, if not many, people within the tribal structure, some of whom were otherwise supportive cultural conservatives, held discriminatory attitudes toward same-sex relations and non-heteronormative behavior. At the same time, he did not see the actual practices—the songs, the dances, the prayers—or their performance in contemporary settings as containing any anti-gay or heteronormative ideas. Rather, he saw the discriminatory ideas against Two-Spirit people as historically derived impositions on community practices. Jason told me that "everyone knows I am gay. But they leave me alone because some don't care and others are afraid of my uncles and mother. But really we don't go around announcing and bragging anyways. It's not good medicine to be 'out' like that here. Quietly respectful is how we do everything." Jason's mom later said, "All the signs are there, let people figure it out if they even care who [Jason] sleeps with." According to Jason his "practically out" status has had little impact on the opportunities available to him among the social and ceremonial organization. Whenever I mentioned the possibility of being denied access to certain leadership roles or having his cultural authority challenged because of sexual orientation, he continually referenced how any form of denial would be an insult to his family and not very Osage.

Community-constructed ideas of autonomy tell us much about why Jason and Jill felt a certain comfort among their ceremonial societies, a comfort they repeatedly emphasized did not exist outside of that microcosm. While Jill or Jason never used the word "autonomy" or described a specific Osage philosophy of autonomy, the evidence of individual autonomy within community standards is visible in the ways they interact with family and community members. Likewise, how Jason and Jill conduct themselves explicitly link responsibility and autonomy in various ways. The freedom "to be" for Jason and Jill is achieved through community observation of their responsibility to community values; I was repeatedly told that they can come "as they are" as long as they have "respect for the ways."

A fear of homophobia that is conditioned by knowing oneself as Osage and gay outside of culturally conservative contexts may be the reason that Robert was careful about being completely open about his sexuality. Yet, as I now realize, the reasons he chose to continually delay his debut as a fully inducted member of the war dance society were more complicated than a direct correlation between homophobia and the absence of the overt acceptance of GLBTQ2 tribal members. Robert grew up with only sporadic contact with Osage culture, gained mostly through visits to his grandparents, who helped raise him. Robert's mother participated in Osage ceremonial life until she left the house at the age of eighteen and moved out-of-state. Robert's grandparents were very active in ceremonial life until they became too ill to participate in the late 1960s. Up to the point when I met him in 1998, Robert's involvement in Osage culture was largely at the level of participant-observer. He had been integral in establishing the gay Native community in Oklahoma, long before the concept of Two-Spirit emerged, but participating in Osage ceremonialism was increasingly important to Robert.

To dance in the annual ceremonies he had to assemble the required regalia and social associations. In order to be an inducted member of the I'n-Lon-Schka Robert had to undergo a naming ritual as well as establish himself with one of the existing "arbors," or establish his own. Arbors are family-designated camping and covered feeding areas or small historic camp homes around the ceremonial ground, some of which have been occupied by the same lineages for more than a century. They also act to represent social and kin affiliations. Robert had been loosely affiliated with Jason's family arbor, but also wanted to reclaim his family's right to have a ceremonial camp and participate in the dances. Robert would revitalize his lineage within the ceremonial organization by being named, establishing himself within an existing arbor or one of his own, and having the ability to appropriately gift community members at his ceremonial giveaway. He often talked of having his own arbor where Two-Spirit Osages could find the support they need for participation, as he said, "especially for those who have been pushed away by their families or don't feel welcome by some of the ways people talk about or act around gays." It was two years before Robert had accumulated the complex and expensive handmade regalia to participate in the dance. Two years after completing his regalia Robert still had yet to be named, have his induction giveaway, and become formally associated with an arbor.

My initial conflation and attribution of these facts to a fear of homophobia placed Robert's actions completely out of the realm of his autonomy and that of the community. Though Robert may have adequately readied himself by accumulating all of the proper regalia, giveaway items, and approvals from elders, he had not put in enough time to gain the support required for induction. Robert understood that his incorporation into tribal ceremonial, and social practices required the display of a proficiency in knowledge, practice, and commitment; it required docility to "the joyous discipline." For Robert to be taken seriously and his lineage revitalized, he needed to display a continual presence at community events and a willingness to undertake the work of learning social practices and values over a sustained period of years. Simply attending social events and ceremonies is the beginning of joyous discipline, but to be entrusted with roles in the community one must be given the privilege by those who maintain the practices of joyous discipline. One can only achieve access and responsibility when the community observes that the individual has accumulated the proper sets of knowledge, together with sufficient backing and guidance from family, clan, and other supporters.

Without the immediate social support from which Jill and Jason benefited, Robert had to build a set of solid connections among acknowledged social and ceremonial leaders who could sponsor his family's return to ceremonial life. Individuals who have the symbolic capital to sponsor someone are only willing to lend their support to people who have proven their commitment. By being inducted into ceremonial life as children, Jason and Jill were able to rely on their families' authority to negotiate their way through tribal social life and thus had the ability to invoke their high standing when feeling threatened. But they also had the responsibility of maintaining their families' status through social and ceremonial commitment. Not having this support system, Robert had to cobble together associations within the closely knit war dance society, whose suspicion of outsider values has helped maintain social and ceremonial continuity. I was told secondhand that a community elder with whom Robert was seeking sponsorship said he cared little about Robert's sexuality, but that he was waiting to see the kind of commitments to ensure no one was "wasting their time." No one wanted to pressure Robert to participate because this would run counter to his personal autonomy to engage the community on his own terms and within his own timetable. Thus the location of freedom for Robert is not through insistent forms of acknowledgment, but through a historically established cultural logic that provides for multiple forms of autonomous personhood and paths to reach them.

CONCLUSION

Despite the promise of a queer indigenous theory for engaging settler epistemologies, a queer subjectivity is difficult to reconcile with the forms of autonomy Jason, Jill, and Robert seek with their participation in, and commitment to, culturally conservative values and practices. I propose an understanding of Two-Spirit men's participation as a form of social, spiritual, and cultural orthodoxy that provides an ancient, rather than radical, political autonomy reached by means of docility or the joyous discipline. A commitment to the particular forms of freedom afforded culturally conservative Two-Spirit men challenges the universalist emancipatory proposition offered by a subjectless critique. Instead, the subject's freedom is derived from the stability offered by cultural authority and his or her submission to the rigors of community practice. Located within the submission to authority is the possibility of autonomy of personhood acknowledged by other autonomous entities: persons, spirit beings, and social practices. This stability allows persons to access the sources of autonomy within themselves and within the sociocultural logic of the practice. To seek disruption or resignification or to challenge community autonomy removes the source of these finite, local, and tribally specific origins of selfhood. Thus I will continue to grapple with the possibility that the queering of the seemingly stable, but dynamic, cultural logics that make up cultural authority would question the very basis upon which any tribally specific or broadly conceived notion of indigeneity is founded.

I have also argued that a subject unified by community practice possesses a form of autonomy that obtains a certain amount of cultural authority. Expanding our understanding of the ways in which culturally conservative GLBTQ Natives seek "freedom" in unified selfhoods can also illustrate a premodern queerness whose contemporary forms of expression are influenced by modernity, but not bound to it. Thus cultural authority emerges less as a set of discourses seeking to limit freedom and more as a way of knowing oneself in the world through mastering relations between autonomous subjects. Robert, Jill, and Jason do not possess cultural authority and freedom despite their "differences;" rather, they derive the freedom of cultural authority through the ways their differences engage the joyous discipline of ceremony. As a Jicarilla

Apache Two-Spirit man told me about GLBTQ Natives in his community's Sun Dance, "We have to show who we are through knowing the ways, singing the songs and saying the prayers."

One cannot help being overwhelmed by community actions that contradict the autonomy of GLBTQ Natives, such as tribal laws banning same-sex marriage. It is in these national tribal contexts where scholars can successfully argue the need to disrupt heteropatriarchy manifested in nationalist and sovereignty agendas. If culturally conservative practices and heteropatriarchical tribal nationalist agendas, such as those banning same-sex marriage, are collapsed into a singular source of subjectivity, we may potentially lose sight of the ways GLBTQ people such as Robert are actively pursuing queer indigenous emancipation. I am not so naïve as to think that tribespeople with heteropatriarchical views are not imposing those values on culturally conservative practices, but unlike the nationalist political arena, microsociological communities continue to be bound by ancient practices and logics that contain openings for the expression of difference, sometimes in small, but significant ways.

Notes

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6. Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 26, 107, 159.

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11. 11 Anne Straus, "The Structure of the Self in Northern Cheyenne Culture," in *Psychosocial Theories of the Self*, ed. Benjamin Lee (New York: Springer US, 1982), 125.

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13. Champagne, *Social Change and Cultural Continuity*, 29–30; 26; 31; 32.

14. Andrea Smith and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Native Feminisms Engage American Studies," *American Quarterly* 60 (2008): 241.

15. Jennifer Denetdale, "Carving Navajo National Boundaries: Patriotism, Tradition, and the Diné Marriage Act of 2005," *American Quarterly* 60 (2008): 289.

16. Uncited quotations in this article are drawn from this research. Consultant interview times, places and names are protected by IRB. Notes are in the possession of the author.

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18. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14.

19. Lang, "Various Kinds of Two-Spirit People;" Lang, *Men as Women, Women as Men*; Roscoe, "How to Become a Berdache;" Roscoe, *Changing Ones*; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang, "Introduction;" Wesley Thomas and Sue Ellen Jacobs, "'...And We Are Still Here': From Berdache to Two-Spirit People," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23 (1999): 91–107; *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism*; Roscoe, *The Zuni Man Woman*.

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33. Ibid., 120.

34. Womack, 66.

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