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QUEER PANIC IN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

By

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Thesis

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Queer Panic in Native American Literature

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Indigenous American sexual minorities and alternatively gendered voices went underground due to Eurowestern sexual colonization from the time of the conquistador invasions of the early 16th century to the political campaigns of cultural homogenization of the mid-20th century. A cultural distortion still exists in the postcolonial era. In the past many North American indigenous nations had culturally specific sexualities and genders that reflected the cultural heterogeneity of the Americas. Today cultural assimilation negatively affects queer Native Americans, and culturally imported attitudes of homophobia are reflected in Native American literature. An interdisciplinary approach must be used to study the cultural distortion that affects all levels of Native American societies including sexuality and gender, by combining anthropology, social studies, forms of oral and textual literature, and history, a discourse between competing Native American voices is revealed.

The results indicate that some Native American authors exhibit traditional and/or neo-traditional views versus assimilated views about Native American queer and two-spirit people, traditional means the specific cultural constructs of the nation that produced them, and assimilated means cultural absorption by another and does not mean acculturation. Assimilated views of homosexuality such as James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, readily canonized by the literary establishment, are still influenced by the patriarchy. Queer voices that attempt to rediscover Native American's past acceptance of multiple genders and sexual diversity, neo-traditionalists like Michael Red Earth and Anne Waters, have remained largely unknown by mainstream America, reflecting the invisibility of Native American sexual minorities and two-spirit voices in contemporary American life.

The principal conclusion is that a culture clash exists between assimilated and traditional and/or neo-traditional views about the re-acceptance of alternative genders, and the acceptance of culturally imported queer identities. Even so, Native American sexual minorities and two-spirit people are telling their stories as an act of decolonization and reasserting their cultural power.

Theodore Cecil DeCelles

English Literature Thesis

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## Queer Panic in Native American Literature

### Introduction

The voices and identities of Native American sexual minorities and alternative genders have been distorted by a merging of two cultures.<sup>1</sup> As a result of the distortion according to Wesley Thomas in *Two-Spirit People*, a closeting of Native subjectivity was the result. Thomas refers to Edward H. Spicer's important text *Cycles of Conquest* in order to make his argument: "Religious leaders, medicine people, and others at variance from Christian norms started to be discrete about exposing their identities to the outside world. They moved underground due to the pressure from Western secular and religious beliefs" (157). Many Native Americans have chosen to remain silent about cultural concepts of Indigenous sexuality and gender. Steeped in patriarchy, American culture has demonized differing sexualities queer in relation to western heteronormative binary sexuality. Well over a hundred Native American cultures have more than one gender and likewise practice sexual diversity.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, one might conclude that tribal peoples do not condemn alternative genders and remain open-minded about varying sexual practices. What is the main cultural response to cultural distortion in relation to Native American sexuality and genders? Many Native American cultures have adopted or assimilated the homophobia of the dominant American culture, while on the other hand traditionalists have

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<sup>1</sup> For lack of better terminology, "gay" will be used interchangeably with "queer" and "homosexual." Unless otherwise stated I will use the term "sexual minorities" when appropriate. The term "two-spirit" is a contemporary cultural term that has been accepted by the larger community of queer Native Americans. The Algonquin word *niiizh manitoag* (two-spirit) was a term formally adopted in 1991, and reclaimed from the anthropological term "berdache" as an act of decolonization.

<sup>2</sup> Gay American Indians tallied 133 tribes that had alternative genders as indexed in *Living in the Spirit*.

maintained social spaces for third genders and sexual diversity (within a closeted realm).<sup>3</sup> A tension exists, therefore, between traditional and/or neo-traditional versus assimilated voices. Native Americans assimilated homophobia/queer panic, as one form of imported Eurowestern morals in conflict with Native American culturally originated genders and sexuality. This lived tension is reflected in the themes and narratives of Native American literature. For instance, James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko have characters in their novels that exhibit negative stereotypical traits or characterizations expressing assimilated homophobia from Eurowestern culture, while many Native American two-spirit and sexual minority writers are reclaiming their power in literature.<sup>4</sup>

What is more this dichotomy around heteronormative/queer literature did not happen in the first wave of the Native American Renaissance primarily associated with the 1970s. The dichotomy developed during the second wave of the Native American Renaissance primarily associated with the 1980s-1990s. Before the Native American written word, oral storytelling included all sexualities, both supportive and condemning of alternative genders and sexual minorities, but Eurowestern cultural domination distorted Native American sexuality, and as a result, the record of sexual and gender diversity was almost lost to history.

Perhaps culturally originated sexuality and gender diversity of the Americas was obscured to a path of oblivion because Eurocentric ideas of gender and sexuality became the dominant discourse. Queer Panic is a term derived from the legal and psychological designation “homosexual panic.” “The term first appeared in Dr. Edward Kempf’s textbook *Psychopathology* (1920), which described typical cases in which a young man became convinced that friends or

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<sup>3</sup> Homophobia is just what the word means, phobia to homosexuality. Phobias do not come from a rational place within the human mind. Homophobia is steeped in hegemonic cultural conditioning. Panic is an automatic response to a threat, thus queer panic is a product of cultural irrationality.

<sup>4</sup> Most notably Paula Gunn Allen and Maurice Kenny

comrades believed he was homosexual, stared at him oddly, whispered insults like ‘cock sucker,’ ‘woman,’ or ‘fairy,’ and tried to engage him in fellatio or sodomy” (Rosario 39-41). Much later homosexual panic was used as the primary motive for the 1998 Matthew Shepard murder by the legal defense of convicted killers Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. James Welch’s *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* was published two years after the Shepard murder. Welch’s narrative contains a portrayal of a murder of a man that appears to be motivated by an instance of Native American homosexual panic.<sup>5</sup>

Homosexual panic narratives in novels by James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko resemble horror or freak shows, because homosexual white men are demonized by the characteristics of freaks or monsters. In the *Heartsong of Charging Elk*, homosexual white men are not people; they are literally monsters in human form called *siyoko* (Lakota translation: fear or that which is fearful) who indiscriminately rape and kill: “Charging Elk couldn’t help but fear the worst. In their tenderest of moments, he had fallen into a black sleep and the *siyoko* must have killed her before performing his vile act on Charging Elk’s cock, a cock meant for Marie alone and certainly forbidden to a man” (299). In Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, homosexual white men are monsters of poly-perversity; they have sex with men, women, basset hounds, dying veterans, and even farm machines, when having sex high on cocaine is the norm rather than the exception. The diversity of white male homosexual sex acts is characterized as a

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term “queer” as a general term that encompasses anything that has been queered by mainstream society in regards to gender and sexuality. Androgynous men and women are queer. Same-sex erotic unions are queer. Gender roles that deviate from heteronormativity are queer, whether or not the gender roles require androgyny or not, and whether or not individuals have sexual unions with their own biological sex. The word “sex” signifies two definitions: First, sex means a biological male or female other than intersex people. Second, “sex” means sexual activity. Gender does not mean biological sex. Gender signifies identity and roles accepted by society but not by biological determinism. The confusion between gender and sex is the result of a society pairing only two gender roles with two biological sexes, but it was not always this way. Binary sexuality and binary prescribed genders queer anything outside the dualistic spectrum of two gender roles and two sexes. Binary sexuality has no reference point for the cultural concept of multiple genders or even three biologically determined sexes (male, female, and intersex). A society that does not have an adequate reference point for gender and sexual diversity produces fear or phobia resulting from ignorance, and therefore the response to fear is queer panic.

natural part of European decadence. For instance, Silko is not very subtle in her critical depictions of homosexual white males:

The Judge did not consider himself homosexual; he was an epicurean who delighted in the delicacies of both sexes. In classical times it had not been necessary to talk about contact between men. Contact was action, and action was behavior. Behavior was not identity: he was man with a cock tip big as a fist, and balls that hung like a bull's. His was merely a cocks man's taste for strange fruits. (645)

Both Welch and Silko's homosexual white men share similar descriptive elements, but differ in one considerable way: Welch uses narrative action to demonize his homosexual white male characters in a form of predacious behavior most notably a male-on-male rape passage, but Silko relies more on plot devices for her homosexual white male characters in a form of pervasive perversities, most notably marked by lack of emotion and tenderness. Despite the similarities and differences in how the two authors characterize their stereotypical portrayals of homosexual identity, both authors create assimilated homophobic characterizations drawn from Euro-American cultural myths and stereotypes about homosexual men, while reconstructing Native American identity.

Other authors, most notably queer Native American authors, reconstruct interpretations of culturally specific sexualities, and others reaffirm culturally specific gender identities. *Living in the Spirit* is a groundbreaking collection of essays, poetry and short stories chronicling the lives of Native American sexual minorities and two-spirit people. *The Spirit and the Flesh* is an anthropological book chronicling the gender and sexual diversity of Native Americans. Some of the sex acts in the book contain descriptions of sexual unions between alternatively gendered people and men, and between masculine men who identify as homosexuals and not as

alternatively gendered people. Homosexual and two-spirit identities are not the same cultural constructs, but both are cultural attempts to give definition to the natural ambiguity of the human sexual response. Anthropologist Sue-Ellen Jacobs states in *Two-Spirit People*: “The sexuality of individuals originally classified as ‘berdache’ (whatever the term’s spelling) turns out to be not exclusively homosexual, nor exclusively transgendered, nor transvestite” (29). If sexual diversity was regarded as natural in Native American societies of the past, then Welch and Silko are expressing the mores of contemporary sexuality.

Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* and Welch’s *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* are political novels. One could interpret the villainous gay characters as metaphorical in a political context, because of the domination of indigenous peoples by Europeans, especially Native American men who were subjected to cultural domination from Eurowestern men.<sup>6</sup> The political context is, of course, colonization, and its aftermath, when Eurowestern men raped the Americas based on the ideology of what would come to be called “Manifest Destiny.” Under the logic of a metaphor of rape used to explain colonization, Eurowestern men are immoral homosexuals who will rape or fornicate with anything.<sup>7</sup> Silko and Welch might, in fact, be using metaphorical critiques about the decadence of the colonial project, which benefited from corrupt political conditions and individuals engaged in both metaphorical and literal territorial and sexual colonization. Scott Lauria Morgensen argues that all indigenous sexuality and gender identities were queered by white colonial settlers in order to establish white supremacy. One method to establish colonial

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<sup>6</sup> Some people also use the term Euramerican, Caucasian, and Anglo-American, as alternatives for “Eurowestern.” I prefer Eurowestern for reasons outlined in Footnote #7.

<sup>7</sup> I must take time to define the difference of the morphological stem of Euro in some terms. European means European simply enough or a citizen of a European country. Euro-American is a citizen of any country in the Americas whether North or South America, the term clarifies racial and cultural heritages from Europe. “Eurowestern” is an empty signifier that some define as cultural qualities derived from European origin much in a similar way “indigenous” is a blanket term for all native peoples across the globe who were encroached upon by disenfranchising outsiders. Therefore as a result of settler cultural identity, assimilated Native Americans often exhibit Eurowestern qualities, but they are not Euro-Americans.



rule motivated by white supremacy is to force disciplinary rule based on settler sexuality. Morgensen recounts Vasco Nunez de Balboa's genocidal expedition into Panama during which he indiscriminately fed indigenous people to dogs. Subsequent to these acts, Balboa found the king's brother [authors note: the brother of a leader of a Mesoamerican nation] and about forty other men dressed in women's clothing and executed them all on the grounds of perceived sodomy. Sodomy was, then, used as a retroactive justification for the prior act of feeding indigenous people including women and children to dogs.<sup>8</sup> Morgensen states, "Linking ascriptions of savagery to transgressions of a sexual nature thus defined European rule as sexual colonization" (36). Racial theory analyzes racism as a cause of Eurowestern people's colonization of the Americas. Gender theory studies heteropatriarchy as a cause of the sexual subjugation of Native American female, male, and alternative genders. The two theoretical frames intersect when it became obvious that white male racism and sexual conquest were key components of the genocide of Native Americans, and thus religion was the primary excuse allowing Eurowestern sexual norms or values to be forced upon culturally originated Native American sexuality.<sup>9</sup>

Welch and Silko do not depict two-spirit people in their novels, but a pertinent question must be asked: are their villainous gay white male characters just postcolonial metaphors? A close reading of the two texts reveals that there are no metaphorical allegories in the stereotypical portrayal of male sexual minorities in *Almanac of the Dead* and *The Heart Song of Charging Elk*. Silko's and Welch's postcolonial homophobia reflects the Christian hegemony of settler sexuality that rewards heteronormativity, renders Native American queer identities invisible, and demonizes homosexual white men. In opposition to these two canonical authors,

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<sup>8</sup> See "Sexual Colonization and Disciplinary Power" in Chapter 1 of Morgensen's *The Spaces Between Us*.

<sup>9</sup> See Manifest Destiny

Native American and Canadian First Nation gender and sexual minorities such as Anne Waters and Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm have been representing their identities in literature, having almost lost their culturally specific gender and sexual identities to history. Thus an assimilated/traditional dichotomy in contemporary Native American cultures is reflected in the canon of Native American literature in the case of representations of sexuality.

### Decolonizing Sexuality and History

The erasure of the history of alternatively gendered Native American people and the assimilation of post-puritanical American culture is in part the result of textual history affected by political and cultural biases. Eurowestern history is a product created by a Eurocentric-based academy, which results in one-sided history written by Euro-Americans for the consumption of the Eurowestern world as Winona Lu-Ann Stevenson argues in her thesis “Decolonizing Tribal Histories.” Native American history is often left out of this picture due to its non-conforming to Eurowestern historiographical norms:

For most historians, the major prohibiting factor is that Native American oral histories do not neatly conform to Western imperatives. Trained in the Western mode, historians are confronted with content and form that often bear little resemblance to what they know and work with. Unfamiliarity breeds suspicion which results in rejection, omission by avoidance, or superficiality. Historians fear what they do not understand and so they ‘other’ Indigenous voices right out of their own histories. (1)

This academic conformity has led to a lopsided history suffering from Eurocentric bias. Native American oral historians have been sidelined to the extent that there still is a widespread assumption that “Native Americans have no history.” Many assimilated Native Americans were

educated in schools with the Eurocentric curriculum. Welch and Silko were included in an era when U.S. policies still aggressively forced policies of American assimilation on Native Americans. Many were educated in government-run boarding schools or institutions specializing in Christian-based propaganda like missionary schools. Native American historical references were eventually skewed toward the view of the dominant colonizing power. The Eurowestern cultural imperialist project used education as an attempt to create Native Americans in the image of Euro-Americans. In “American Indian Boarding School Experiences: Recent Studies from Native Perspectives,” Julie Davis summarizes David Wallace Adam’s argument that the humiliating effects enacted on Native Americans was intentionally performed for purposes of attempted cultural decimation:

Adams story of Indian people’s boarding school experiences is largely one of cultural struggle. He argues that through the boarding schools, reformers, educators, and federal agents waged cultural, psychological, and intellectual warfare on Native students as part of a concerted effort to turn Indians into ‘Americans’. (20)

Those that did not willingly recreate themselves in the image of their creators were literally sentenced to die, because genocide used colonial education and colonial sexuality as methods of dominance by the Eurowestern heteropatriarchy.

Native Americans, to varying degrees, had become estranged from their traditional cultures as they had become estranged from their traditional lands, and Native American homogenized sexuality had become estranged from various culturally specific sexualities. Beatrice Medicine (Standing Rock Lakota) writes about the disappearance of sexuality as part of religious repression:

Again, the congealed interaction of small groups and the onus placed upon such individuals (males, historically, and now females) as the result of generations of an imposed ethical and moral system have apparently taken their toll on the participants in Native societies. Emphatically, the ritual roles of such tendencies, especially the male actor, have been a part of the total religious repression, as with the Sun Dance among the Sioux. (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 152)

Christianized hegemony repressed Native American spirituality to the extent that the spiritual traditions of alternative genders were almost destroyed. Nonetheless, most indigenous people have not completely assimilated the foreign values of the Eurowestern cultural imperialist project. Oral history is one of the tools used to resist assimilation. Oral historians were traditionally relied upon by Native Americans. Nevertheless, when the oral history tradition was hushed, to say that potential entire libraries of knowledge were lost is an understatement, or cultural knowledge if not entirely lost was distorted including sexual diversity. Today Native Americans are busy reconstructing a neo-traditional contemporary indigenous culture by, among other practices, interviewing elders and recording oral history. Other academics in the social sciences are interviewing contemporary Native Americans including two-spirit people and sexual minorities. Some Native American authors are trying to decolonize on their own terms, or reinterpreting culturally specific traditions in the form of historical fiction. Native American historical fiction has importance in the project of cultural reclamation due to the fact that the genre is a descent from Native American oral history; fiction can be an attempt to argue against Eurowestern dominance against Native American culture and history, and is a collective project of reconstructing a sustainable subject position for Native Americans in the contemporary moment.

Since Native American oral history has not been accepted by the western academy of historians, or was met with great resistance, or trivialized as mere superstition or myth, Native American history can be formulated in written fictional narratives and includes factually legitimate historical fiction. The history of sexuality has omitted a great part of sexual diversity in regards to Indigenous sexuality. Contextual history means recounting the atmosphere of an era as accurately as possible. Native American historical fiction gives voices to the unheard who did not have the power to tell their own stories. Native American oral history sometimes combines myth with fact. The Aztecs and other Mesoamericans have different versions of the events that led to their demise than do the Spaniards, for example, but historians have judged Aztec history as embedded in ritual and too foreign to take seriously.<sup>10</sup> Another form of reclaiming Native American history is ethnohistory, and the Spanish accounts of history regarding the fall of the Aztecs is being contested; such as the story of the Aztecs mistaking Hernán Cortés to the god Quetzalcoatl and the conquistadors as “white” gods, when some of the conquistadors were actually African freedmen such as Juan Valiente (Restall 53).

Native American historical novels, such as Welch’s *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* are part of the larger postcolonial intertextual mosaic of narratives that includes many other genres written by Native American writers. As stated before oral history is rarely taken seriously by the Eurowestern academy of historians, as a response historical fiction has become more prominent in Native American literature as a viable alternative for the reclamation of history.<sup>11</sup> Although historical fiction does not completely replace oral history, it gives fuller perspectives of the past

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<sup>10</sup> Most first-hand accounts of the fall of the Aztecs were told by the Spanish, such as in letters written by Hernán Cortés to Pope Charles V, while competing Aztec historical accounts were dismissed, thus making the Western historical perspective the only view. For more information see Matthew Restall’s book *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps historians in the past never took Native American history seriously because Native American history was seen as legitimate study of anthropologists.

and is just as informing as the storytelling tradition and oral history tradition for decolonization. Historical fiction novels like *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* are contextual history, including sexual contexts. Many contemporary novels written by Native American authors have a strong sense of historicism. Perhaps the best example of how the past affects the present and future in a contemporary Native American novel is *Almanac of the Dead* by Leslie Marmon Silko. One can see how the loss of culturally specific Native American sexualities happened if one studies a trajectory from oral history to contemporary novels, which contain parallel representations of sexuality and history. Even so, despite Silko's and Welch's contextual historicisms, both authors seem to have lost sense of how alternative genders were prominent and included in Native American cultures in the past. I compare Silko's and Welch's novels to analyze their portrayals of homosexuality.

Villainous homosexual characters are portrayed in some of the most popular and successful novels in the canon of American literature. Characters that are not fully realized are often patchwork stereotypes like the homosexual characters in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*. Welch and Silko, as representative authors of the Native American Renaissance, a time period of when the U.S. government was still using coercive assimilating techniques in the 1960's and 1970's, but a new current in politics was formulating and more progressive policies of racial integration was beginning to happen. However, by the time the American government abandoned its hard-line policies of Americanization, much was already assimilated: the core of Native American worldviews was changed, that of spirituality and sexuality. Most Native American people assimilated Eurowestern norms of binary gender and sexuality as a subset of the pervasive influence of

Judeo-Christianity. Welch and Silko assimilated Eurowestern cultural norms and values that are in their characterizations of homosexual men.

### Contextualizing Unseen Sexual History

*The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and *Almanac of the Dead* may seem to have little in common during a first textual reading, but the negative portrayal of the gay villains is an obvious commonality. Stereotypes of queer men in these novels represent a loss of complex identity, where the queer characters are without any multidimensional human characteristics. Silko's characters Beaufray, David, Eric, Ferro, Jamey and Paulie have very similar characterizations with Welch's Breteuil and Olivier; all are dehumanized, gay, white male characters with Ferro as the token gay male whose heritage is partially Yaqui. As we shall see some literary critics have charged Silko with homophobia, because she expressed the most negative stereotypes of gay men in *Almanac of the Dead*. More critics have criticized Silko than Welch as homophobic with Lisa Tatonetti as a rare exception, who criticizes Welch about his negative stereotypical portrayal of gay characters in *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*. One has to analyze the postcolonial Native American social environment that has allowed Native Americans to feel the need to write about gay white men in such a negative stereotypical fashion, while there is little to no negative stereotypes for gay Native American men and two-spirit people by Native American writers. Perhaps the best answer is found in history. Perhaps Native American textual storytelling narratives are attempting to keep alive the unheard and unseen past from becoming totally lost. Late twentieth-century/early twenty-first century reinterpretations of what it was like in the nineteenth-century, however, are anachronistic and largely written from the perspective of

Native Americans who have become assimilated in modern American life; such as Welch's incomplete representation of Lakota sexuality in *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*.

Other authors like Silko reinterpret history chaotically; for example, almanacs were destroyed by Catholic friars, and Silko tries to reclaim lost contextual history by inventing a fictional almanac that twin sisters Lecha and Zeta are trying to decipher with all signs pointing to an apocalyptic era called "Death Eye Dog" where all cruelties are the norm rather than the exception.

What has been lost among other things from the nineteenth-century oral storytelling days to the twentieth-century textual storytelling days is providing spaces for the representation of Native American sexuality as it existed in the past, like polygamy and polyandry, and living arrangements similar to queer marriages between two masculine, biological males. The partial loss of culture also includes the concept of more than just two genders. Men and women who do not conform to the concept of gender binaries are known as two-spirit people today. Many people still do not know what a two-spirit person is like today, because there are scant media representations, including in Native American literature. The lack of media representations can be answered with a look into history also.

Alternative genders were rendered secret, as the American government continued its educational and social projects of assimilation well into the twentieth-century, but the sacred traditions of alternative genders did not completely terminate. However, as I already stated, much knowledge was already lost, especially among Native Americans who relocated to urban areas to find employment; but some traditions still remain alive in story and in lived experience in defiance to imported conventions.



## The Native American Ethnographic Novel

Past knowledge of culturally specific sexuality in Native American cultures was influenced by American social conventions, because Native American authors like Ella Cara Deloria were in the process of being assimilated by mainstream American society, and by the 1940's (the time Deloria finished her unpublished manuscript), some of what Deloria left out of her manuscript might have been by her own volition, because the concept of alternative genders became taboo and invisible in Native American cultures during her generation.

Deloria's ethnographic novel is characterized by sexual assimilation, by her acceptance of non-indigenous ways of categorizing sexuality. Native American historical fiction is the literary descendent of the ethnographic novel. Deloria's *Waterlily* is an example of a Native American ethnographic novel. Deloria only presents two genders based on the binary of two biological sexes. She largely portrays Yankton Dakota women's social roles in relation to marriage, and Yankton men's social roles through duties to the various Yankton societies; both men and women are integral to their families and the larger kinship network of the *tiyospaye* (group of tipis). Deloria's portrayal of Yankton society is authentic from a contextual historical viewpoint, but her presentation of a limited gender social binary is not entirely accurate. An important point to note is that *Waterlily* is an ethnographic novel, with an emphasis on the word "novel," just like *Almanac of the Dead* and *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* are fictional novels, but all three novels have social ramifications. Fiction reflects reality, and reality is influenced by fiction.

In *Waterlily* each society is established as a homosocial environment, which may give the appearance that Yankton *tiyospaye* are gender segregated, but definitions of sex that is based on biological determinism and gender that is based upon social constructs are two very different

things. Deloria's portrayal of men being initiated into the Kit Fox Society is what non-Native American people might find easily acceptable based on Eurowestern stereotypes of masculinity. Yankton men are publically invited by members of the Kit Fox Society rather than an individual choosing what society he wants to join. Men asked to join the Kit Fox Society do have the choice whether to accept or decline membership. The men who are invited are quick, agile, ready to serve, generous, and are involved in tribal activities, all masculine qualities that Euro-American readers can relate to, but we must not readily accept the portrayal of gendered characters in Deloria's novel as the full picture of Yankton social life.

People outside Yankton Dakota society may easily digest the idea of masculine men being accepted into military orders. Deloria states: "The military orders functioned rather as messengers, scouts, camp police, in short as guardians of the camp circle and its people" (97). American males in the military are highly masculine, much like Dakota braves are in Deloria's narrative. American readers might make parallels between Dakota military societies and the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, but the social roles of the Yankton Dakota military societies include more diverse duties focused on allowing the *tiyospaye* to function through kinship obligations.<sup>12</sup>

Deloria focuses on the social roles of only two genders, without focusing on the importance of Lakota alternative genders like *winkte*. Some *winkte* were openly involved with braves and recognized by *tiyospaye*. Deloria failed to report that fact, even though she was an ethnologist. Nonetheless, Deloria did not have much prior research available for her to back up her narrative if she included *winkte* in her ethnographical novel. Scant research was done in the

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<sup>12</sup> The warrior societies of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines are vocations and are primarily responsible for the security of a nation, while the warrior societies of the plains Native American nations were responsible for many other duties such as hunting, gathering, drumming, and spiritual duties. Being a warrior was not a separate vocation but part of the masculine spiritual identity.

1940s about alternative genders with the exception of ethnographer Alfred Kroeber. The invisibility of alternative genders like *winkte* caused by assimilated Native Americans ignoring their existence started, then, as early as the ethnographic novel and continued as a trend into Welch's and Silko's generation, mainly because there are no published stories written by Native Americans that have prominent alternatively gendered characters during their time periods.

*The Heartsong of Charging Elk* adopted the hyper-masculine warrior stereotype appropriated by Americans. Historical accounts of Lakota biological males stereotyped those who were supposed to be warriors, count coup, scalp white settlers, and go on war raids in the far off distance. Lakota men were not supposed to dress in a mixture of men's and women's clothing or bead and cook with females.

The closest portrayal to male same-sex marriage in Yankton Dakota society is a concept called a *kola*. Deloria is careful to portray the kinship function of *kola* as non-sexual with the description of *kola* as akin to brothers: "Two men who became fellows, *kola*, immediately thereby placed themselves in the limelight, fully cognizant that others watched them... The demands on fellows were somewhat greater even than those on natural brothers, loyal and devoted as brothers were supposed to be" (99). A realistic portrayal of men might imply that perhaps somewhere in time some *kola* were in sexual relationships and other *kola* were in strictly platonic relationships because of the intimacy of bonded families. "And automatically, like brothers, each fellow was son to the other's parents and father to his children. All other relatives were likewise shared" (Deloria 99). Such possibility of *kola* as unofficial marriage arrangements is questionable since the parents and extended families became in-laws through *kola* as well.

Yankton Dakota society has more than just two genders; historically they had three (some say four genders like manly-hearted women), which include the *winkte*, which means "two souls

person” and are *wakan* (powerful, sacred). The likelihood that a *winkte* was in a *kola* with another *winkte* was highly unlikely since *kola* was for men only. *Winkte* are biological males whose gender were not male but an entirely different gender; most took on the appearance of androgynies. Walter L. Williams states in *Spirit and the Flesh* that *winkte* were allowed to marry men. “Traditionally, Lakota culture accepted the *winkte* only as a secondary spouse, to be married after a man already had a female wife and children” (118). To this date, I have not found any historical literature that recognized official marriages between the two genders of men or women of any Siouan culture whether Lakota, Eastern and Western Dakota. Deloria does not disclose anything other than the heteronormative understanding of gender and affiliation; therefore, we will never know if a *kola* was like an alternative marriage.

Other Native American cultures historically had men who displayed affectionate public relationships. Williams cites nineteenth-century accounts of an ethnographer who witnessed intimacy between biologically-born males who did not identify as alternatively gendered people: “Among men, this commonly took the form of an especially warm friendship between two males. A nineteenth-century army officer who studied Indian customs closely reported on these ‘brothers by adoption.’ Speaking of Arapaho male pairs, he stated ‘They really seem to ‘fall in love’ with men; and I have known this affectionate interest to live for years’” (91-92). The campaign to silence Native American openness to gender and sexual diversity was conditioned long before Deloria.

Fear of death was initial motivation to protect alternatively gendered individuals, but later the sexuality of *all* Native Americans was culturally regulated by the dominant American moral regime as stated by Laura Scott Morgensen in *The Spaces Between Us*:

Death thus still shaped sexual colonization in the era of containment and assimilation, but in new ways. Under colonial rule, Native people faced constant condemnation of gender and sexual transgression, which at times took shape as a violent education in a new life. But when public punishment—which now did not end in murder—failed to quell resistance, the deadly logic of regulation kicked in. (40)

Thus the motivation for silence appeared for Native American oral historians, and later for ethnologists and authors to omit any references about alternative genders and sexual diversity, and in time alternatively gendered people became an invisible class of people. In other words Euro-American oppression of Native American people made social conditions where it was seen as acceptable by Native Americans to readily assimilate a Eurowestern cultural worldview. Deloria states: “The tribe’s concern was that girls should become women and its boys men through normal and progressive steps without complications” (61). Deloria never specifies what these “complications” were, but she gives a hint; biological boys allowed to dress in female clothing and play girl games is the wrong direction: “To guard against any possibility of this, Little Chief had been carefully steered, and now it seems that all his inclination was in the right direction” (61).

The passage of guiding children to Eurowestern gender binaries of one man and one woman documented in *Waterlily* is not entirely historically accurate but was an inevitable result of cultural assimilation. Historian Richard C. Trexler writes that the Teton Dakota inclusive attitude regarding alternatively gendered people in accepted social roles has always been the traditional way from the nineteenth-century to the at least the mid-twentieth-century: “Lame Deer, for example, made clear that adopting the role of the berdache among the Teton Dakota was not always an exercise in free choice. Rather, one became a berdache, in his words, ‘by one’s

own choice *or in obedience to a dream*” (626). Lame Deer had conversations with Trexler circa 1971, and thus the Teton Dakota alternative gender tradition lived on, however, more discreetly than before. The significance of Lame Deer reiterating *winkte* responding to visions signifies a social role for everybody. The Teton Dakota (Western Lakota) are extended kinship relations of the Yankton Dakota, and one can arrive at the conclusion that if the Teton Dakota had alternatively gendered people in their *tiyospaye*, then Yanktons had alternatively gendered people:

As Wissler discovered long ago while studying the Oglala Lakota, future berdaches in some areas were in fact expected to have essentially identical visions involving such specific essences as the moon and the buffalo, or perhaps a dream of the Old Woman, all of which were sure signs of the berdache status the particular community of dreams expected one to assume. (Trexler 626)

Gender roles of the Oglala Lakota were spiritually interwoven into the social fabric like all other Lakota nations had, and over time, those that had spiritual power, *winkte*, were seen as something shameful rather than sacred.

Alternatively gendered people could have been edited out of *Waterlily*, but we will never know. Deloria may or may not have even heard the term ‘berdache’ that ethnographers used for alternatively gendered people at the time, but as the first prominent female Native American ethnologist, she might have known about what prior ethnologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century or her colleague Alfred Kroeber were describing. Perhaps she did not want to cause any controversy. Many people raised with the knowledge of only two genders and two sexes would have had difficulty understanding more than two genders in her novel, but the sanitization of Yankton culture through the filter of Deloria’s text means that even though her representation of

contextual history is quite believable, other factors must be taken into consideration to get the entire picture of Yankton culture.

Deloria had three manuscripts with three different audiences in mind, according to Susan Gardner in the “Introduction” to *Waterlily*: “All three books were difficult for her to write because the genres and audiences to her were culturally inappropriate for what she was trying to accomplish (missionaries, anthropologists, the reading public for popular romance fiction—all white outsiders to her original culture....” (vii). The genre synthesis of the *Waterlily* manuscript was also highly edited by her collaborators, anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Ruth Fulton Benedict, and Margaret Mead. Authenticity always is a question in Native American fiction; however, authenticity is not necessarily a requirement. By adding anthropologists to edit a fictional novel, Deloria seems to be very conscious of being an authentic voice in Native American literature.

Authors are not witnesses to the time periods in which the narrative settings take place, which makes for potential anachronistic representations.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, readers who build modern representations about Native Americans based on historical fiction must take note that they are merely reflections of the past and not actuality.

### From Ethnographic Novels to Contemporary Fiction

Historian Hayden White argues in *Metahistory* that Euro-American history has four forms: formist, organicist, mechanistic, and contextualist. Contextualist history means events are explained by their relationships to other events and finds a pattern or similar descriptors to contextualize an era. White never included novels in his definition as historians limit themselves

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<sup>13</sup> Such as *Our Galaxy*, *The Wolf Trail* written by myself, because I never existed at the turn of the century when Euro-Americans were coercively settling the plains.

to non-fictional narratives. I believe that history is a series of competing narratives and as unbiased and objective as historians claim to be, there still are cultural biases and interpretations, and sometimes nationalistic factors skew history in the territory of being historically inaccurate. Novels can and should be included as relevant historiography, if not for historical accuracy then for historical contextualization. I consider *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* a contextualist historical novel meaning that the novel enlightens the reader to a bygone era, in this case nineteenth-century France and Lakota country as well, even if the text contains some historical anachronisms. A mixture of fact and fiction is included in Welch's historical fiction since Buffalo Bill's Wild West show actually toured Europe. The contextualist nature of Native American historical fiction novels reclaim bygone eras lost in the death of oral history. All Native American literature shares a common reconstruction of individual identity, but in the case of Silko's and Welch's portrayals of homosexual men, the reconstructions are influenced by cultural assimilation of white American culture in the form of homophobia. The cultural factors that left out the voices of alternative genders and sexual minorities have intergenerational continuity, by echoing earlier generations of Native Americans. Deloria's era did not know anything about homophobia. The term was coined in the 1960s by a psychologist named George Weinberg. Deloria's omission of alternative genders is not homophobia per se but was a sanitization of "authentic" Yankton culture. This sanitization was the basis for Welch and Silko to develop sexual identities that were long hushed or very discreet, to the point of invisibility, on American Indian reservations. Some Native Americans equated homosexuality with other imported ideas that came from across the ocean.

If Welch and Silko wanted to reconstruct more accurate Native American cultural narratives, they would have included multiple gender social constructs and sexual diversity.



Their novels do not include two-spirit people as being integral and respected members of tribal kinship networks. Silko's sole gay character with some Native American blood named Ferro, emulates gay white male characters. Ferro's emulation is indicative of lost or deformed sexuality, and can be interpreted literally not metaphorically, because men like Ferro exist in reality outside literary textual narratives. Two-spirit gender identity has been wrongly equated with homosexuality by both Euro-Americans and Native Americans. The invisibility of two-spirit characters written by presumably heterosexual Native American authors reflects assumed foreign sexual decadence. A popular assumption in Native American communities is a cultural contamination by European decadence that brought the concept of homosexuality to the Americas, or perhaps Silko and Welch were assimilated to such an extent by American culture that they simply did not know enough about two-spirit people when their novels were published. This invisibility of alternatively gendered people in the canon of Native American literature is not simply the result of failure. It has been very difficult for me to find any books portraying different sexualities and alternative genders, or Native American erotica in general. The invisibility of true Native American sexuality coalesces into invisibility at best and misrepresentation or demonization at worst. The misrepresentation is emblematic of the patriarchy in the form of observation (or avoidance) in the male gaze.

#### Contextualizing the Contemporary Unseen Native Queer Erotics

The loss of identity for alternatively gendered Native Americans has been usurped by the heterosexual male gaze that constructs representations of sexuality through a heterosexual lens. We can go one step further and add that the Euro-American heterosexual male gaze dictates what should be seen by heterosexual women, lesbians, gay males, two-spirit people, and other queer

social subjects regardless of race, especially in pornography and Hollywood films. American pornography has disproportionate representations of Euro-American performers to other races in the American population. Mainstream film is not an exception. “Steve Neale identified the gaze in Hollywood films not primarily as male, but primarily as heterosexual” (Finzch, pars. 16). Norbert Finch states there is intersectionality between gender and other social factors: “Gender is not the only criterion that determines the regime of the gaze. Race and class are also decisive factors and must be conceptualized as intersectional categories” (Finzch, pars. 28). The heteropatriarchy means white heterosexual men are at the top of the hierarchy, and society subconsciously makes media representations for those of the greatest authority. The Euro-American heterosexual gaze is emblematic of American patriarchal culture, and not only affects the representations of characters in movies, the gaze also crosses all boundaries and is represented in characters on television, plays, pornography, erotica, advertisements, history, and literature. In other words, most media portrayals of sexuality paradoxically are marketed for the sexuality of a limited audience for all audiences. All other portrayals of sexuality are queer.

One example is Victoria’s Secret lingerie. Most of the models are Euro-American ultra feminine passive recipients of being stared at. If Victoria’s Secret lingerie was marketed to lesbians, the women might be posing differently, perhaps more assertive poses. None of the hypothetical lesbian lingerie models would have large amounts of makeup, or look like potential victims of anorexia with large silicon breasts. If Victoria’s Secret was marketed to transvestites or transsexuals, there would be transgender and cross-dressers as models. Real lesbians (and not the type of lesbians that are in the sexual fantasies of straight males) and transsexuals are queers and, therefore, they are invisible to the white male heterosexual gaze.

An example of a non-queer portrayal of Native American sexuality is Disney's cartoon film *Pocahontas*. The reason why *Pocahontas* is entirely popular is because the characterization of Pocahontas is sexualized under the terms of the patriarchal male gaze as she moves across the countryside as some sort of seductress of Eden, only to fulfill the white male fantasy by becoming the possession of Captain John Smith.

The absence of Native American erotica in the American canon of literature and media portrayals is the result of the queering of all Native American sexuality, whether straight or gay, as invisible because Native American erotica does not conform to the white male gaze. Silko and Welch have opted for the implicit and explicit demonization of gay men and invisibility of two-spirit people, which does not deviate from the straight white male gaze. Thus both *Almanac of the Dead* and *The Heart Song of Charging Elk* both have very masculine narratives that are not necessarily complicit with the heteropatriarchy but are strongly influenced nonetheless.

#### The Native American Erotica Taboo

The male gaze disallows erotica that differs, and thus queer erotica continues to remain invisible. Sophie Mayer explains the invisible erotica of two-spirit people in the canon of American literature. Mayer relates the difficulty of getting educational establishments to recognize that there is a literary tradition of Native American erotica:

In a graduate class on women's erotica at the University of Washington, Miranda [Author's Note: Deborah A. Miranda] found herself 'Searching for American Indian Women's Love Poetry and Erotics,' .....Her professor first denied the existence of Native women's erotic writing, and then, when Miranda materialized 'volumes of the stuff,' the instructor excluded it on the basis that there was no critical treatment. (10)

Mayer explains there is a tradition of two-spirit people, sexual minorities, and heterosexual Native Americans writing about their erotic selves, but it is being excluded on an active basis with those that have authority, even in the Humanities.

Trickster tales serve as a beginning reference point for Native America erotica because they are historically relevant as part of the oral storytelling tradition, and provide an example of various tribal worldviews before the influence of culturally imported morality. Some trickster tales include sex, and if the trickster tales are not the literary precursor to Native American erotica, then perhaps the sexual nature of trickster tales influences Native American literature in general. Some coyote tales are scatological, and others are erotic. People have an ideal about what contemporary erotica is like. Erotica should titillate the senses and heat up the interior sexual being, but the invisibility of the Native American erotic self goes deeper than just taking into consideration Native American characters in erotica; there has been overt oppression of Native Americans expressing anything sexual at all that originates from their own cultures.

The trickster tales have a talking penis (Gros Ventre), Little Brown Eye who is a speaking anus (Blackfeet), a toothed vagina (Yurok), and there is a legion of coyote tales which chronicles Coyote's misadventures in the compilation *American Indian Trickster Tales* edited by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz: such as "Coyote Keeps His Dead Wife's Genitals" (Lipan Apache)<sup>14</sup> and "Coyote Sleeps with His Own Daughters" (Southern Ute).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The story tells about how Coyote cut out his wife's genitals after she died. Before he buried her, he dried and ground up her vagina to a powder in a pouch. Later, he masturbated with the powder and it made him orgasm. One day when he was gone, his sons took the powder and masturbated. When Coyote came home, he was angry and caught his son in lie when his son said his little penis looks like a pouch.

<sup>15</sup> The story tells about how Coyote was no longer sexually stimulated by his wife, and so he faked his death and disguised himself as a handsome young man. He married his own daughters, but Coyote had a son who recognized his father by his four missing teeth. He told his mother and she asked her daughters how the handsome young man makes love to them. They tell him that he sucks on their breasts. That is how Coyote's wife found out that her husband tricked them. The story ends with Coyote's wife chasing after Coyote with a knife, and his daughters are so ashamed they fly up into the sky and become stars.

Many stories with sexual overtones portray Coyote as a man plotting to have sex with women by tricking them by disguise. Sometimes he uses his penis to trick women into sex like in the “Talking Penis” (Gros Ventre). A trickster called Nixant feels like copulating after he sees two young women picking turnips; “He called out to them, ‘You girls, come over here. I want to dance for you.’ His penis stood up and shouted: ‘You girls, do not come. He only wants to abuse you! Stay away.’ The young women ran off. Nixant was angry and embarrassed” (Erdoes & Ortiz 161). The story chronicles the events of Nixant arguing with his penis until an ugly woman promises him that if he has sex with her, his penis will stop talking. After he has sex with the woman, his friend asks him how the ugly woman cured him, but Nixant does not want to talk about it.

Erdoes and Ortiz mention in the “Introduction” to *American Indian Trickster Tales* that many of the tales, including the sexually explicit tales, were told around children. After relating how the Hopi speak openly about sex in front of their children, the editors say: “The authors of this book can bear witness to this fact. We have often seen the sacred clowns—Kosa, Koshare, Koyemishi, Chiffonetti—doing things that upset the occasional missionary or make an elderly lady tourist blush” (XXI). Perhaps a correlation exists between sexual openness and not having a separate category rendering sexual words taboo, as Erdoes and Ortiz state: “It should be noted, too, that there are no ‘dirty’ words in Indian languages. A penis is a penis, not a ‘dick’ or ‘peter,’ and a vulva is just that, never a ‘twat’ or ‘snatch’” (XXI). One must think about the cultural clash between Native Americans and Euro-Americans from the time of Columbus to the early twenty-first century. Native Americans cultures have long traditions of sexual openness, sexual diversity, and multiple gender identities. The other culture has a long tradition of sexual repression, binary sexuality, and only two genders. The attitudes and behaviors have not been

part of a peaceful cultural exchange. The European invaders, and later, American settlers, historically clashed with various Native American nations' divergent sexualities, and the concept of alternative genders was quite baffling to the Eurowestern worldview.

*American Indian Trickster Tales* has a narrative portraying homosexuality titled, "The Winkte Way" (Omaha). The tale chronicles Iktinike and Rabbit who are always chasing women. For a change they decide to mount each other and try out the *winkte* way, but they argue who should be on top: "They argued for awhile. At last Iktinike lost patience. 'All right, get on top of me.' Rabbit did. 'Oh, it hurts!' cried Iktinike. 'Your *che* is very big!' 'No it isn't' said Rabbit. 'Your *onze* is too tight.' After only a few seconds, Rabbit got off Iktinike's back and ran off. Rabbit is very quick at that kind of thing" (134). Iktinike is angry that Rabbit deceived him by mounting him first and then running off. He ends up giving birth through his anus to a litter of bunnies. After giving birth he goes home to a wife who wants to have sex with him, but after such a stressful day Iktinike complains he has a headache.

Trickster tales are just one representation of Native American's openness toward sexuality. These were not dirty tales to be shielded from others. The tales were the paradox of immoral morality tales. Iktinike's sex life was negatively affected with his wife after he explored queer sex with his friend. The tale includes potential bestiality (depending on one's reading), infidelity and homosexuality, but in the end it was Iktinike's marriage that was affected in a bad way, as well as his reputation because everybody in the tribe learned about who mounted him. Iktinike was furious as he went around talking to people with day-to-day banter, and they all mention to him that Rabbit told them what happened: "He came to a place where some boys were playing stickball. Iktinike called out to them: "*Hokshila*, what's new?" "Nothing much, uncle," one boy answered. "Only that Rabbit came by here, telling everybody that he mounted

you” (134). The young men or boys already know what happened and they have a nonchalant response to the news. The only one who feels shame is Iktinike, “Oh, he [Rabbit] shamed me,” thought Iktinike. “He’s bad-mouthing me already” (134).

I need to address the ambiguity of bestiality in “The Winkte Way.” Many Native Americans take the names of animals. One interpretation is Iktinike and Rabbit are both people. Another interpretation is that Rabbit is an anthropomorphic rabbit, something like a cartoonish rabbit, both with human and non-human characteristics, which complicates any potentiality of interspecies erotica. We do not see an example of sex between two different genders, but sex between two characters who are identified by the gender identity of men, and thus the tale is an example of homosexuality, not of a sexual union between a *winkte* and a man. Sexual unions between a *winkte* and a man is not homosexuality. Perhaps Iktinike is feeling shame not because he was practicing homosexuality, but his secret was told to everybody by the silly rabbit. Sexuality is out in the open in Omaha culture, but that does not make it everybody’s business.

The ease about the subject of sexuality discussed in many Native American cultures reflects a more casual but spiritual view of sexuality, one in which alternative genders and sexual minorities can feel comfortable and accepted. Williams chronicles ethnological studies from the late nineteenth-century to the 1980s regarding North American indigenous sexuality, and one commonality in most tribes was openness about sexuality:

First, berdaches usually participate in sex with men, but homosexual acts are not limited to berdaches. Second, sexuality in many Native American societies is not seen as solely for the purpose of reproduction, and is not restricted to the institution of marriage. It is instead perceived as a gift from the spirit world, to be enjoyed and appreciated. (Williams 88)

Williams' research in *The Spirit and the Flesh* tells about priests, missionaries, explorers and ethnologists scandalized by the sexual diversity of the indigenous cultures of the Americas. Fifteenth-century Spanish chronicler Oviedo reported a "...nefarious sin against nature" (87). Seventeenth-century Columbian Priest and historian Fernandez de Piedrahita mentions how men preferred alternatively gendered biological males over women in the Lache people. Eighteenth-century soldier and governor of the province of Las Californias of New Spain, Pedro Fages, mentioned how "sodomites" were "...addicted to this abominable vice" (87). In 1702 French explorer Pierre Liette said Illinois men "abandon themselves to the most infamous passions" (88). A judgmental and condemning attitude toward the diversity of sexuality of the North American indigenous peoples has been a colorful part of the biblical Eurowestern tradition.

The dominant culture exported their puritanical cultural norms to those made vulnerable by colonialism. Cultural myths of damnation, original sin, and other foreign ideas affected Native American sexuality. Sexual colonization was a longstanding aspect of cultural genocide. But why did the colonizers choose cultural genocide? The power structure of Eurowestern culture did not want to provide any viable alternative to the patriarchy. Andrea Smith writes about sexual colonization as a response not to the prospect of assimilating Native Americans into Euro-American culture, but as an attempt to save Eurowestern culture by making Native American cultures less enticing, because Native American cultures had more egalitarian social structures and, therefore, were considered more attractive cultures for Eurowestern individuals:

The relatively egalitarian nature of Native societies belies patriarchy's claims to normality, and thus it is imperative for a patriarchal society to thrive to destroy egalitarian societies that present other ways of living. The demonization of Native women, then, is part of white men's desires to maintain control over white women. (78)



The egalitarian nature of small tribal units meant that all members of the communal society were needed for the survival of the tribal unit. This, in turn, was an attractive alternative for white women, because of the freedom offered by Native American societies, which caused ire for colonial society as Andrea Smith argues in “Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples”: “And in fact, the nature of Native societies did not escape the notice of the colonizers. It was a scandal in the colonies that a number of white people chose to live among Indian people while virtually no Indians voluntarily chose to live among the colonists” (77). The temptation to “Go Native” had a strong pull for low status people in the Eurowestern patriarchy because the poor, women, and sexual minorities gained more respect living with the Indians. History reveals that most Native Americans did not willfully adopt Eurowestern culture at first, simply because a hierarchical society was not an attractive option to more egalitarian societies, but in the end Native Americans could not completely overcome the white male colonial project. As a result, Native Americans suffered loss of identity.

These days Native Americans are attempting to decolonize in the form of textual storytelling as a challenge to lost identity. A crucial aspect of decolonization is reclaiming sexual diversity and multiple genders. There is Menominee poet Chystos, Muskogee Creek poet Joy Harjo, and Ashinaabe poet Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, all compiled in the groundbreaking text *Without Reservation* (2003). The text is a direct challenge to binary sexuality and the homogenization of sexuality around the world since the collection is international from Maori to Canadian First Nations and contains all sexualities. But the fact is queer Native American authors are still invisible in America more than two and a half centuries after they were first chronicled by explorers, missionaries and traders.

Sophie Mayer explains in the article “This Bridge of Two Backs: Making the Two-Spirit Erotics of Community” about the importance literary journals are for the project of decolonizing Native American sexuality: “Journal reviews and articles act as a framework that maintains the presence of alternative works that have fallen out of print—after all, quotation in scholarly texts is how the majority of Sappho’s poetry was preserved” (6). The decolonizing and reconstruction of indigenous two-spirit sexuality remains invisible to the American public, but at least in Canadian Aboriginal and Native American cultures, the circle has been completed with *Without Reservations*. Mayer states: “As an anthology published by an Indigenous press representing Indigenous writers to the Canadian public—that is, a communal—culture, as well as an artifact of national culture as heard on CBC, but it is one in which individual difference—for example, same-sex desire—is embraced rather than excluded” (8). The fact that *Without Reservations* was covered by national media in Canada is significant, but the collection did not make significant inroads into the American public consciousness to say the least. So where are all the queer Native Americans in American literature? The positive images of queerness articulated in Native American oral traditions are not present in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*.

### Colonized Sexuality

*Almanac of the Dead* does contain a homosexual man of mixed raced named Ferro. Ferro is part Yaqui from Mexico. Ferro is unlike the other gay male characters in *Almanac of the Dead*. We are first introduced when Ferro and his lover Jamey are sniffing lines of cocaine in a swimming pool. Jamey is Euro-American: “The downy blond hair on his thighs and belly bleaches platinum. Jamey’s eyes are deep blue, not pale, washed-out like Paulie’s eyes” (180-181). Paulie is Ferro’s ex-boyfriend. The only description of Ferro is that he is obese: “He had

always wanted thick black hair on his chest. The fat made his breasts hang like a woman's. With hair the fat would have been less repulsive" (186). Ferro is a smuggler of cocaine, "Ferro had never let on where the cocaine comes from" (181). The introductory passage of Ferro reveals two gay men who do not understand the meaning of true love. Ferro is selling cocaine to Jamey, who is a rich student. Ferro is playing power games with his customer boyfriend by throwing away a gram of cocaine into the swimming pool for no reason at all, and then tossing another gram on the floor and leaving Jamey's presence without saying anything.

The two men are not in love, but use each as components in an economic transaction. Ferro is using Jamey for sex and money, and Jamey is using Ferro to obtain cocaine. Ferro has issues with his mother Lecha for her abandonment of him when he was a child by leaving him with her twin sister Zeta. Zeta leaves young Ferro in a Catholic boarding school when on drug smuggling runs to Mexico. When Ferro is alone, he thinks about his mother: "He had lain there hating her with all his might. He had hated her more than he had feared dying with a mortal sin on his soul" (183). The stereotype of Ferro echoes a stereotype invented by American society. Society dictates that homosexual men are supposed to have issues with their mothers. Society dictates homosexual men are supposed to do drugs when having sex with each other. Homosexual men abuse a lot of drugs. Homosexual men can never truly love each other. Homosexual male couplings are a symptom that something is truly wrong with society. The above stereotypes are derived from a puritanical mindset that same-sex relations between men are wrong. Silko's and Welch's textual expressions of homophobia reflect society.

Writers as the mirror of society include the good and the ugly. Homophobia is rampant on most Native American reservations, in ways that echo the assimilation of American puritanical sexuality. The reality is Native American homophobia has resulted in the abuse of

gay men and two-spirit people on and off reservations. Sue-Ellen Jacobs chronicles the loss of culturally specific sexuality in her article “Is the North American Berdache Merely a Phantom in the Imagination of Western Social Scientists?”:

The irony is that as the “berdache” became an honored figure in the reconstructed romantic history of Native American cultures, lesbian, gay, two-spirit, and transgender people of various American Indian heritages were being beaten, disowned, and disavowed on their reservations. Some commit suicide, and others leave their reservations and seek new lives in a city. (22)

Not all people on American Indian reservations assimilated imported homophobia. Many resisted because tribal membership is foremost important than who a person engages in sexual unions with. Furthermore, Native American assimilation of Eurowestern culture does not constitute a strict dichotomy. Varying degrees of cultural assimilation is a reality in Native American cultures. The resistance to American homophobic values has been a long-term theme for some tribes with alternative genders when other tribes were rejecting their alternatively gendered citizens. However, if Ferro would have been born a century earlier, he most likely would not have been a drug dealer and homosexual. Ferro would have been seen as sacred and held in high regard by the Yaqui people. He would not have consumed any stimulants, because the Yaqui did not use peyote or other hallucinogenics unlike their Mesoamerican neighbors.<sup>16</sup> He might have been an alternatively gendered Yaqui rather than a reconstruction of Eurowestern queer sexuality. But Silko is from the Pueblo Laguna nation not the Yaqui nation. Most Pueblos had

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<sup>16</sup> Carlos Castaneda studied with a Yaqui shaman named Don Juan Matus. Many anthropologists said Castaneda was a fraud, because Yaqui shamans traditionally have not used Peyote. A nagual (shaman) of Lancandon Mayan and Yaqui descent named Tata Cachora (who said he taught Carlos Castaneda as well as several other shamans, claimed Castaneda fictionalized what he learned from the shamans as one character named Don Juan Matus to sell more books). Mayan shamans have traditionally used hallucinogenic stimulants in spiritual ceremonies.

alternatively gendered people as integral and respected roles of their societies. The question is whether Ferro knows enough about his Yaqui heritage.

Due to the condemnation of homosexual men, America has no traditional social role for Ferro in Silko's novel. He indulges in modern excesses of cocaine and food to compensate for his loss of a role in a society. Ferro no longer has a sacred role, and a breakdown of social and kinship structures means he adopts a dangerous lifestyle, a lifestyle of smuggling contraband over the Mexican/American border. Likewise, his mother Lecha and his aunt Zeta have lost their traditional Yaqui social roles and subsequent loss of power.<sup>17</sup> Lecha and Zeta are smugglers and drug addicts just like Ferro, since they all experienced intergenerational trauma of moving from a more egalitarian Yaqui society to patriarchal Mexican/American societies of unequal social stratification. What if the Yaqui did not fully assimilate Catholic morals? What if Silko's heritage, the Laguna Puebloans, were not sexually colonized? Of course, textual fiction is not real life, but since writers reflect society, the interplay between real life and fictional text is crucial. Ferro might have gained queer identity of a nearby southwestern nation through intertribal marriage, acculturation or adoption, like the *kwido* of the San Juan Pueblo (pre-Columbian name: Okay Owingeh), or he might have continued the traditions of his own people if he was not sexually colonized. The shamans of the Yaqui have several varieties including Pascola, Deer Dancers, Maestros, Matchitini, and Fariseo, but there is no indication that alternatively gendered people went by any formal names but remain uniquely individual:

A Yaqui Indian now in his thirties, who was raised as a berdache, was respected as a dreamer and a mediator between the genders. He did a mixture of women's and men's work, and was sexually active with men. About 1970 he migrated to Los Angeles, where he merged into the gay community. He continued to gravitate to androgynous work,

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<sup>17</sup> The Yaqui are a traditional matrilineal/bilineal society.

becoming a florist and later an owner of a unisex clothing boutique. Though he was successful in the city, he missed the spiritual element that had been so important in his life. In 1982 he gave up all his material gain to return to his people. Today he is an apprentice to an elderly berdache, training to be a healer. (Williams 220)

Silko characterizes no descriptions of Ferro as two-spirit. He is not effeminate or androgynous, although if he was raised in a traditional Yaqui manner, he would have become a healer rather than a dealer.

One must investigate the Puebloan people to see if there are any indicative sources that might have influenced Silko's characterizations of Ferro of being a potential alternatively gendered person living in modern gay culture, paralleling Williams' unnamed case study above. Sue-Ellen Jacobs recounts that when she interviewed the last traditional *kwido* in the Tewa people (who are part of the Puebloan cultures), the loss of culture was apparent after the last *kwido* died in the 1980s. After that the community refused to acknowledge any *kwido* existed, even so far as some members denying that any *kwido* ever existed, accusing Jacobs of misunderstanding what was reported. Jacobs was baffled asking a pertinent question about this response in her text:

What happened? Why did the death of the traditional *kwido* cause the disappearance of his status? Why has the child who should have been his spiritual successor been tormented by the male members of his family, staunchly protected by his women relatives? In the summer of 1992, an angry male at a party "carved open" this young man's stomach. (25)

Jacobs is referring to a young Tewa man who was considered a homosexual and not a *kwido* by the members of his tribe. The young man suffered the same sort of condemnation that

Eurowestern homosexual men suffer within their own patriarchal societies. The cause of the attack was apparently either a hate crime or queer panic. Due to adopted foreign condemnation and loss of culturally specific gender and sexuality, Tewa people have assimilated Eurowestern cultural norms.

Suffice to say, Silko comes from Puebloan cultures and should know about the *kwido*, but it is important to note not all Puebloan cultures accepted the cultural construct of alternative genders. The Pima lacks alternative genders and acceptance of queer sexuality. The Laguna Pueblo, on the other hand, have gender diversity like most other southwestern tribes and their third gender is called *kokwima*.<sup>18</sup> Silko left out any pertinent characterizations of *kokwima*.

#### A Question of Sexual Multiplicity

One would think that with as many genders that some Native American cultures had, bisexuality would not exist for them since it is a product of binary sexuality. There have been many historic references about the obvious androgynies of alternatively gendered people, but less so has been written about Native American sexual unions with both biological sexes. Wesley Thomas had difficulty finding any culturally specific bisexuality in Native American societies: “I have found no separate linguistic category for bisexuality for either males or females, but I know that bisexuality as it is defined by Western traditions is practiced among the Navajo contemporary males and females” (163). Thomas concludes that there needs to be more research in regards to bisexuality in Native American societies.

When considering the concept of bisexuality in regards to societies such as the Lakota who have three to four genders depending on who you ask, then the consideration would be that a man with equal preference for man-to-man sex as well as man-to-woman sex is bisexual.

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<sup>18</sup> See *Living in a Spirit: A Gay American Indian anthology*

Where is the modern term for a man who has sex with every gender: another man, a woman, and a third gender? More studies need to be done on Native American bisexuality and the potentiality of trisexuality.

Some Native American social structures do exist where bisexual flexibility is institutionalized, such as a young man having sex with another man in puberty, but as he gets older, he is expected to take a woman as his wife. Williams notes that today such arrangements are more popular in Southwestern nations and Mexico using the Mayas, Hopi, Mohave, and Zapotecs as examples: “Though they have been having sex with other males, when they are between ages twenty and thirty, masculine men almost always marry women and have children. But gossip suggests that some continue to have sexual experiences with males even after they are married” (91). If bisexuality is possible in societies that have multiple genders, then polysexuality is possible for those people who engage in sex with four or more genders. There is no record of erotica or fiction highlighting Native American trisexuality and polysexuality. Perhaps the absence is indicative that such sexualities do not exist in Native America, or is queered into silence like all other Native American sexualities.

Many different sexualities and genders have been left out of the literary canon that was written by Native Americans, with a few exceptions such as Paula Gunn Allen. The tension that exists between homophobic and non-homophobic literary narratives is the result of a situation where textual representations are biased if they recognize queer Native American sexualities at all. All Native American sex is taboo in the American consciousness, unless it involves a typical narrative where one character is Native American and the love interest is Euro-American. Native Americans do not have sex with each other but only with Euro-Americans, are heterosexual, and



most certainly are not queer. Charging Elk has sex with a French prostitute named Marie in Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, and Charging Elk is definitely not queer.

### Chronicling Decolonizing Sexualities

Is containing limited representations of sexuality in Native American literature really an act of decolonization? Perhaps Welch is marginalizing the queer, but as noted, he was living in an age of forced assimilation. Perhaps the correct question is why should he include other representations of sexuality given the limitations of his era? Even the experts, men of science, knew very little about Native American alternative genders. The ethnological study of alternatively gendered people was marginalized in the contemporary period as Williams states. He demonstrates how any references about alternatively gendered people were peripheral in early ethnographical studies: "Early ethnographers sometimes interviewed berdaches, but did so within a single tribal ethnography. With only a few exceptions, most of the writings of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries devoted only a few sentences or paragraphs to berdachism" (5). Williams mentions only three other ethnographers who wrote essays about Native American alternative genders in the early part of the twentieth-century; Alfred Kroeber in 1940, Henry Angelo and Charles Shedd's essay in 1955, and Sue-Ellen Jacobs in 1968, but none of the essays were based on new field work. Williams engaged in new fieldwork interviewing thirty-eight Native Americans from multiple tribes including Silko's contemporary Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo).<sup>19</sup>

Before Williams' field work was released, a growing canon of Queer/Two-Spirit literature was happening according to Lisa Tatonetti in "Sex and Salmon: Queer Identities in Sherman Alexie's *The Toughest Indian in the World*":

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<sup>19</sup> See "Acknowledgements" in *The Spirit and the Flesh*.

Contemporary queer Native American writing emerged circa 1976 with the publication of two pieces by Mohawk author Maurice Kenny: an essay, “Tinseled Bucks: A Historical Study of Indian Homosexuality,” and a poem “Winkte.” This beginning was followed in 1981 by Laguna author Paula Gunn Allen’s essay, “Beloved Women: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures. (201)

Tatonetti chronicles many other Queer/Two-Spirit writers, some whose writing was collected in *A Gathering of Spirit* (1983), featuring eleven Native American and First Nation lesbians and heterosexual women representing forty nations, and *Living in the Spirit* (1988) was released, featuring all sexual minorities and alternative genders. Since then there have been countless other queer voices in Native American literature.<sup>20</sup> Despite the reality that two-spirit and sexual minorities have more prominence in Native American literary culture, homophobia continues to be a problem as the continued, almost uncontested canonization of two bestselling Native American authors with the most accolades, Welch and Silko, who characterize homosexuals in their novels as stereotypically predacious.

In 2004 The University of Washington released a research report by five academics that compared 25 gay, lesbian, bisexual and two-spirit participants and 154 heterosexual participants.<sup>21</sup> The results revealed Pan-Native American societies out of touch with their cultures in regards to sexuality:

Compared with their heterosexual counterparts, two-spirit participants reported higher rates of childhood physical abuse and more historical trauma in their families, higher

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<sup>20</sup> Tatonetti also mentions Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa’s, Barbara Cameron, cofounder of Gay American Indians, and Menominee poet, Chrystos. Two years later, in 1983, Mohawk poet and short fiction writer Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk) published *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art*, the first Native-edited collection of American Indian and First Nation writing. Brant’s collection included pieces by eleven Native lesbians.

<sup>21</sup> Two scholars were from the Psychology department and three were from the school of social work, all from the University of Washington.

levels of psychological symptoms, and more mental health service utilization. Two-spirit participants reported differences in patterns of alcohol use and were more likely to have used illicit drugs other than marijuana. (Balsam et al. 287)

Earlier I wrote about missing literary and media depictions of Native American sexual minorities and two-spirit people in the mainstream consciousness of America. Invisibility in literature reflects real life invisible voices of two-spirit people and Native sexual minorities, which contributes to the difficulties that they experience. A muted voice still contributes to the cultural illusion that there never were gender and sexual minorities in American Indian country, even by Native Americans who call themselves “traditional.”

#### Silko's Angry White Males

The reviews for *Almanac of the Dead* were mixed in 1991, with many big name reviews seething with anger: Sybil Steinberg at *Publishers Weekly* wrote: “Despite its laudable aims, this meandering blend of mystical folklore, thriller-type violence and futuristic prophecy is unwieldy, unconvincing and largely unappealing” (94). Sven Birkerts for the *New Republic* wrote: “The reader will have to bear with me as I chalk out the basic perimeters of the plot. There is simply no other way to take hold of the design, or to gauge the scope and implications — and, ultimately, the failure — of the vision that Silko has attempted” (39). Francine Prose at *Harper's Magazine* noted:

In USA Today, Alan Ryan lamented that Silko's book had neither plot nor characters.

The normally astute Paul West had similar troubles, which he shared with his L.A. Times readers: “I found myself peering back, wondering who was who, only to remember fragments that, while vivid and energetic, didn't help me in my belated quest for a family

tree....” Silko does not interest herself much in psychology, in the unsaid word, the thought uncompleted, the murmur lost. (61)

The terrible book reviews added up, just as the good book reviews added up. Silko’s epic had a polarizing effect on book reviewers. Melissa Hearn for the University of Nebraska press magazine *Prairie Schooner* wrote: “The broad scope of the enormous novel and the research and imagination that it demonstrates explain why we have waited for so long for a major work from Leslie Silko” (149). Linda Niemann at *Women’s Review of Books* wrote: “This is the best book that I’ve read in years. I called up my friends and told them to buy it. I’ve read it aloud to people over the phone” (1). Neimann explains how her perception of the world had changed (presumably for the better). However, *Entertainment Weekly* gave the book a grad D; book reviewer Gene Lyons took the villainous gay characters a little too personally: “To underline Caucasian iniquity, much of the narrative concentrates in considerable — one might even say loving — detail upon European penchants for dope snorting, murder, and buggery. Especially buggery. Judging by the number and variety of gay villains in *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko seems more than a little homophobic” (Web. “Almanac of the Dead”). I found it interesting that the good/bad reviews were divided mostly along gender lines. A couple of the reviews gave brief mentions about perversity as a result of the decline of the Western world, but Lyons is the one who seems to have taken the most offense of Silko inferring that white men regularly engage in classical bestiality and homosexuality.

The perversities in Silko’s novel are not just characterizations of Euro-American homosexual men. Ferro masturbates to the crucifixion of Jesus. Ferro as a schoolboy was sent into the chapel as punishment by the nuns. He discovers his homosexuality by fantasizing about

a dying and very nude Jesus hanging from the crucifix with an erection caused from a Roman guard who spears him:

The pleasure he got from leaning closer and rubbing against the pew made him close his eyes. What he saw then was the spear of the soldier stabbed into Jesus' ribs and the gush of blood that had spurted. Ferro always imagined the soldier as large and handsome and reluctant to hurt Jesus, but some mightier force had given him orders. The older boys claimed hanged men died with penises erect or spurting liquid. Ferro realized the loincloth on Jesus had only been for the sake of good taste. When he closed his eyes, he imagined Jesus' execution conducted in the nude. The last sign of life had left Jesus' body in the same spasmodic jerks that Ferro saw his own penis make as he pulled in the warm bathwater. (187)

The postcolonial Jesus snuff setting is a paradox; while Ferro's sexuality is awakening, his Native sexuality is dying, and what replaces his Native sexuality is the emblem of Eurowestern sexuality, holy Jesus, in whose name Christian patriarchy has dictated the death of many queer Native Americans.

Ferro's sexual awakening means he never inherited Yaqui sexuality, and with each masturbatory stroke he assimilates the sins of the dominant American culture that tells him being a homosexual man is a mortal sin of shameful sodomy. One culture's sin is another culture's honor. Likewise, his mother Lecha and her sister Zeta lost their sexuality by being sexually abused by their uncle. Lost sexuality parallels lost cultural power. Lost power parallels lost identity:

Out of the corner of her eye, Zeta had seen it was a very old woman, dressed in a long black dress and black shawl. She had whispered to Lecha the old woman was an Indian.

At that instant the tiny figure in black had turned into their gateway and stopped. In a clear voice as strong as Auntie Popa's, the old woman had said, "You are Indians!" Zeta had never forgotten the chill down her backbone. Lecha had cowered closer to her. Their cousins had jumped screaming and fled inside. (114)

The process of assimilation had begun early resulting in childhood ignorance about Lecha and Zeta's cultural heritage, which has been transferred from one generation to another. Ferro was not raised in a communal society, but raised in a rootless capitalist American society where people often relocate to other towns to find employment. The rootless environment includes being raised in an urban environment like Tucson that supports the cultural fragmentation of the capitalist project. Ferro does not seem to have any awareness about his cultural heritage, which parallels his mother and aunt not knowing that they were Yaqui when younger.

Gender and sexual variance never disappeared from the Yaqui even during the Eisenhower era, and existed long before the United States recognized the Pascua Yaqui reservation in southern Arizona on September 18, 1978: "A Yaqui Berdache born in northern Mexico in 1950, gained a reputation as a dreamer by the time he was nine years old. He has extremely vivid dreams, in which he takes on identities of other people and creatures. This dreaming ability is valued by his traditionalist family, who see it as a reflection of his spirituality" (Williams 26). Contrast this Yaqui boy's status in relation to how his family values his spiritual gifts from the sacredness of being an alternatively gendered person to Ferro, whose mother's Lecha and her twin sister were raised by their Euro-Mexican father Auntie Popa and the nuns at a Catholic boarding school.

Catholic boarding school erased any trace of their Yaqui identity. The twin sisters further cemented the loss of their cultural identity as they became young women during their *coyote*

*years*: “Coyote might best describe the intervening—Lecha constantly traveling, from lover to lover and city to city. Lecha’s best stunt had been the birth of Ferro one Friday morning; by Sunday noon Lecha had been on a plane to Los Angeles, leaving Zeta with her new baby” (125). Ferro’s racial makeup is ambiguous because he was born a bastard. Silko has multiple references about his love for white men. Ferro idealizes the European male body by keeping coffee table photography books of classical Greek sculptures on his coffee table, and he tries to make himself lighter to blend in with his surroundings: “In the old two-story house in Sonora with whitewash smeared over clay plaster that peels away from the adobe bricks. Whitewash everywhere—covering the wood planks and pillars of the long porch. Ferro remembers playing with chunks of white clay. Rubbing it over his hands and arms to make himself lighter” (182). Ferro is most likely mestizo. Since Ferro’s partial heritage is Yaqui, for the sake of simplicity, I will focus on Ferro as a “Mestizo-Yaqui,” who inherited American homosexual identity by default.

#### Identity Lost: Homophobia Found

Loss of identity in one generation as the result of forced cultural assimilation of Eurowestern values and norms affects subsequent Native American generations in a traumatic manner. A large portion of the trauma comes from racism, which Silko explores. Yoeme’s ex-husband and their family hate Indians, because Indians are bodily and figuratively in the way of her ex-husband’s desire to fully develop white Mexican identity for his mixed race family. The beginning of the long process of intergenerational trauma is embedded in his Mestizo-Yaqui children and grandchildren, who respond to white Mexican racism with internalized racism, thus Ferro idolizing his white male lovers and painting his skin white. Another component of intergenerational trauma is loss of traditional spirituality, which is replaced with a generic

version of Christianity that does not work for some, especially for neo-traditional two-spirit people relegated to an inferior status as “gay men.” Silko vividly expresses the inferior status of gay men. Ferro is a villain, because he smuggles weapons and cocaine, but he is also a tragic figure who inherited a broken past from a broken history.

Like Silko, Welch has created two stereotypically negative homosexual characters, Breteuil and Olivier, showing how they inherit an inferior status as biblical sodomites. Welch reveals how the French demonized homosexual men through the eyes of a character named Rene: “They were all *polissons*, all bound for perdition in the next life—but in this life they were more than a simple thorn in the side. They were evil beyond compare” (Welch 143). The Catholic condemnation of gays reveal cultural parallels between nineteenth-century France and their colonial predecessors in New France and, later, Quebec about both the stereotyping of homosexual men in general, and the demonization of two-spirit Native Americans. Welch is part Blackfoot and I speculate about whether he had knowledge about the Blackfoot phenomenon of the Manly-Hearted Women (*sakwo'mapi akikwan*) and Man-Woman (*ake'skassi*). Welch is also part Gros Ventre, French and Irish. There is no name for Gros Ventre alternatively gendered people. Of course, an author's knowledge of indigenous sexuality is not necessary in producing a Native American character from a different tribe. The main protagonist in *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* reveals nothing about how Lakota *winkte* are like effeminate French homosexuals. Charging Elk adopts Eurowestern homophobia in a French style as part of his assimilation into French society when he automatically labels a Marseille gay man a *siyoko*, which is a Rosebud Sioux (Sicangu Oyate) word for “fearing what is fearful.”

To Queer Personified Fear



Charging Elk is a nineteenth-century Oglala Sioux who travels to France in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, but he is accidentally left behind in Marseille France. He is homeless for a while, imprisoned then released to a guardian. The reader is first acquainted with a chef named Breteuil who is loading fish on a cart. Rene is a man who has taken Charging Elk into his custody, but when Rene sees Charging Elk helping Breteuil, he reacts with alarm: "Damn that Breteuil! He was an abomination in the eyes of God, with his effeminate ways and haughty manner. Rene knew by hearsay the kind of crowd the chef ran with" (143). The passage reveals Breteuil as a homosexual French man. Rene is a Catholic man whose attitude is shaped by a long anti-homosexual Christian religious tradition.<sup>22</sup> The characterization of "polissons" roughly translates as "scamp" or "rogue." Charging Elk goes from being ignorant of what a homosexual is to making a reference later in the narrative about Breteuil being a *siyoko*.

The anachronistic portrayal is due to the fact that James Welch is a Native American author who has portrayed gay men in the same way that the dominant culture portrays gay men. The dominant culture has often portrayed gay men as stereotypes, and not fully realized people or multidimensional characters in literature. The inhumane Eurowestern attitude toward homosexual men can be summed up in *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* when Breteuil is introduced. Rene, deploring Breteuil's effeminacy, reveals historical French culture at odds with historical Native American culture. French culture does not have any homosexual mythical stories in any spiritual sense like many Native American cultures do about alternatively gendered people, especially the Navajo. Homosexual French men have no official ceremonial roles unlike certain alternatively gendered Native Americans have, depending on the culture.

The negative characterization of Breteuil and Olivier is not something new. Gay men have been characterized as predatory and accepted as sexual predators. Welch foreshadows the

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<sup>22</sup> See Leviticus 18:22 in the *Bible*.

predacious nature of Breteuil. Rene warns Charging Elk about Breteuil: “You must stay away from that creature. He is an evil one. He and his fellows prey on the uninitiated. They are the devil’s own spawn, a pox sent by Satan to tempt young men of limited intelligence and morals....” (144). What Rene states about Charging Elk is Welch’s social criticism about homophobia inherent in French society in the late nineteenth-century. Homosexual men are creatures and not humans. They tempt men (who are all surprisingly heterosexual).

The second time Charging Elk sees Breteuil is a pivotal moment of the narrative when he judges Breteuil to be a *siyoko*. What is at the heart of the matter is Charging Elk has already jumped to the conclusion that Breteuil is a *siyoko* long before Breteuil does anything bad to him. If we look back at the “The Winkte Way” in *American Indian Trickster Tales*, every male’s reaction was nonchalant about Iktinike and Rabbit curiously exploring their sexuality with each other the *winkte* way. Charging Elk does assimilate much of French culture, so that very well might be the reason for his expression of homophobia, but he never formally adopts Catholicism and the anti-homosexual belief system inherent in that religion. A process of elimination points to the possibility that Welch is writing from a perspective of an assimilated Native American, who is expressing an unwieldy paradox of criticizing French homophobia while expressing his own homophobia.

I disagree with other literary theorists who believe that authors’ personal attitudes do not equate with the text. My position is that assimilated Native American writers often express the attitude of the dominant culture, thus the lack of metaphorical portrayal of gay white males and the demonization of homosexuality by Welch and Silko.

The subject of queer sexuality is pertinent in the pivotal moment in Welch’s novel. Charging Elk is in a brothel that houses a prostitute named Marie whom he is infatuated.

Breteuil's ex-lover Olivier owns the brothel. Women are officially for the clientele, but in the back behind curtains "boys" are kept. Olivier is pained to escort his ex-lover to the boys in the back rooms. Charging Elk is patiently waiting to see his favorite woman and does not notice Olivier and Breteuil going into the back, "Charging Elk did not see Olivier and the pale *siyoko*, arm in arm, wind their way through the crowd to the curtained back rooms. He was waiting for the girl with the blue wrapper to appear again" (224). The question that needs to be asked is how does Charging Elk know Breteuil is a *siyoko*? The pivotal moment reveals Breteuil has done nothing to Charging Elk to make him believe he is a *siyoko*. Welch could be stylistically foreshadowing, but using the word *siyoko* for a characterization of a homosexual French man is quite an odd choice. Perhaps Charging Elk sensed something evil about Breteuil beforehand, and later on in the narrative, Breteuil reveals his predacious homosexual nature by raping Charging Elk.

Book reviews have been complicit with Welch's expression of culturally assimilated homophobia unlike the book reviews accusing Silko of homophobia. Did Silko receive all the criticism because she is a woman? The book reviews of *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* have stated that a *siyoko* is an evil spirit. A shared cross-cultural element of Native American spirituality is the dichotomy of balance/unbalanced, not good/evil. Good and evil is largely a Christian concept. A *siyoko* can be a personified form of fear. The book reviewers interpreted "evil spirit" from their own cultural relativity.

Siyoko is introduced in the story "Ikto's Grandchild Defeats Siyoko" in *American Indian Trickster Tales*:

There was a Woinihan, a frightful monster. Its name was Siyoko. Everybody was afraid of him. Siyoko could uproot forests and flatten mountains. He could swallow a whole

buffalo with one gulp. Even Unktehi, the terrible Water-Monster, took refuge at the bottom of the river when Siyoko was around. And also Anung-Ihte, the horrifying two-face Woman Spirit, kept out of Siyoko's way. (Erdoes & Ortiz 105)

The *woinihan* tale comes from the Rosebud Sioux (Sicangu Oyate), and many Oglala Lakota live on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. The trickster tale tells about a wizard name Ikto who challenges Siyoko to a bet, the winner gains everything the other owns including their wives. Ikto has a grandchild who is a baby trickster. The premise is that Siyoko is trying to scare the child, and if the child becomes scared, then Siyoko wins everything the wizard owns. If the child does not become scared, then Ikto wins everything the trickster owns. Siyoko changes into many different forms to try to scare the child, but the child never becomes fearful. Siyoko places the child on his lap in defeat, but the little boy pisses and defecates on him. Ikto wins everything Siyoko has, but he does not want Siyoko's wife because she is too ugly.

The story is humorous and is emblematic of overcoming one's fears. Essentially, what Breteuil represents to Charging Elk is a monster. When Charging Elk recognizes Breteuil is a monster before given any evidence, it means Charging Elk is trying to overcome either his internalized homophobia or latent homosexuality. Oftentimes, people respond with fear to something they cannot understand. If a person cannot understand his or her attraction to a person, one psychological response is fear of the person. Charging Elk does not fear Breteuil at first, but he grows to fear him without any just cause, even before the rape.

The main stereotypical characterization of Breteuil is his queer predatory behavior for penises and scheming to do anything to get them. Breteuil threatens Charging Elk's love interest privately out of earshot of his intended target. He verbally and physically abuses Marie until she consents to participation in his perverted scheme. Marie realizes that she is in a position with no

power. Breteuil slaps her, “He called her a bitch, a slut, a cunt, and still she shook her head wordlessly” (269). Breteuil’s ill treatment of Marie is another negative gay stereotype that Welch assimilates. Olivier, the only other gay character, is misogynistic as well.

A pervasive stereotype of gay men is that they do not like women, because gay men either are envious or they want to be women themselves: “She [Marie] was tired but she was also afraid of Olivier, who had thrown more than one girl into the street for being less than enthusiastic. He [Olivier] was quite sweet and deferential to his customers but hard on the girls. Some of her coworkers suggested that he did not like women” (227). Welch characterizes Olivier in way that replicates a pervasive heteronormative stereotype about gay men: adult gay men are exploitative or predacious enough that they prefer pubescent boys over men. “Breteuil suddenly hated Olivier. Although they both liked their boys, Olivier was a common pederast, whereas he, Breteuil, was capable of a purer, higher-minded kind of love, one more consistent with his artistic temperament” (258). Charging Elk’s wine is drugged by reluctant Marie. He drifts in and out of consciousness and wakes up slowly realizing Breteuil is performing fellatio on him, “Then he panicked” (277). Queer panic leads him to kill Breteuil.

The police speculate why Charging Elk murdered Breteuil. They speak about the honor code of the savage. Is queer panic a hate crime? Stephen Tomsen notes there are two typical scenarios in the homophobic murders of gay men. The first one is the group attack mentality where men sometimes in marginalized communities react with antisocial male protest behavior: “Fatal gang attacks which are often seen by activists as typical ‘hate crimes’, can also be read as masculine crimes characterized by a group competition and production of masculinities” (396). The typical hate crime does not resemble queer panic:

The typical homophobic hate crime is often understood as an attack by strangers in such public spaces as known urban gay and lesbian settings or cruising areas frequented by gay and homosexual men. Its motivation is the hateful targeting of a despised group and the warning entailed in the random selection of a victim. (Tomsen 395)

A second situation usually happens between two men when a perceived or actual advance is made by one male on another. The latter resembles the incident where Charging Elk murders Breteuil. If a man murders another man for a sexual advance real or imagined, then it is not a stretch of imagination that a man might murder another man while being raped. Anger might be the primary motivation to kill the perpetrator of a sexual assault, but the answer is most victims do not kill, or cannot kill their victims, especially in an incapacitated state.

The concept of spiritual imbalance in various Native American tribes is not synonymous with the Christian concept of evil. Charging Elk is experiencing a spiritual crisis, and the rape is the catalyst for him to react from being spiritually imbalanced. *Wakan Tanka* is the holy essence or higher power of the Lakota, and after the rape and killing of Breteuil, Charging Elk prays to *Wakan Tanka* to return to his people. The fact that he prays to return to his people right after he experiences a traumatic event reveals a man who lacks the guidance of belonging to any culture.

If belonging to a culture helps to define identity, then belonging to a culture dictates behavior as well. No Lakota men, women, *winkte*, and children help define Charging Elk's behavior in France. No Lakota male societies exist in France for him to join. Charging Elk is not a metaphor, he is a literal interpretation, or a literary mirror to those Native Americans who lost their cultures. If one loses a culture, then what replaces what was lost?

Historical records exist of sodomites being burnt at the stake in Europe and sodomites being fed to canines by the Spanish conquistadors in Mesoamerica, but there are no records of

Lakota and other tribes committing mass murder of *winkte*, and therefore, somebody who lost a culture finds the morals and values of another culture.

The Lakota variance of genders and sexualities is quite a cultural backdrop to place a narrative in which a man kills his gay rapist. Charging Elk might have thought of Breteuil as a *winkte*, hypothetically, since Breteuil is a chef. Cooking has traditionally been Oglala women's and *winktes'* occupation. Breteuil is described as having "effeminate ways and haughty manner" (Welch 143), which conforms to *winkte* gender identity. But *winkte* are sacred, and somebody with inherent sacredness would never rape another person. Indeed, Charging Elk does react out of assimilation into French society, even as a reaction to rape. The most likely punishment for a rapist in Lakota culture is one of banishment not murder. All the factors in this event as scripted by Welch culminate in queer panic.

Internalized homophobia is a collection of negative attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, and prejudices against sexual minorities that a person expresses both internally, at the self, and externally, at the other, regardless of identifying as queer or heterosexual. Internalized homophobia is often expressed against gender minorities as well. Homophobia is not just a Eurowestern cultural construct. Many societies around the world respond to same-sex unions in different ways and not all of the responses are peaceful, but Charging Elk is still exhibiting culturally assimilated French homophobia mixed with cultural displacement, because he believes that he is required to destroy evil, the evil that his guardian Rene told him about while referring to Breteuil. Welch writes, "Even so, two sleeps later, he still felt strong about killing the *siyoko*. It was simple enough—when one comes upon evil, one kills it. Evil is not a dangerous animal. One does not kill a bear or a big cat or a rattlesnake simply for the sake of killing. These things were put on earth by Wakan Tanka and one lived harmoniously with them—unless they

threatened” (297). Welch quickly follows the passage with a narrative about how the white man brought evil to the Americas. “The evil that the *wasichus* [white man] brought was everywhere” (297). One of the evils apparently was homosexuality.

Both Welch and Silko are strongly criticizing Western society, while simultaneously expressing biases that they have assimilated from the culture that they are criticizing. I agree with Lisa Tatonetti’s argument that Welch and Silko are expressing homophobia in their writing:

Paralleling the reticence of the larger critical community regarding queer Native voices has been the troubling inclusion of both implicit and explicit homophobia in the work of influential Native writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko and James Welch. Both Silko’s 1991 *Almanac of the Dead* and James Welch’s 2000 *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* contain negative images of queer sexuality: in each text, gay male characters function as the site of seemingly unrelenting evil. (201)

Since alternatively gendered people historically had special places in Laguna Pueblo, Blackfeet and Gros Ventre societies, then how did the negative stereotypical depictions creep into both narratives? Writers represent what they know at the time they write, unless they do their historical homework and are able to gain distance on their own ideological values.

### The Big Gay Apocalypse

Silko’s homosexual white men are similar to Welch’s homosexual white men in that they represent evils brought to the new world. The reader is introduced to two trios of gay men. The first is Ferro, Jamey, and Paulie. Ferro already dropped Paulie for Jamey. Paulie is still kept on Ferro’s family ranch as a bodyguard and chauffer for Ferro, but Paulie has fallen for Jamey creating jealousy for Ferro, who does not really love any of his gay white male partners. The



descriptive elements reveal men who only respond sexually to each other without any type of refined emotion. “Ferro had savored Jamey’s silky, smooth skin, imagining he, Ferro, was a captive. A victim of homosexual rape by lovely, cruel, Jamey, who had immediately abandoned him” (455). Now there are two different narratives involving white male on indigenous male sexual victimization written by two prominent Native American writers. The coincidence is an aspect of Native Americans othering culturally imported sexualities and morality which are symptomatic of the downfall of the Native American world, sort of a big gay apocalypse for a world that was lost in the wake of violent sexual colonization. Native Americans are the victims of sexual colonization, until they become willing recipients complicit with the worldview of the dominant colonizing power. The descriptive elements of Ferro’s emotions for Jamey are indicative of willing victimhood.

Nobody has gentle emotions in *Almanac of the Dead*, but the gay characters have ravenous appetites and a carnal passion to victimize each other, or in Ferro’s case to be victimized. Silko describes Jamey in scenes such as this one: “Roll over, lie back grinning, take another snort. Jamey wanted nothing more in life than that: to snort and fuck all morning and afternoon” (456). Ferro is a man of passions and sees sexuality as something to be consumed. He wants to start a company using the white male body as a commodity with Jamey being the first calendar guy, even after their relationship ends. Ferro hopes to start a publishing company with hope that startup money will be from the lucrative proceeds from a calendar of nude Tucson policemen called *Cop Cakes*, as long as all the books he publishes are only about men. “The subject of the books wouldn’t matter so long as they aren’t about women” (458). The misogyny continues with the next trio of characters.

The second of Silko's gay male trios is David, Eric and Beaufray. Beaufray is involved in trafficking cocaine and illegal films such as gory hospital operations. Beaufray is another plot device complete with the worst misogyny out of all the characters. Seese is a female drifter involved with Beaufray's love interest, David, and a reason why Beaufray hates her, because she is a woman. "Beufray had gone days, and sometimes weeks, without speaking or in any way acknowledging Seese's existence" (49). Like Ferro, these men are involved in cocaine trafficking, but Beaufray is characterized as being particularly villainous: "The group Beaufray worked with had stockpiles of cocaine in warehouses packed floor to ceiling, in sealed drums. Eric said Beaufray never stopped anyone from pigging out on cocaine in the silver bowl because Beaufray got aroused when someone overdosed on the drug" (50). Eric's and David's sexual relationship revolves around denial, because they both lie to Seese about any sexual encounter between them and Beaufray. Beaufray, on the other hand, hates Seese and becomes an oppressor of women by kidnapping her child. Beaufray gives Seese bags of cocaine with the hope that she will overdose because he believes that men should raise children without women. Then David and he could raise the kidnapped child together. All of the misogyny culminates in a long narrative with an amazing array of gay stereotypes, which culminates in something that resembles the sensationalism of a 1950s juvenile delinquent film warning teenagers about the evils of homosexuality. The queer is just one component of many perversities leading up to somewhat ironic and still somewhat homophobic big gay apocalypse. An apocalypse that does not end the whole world, but ends the Eurowestern world in the Americas and all of the perversities and/or foreign born concepts that Euro-Americans brought with them including the toxicity of narcotics, brutal greed, bestiality and the corruption of a broken justice system, psychopathic

sadomasochism, homosexuality and racism. The queer characterizations resemble a moral panic. Silko's queer panic.

### The Traditional Versus the Assimilated

In traditional Lakota history *winktes* were seen as public lovers of married men. The unmarried *winktes* fit a concubine role for Lakotas. Women were expected to remain chaste, but *winktes* were allowed to be in multiple sexual unions with men. As already stated, *winktes* were sometimes second wives, but they were not encouraged to marry. Charging Elk certainly would have known about the existence of *winktes*, as Williams notes: "Not only do the lovers of berdaches not mind being seen with the berdaches, they may serve as a public following for them" (101). One does not harm a *winkte*.

Homophobia does exist on Lakota reservations, but usually homophobia is directed against two perceived homosexuals rather than *winktes*. Micheal Red Earth's essay "Traditional Influences on a Contemporary Gay-Identified Sisseton-Dakota" in *Two-Spirit People* tells about his experience of being caught between divergent *winkte* and homosexual cultural constructs. Red Earth exists in a state of liminality between assimilated and traditional Native American cultures. Traditional means culturally originated or culturally specific. Red Earth was raised off the reservation, but his family returned every year to pow-wows and to reconnect with family. He speaks about how he was identified in childhood as a *winkte* by elders:

I remember myself being a quiet, serious child. Kids my own age would comment that I walked "like a girl." A difference was also noted by some elders. Recently, my mother told me that when I was still a toddler some of the elders on the reservation told her I was "*winkte*." Because of her assimilation, my mother translated this into "homosexual."

When I pressed her on this subject, she remembered that the elders said this with no apparent judgment. They said it as if they were simply stating a fact. She chose to take comfort from the lack of judgment and hoped they were wrong. (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 212)

Red Earth was sent each summer to his grandfather's and his second wife's home on the reservation. Red Earth tells about how he took an interest in his step-grandmother's beadwork. The implication of his choosing women's traditional work was a declaration. At the time he did not know that he was telling his grandfather that he was indeed *winkte*. Red Earth was allowed to be who he was and his grandfather and step-grandmother did not try to force him to change. He was allowed to accompany his step-grandmother to quilting bees and beadwork sales. He was allowed to go into places where no other boys were allowed to go such as women's restrooms.

Later Red Earth became conflicted about his location between the assimilated urban world and the traditional Sisseton Dakota world. He chose to join the gay liberation movement after the Stonewall Riots and then announced his homosexuality to everybody at the age of fifteen. He later realized the gay liberation movement was an extension of white gay culture. He said that he was treated differently by other gay men. The traditional and assimilated sides of his family had different responses to his homosexual identity: "The reaction among my family was predictably along assimilationist and traditional lines. The assimilationists, including my mother, were upset for obvious reasons. The traditionalists were confused—they didn't know what this meant" (213). Red Earth said a reactionary response to gay liberation was met with a new homophobic lingo of *faggot*, *pervert*, and *homo*. He said the people who used homophobic slurs were his urban assimilationist aunts and their white male partners, while the traditionalists on the reservation probably knew what the derogatory words meant but did not use them (212). The

conflict in many tribes between acceptance and condemnation of homosexuality is not just from culturally imported Eurowestern Christianity.

Many tribes had stories about grotesque children being born from “unnatural love” including the Pawnee, Assiniboine, and Fox.<sup>23</sup> My interpretation is not all of these stories are homophobic; some reveal more about violent reactions to marital infidelity than about homophobia, and some are allegorical explanations about why same-sex couplings cannot physically bear children together. Historically not all tribes accepted the concept of same-sex couplings and held views of alternatively gendered people as something not good and unnatural. More studies should be done to analyze what tribes had myths condemning or accepting same-sex unions and alternatively gendered people. I believe when Eurowestern culture superimposed morality based on Judeo-Christianity on Native American moralities, certain Native American nations that were already accepting of alternatively gendered people and same-sex couplings further lost their culturally specific moral and spiritual belief systems, while those that condemned gender and sexual minorities had their prejudices reinforced. In other nations, competing voices that were both accepting and condemning eventually gave way to condemnation with acceptance being either silenced or kept absolutely discreet, but as with all things, the influence of Judeo-Christian morality was not absolute.

### Cultural Distortion

Still homophobia seems to have been normalized on current reservations today, even for those reservations that have not totally lost cultural traditions of alternatively gendered identities. A demotion of sacredness for alternative genders and a lack of respect for homosexuality have

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<sup>23</sup> Please see *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Myths from the Arapaho to the Zuni* by Jim Elledge for more information.

been assimilated. As I already noted some Native Americans believe homosexuality was brought to Indian Country by the decadent white man along with many other evils. While the decadent white man is a Native American cultural myth, postcolonial Native societies have seen a loss of social status for alternatively gendered people. There are over 500 federally recognized tribes and 200 federally unrecognized tribes; 300 languages are still spoken (Balsam et al. 4). The heterogeneity of Native American societies makes studying them as a conglomerate group a difficult endeavor. Despite the cultural differences, the majority of Native American nations currently do not officially recognize alternative genders. The GAI History Project indexed 133 tribes that are on record as having culturally specific originated social spaces for alternatively gendered people (Roscoe 217-222). Many of the 133 cultures were divided into land allotments from the Dawes Act of 1887. Today, nobody knows the exact numbers of how many reservations recognize two-spirit people; further research into the numbers is needed.

The reality is two-spirit people are suffering at the hands of Native Americans and non-Native Americans alike, which is the result of cultural distortion. Only three years after the death of Matthew Shepard, in 2001 Sixteen-year-old two-spirit Navajo Fred Martinez Jr. was bludgeoned to death by a white male in Cortez, Colorado, echoing a tradition of sexual oppression ever since Vasco Nunez de Balboa murdered alternatively gendered Mesoamericans with packs of dogs. The cultural distortion does not just exist in social spaces outside Native American households, but it happens at the hands of Native American parents and caretakers also. Non-gender conforming children experience high levels of physical abuse, “twice as high as other AIAN [American Indian Alaska Native] participants” (Balsam et al. 296). The 2004 University of Washington study was self-reported and revealed Native non-gender conforming people and sexual minorities had higher rates of historical trauma than Native American

heterosexuals and genders that conform to the dominant society's binary definition, gender and sexual minorities suffered higher levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, higher alcohol and substance abuse, and greater usage of community mental health services with 82.5 % seeking mental health treatment ever, 37.5% seeking outpatient substance abuse ever, and 29.2% seeking inpatient substance abuse ever" (Table 2, 296). Gender and sexual minorities also had higher percentages of childhood sexual abuse, lifetime sexual assault, and lifetime instances of being robbed, mugged, and physically attacked (e.g., 40% vs. 25% for childhood sexual abuse) (Balsam et al. 295-297). Another factor adding to the cultural stressors of Native American gender and sexual minorities is their cultural invisibility.

I have analyzed the historical trauma that Native American sexuality has assimilated. Now I will briefly present actual Native American queer and two-spirit people who present themselves in literature who refuse to be invisible.

### Reclaiming Sexuality

If some tradition was lost after colonization, queer Native Americans defiantly retain their unique voices and narratives in a postcolonial identity known as two-spirit. Two-spirit is a contemporary interpretation of pan-Native American queer sexualities and genders. Two-spirit people do not necessarily claim authenticity from the past, for example, some people have adopted two-spirit identity in tribes that never included alternative genders, while others reinterpret gender traditions that have disappeared from their tribes, and are, accordingly neo-traditionalists. Biological women are included in the two-spirit identity movement. Until now I have been analyzing biologically-born males engaged in sexual relations with other biologically born males, but what about Lesbians? If biologically-born males become *winkte*, can

biologically-born women, already seen as *wakan* and keepers to all that are good, become *winkte* also?:

According to the Lakota scholar Bea Medicine there is no historical fourth gender or sexual term (i.e., female-to-male transgender people) in Lakota, as there is no historical evidence such people existed within the Lakota tradition. Although there is a history of warrior women within the Lakota tradition and there is a modern term that is used sometimes by the female-to-male trans-gender people and lesbians, *koskalakawin*. (Dollarhide 35-36)

Many types of manly-hearted women existed on various tribal nations. Some identify as two-spirit today, and others assimilated the identity of lesbians. Paula Gunn Allen self-identified as lesbian. Her narrative voice assimilated the dominant culture as well, which reflected her life, in the sense that she moved from the Laguna Pueblo, Arizona reservation to San Francisco, California, joining the gay rights movement.<sup>24</sup> The short story “Raven’s Road” by Gunn Allen is mid-century American realism. The story takes place in 1944 during the Second World War, when women were often in military support positions at home and abroad but not engaged on frontline battles. Gunn Allen’s narrative is about a Native American urban lesbian assimilating into American life. We hear the protagonist’s story through a first-person narrative. The story begins when Allie gets into trouble as a teenager; she is given the choice of joining the Army, reform school, or time in the penitentiary. Allie chooses the Army. Allie relates how she met Bree one night when the army lesbians engaged in sex play in the dark. The fact that the army

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<sup>24</sup> For me assimilation does imply replication of another’s culture, but not entirely. There is no such thing as perfect assimilation, perhaps “partial assimilation” is an accurate description. Partial assimilation is not necessarily acculturation either, because acculturation is a natural process of cultural exchange and influence. For a history of forced assimilation, acculturation is too soft of a word, which implies that Euro-Americans did not try to obliterate Native American cultures through genocide but through peaceful cultural exchange. The process of Native Americans reclaiming their voices in literature is just one aspect of an attempt to return to a state of originality.



used to witch hunt gays and lesbians reveals an oppressive setting where lesbians had no choice but to meet by clandestine means.

The story is a mediation of hierarchical power caused by social inequalities. Personal relations are affected by a socially stratified society analyzed through the characters of Bree and Allie. Bree is Euro-American and Allie is Cheyenne. Bree has more social power than Allie, both as her Army superior and in the larger society. Bree professionally confronts her lover and Army inferior:

She called Allie to her quarters one night, late, and questioned her sharply about her work that day. Allie answered, feeling only mildly worried. She had faced frightening white authority often in her life, so often that she was all but indifferent to their power. She knew it was only physical power in the end, and she was accustomed to beatings, solitary confinement, and social ostracism branding her as socially unacceptable, deviant, unwanted, was the same as naming her Indian. (141)

The epistemological beginnings of queer theory began in Gay and Lesbian studies in the early 1990s. Queer is a literary trope signifying all sexuality that is queered or “othered.” The sexuality of minority cultures and races is queered by society, as well as women and men who do not fit established gender roles. Whether a woman is lesbian or not, military women in Eurowestern societies have been queered.

Fighting is still seen as unfeminine, mostly in patriarchal societies. “Raven’s Road” reveals racial, military, sexist and heterosexist hierarchies where heterosexual men are on top. White Americans are above all other races. Older people have more power than younger people. Sergeants have more power than privates. Heterosexual women are somewhere at the bottom, but the hierarchy of oppression places lesbians at the absolute bottom. Allen focuses on lesbian

culture in her novel and how the hierarchy of oppression affects them. Eventually, much older Bree is retiring from the military and tells Allie and the rest of the lesbians that she was protecting them from the military witch hunts. Bree warns her army inferiors that once she leaves, nobody is going to protect them from persecution.

Allie chooses to leave the military. She relocates to Seattle where she finds other lesbians who meet at a discreet bar on the second floor of an office building. Allie eventually finds happiness when she meets what can conceivably be a two-spirit person. At first Allie thinks she meets a man named Raven, but the man turns out to be a woman who is Mississippian. Allie is surprised with laughter that Raven is Mississippian, at that time thought to be extinct peoples. Allie's laughter comes from the success of cultural and sexual survival. The slow genocide of the Native Americans was not a successful political project. Alternatively gendered people and Mississippian people have survived centuries of American oppression.

Setting aside Bree's and Allie's power inequality, Bree is not a villain or a hero, but is a human being trying to protect her friends and fellow soldiers from anti-homosexual persecution. Allie is indifferent to any potential persecution. Oppression has been normalized for Allie. "Raven's Road" multidimensional lesbian characters are an antithesis to the male homosexual characters by Welch and Silko. Allen's characters of Bree and Allie are fully complex versus Welch's one dimensional Olivier and Breteuil, or Silko's Eric, David, Beaufray, Ferro, Jamey, Paulie et al., which I believe reveals the discourse between traditional and assimilated queer representations in Native American literature.

Another queer Native American voice is Maurice Kenny (Mohawk) who wrote about two-spirit Lakotas in his poem "Winkte" in Will Roscoe's *Living in the Spirit*: "We are special to the Sioux! / They gave us respect for strange powers / of looking into the sun, the night. / They

paid us with horses not derision. / To the Cheyenne we were no curiosity! / We were friends or wives of brave warriors / Who hunted for our cooking pots / Who protected our tipis from Pawnee” (153). *Winkte* and other culturally specific alternatively gendered Native people have weathered a new world that cropped up around them, outsiders with ideas of derision from the conquistadores well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The American Psychological Association believed their theories were relevant to all cultures, which for years labeled homosexuality a mental illness until declassified in 1973.<sup>25</sup> The twofold condemnation of psychology and religion was not relevant to *winkte*, and *winkte* survived long enough for Maurice Kenny to record a poem for eternity.

The oppression not only hurts sexual minorities, but collectively hurts all Native Americans and all oppressed minorities in general, best described by Anne Waters (Seminole/Choctaw/Chickasaw/Cherokee) at the beginning of her poem “Journeys of the Mind” in Roscoe’s anthology:

You cannot / extricate / my Indianness / my Jewishness / my lesbianness. / You cannot / reach in and / exorcise that / pain, or joy. / You can take / me to your schools / but you cannot / take my mind / because / Indians and Jews / and Lesbians / don’t forget / we remember—always / because we can’t / forget. (187)

Waters takes the context of oppression and generalizes it by making references to American Indians, Jews and Lesbians. Sometimes generalizations and simplicity become more powerful in a larger context, where women, men, two-spirit, heterosexual, homosexual and lesbian Native

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<sup>25</sup> All indigenous cultures have their own unique form of non-western psychology. Psychology is limited because Eurowestern epistemological worldviews are culturally limited or ethnocentric.

Americans are included in a space where oppression intersects. The problem is magnified when oppressed people oppress other oppressed people.

Native American people have traditionally accepted the “queer.” Many but not all Native American cultures had alternative genders and recognized sexual diversity. Much culturally originated sexual diversity is evidenced in history from the trickster tales and oral storytelling traditions e.g. by translating mythic narratives directly into social patterns and behavior. In response to the colonial project, many Native Americans became silent about the existence of alternatively gendered people. Sexual openness became discreet in ethnographic novels and was kept as peripheral notes in the fieldwork of anthropologists. Over the course of a few generations, hostility to Native American gender and sexual minorities has grown to violent proportions in Native American cultures and abroad, and some of that homophobia has been expressed by popular Native American writers. A tension exists between assimilated and traditional and/or neo-traditional Native Americans during the current period of decolonization. However, there is a literary tradition and growing canon of Native American queer and two-spirit poetry and fiction by writers who are reclaiming their sexual and gender identities.

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