

ALTERNATIVE GENDERS IN THE COAST SALISH WORLD:
PARADOX AND PATTERN

by

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ABSTRACT

The concern of this thesis is the position of people of alternative genders in Coast Salish culture, not only in the past, but in the present. How were individuals with such a difference treated? What forces constrained them? What factors afforded them opportunity? Were such genders even recognized? With these questions in mind, field work was conducted with the permission of the *Stó:lō* Nation throughout the summer of 1998. This paper is based on interviews conducted then and subsequent interviews with people from other Coast Salish groups. In addition, local ethnographic materials—with reference to field notes whenever possible—and traditional stories were analyzed from the perspective of Coast Salish epistemology. Alternative genders need to be understood foremost in the cultural contexts in which they occur, only then can comparisons proceed from a secure foundation.

Research revealed a paradoxical situation. Oral traditions in which the alternately gendered are despised, occur side-by-side with traditions in which such people were honoured for the special powers they possessed. Individuals and families operated in the space generated by this paradox, playing the “serious games” to which Ortner alludes (1996:12-13). The absence of a “master narrative” in Coast Salish culture accounts for some, but not all of these contradictions. Equally relevant are persistent patterns of secrecy, personal autonomy, kin solidarity, differential status, and differential gender flexibility that both restrict the social field and offer stress points that were, and are, manipulated in individual and collective strategies. Given a world view in which transformation was the norm, and in which the disadvantaged could become powerful overnight by revealing the power they had hidden, some alternatively gendered people were able to maximize their potential and become significant forces. No formal roles offered sanction, instead an ad hoc approach marked the response to alternative genders and the outcome rested on the position of the individual and her/his family, and their ability to maneuver within multiple constraints. It was this potential to transform a stigmatized status into an honoured role that made the position of the alternately gendered paradoxical.

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In 1995, Saylesh, a young, very feminine male-bodied member of the *Stó:lō* Nation was introduced to the concept of “berdache” in an ethnography course on First Peoples of North America. For Saylesh, this concept had resonance far beyond the term gay, and he began to refer to himself as a two-spirited person to express the male and female spirits sharing his body. As an individual immersed in the cultural practice of his people, Saylesh was eager to learn if the *Stó:lō* had recognized alternative genders¹ in the past, and what the position of people like himself might have been. However, the anthropological study of alternative genders has been largely confined to cultures in which the “berdache” form of alternative gender was institutionalized and there exists some continuity of practice². Cultures in which alternative genders may have been expressed more subtly, or in which ambiguity and contradiction in this arena were the norm, have never held the centre stage of this analysis. Falling into this latter category, it follows that the cultures of the Coast Salish, including the *Stó:lō* culture, have never been analyzed by an anthropologist with this issue in mind.

The driving force behind this research is the intriguing questions Saylesh posed, both directly, and through the identities he claims. I approached Saylesh with the idea of investigating alternative genders amongst the *Stó:lō* and it is his enthusiasm for the project and willingness to work closely with me—facilitated by our shared experienced of the Vancouver Lesbian and Gay community—that made this work possible. The bulk of the field work was conducted in the spring and summer of 1998 during the UBC Ethnographic Field School which is a collaborative effort between the *Stó:lō* Nation and the university. Eight formal interviews³ were conducted with seven individuals including Saylesh: four with Elders, two with cultural experts, one with a young gay man from the

Sliammon reserve. Interviews were largely non-directive and copies of the transcripts were provided for approval. As much information was gathered in conversational contexts and through observation. With Saylesh, ongoing contact enriched the interview process and he was able to provide me with valuable insights and suggestions as my field work proceeded.

To the staff of the *Stó:lō* Nation with whom I was to work closely, and who suggested contacts, I explained that as a lesbian I had an emotional, as well as, an intellectual commitment to this topic and that this would be a factor in my interpretation. Although access was eased by this collaborative relationship, there remained considerable resistance to engagement on this subject by most people I approached. Undoubtedly, the fact that I am *Xwelitem*⁴ reinforced a social tendency not to talk about, or recognize the existence of people who are “that way.” The pervasive silence around this issue, stemming from the non-interference ethic and to a lesser degree homophobic attitudes, is taken up in greater detail as it becomes relevant (cf. pg. 30, 35-38). Given this, although I encountered other people of alternative genders in the course of my field work, Saylesh remained the only *Stó:lō* of an alternative gender I interviewed. No one was willing to approach those they knew of alternative gender about my project, largely because that would have meant stating the unspoken truth.

The Coast Salish have traditional territory in southwestern British Columbia and Western Washington with family and ceremonial activities conducted across the international border. Extended families continue to be the organizational core of social, ritual, and political life. It has been argued, both for the past and the present, that communities consist of intervillage networks of consanguineal and affinal kin, not as those

people sharing the close proximity of a village (Suttles 1987:220). Social stratification persists so that people distinguish between those who are upper class (*Si:ya:m/Si'ab*) and the relatively small lower class. The upper class have access to private family knowledge and therefore understand how to conduct themselves properly, while the lower class reportedly lack such "advice" (Suttles 1987:5-9). Coast Salish concepts of class are not readily tied to economic distinctions; instead status comes from the ability and willingness to meet family and ceremonial needs, and the maintenance of reciprocal relations. These reciprocal relations extend to the non-human realm. The belief that humans require the help of superhuman entities is pervasive and many Coast Salish acquire one or more spirit helpers through Longhouse practices.

Research into the social construction of alternative genders in the Coast Salish world reveals paradox: high regard and loathing, acceptance and banishment, coexist in the ethnographic record. The recognition of internal contradictions in Coast Salish culture is not new. In her analysis of gender among the Skagit of Western Washington, Sally Snyder argued that the status of woman was paradoxical. They could not be denied the same rights and privileges as their male siblings in theory, while in practice, they were hampered by a cultural belief in the "insignificance" of women (1964:254-256). For persons of alternative genders—and today, alternative sexualities—a similar paradox operates. As a group they faced disparagement and even murder, while as individuals, they could, and did, turn their difference to an advantage that increased their status. The same persistent cultural patterns of structural fluidity, individual autonomy, class and status differentiation, and kin solidarity underlie both paradoxes, creating the maneuvering space some individuals employ to overcome constraints. Despite the disruption of contact,

traditional epistemology has continued to shape understandings and current practices around alternative genders, forming a core of resistance to dominant ideologies. Raising the subject of alternative genders and sexualities uncovers strongly conflicting understandings of the past which in turn inform contested claims of “tradition,” within the contemporary social field.

I will briefly review the literature which serves as the frame of reference for current alternative gender studies, as well as queer theory, a body of thought less utilized in alternative gender research. A survey of the local ethnographic data relevant to alternative genders uncovers contradictions within and between Coast Salish cultures, and illustrates the paradoxical status of those of alternative genders. The relationship between significant, patterned features of the Coast Salish worldview and the possible strategies open to such individuals despite restraints is then discussed. Finally, I examine how the lack of an ongoing “tradition” of alternative genders is giving rise to strongly contested claims about the past and different visions of the *Stó:lō* future. Foremost, I am concerned with context rather than definition⁵ and so attempt to firmly situate the discussion of alternative genders within a Coast Salish cultural frame.

Few aspects of the study of alternative genders have provoked more discussion than the thorny problem of finding an appropriate language⁶, through which to convey local signification, without evoking the distortion of Western conceptions. The term “berdache,” was used in anthropological literature until recently, as a way of referencing the many variations of alternative genders, but has been largely discarded as a pejorative term given its original meaning “kept boy” (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997:3-4). In 1990, a conference of lesbian and gay First Nations and Native Americans adopted the

term “two-spirit” as a replacement for “berdache,” and to affirm a unique and “traditional” Native alternative gender identity emphasizing spirituality over sexuality (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997:3-4). Still, Jacobs, Thomas and Lang (1997:3-4) caution, in some cultures this term can be problematic, as is the case for the *Stó:lō*. Another option is the term third gender⁷ is used by Herdt (1994a:19, 1997:227) to refer to one or more genders beyond and equal to Man and Woman.

The term alternative genders is used in this paper since 1) terms in the regional languages are eliminated by virtue of the derogatory connotations they carry; 2) the term two-spirit is offensive to some *Stó:lō* Elders, who think it intrudes upon private aspects of Longhouse spirituality and; 3) while I have no quarrel with Herdt’s (1994a) definition of his term ‘third gender,’ the word third detracts from the notion of multiplicity. The term alternate gender has come under fire from Epple (1998:271-273) because alternate is defined as a choice between two things, thereby placing Woman and Man in opposition to the “other”. Alternative has the advantage of a somewhat more open meaning, in which there is a choice between similar things. Gender is pluralized to emphasize that several choices may be available. In dealing with the contemporary situation, sexuality rather than gender has become the focal point of difference, as discussed in greater detail in the queer theory section. Therefore, the term alternative sexualities is used to maintain distance from Western concepts of lesbian and gay, unless self-applied. The intention of the term alternative genders, then, is to suggest the possibility of genders beyond Man and Woman of equal conceptual weight.

There are excellent discussions of the problems inherent in ethnographic data in regard to alternative genders available elsewhere (cf. Callender and Kochems 1983;

Roscoe 1987; Herdt 1994a), so this accounting will be brief. A number of scholars have suggested that the cultural violence of assimilation was responsible for the devaluing of alternatively gendered people in cultures in which they were once highly regarded, leading to reticence on this topic (Jacobs 1997, 1968; Roscoe 1987; Williams 1986; Blackwood 1984; Callender and Kochems 1983 for example). Where evidence exists, it tends to be fragmentary and rarely answers the theoretical questions posed. Over the centuries, a bewildering variety of terms has been employed, and early observers frequently confused alternative genders with hermaphrodites, as well as other statuses that required cross-dressing and cross-gendered behaviour. And, as Callender and Kochems note, “Descriptions of berdache sometimes contain much more denunciation than data...” (1983:443). For the *Stó:lō*, Catholic missionaries began acculturation efforts among them as early as 1841 at Fort Langley, while St. Mary’s mission was established in 1861. The earliest ethnographic research came much later, among the *Stó:lō* and other Coast Salish groups, after considerable contact, and informants may have been reluctant to talk about a subject for which they sensed disapproval from the listener.

There are two types of information which are available for the study of alternative genders in Coast Salish culture: written data—primarily ethnographic, and oral traditions which include people’s rereadings of ethnographic materials. Crisca Bierwert has said “Coast Salish culture works without having a master narrative” (1999:5). Cultural dynamics are fluid allowing for local and individual diversity, and accommodating of a continual renegotiation of understandings without discarding the accumulated experience of the past. Since there is no generic Coast Salish present, no generic past can be recovered, but the persistent cultural patterns which influence daily life can be teased out.

Julie Cruikshank's advice to those who work with oral narratives is extremely *apropos* to the Coast Salish case:

Oral traditions cannot be treated simply as evidence to be sifted for 'facts'; they are told from the perspectives of the people whose views inevitably differ depending on context, social position, and level of involvement. Too often, the notion of community history presumes a homogeneity of opinion and interest that does not exist now and cannot be assumed to have existed in other times and places. (1994:414).

What is presented here is my interpretation of what I have read, and have been told, I can no more speak for all *Stó:lō*, than for all Coast Salish. I have had contact with only a small number of people and I do not doubt that there are oral traditions, circumstances, and current opinions of which I am totally unaware.

FRAMES OF REFERENCE

Accounts of alternative genders exist from the 16th century (Katz 1976:285-286), but no anthropological synthesis was attempted until Jacobs (1968) systematically examined the extent of the occurrence of recognized alternative genders for females and males, and described associated social, economic, and spiritual roles, including mediation between realms. Katz's publication of pertinent excerpts from historical and ethnographic sources, presented data from a range of Native groups and engendered further interest. He was the first to apply an explicitly gay analysis to "berdaches," despite his recognition that same-sex sexual behaviour was far from exclusive⁸ (Katz 1976:282). This approach brought to the forefront an ongoing debate regarding the nature of alternative genders. Unfortunately this debate, the romantic advocacy of non-Native researchers, barriers to participation by First Nations and Native Americans of alternative gender in the production of "accredited" knowledge and their exclusion by anthropologists from the

alternative genders discourse derailed the study of contemporary Native alternative genders and sexualities (cf. Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 1997:5, 272-275, 297-318; Jacobs 1997:22-27). Medicine's (1997/1979) consideration of the circumstances behind the gravitation of Native American lesbians and gays to urban centers, stood virtually alone until the late eighties.

In the dialogue that ensued, the relationship between gender, sex, and sexuality (rather than sexual behaviour) and the "naturalness" of dual gender systems, became focal points. Whitehead cautioned against the facile equation of Western homosexuality with Native American alternative genders, since in Native cultures "Sexual object choice was very much the trailing rather than the leading edge of gender definition," rendering same-sex sexual relations insufficient to prompt a change in gender (1981:512, 511-513). She reaffirmed Mead's (1935) observation of the extreme variability of principle attributes of gender, as socially constructed, and argued close attention must be paid to the each unique cultural context before venturing on to wider interpretation (Whitehead 1981:522-523). Yet, she accepted as natural the binary opposition of female and male, Man and Woman, categorizing the alternatively gendered as gender-crossers striving to become members of the opposite sex, rather than as representing equally valid genders. Medicine found that several typically "masculine" sex roles were available to "warrior women" who assumed what she termed a new "sex role identity," neither Man nor Woman (1983:268-273). In contrast, Blackwood (1984:29), maintained that among Plains peoples, men could become Women and women could become Men. She conceptualized a "cross-gender role" but did not reject multiple genders in principle (Blackwood 1984:42).

In their major synthesis, Callender and Kochems defined “berdache” as a distinct “intermediate gender,” with a shared “common core of traits” combining the attributes of Man, Woman, and their own unique attributes which allowed them to “maximize” their economic potential by blending the occupations of men and women (1983:443,448). By contextualizing the descriptions with which they illustrate their points, they demonstrate that few, if any, traits are universal in the many expressions of alternative genders. Increasingly, it was accepted by anthropologists that the diversity of Native North American gender systems include multiple gender systems, and that frequently gender was conceptualized as a continuum, not as the opposition of two discrete categories⁹.

Williams (1986:2), for example, in his sweeping review of Native American gender diversity argued that “berdache” represent another gender. Like Katz (1976), he romanticizes the position of alternative genders in the Native past, stressing the spiritual, rather than the gendered or sexual aspects of their roles¹⁰. Other scholars, (Jacobs 1968; Katz 1976; Whitehead 1981; Callender and Kochems 1983), had commented on the existence of “homosexuality” outside of alternative genders. Williams (1986:115), however, brought a new perspective by stating “one can be homosexual in behaviour without being gender nonconformist,” although he does not continue this thought to its logical inference—one can be a gender nonconformist without being homosexual in behaviour. Albers (1989:134), well known for her studies of Native American women, concluded that at least some indigenous gender systems recognize more than two genders, with third genders and cross-gendered individuals both being possibilities¹¹.

The essays in *Third Sex, Third Gender* (Herdt 1994) take issue with the idea that sexual dimorphism is either the natural principle behind dichotomous gender systems, or

an adequate explanation for the diversity found in human cultures. Herdt argues that in some cultures of New Guinea, as in the Dominican Republic, hermaphrodites are recognized as a third sex on the basis of their physical difference (1994b:419-445). Herdt's introduction traces the application of the idea of dimorphism to our species back to the Darwinian evolutionary paradigm, in which sexual behaviour serves, foremost, the needs of reproduction and adaptive selection (1994a:21,25-26). Sexual dimorphism then, becomes reified in social theory as the unquestioned binary principle of social structure, underlying ritual life, gender systems, and the sexual division of labour (1994:32). Yet, competing ideologies coexist and as Herdt's (1994a:57) work in Sambia illustrates, both a rigidly binary gender system and alternative categories of sex and gender can occur in the same time and place. Herdt (1994a:80) concludes that while divergent sexual behaviour and morphologies are universal, the recognition of third sex and third-gender categories is not.

An important recent anthology continues this debate, but also demonstrates a concern for current lived experience. There is a call for the de-romanticization of the "berdache," although the importance of retaining models which can foster positive identities and roles is stressed (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang (1997:9). Lang (1997), for example, looks at the divergent roles and identities of Native Americans whose alternative gender is recognized as traditional, and those who consider themselves gay and lesbian or two-spirit people. In these same pages, trait-based, bounded-category analyses become another point of contention. Thomas (1997), himself Navajo, writes that the traditional Navajo gender system recognized at least five categories but produces great confusion in his attempts to provide working definitions. Epplé (1997) counters Thomas' approach,

maintaining that for the Navajo, an individual's 'distinctness' is revealed through the connections they have to other beings and processes, so that identities are dynamic and inclusive, rather than static and exclusive, making bounded categories irrelevant.

Unfortunately, she fails to historicize her work, conflating the past with the present, and herself shows rigidity in her rejection of even the possibility of a third gender for the Navajo (1997:174,183). To support her dismissal of categories, Epple quotes Tafoya's principle, "one can have context or definition, but not both at the same time," but ignores Tafoya's (1997:199) advice, that labels dealing with gender and sexuality are useful if treated as only approximate descriptions of social constructs, not as traits prescriptive of an individual's behaviour.

An alternative to both trait-list bound and category-free analyses is proposed in the prototype theory used by Mahmood and Armstrong (1992). Originally developed as a means of conceptualizing 'ethnic groups' their approach can be applied to groups in which no one feature is shared by all members, yet each member shares some attribute with another member (1992:2). Features which are common to a substantial number of members are prototype features, a member of the group who embodies these prototypical features is a prototypical member (1992:5). In the study of alternative genders, "berdache," males who adopt the dress, occupations and demeanor of Woman, yet have unique attributes, have served as prototype members. But peripheral membership could also be argued for "gender radicals," for example, women who confound expectations for their gender by becoming chiefs or join raiding parties but remain Women (cf. Ortner 1996:184). This is a benefit under conditions of scarce and inadequate written information which makes it impossible to ascertain whether the individuals mentioned would have

been perceived as alternatively gendered or as persons who pushed the definition of Woman or Man to its extreme limits. Thus, under this inclusive perspective categories are graduated, boundaries fuzzy and permeable, and individuals with no attributes in common may be seen as members of a common group (1992:9).

Within queer theory, Foucault (1978) has had the most sweeping impact on alternative gender studies. His genealogy of sexuality traced the emergence of sexuality as a concept and as an identity—either normal or abnormal, the resulting speciation of the Western homosexual¹² and later creation of the heterosexual, and linked these social constructions to the particular constellations of knowledge and power born in the industrial revolution¹³ (1978). As David Halperin comments, one of the major conceptual functions performed by sexuality is the separation of gender identity from sexual identity, for “where there is no such conception of sexuality, there can be no conception of either homo- or heterosexuality—no notion that human beings are individuated at the level of their sexuality” (1990:25-26). Same-sex sexual behaviour has existed in all times and cultures, Weeks asserts, but “only in a few societies does a distinctive homosexual identity emerge” (1987:40), echoing Padgug (1979:14). The idea that sexuality is constitutive of identity is then, culturally and historically specific, neither universal over time or cultures.

While much in queer theory is useful to the study of alternative genders in First Nations and Native American cultures, both concerning the effects of the disruptions of contact and the likely biases of observers, much is also irrelevant except when applied to the urban experience, because of a strong Western-contemporary focus. Few of those studying alternative genders seem to have paid much attention to the insights of queer theory and vice versa. Blasius (1998:651,665), for example, criticizes Herdt (1994a) for

resurrecting the 'congenital' third-sex theories, outlined by nineteenth-century sexologists such as Ulrichs, Ellis, Carpenter and Hirschfeld as explanations for same-sex sexual behaviour, thereby placing alternative genders in a defensive-minority position¹⁴. Weston (1993b:354), attacks the notion of an 'alternative gender' for the same reason. However, as previously explained, Herdt is not championing a biological explanation of homosexuality, indeed, he stresses that same-sex desire is neither the same thing, nor the basis of third sex and third genders (1994a:47). He does propose that, in some cultures, the birth of ambiguously sexed individuals gives rise to third sex categories, even under a dual gender system (1994:57). Interestingly, Blasius simultaneously accuses Herdt of ethnocentrism and complains that his analysis "seems to be more appropriate to societies and historical periods other than our own" (1998:665-666).

Although there is a sad lack of cross-fertilization between the study of alternative genders and queer theory, writers in both camps seem to find practice theory useful. The contention that human action "agency" is constrained by any existing social and cultural order "the structure," while at the same time human action creates, reproduces or transforms the given social and cultural order unifies practice theory. The relations of power and inequality are maintained or altered through agency, as actors negotiate, resist or enact the given world (Ortner 1996:1-3). Sherry Ortner's feminist version of practice theory channels our focus not on social reproduction but rather on change, resistance, the fracture points, the imperfect reproduction of patterns, and provides a solution for the trap of practice theory as a loop between structure and agency (1996:17). Given the challenge that a single individual, Saylesh, is posing to his community by speaking out on this issue and the contestation of "tradition" that has already ensued, it can be argued that this body

of theory is equally fruitful for consideration of alternative genders in the Coast Salish world.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

In the summer of 1950 Edmund Lorenzetto told Wilson Duff about a:

“transvestite” called *Sié* Tom. “*Sié* means a woman, hence ‘a woman who called herself Tom.’ From Yale. He had a wife. She had a wife, but she was supposed to be a man. Wore men’s clothes and went around as a man. He and wife got along okay. A good hunter and fisherman. Wasn’t *skwelem* [Indian doctor], but was Indian dancer.

Seemed to live a pretty normal life. Had no family.

Duff 1950:No.5:41

This brief passage provides one of the very few written pieces of evidence relating to the existence of alternative genders among the *Stó:lō*. Another account is found in James Teit’s (1900) work on a neighbouring Interior Salish group, the Thompson. He is told that the custom of cross-dressing and behaving like a member of the “opposite sex” was “frequent among the Coast tribes,” though not among the Thompson (1900:321). Teit then records that “Only two people at Spuzzum were known to do so, but they were more closely related to the Coast tribes [presumably the *Stó:lō*] than to the Thompsons, and spent the greater part of their lives at Yale” (1900:321). Not only are these passages rare, they are scant in detail, but they suggest some of the possibilities that might have been open for the expression of alternative genders.

One significant point is that both males and females cross-dressed. In the case of *Sié* Tom, this was clearly not a transitory-ritualized phenomenon related to shamanistic practices, but rather a long-term adoption of a gender contrary to the typical expectations for his biological sex. The interpretation offered by Edmund Lorenzetto, is that this was a woman living her life as a man, which would argue for gender crossing, as opposed to the

recognition of a distinct alternative gender. Further, the “masculine” occupations of *Sié* Tom are emphasized by Lorenzetto: he was “A good hunter and fisherman.”

Since this person was married, some sort of community, perhaps even institutionalized, recognition of this relationship appears to have existed. As the wife is mentioned three times, but never described as different from other women, we can assume that she was not considered unusual because of her partner. Rather, the impression conveyed of *Sié* Tom, his life, and his marriage, is that it was accepted, even unremarkable. Only in the lack of children, which is how Duff (1952:79) translates “Had no family”, did *Sié* Tom and his wife plainly diverge from other couples. *Sié* Tom’s story resonates with one of the stories I was told. A few of generations ago a man had a wife who was attracted to other women. To keep her happy he married a second woman. Apparently he succeeded, since through the industry of his two wives he became very wealthy. While concerned with sexual behaviour, an equally accommodating and practical approach to difference is evident in this bit of family history. Finally, the change of residence effected by the two individuals from Spuzzum—probably achieved through the activation of family ties—indicates one of the strategies alternative genders might have used to improve their position, when faced with censure.

When the issue of alternative genders is considered for the Coast Salish as a whole¹⁵, somewhat more evidence is available, although given the diversity between groups, generalizations should be approached with caution. Jimmy Frank, a Squamish, explained to Barnett (1935:1-4:118) that *g!a:ilk* (a term which Barnett translates as “berdache”) are caused during pregnancy by the mother wishing her child’s sex to be other than as conceived. In published form, these field notes become distorted into the

assumption that only male children are affected by this transformation, so that only males become “berdache” (Barnett 1955:128). Barrenness was attributed “to this *g!a:ʔk*’s business of change of sex before birth because of wishing parents,” but it is not clear whether barren women themselves were considered *g!a:ʔk*, however they could not be divorced on these grounds (Barnett 1935:1-4:137). Whether through lack of interest or distaste, Barnett failed to record “the various graduations of the male and female mixture” that Jimmy Frank related to him in regard to *g!a:ʔk* (1935:1-4:118). Although Barnett does not share Jimmy Frank’s observations with us, it is clear that Frank was familiar with the concept of alternative genders, that the Squamish had an explanation for their existence, and that several different types of alternatively gendered people were recognized. Censure is absent, the impression is that Frank wanted to share this information.

Also in his monograph on the Coast Salish, Barnett asserts that “Sexually weak or inverted individuals were not likely to become shamans” (1955:149). Unfortunately, this statement is not attributed to any group and the original was not found in the field notes. However, we are informed that among the Squamish, Indian doctors refrained from marriage, while among the Klahouse “doctors plucked their beards “just like a woman.” This suggests that shamans may have departed from expected gender roles or that the alternatively gendered had doctor powers (Barnett 1935:1-5:21; 1-6:116). The Klahouse also had a term which Barnett translates as hermaphrodite, “*tumju*,” although his source told him that he had “heard of them elsewhere but knows nothing of” (1935:1-6:116). Marion Smith (1940) lists *tʔsládeyep*, “like a woman” as a male-nick name but provides no further information in her work on the Puyallup-Nisqually. The Upper Skagit assured June

Collins that there were no “transvestites” among them—rare men did not marry—but they were not “transvestites”—but “in the last century there was one in a Nooksack village” (1974:106).

The Upper Skagit had a story about this alternatively gendered individual, which begins with a young Upper Skagit woman traveling to this village for an arranged marriage:

Her intended husband happened to be away when she arrived, and her mother-in-law told the girl to sleep with a strange man. The girl, frightened, refused. It was the male transvestite. He said, “Come on; I won’t bother you.” The girl’s mother-in-law explained that he was “just like a lady.” The transvestite dressed like women, made baskets, and did other women’s work.

Collins 1974a:106

One of the questions raised by this account, if taken literally, is how did the young woman recognize this individual as a biological male? As a stranger in the village, if the individual of alternative gender was “just like a lady,” implying demeanor, dress and occupation, how did she know? This may be a product of the narrative, if she fails to recognize this disjunction, there is no story. On the other hand, it is possible that there was an element of androgyny about this person, or some characteristics that marked her/him as neither Man nor Woman but something different. Another point that can be taken from this story is the fact that the young woman was probably not seen as a sexual target for an individual of alternative gender. It would be inconceivable for the virginal status of a high class girl to be jeopardized by her own mother-in-law. But the story may also be viewed as a moral tale about class. The young woman’s marriage is arranged (high class), but she arrives at the village alone (low class). If she is to be understood as a low class person, then the family she is marrying into is also low class, a status perhaps confirmed by the presence of

an alternatively gendered member. The story ends with the comment “the Upper Skagit laughed about this man but were not critical of him” (Collins 1974a:106).

From Johnny Moses, a member of the Tulalip and Nootka peoples recognized for his knowledge of cultural teachings, I received the following response to my inquiries concerning Coast Salish understandings of gender. He writes that among “our” people (not identified) there were eight named genders. There were “straight” men and “straight” women, “they were very boring. And so that’s why those two would come together” (Moses 1999:9). Male and female “homosexuals” or *at’k’eanen*, translated as “man-woman,” constitute another recognized gender. The fourth gender he names includes “bisexual” individuals, but also people who “feel straight,” but who are comfortable with any gender. It is possible that “feel straight” refers to “masculine” males and “feminine” females who have sexual relations with men, women, and *at’k’eanen*. *At’k’eanen* may be more androgynous in nature, or, they may be distinguished by their narrower sexual behaviour. Men who feel like they are women trapped inside male bodies “but who can still live as men,” and their female counter parts, are called *k’e chek’ qwe* (Moses 1999:9). Within the Western world view only the first two of these are considered genders. People who practice same-sex sexual behaviour, or who fail in unacceptable ways to meet gendered roles are mistakes, not co-equal gender categories. The strength of this dualistic conception is illustrated in the routine “fixing” of hermaphroditic infants (usually as female) and in surgical sexual reassignment of adults (Kochems and Jacobs 1997:259)¹⁶

The last three genders flow from an individual’s spiritual nature and constitute a radical departure from Western gender concepts. People of the sixth gender are not human in spirit, but of another world, having taken human form to gain understanding (1998:9).

Those of the seventh gender feel at ease with all genders, but only engage in spiritually motivated sexual behaviour (Moses 1999:10). The final gender includes the reincarnated who “when they have sex with someone, they have to be someone else” (Moses 1999:10). Moses commented that regional gender systems varied, even from village to village. Some groups had more genders he has been told, others had no terms for alternative genders (Moses 1999:10). Moses provides evidence for a relationship between shamanistic practice and cross-dressing. If, for example, a family was training a daughter to be a shaman and she died, her brother might be required to take her place and wear her garments during rituals. Women, or men, might voluntarily cross-dress and practice the shamanistic rituals and teachings of the opposite sex, if that reflected their internal feelings (Moses 1999:10).

The information received by Sally Snyder (1964) during her field work in the early 1950's among the Skagit concerning the position of alternatively gendered people bears little resemblance to the foregoing. All “abnormal” individuals were subjected to taunting, but people of alternative genders “homosexuals, hermaphrodites and males who failed to mature sexually” were treated with derision and disadvantaged (Snyder 1964:193)¹⁷. Her dissertation was focused on the analysis of the traditional stories she recorded, and here alternative genders receive only the most minimal treatment. Thus, her analysis of this issue, and of *azull* is based on the vast amount of ethnographic material she recorded. The Skagits she worked with denied any instances of women “transvestites” or of female-female sexual behaviour (1964:284). Four terms were used to describe various types of alternatively gendered males. The word *sali?i'b'* is translated as “like two” and was applied to all cases of morphological sexual ambiguity and “psychosexual inversion”

(1964:194)¹⁸. True hermaphrodites who had mixed genitals and manifested the secondary sexual characteristics of both male and female were called *s.tə'buʒa* (1964:194).

Taʔai?i'b' which is translated as “like a woman,” is used to describe men who adopt the dress (and demeanor and occupations?) of women, who are homosexual in their desire or in some way sexually dysfunctional (1964:194). The last word mentioned is *xwtobši'b'*, translated as “like a man.” Snyder was told that this term refers to a man “who was a mature, normal male and heterosexual in his desires, but otherwise conditioned to a feminine role” (1964:194). In some cases, she reports, parents raised boys to be *xwtobši'b'*, but why this should be so is not explained. Such people were not mistreated and did not lower family status (1964:194).

The last two categories, as described, differ in two aspects. The first is in sexual behaviour. There are accounts from several related cultures, including the Bella Coola (Nuxalk) and Bella Bella (Heiltsuk) (McIlwraith 1948:45-46), the Haisla (Olson 1940:288), and the Quinault (Olson 1936:99) of heterosexual behaviour by people called “berdache.” However, Olson’s (1940:200) avowal that “homosexuality is unknown” among the Haisla—when it is well documented for neighbouring groups (Ford 1941:129-132), is hard to believe. McIlwraith says that men who behave and dress like women may take a wife without changing their adopted role. He also notes that some of these men had a sexual aversion to women, the possibility of same-sex sexual behaviour is never addressed. This may be due to his own prudery or aversion, since he comments about the hermaphroditic folk hero, *Ala'yao*, the prototype of such people: “it will be readily understood that he was not regarded with much awe” (1948:45-46). Exclusive

heterosexuality is apparently as difficult to prove as exclusive homosexuality (cf. Callender and Kochems 1983:444,449-451).

If the claim that *xwtobš'i'b'* were heterosexual is accepted, than sexuality may be at the heart of the contrasting attitudes to these two forms of alternative gender. Snyder (1964:106) finds that sexuality itself was an obscenity for the Skagit. The word used in the language to describe the concept of sexual behaviour is the plural of *azu!l*, which means impure or spoiled (1964:102-103). *Azu!l* also has the meaning of the female and male which must come together to recreate, and "*azu!lada* [sexuality] is why we are not perfect" (1964:103). This word can describe the condition of the sexually aroused, those who are planning to have, having, or who have just had sexual relations (1964:102-103). *Kwiat*, is that which is not female and not male, "sexless-perfect" (Snyder 1952-54, Journal II, Box 109:51). Heterosexuality might seem to be more suspect than homosexuality, given that impurity is the consequence of the meeting of female and male. However, the Skagit believed that anal pregnancies and deliveries were possible in both sexes and viewed them, and by inference, anal intercourse, with horror (Snyder 1964:192). In one myth Snyder recorded, Coyote is made pregnant in retribution for insults, a highly humiliating punishment because he can only use his anus as a birth canal (1964:191-192). Since the attainment of *kwiat* required sexual abstinence, it may be concluded that sexuality of any kind demonstrated the imperfection of humans.

The second difference between *ta'łai?i'b'* and *xwtobš'i'b'* is the matter of sanction. *Ta'łai?i'b'*, we are told occurred because their parents had broken *si'ab* (high class) precepts or had ignored tabus during the pregnancy (Snyder 1964:194-195). If conceived of as a living reminder of the family's failure to be *si'ab*, than it is understandable that

Snyder should be told that such individuals were pressured to conform to the gender role of men and to suppress any same-sex sexual desires (1964:195). Thus, *taʔai?i'b* were perceived both as unfortunate accidents, and as social deviants exercising choice. In the case of *xwtobʂi'b* the choice was made for them by their parents. But why would parents reach such a decision, especially when we are informed that a very similar group of alternatively gendered persons were completely marginalized? One possibility is that there was an element of spiritual sanction which was not revealed to Snyder, that may have conferred advantage on the individual and family, or at least deflected criticism. Another, is that with the interference directed at indigenous gender systems the meanings of the two terms have become confused. Same-sex sexual behaviour between men and women is recorded for many Native North American cultures (cf. Callender and Kochems 1983), but such individuals acted from preference and did not have the alternative gender status that a “berdache” did. Were *taʔai?i'b* originally defined on the basis of their sexual behaviour, while *xwtobʂi'b* were distinguished by supernatural sanction and considered “heterosexual” because their partners were always of a different gender, if not always of a different sex?¹⁹ The contemporary Shoshoni make such a distinction: “A gay person, as opposed to a *tainna wa'ippe* [traditional alternatively gendered person] is defined as lacking the spiritual element, acting on personal preference instead of manifesting spiritual power” (Lang 1997:106).

A story very like the one told to June Collins (1974) by the Skagit is found in Snyder's (1964) dissertation. There are some alterations in the nature of the characters and in this earlier account the “transvestite” is Skagit and is lured to the Nooksack village:

He, or she [*Yæ'lxwad*], was thought by some people to be male because his external genitalia were masculine, although underdeveloped. Other persons treated him as female, thinking that he was a normal woman, which was his role and appearance when clothed. On one occasion an adolescent girl, one of my informants, was asked by her relatives to share a bed with "her." They regarded this person as totally feminine. He was a transvestite, did women's work, and was homosexual. Men who were not themselves considered homosexual would have hostile sexual relations with him, taking the active role in anal intercourse. One of these men, a Nooksack with whom *Yæ'lxwad* had fallen in love, went so far as to propose marriage in order to get this *sali?i'b'* into a Nooksack village where he could be properly humiliated. *Yæ'lxwad's* deviance was a source of much despair to his family who had tried in vain to raise him as a male. As a result of anal intercourse he was believed to have become impregnated. He died in labour, the Skagits said, unable to give birth because he lacked a birth canal.

Snyder 1964:193.

Yæ'lxwad is an example of a *taʔai?i'b'* Snyder tells us. As the woman sharing the story was an adolescent at the time of her experience, the events must have taken place around the turn of the century, at a time when the influence of the dominant white culture was growing. Many of the observations Snyder makes concerning alternative genders can be drawn from this account. If this is a major inspiration for the interpretation she offers it should be kept in mind that considerable changes may have already occurred in the Skagit gender system and in sexual behaviour, arenas particularly vulnerable to imposed Western morality. Nevertheless, *Yæ'lxwad's* death from an anal pregnancy echoes the story about Coyote.

How do *s.tə'buza* fit into our understanding of alternative genders among the Skagit? A Skagit man gave the following explanation: "he's a woman yet a man. That type, male or female, never gets children. It carried both sexes" (1952-54, Journal II, Box 109:51). If a pregnant woman ate the wrong foods, or teased Coyote or Mink,²⁰ both the subjects of stories in which gender roles are confused, she would give birth to such a

hermaphrodite, a foolish child, or twins (1952-54, Journal II, Box 109:51). Another Skagit person Snyder worked with maintained that hermaphrodites were born when animals turn against a pregnant woman (1952-54, Journal II, Box 110:2). Like the parents of *ta'kai?i'b'*, the parents of *s.tə'buza* had shown themselves to be unworthy *si'ab*. The birth of the congenitally deformed was equally cause for the denouncement of the parents (Snyder 1964:194). To say that hermaphrodites were evidence of wrong doing does not explain why they should be viewed with such distaste. A return to the concepts *azu!!* and *azu!!lada*—which respectively deal with the taint of the sexed condition and the coming together of the male and female sex in sexual relations—gives rise to the likelihood that *s.tə'buza* were considered inherently unclean because, in their morphology and nature, they internalized *azu!!lada*. As the epitome of *azu!!* they stood in direct opposition to *kwiat*, sexless perfection, even when they could not function sexually.

The *Stó:lō* may have shared the Skagit's attitude towards hermaphrodites, although there is no record of their having such extreme concepts as *azu!!* and *azu!!lada*. There are two mountains in their territory which have names in *Halq'eméylem* which were translated as hermaphrodite, one of which has associated oral traditions. *T'ámiya* Mountain shares its name with a creek and a village which once stood at the mouth of this creek. Two divergent oral traditions exist. In the more positive tradition, *T'ámiya* village was where the hermaphrodites lived, although the individual who told me this thought that there could never have been that many. He went on to say that Elders had told him that such people—people who were both man and woman—had a special job to do, but they didn't specify its nature. Another person told me that this mountain is sacred. In the tradition usually recorded, *T'ámiya* was the mountain upon which hermaphroditic babies

were exposed. Some people say that until the age of three, such children if recognized or discovered were left on the mountain (Galloway 1976:168). According to Bob Joe the proper name of the mountain was *t'amiyehóy*, for which the literal translation is "hermaphrodite" plus "finish, stop" (Galloway 1976:231).

Another version tells us that deformed babies were left on the mountain to die (Galloway 1976:166). *Támiya* is variously translated as deformed, hermaphrodite, hermaphrodite baby, not man/not woman, and half man and half woman, with many alternative spellings. Possibly the translation "hermaphrodite" represents a misunderstanding of the meaning people were trying to convey, as Stevenson (1902:37) argued long before the current era of debate began. Half man and half woman may be closer to what people said, and does not necessarily imply any physical difference. However, Wayne Suttles (1998) recorded the terms *st'émeve* in Downriver *Halq'eméylem* and *st'ámeve* in Cowichan, which was explained to him by two older people as "a person who is half man and half woman, who has both male and female sex organs." The older of the two said this sort of person was rare, the younger commented that *st'émeve* wore women's clothing (Suttles 1998). Further, it should be noted that this term is not a combination of the *Halq'eméylem* terms for man and woman, which are frequently the roots of Native terms which were translated as "berdache" (cf. Lang 1997:103). Two Interior Salish groups share this term: *stámmiya* in Lower Kutenai (Ktunaxa) is translated as "acts like a woman," the term *sta'mia* is translated as "hermaphrodite" for the Coeur d'Alene (Schaeffer 1965:218; Ray in Roscoe 1987:146).

The translation of *támiya* as deformed may also stem from such a misunderstanding, since hermaphroditism does involve morphological difference, and the

two terms may have been seen as interchangeable. One of the Elders interviewed made a connection between hermaphrodites and homosexuals and those who are physically or mentally disadvantaged. The Skagit made also made this association (Snyder 152-54, Journal II, Box 109:51). Those that confound female and male in body and Man and Woman in behaviour are likely to provoke similar reactions. Herdt posits a relationship between the recognition of hermaphrodites as a third sex and greater plasticity in the expression of gender (1994b:424-425). But while oral traditions and traditional stories about hermaphrodites may support the presence of alternative genders, and androgynous and cross-gendered behaviour, such traditions do not guarantee either a space for alternative genders or positive sanction, as his work with the Sambia reveals (1994b).

In the traditional stories of the *Stó:lō* (called *sxwoxwiyám*), the character Wren²¹ is known as *T'ámiya*, the word which has been translated as meaning hermaphrodite. The earliest recorded version of this story was collected by Boas (1895) and translated into English only quite recently. "*T'a'mia*" uses his power to create a path to the sky from a chain of arrows (1895:45). The footnotes, an addition to the translated version, translate *t'a'mia* as Wren. Charles Hill-Tout (1978:56) also translates Wren as Tamia, as does Teit in the three stories he collected from the Thompson and in the Lower Fraser region (1911:246,340-343; 1917:10). But there is no mention of either hermaphroditism or transformation. In a *sxwoxwiyám* told to Lerman (1951:185-191) by Mrs. Agnes James of Matsqui, Wren lives near Tomihy Mountain with his grandmother. When Bear raids his fish trap he kills him making enemies of his neighbours. By following her grandson's advice Caterpillar thwarts the attackers and they decide he is a "smart guy" and just the person to lead them in their war against Thunder. On Tomihy Mountain he sings a song,

dances, and shoots the arrows to make a ladder to the sky—the mountain, now named for him, was low before this. The war is a success and they return home. This all took place when Wren was still a person. There is nothing to indicate that Wren is a hermaphrodite, but there is an association with *Támiya* Mountain.

Only in one *sxwoxwiyám* was Wren described as an hermaphrodite. This is a version I collected, and the context of the interview, in which I asked questions about the position of people of alternative genders in the *Stó:lō* past, may have prompted the association. A fluent speaker of *Halq'eméylem*, this Elder denied any knowledge of stories about *Támiya* Mountain but concluded the interview with the observation that “Maybe there wasn’t even any homos at that time. I don’t know. But that story’s there. Maybe to warn us what could happen to us.” Since I had just repeated my original queries about *Támiya* Mountain I interpret this as a reference to this story and those of banishment. I was told that *T’ámiya* was a very small hermaphrodite with a greedy grandmother. *T’ámiya* decided to kill a moose for her. He was small enough to get into any of the moose’s orifices, but the only one the moose couldn’t protect was the rear. Once inside, *T’ámiya* severs the moose’s heart. The grandmother eats her share, and *T’ámiya*’s as well, choking to death. *T’ámiya* is transformed into Wren. An elaborate version of the story was told to Wilson Duff (1950,#4:2-10) by 71-year-old Patrick Charlie and another recorded by Snyder (1964:365) but Wren is not hermaphroditic.

Another dimension of *T’ámiya*’s character is his nature as a sort of folk hero. Oliver Wells (1970:36) tells a *sxwoxwiyám* in which Wren (Ta-mee-ah) is credited with the origin of weirs. The Puyallup have a story in which the Transformer teaches Wren (*stcatcL* in Lushootseed) the use of the wedge and maul (Ballard 1929:81). Among the Klallam,

Wren finds the way into Northwind's house and is able to force him never to blow for more than seven days in succession (Gunther 1925:113-170). *Ala'yao*, the Hermaphrodite, a supernatural being who has the character of a folk hero among the Bella Coola is credited with bringing berries to the people (McIlwraith 1948:45-46). It is unclear to me just how these stories should be interpreted as a whole. Only the most recently collected *sxwoxwiyám* contained all the elements necessary to make an association between *T'ámiya*, the mountain of this name, Wren and *T'ámiya* as an hermaphrodite. One other person remembered hearing or reading a *sxwoxwiyám* in which Wren changed back and forth between being a man and a woman, but it has not been located. Snyder discovered that some of the Skagit people she worked with censored any stories they considered salacious. When she volunteered missing details from other versions she had heard, the deleted passages were filled in (1964:362). Perhaps *T'ámiya*'s hermaphroditism was prudently forgotten, because it was felt that this part of her/his nature would meet with disapproval (cf. Callender and Kochems 1983:443). Although it cannot be definitely asserted that the Wren and *T'ámiya* stories treat a hermaphroditic theme, no other explanation accounts for the use of the same name for hermaphrodites and Wren, and the association of *T'ámiya* mountain with both.

There is one *sxwoxwiyám* which has alternative gender and same-sex sexual behaviour as a motif. Originally recorded by Boas, the story opens with a lonely old woman, *Käiam*, wishing for company, which is granted to her when the two parts of the salmon roe split in half to become two girls. The girls grow up to be very pretty and wish for a man. *Käiam* pretends to die and the young women bury her with her wedge and hammer. Once they are gone she ties back her wrinkled skin to make it smooth. She uses

the wedge for a penis and breaks the hammer in two to serve as testicles. The young women greet her warmly and feed her, although they are puzzled when she hides her mouth to chew, concealing its toothless state. They agree to share her as a husband and she lies between them. One of the women feels for her new husband's genitals and is happy to find all as it should be, but then she tickles her and discovers that it is *Käiam*. The girls run off ashamed (Boas 1895:41-42). Virtually identical versions were recorded by Hill-Tout (1978) about the same time, the primary differences from the first being that the two young women fight over the supposed youth, and that the old woman has intercourse with them both. Only on the following day, as the three bath together, do the women suspect that the young man is their grandmother. The following night they tickle her to test their theory, and discovering they are correct they take her down to the lake and continue to tickle her until she dies (Hill-Tout 1978, Vol. III:124-129).

One might argue that the old lady was motivated solely out of fear of losing her companions to young men. In both versions however, *Käiam* shows preference for the younger woman, who is only distinguished from her sister in the telling as being more attractive, which implies that there is a very real sexual attraction on the part of the old woman. The possession of a hammer (maul) and wedge by a woman is unusual in itself. These are men's woodworking tools and their use suggests that the old woman was, at the very least, not adhering strictly to a woman's gender role. In the Boas version she lives alone, so it might be expected that she would do all the tasks normally divided between men and women. But in the Hill-Tout versions isolation is not specified, nor does she wish for the girls to alleviate loneliness, she just hears the salmon roe crying like children and takes them home. In the rendering collected by Boas the old woman is unable to

consummate her desire, but also she is unharmed at the end. Events unfold differently in the second version. The old woman carefully instructs the women to include her hammer and horn in her canoe burial before she feigns death. So successful is she at playing the part of a young man that she is able to have intercourse with both women without them being aware that her genitals are artificial. Finally, when the women discover her deception they kill her in a manner designed to strip her of dignity. The girls then advise travelers that the waters of the lake will calm if this the story of the old woman's death is told. This telling of the story seems to suggest that the old woman's fate met with even supernatural approval.

Another recurring theme in the stories of the region, which may have bearing on the treatment of people of alternative genders in the past, is the general principle that people who have some stigma attached to them are also endowed with exceptional power. In the Brother and Sister story when a high-born incestuous couple find that their forbidden behaviour has resulted in pregnancy they go away to live in the woods. Their son quickly grows to manhood. He tells his parents that they look alike and they admit that they are close relatives. They prepare the son for return to their people, providing him with an enormous pack of food which the father magically shrinks. Looking back upon his former home, he sees it burning—his parents have immolated themselves from shame. The young man demonstrates many extraordinary powers at his parent's village and eventually forces no less a personage than the Sun to give him his eldest daughter as a wife (Lerman 1951:192-208). Another example was said to explain where *X̄ls* (the Transformer) got his power. A sick old woman asks her husband to put her in a gravebox up a tree. Although this saddens him he does as she has asked. Regularly he walks the trail to the tree grieving

and mourning. His wife, however, is being visited in that box by a nice young man and she becomes pregnant. One day the husband hears the baby crying and he happily takes his wife and her child home. The baby becomes the powerful transformer, *Æls* (Duff 1950, #5:18).

Also in this vein are stories such as the ones about the humpbacked boy who saves the lives of the children stolen by an ogress. Despite his deformity, which traps him in the basket of the ogress after he has set all the other children free, he is the only one who is clever enough to outwit the child-eating monster (Ballard 1929:103-106). This is a story found throughout the Coast Salish world. In another, a blind and crippled boy is abused and rejected by his father, he flees to the wilderness to die alone. Instead, he meets a supernatural who gives him wealth, restores his vision and leaves him sound (Snyder 1964:226-228). This last story falls into the Cinderella type of story told by the Skagit, in which, according to Snyder, misunderstood “sterling” youths experience deprivation which automatically renders them *kwiat*, a state sure to attract strong spirit powers (1964:228). This may account for the attractiveness of the Skagit boy to powerful supernaturals but does not explain in the three *sxwoxwiyám* why those who might be expected to be society’s outcasts are actually the smartest and the most powerful. Perhaps these stories reflect a belief that supernaturals take even more pity²² on the weak or they might indicate that you really cannot be sure who has spirit powers and the tendency for any sign of success to be taken as confirmation of those powers (Amoss 1977). The Klallam maintained that “Those who gets the best spirits are orphans and others who have fared badly socially, for they will make the greatest effort” (Gunther 1927:289). Attendant themes of transformation abound in the stories of the region and must have provided a

degree of supernatural sanction to an individual's efforts to express an alternative gender (cf. Bierwert 1999:72-85). Overall, there existed a belief system that would have made it difficult to marginalize a person of alternative gender if they acquired the spirit power necessary to be an effective adult.

It is difficult to account for the apparent yet nebulous connection between twins and hermaphrodites. The most explicit identification between the two is found among the Skagit, where failure on a pregnant woman's part to follow certain prohibitions could result in her child being a hermaphrodite, foolish, or in the birth of twins (Snyder 1952-54, Journal II, Box 109:51). Collins, who also worked with the Skagit, was informed that the birth of twins indicated supernatural disapproval and that the father's spirit helpers abandoned him (1974:217). The Klallam regarded twins as animal-like, but if the parents followed the necessary restrictions they could also acquire supernatural powers (Gunther 1927:237). The Twana had similar beliefs, and like the Klallam, required the withdrawal of the parents and children to protect the community from the magical danger the children posed (Elmendorf 1960:420-422).

In contrast, the Lummi considered the birth of twins especially auspicious. They were thought to increase the wealth of the people through their special powers and to influence the elements, a trait commonly attributed to twins. The mother could heal the sick and both parents would have their wishes granted (Stern 1934:14-15). The Klahuse said they often became "big men" (Barnett 1935, 1-3:74) while Duff was told that "Twins themselves are powerful" (Duff 1950, #5:40). Significantly this observation immediately preceded the story about *Six* Tom. The subject of twins also surfaced when one person I spoke to asked her Elders about the men who dressed and acted like women. Her

grandmother told her that twins were also very special people with spiritual powers. Finally, the *Stó:lō* around Chilliwack have an origin story in which twins figure. A woman gives birth to a boy and then a girl, a month apart. The birth of the daughter is accompanied by fearsome lightening and thunder. The male twin becomes the leader of the people and his descendants still occupy the area. The sister never marries.

It would be easier to propose a meaningful association if the twins were always specified as being male and female. In that case one might apply Crisca Bierwert's (1988:370) assertion, based on her analysis of male and female in *Stó:lō* culture, that the spirit of each individual contains both the male and the female in a "balanced dynamic." Given such a view it is possible to imagine that hermaphrodites and alternatively gendered people might be seen as inherently powerful because of their ability to manifest the traits of woman and of man and mediate between realms. Male and female twins would have shared this nature. But this does not explain why twins of the same sex would also be considered powerful and dangerous. The answer to this question may lie in their rarity. Further, the animal-like quality of twins, which is a reoccurring theme, would have given them the quality of mediation between human and non-human worlds. The ability to mediate, special powers, and rarity may tie conceptually bind twins, hermaphrodites and alternative genders.

In summary, the ethnographic data shows that cross dressing and cross-gendered behaviour were open to both males and females, although recorded more often for males, and seemingly widespread. There is evidence for the *Stó:lō*, the Squamish, the Nooksack, the Skagit, the Puyallup-Nisqually, the Cowichan. Lacking greater detail in the ethnographic record, the specific character of these manifestations of alternative genders

remains elusive. What is described as crossing gender boundaries in dress and demeanor may be the expression of genders beyond Man and Woman, or it may be gender crossing whereby a female becomes not so much a member of an alternative gender but a Man. Better understanding can be reached by examining some of the patterns that would have framed cultural responses to individual action in regard to gender.

PARADOX AND PATTERN

To situate the foregoing discussion more firmly within Coast Salish epistemology, as slippery a concept as that is, reference must be made to the localized ethnographic theories that propose certain cultural patterns. Of these, perhaps the most significant—because it lies at the heart of understanding Coast Salish culture, past and present—is its dynamic, pliant and contradictory nature. As stated earlier, Crisca Bierwert has said with brilliant clarity that Coast Salish culture “works without having a master narrative” (1999:5). It is a culture “destabilized” and “decentered,” in which the “‘text of culture’ is episodic, open to accretion of meaning” (Bierwert 1999:5-6). In virtually every area of Coast Salish life, a wide range of performances found social acceptance (Amoss 1978:33). That there is “there is very little intersubjective agreement in the Coast Salish world” is a truth rapidly affirmed in the study of alternative genders (Miller 1998 personal communication). Snyder thought it natural for the Skagits to be unperturbed by contradictions in their folklore: “Because society is loaded with conflicts and composed of people with ambivalences about it [society], why should there not be contradictions?” (1964:60). From this position the apparent inconsistencies found in the ethnographic data around alternative genders becomes, not a problem plaguing the anthropologist, but rather an insistent push towards a more open and fluid perspective. The resistance of this field to

easy categorization, and the conflicts evident even within the attitudes of a single group, suggests that the same factors governed the treatment of people of alternative genders, as were responsible for the paradoxical position of women in Skagit society.

The paradox which Snyder demonstrates existed around the status of women in Skagit society is closely tied to the issue of gender flexibility (1964:255). Littlefield illustrates that in the period from initial contact to settlement the gendered division of labour was loose among the *Sne-Nay-Muxw*, a Coast Salish group (1995:49-55). The same assertion was made by Elmendorf for the Twana (1960:396). In her discussion of the paradox surrounding women in Skagit culture, Snyder found that women had choice which was denied to men. They could be passive and validate mere lesser supernaturals without blame, or they could legitimately strive for the most powerful (Snyder 1964:285). Miller (1994) characterized Skagit women's gender roles as responsive to changing situations, circumstantial and negotiable, open to both long-term change and rapid variation due to individual innovation (Miller 1994). Although the specific historic circumstances of each group impact on the degree to which this flexibility has been realized, this analysis holds true for all the Coast Salish. For this same group, Miller, in his analysis of gender roles, made the observation that "the male gender role has been markedly inflexible over time" (1989:203). Long-term flexibility does exist, but individual changes to men's gender roles meets with resistance (Miller 1994).

However, Coast Salish ideals of the attributes of men and women are not in easy accord with the imposed Western gender system. As will be described in the following discussion of the paradoxical nature of women's status among the Skagit, there were cultural principles which permitted some women to go beyond the usual roles assigned to

them on the basis of their biological sex, without necessarily defying feminine ideals. Working with the contemporary *Stó:lō* Bierwert has written, “Women are expected to be—and expect themselves to be—strong, powerful people” (1988:357). Further, nurturing, deference, the valuing of influence over dominance, attitudes “that are more universally women’s are highly valued in *Stó:lō* culture” (Bierwert 1988:338). Men play a large role in the care of their children and are particularly fond and affectionate with the smallest (Collins 1974b:75; Bierwert 1988:308,313). A woman Elder told me that in the past if a man wished to pursue those occupations associated with women that was acceptable, “Men did women’s work,” and she went on to tell me about a man who was a spinner and weaver. Warriors, because of their association with unbridled violence, were feared and in some groups had to purify themselves upon return (Barnett 1935, 1-1:69, 1-3:104). In contrast, the ideal high-class man was quiet and peaceable as explained to Duff: “They made him big and he made himself small, humble” (1950, #5:13).

Women, such as Snyder depicts, would have been “gender radicals,” to use Ortner’s (1996:184) term. Those who push the confining envelope of their gender role without tearing it, because the effect is a shift in the boundaries between gender roles, rather than a new gender. Some men with more “feminine” natures, in Western terms, may have found satisfying outlets within the relatively broad range of attributes and behaviours that were permitted by their gender role. The resistance of certain men to marriage and sexual relations with women may be indicative of one such strategy (Duff 1950, #7:102; Smith 1940:171). At the same time, equivalent behaviour to that which made women “gender radicals” would probably have activated a status of alternative gender for male-bodied individuals.

The manner in which gender flexibility played out and the concurrent factors which constrained women's choice are delineated in Snyder's analysis of paradox. Snyder found that the paradox of women's status among the Skagit was solidly grounded in daily life: "the paradox was real, not merely apparent" (1964:255). She goes on to say "That is, the social system permitted women to achieve almost unlimited status and authority. But natives' generalizations about women's status as insignificant, the payment of a bride-price—which was unequivocally regarded as a purchase, and other explicit features of culture were in conflict with the functioning of society"²³ (Snyder 1964:255). One feature was the lack of differentiation in the treatment of children until the age of five or six, as Skagit childhood was considered neuter or sexless (1964:203-204). The Twana went further, treating boys and girls similarly until they were between eight to twelve years-of-age (Elmendorf 1960:428). Snyder contends that training into appropriate gender roles came too late to be effective and aggravated ambiguity between Woman and Man (1964:291). Indeed, she maintains that "the only idea that did separate the sexes was that of mature sexuality" (Snyder 1964:204).

An associated, and more significant, consequence of this underlying theme of equivalency between women and men is manifest in the guardian spirit complex. The Puyallup-Nisqually thought adult life inconceivable without power (Smith 1940:56). Collins drew the conclusion that the Skagit held the acquisition of spirit power to be of equal importance for girls and boys (1974a:176). Throughout the Coast Salish world both males and females trained for spirit power (Collins 1974a:223; Snyder 1964:257-259; Elmendorf 1960: 397,428; Duff 1950, #2:81; Smith 1940:189; Barnett 1935, 1-4:34,80, 1-6:109, 170; Haeberlin and Gunther 1930:68; Gunther 1927:289). Several groups

subjected their male and female children to the same rigorous training for spirit powers, but kept girls closer to home so that they seldom went on spirit quests and therefore normally acquired only the lesser spirit powers (Smith 1940:189, 193; Barnett 1935, 1-4:80, 1-6:109,170). Skagit girls were admonished to pursue their spirit training in the same exacting manner as their brothers, although not subject to the same coercion (Snyder 1964:258). Among other groups it would appear the expectations for girls and boys differed little in this regard (Collins 1974:176; Elmendorf 1960:397; Haeberlin and Gunther 1930:68). In her research among the Klallam, Gunther was told that girls were sent out to find guardian spirits before puberty and that “if they can stand the physical privations, they can get any spirit a man might obtain” (1927:289). A *Stó:lō* man told Duff that training started as soon as a child could walk: “Grandfather or uncle takes a hand. If you don’t do as you were told, you wouldn’t get fed. Boys and even more so, girls” (1950, #2:81).

Haeberlin and Gunther were assured that women attracted only the less powerful spirits, but their data for the Snuqualmi, Snohomish, and other Puget Sound groups contests this view, as four powerful spirits are mentioned which women were known to have had—including *sqaip* a powerful war spirit (1930:67, 70-71). Among the Skagit, where girls were not forced into the same harsh spirit training as their brothers, they could still attain any spirit power if they chose to apply themselves (Snyder 1964:254-255). The belief that the same spirit powers were available for girls as for boys, or at least powers equally as strong, appears widespread (Elmendorf 1993:186-188, 192-198, 250; Collins 1969:336; Smith 1940:72; Barnett 1935, 1-3:128-129, 1-6:169; Gunther 1927:295). Guardian spirit powers conferred supernatural sanction on occupations and behaviour. In

practical terms, the equivalence of women's and men's guardian-spirits acted against the gendered division of labour and enabled women to pursue occupations normally considered the province of men (Elmendorf 1960:396). Snyder remarks "women might acquire spirit-powers that abetted their proficiency and gave them skills greater and different from those associated with femininity and its status" (1964:282). The Skagits she worked with recalled women who were band headwomen, hunters, net fishers, the professional makers of shovel-nosed canoes (Snyder 1964:255, 282-285). A Klallam woman who receives spirit power for war "becomes brave and accompanies war parties" (Gunther 1927:295). Two Halmalco sisters obtained very strong doctor power; a Klahouse woman submerged herself in a lake and found wealth power (Barnett 1935, 1-3:128-129, 1-6:169). More recently, both Pamela Amoss (1978) and Michael Kew (1970) emphasize the relatively equal participation of women in ceremonial life. Today, among the *Stó:lo* "the exclusion of women from any position [is] a problematic practice," although some constraints do apply and women are, for example, rarely *public* speakers (Bierwert 1999:188).

But the status of women could hardly be considered paradoxical if there were not also cultural attitudes and practices that imposed constraints on women's lives. In Snyder's words, "On the one hand, women were regarded and treated as property ... On the other hand, all women were looked upon as individuals who inherit family status equally with their male siblings" (1964:254). Girl children and boy children, alike, offered opportunities to increase a family's wealth and status through marital alliances, and important names tended to be given to older children regardless of their sex (1964:256-257). Yet, compared to little boys, little girls were ignored and traditional stories

contained dire warnings against girls who competed too successfully with boys, and acquired prestigious guardian spirits²⁴ (1964:291,287). Before marriage, the virginal and modest demeanor demanded of young women made it difficult for them to have influence (1964:275). Married women were answerable to their husbands and there were “deeply-rooted Skagit notions about male dominance” (1964:277). Some women did attain powerful supernaturals, but the sexuality of adult women repelled spirit powers, and further, was cause for subjecting women to the constant prying and control of their affinal relations (1964:280). The wife of a headman might assume his authority upon his death, but at any time she would be in the incongruous position of controlling and being controlled (1964:280). Snyder’s analysis led her to the conclusion that not only “a bewilderingly ambiguous situation existed, but more significantly, that feelings about women’s roles were nearly explosive” (1964:256).

I would argue that a similar paradox characterized the status of alternative genders in Coast Salish culture. The contradictions requisite of paradox are evident. The Skagit opposed hostility toward male-bodied alternative genders with approval for the feminization of some boys. A similar situation occurs among the *Stó:lō*—the malevolence of the stories surrounding *T’ámiya* Mountain contrast with the casual acceptance of *Si* Tom. Like women, alternatively gendered people would have maneuvered in the space between constraint and opportunity. Gender concepts could be manipulated by individuals to create personal choice in gender construction, but not freely. Snyder’s analysis suggests the negotiation of social actors seeking agency could proceed along a number of dimensions, using a number of strategies. Still other cultural patterns and principles, relevant to this question, remain to be discussed. These are beliefs and practices which

continue to have a pervasive influence, which are an integral part of the fabric of Coast Salish life. As the very matrix in which Coast Salish life is lived, they influence to some degree the lives of all within this world, cross-cutting issues of gender and sex.

Amoss has said that there are three pervasive themes which determine social interaction among the Nooksack: “personal autonomy, kin solidarity and differential status” (1978:41). It has been posited that apart from slaves, who don’t even enter into the analysis, there were two social classes among the Coast Salish, separated by a relatively impermeable boundary (Suttles 1987:6-7). The lower class was the smaller of the two. Today, as in the past, these people are regarded as those who have “lost their history” by the *Stó:lō* (Carlson 1996:189-190). Membership in the upper class was based on good birth, spirit power, the wealth which spirit power engenders, the ownership of incorporeal property such as hereditary names, and proper behaviour—the secret of which is known only to those with “advice” (Suttles 1987:8). “Advice” describes the stock of private family knowledge and family history possessed by every high-class family and the moral, spiritual, and social training lavished on the children of such *Si:ya:m* (Suttles 1987:8). Lower-class people lacked “advice” and were used as poignant examples of the consequences of improper behaviour (Suttles 1987:9). There was, and is in my experience, a cultural emphasis on status and prestige (Suttles 1987; Amoss 1978; Kew 1970). The status of Skagit women, and the status they accrued through their husbands, had a great deal to do with their ability to assert themselves (Snyder 1964:275). That this should also be the case for individuals of alternative gender, as Saylesh’s case indicates, is not surprising.

Extended families are at the heart of Coast Salish social life (Miller 1997:107). All members of a family will nominally share the same class, but not the same rank (Snyder 1964:174). A single family at its zenith may have upwards of eighty members and those members closest to the family head will have greater privilege and access to resources, while those at the periphery will be disadvantaged and marginalized (Miller and Pylypa 1995:18). Therefore an extended family may include powerful, wealthy members as well as those who are poor and lacking in influence. In addition, families practice deliberate truncation. Amoss has observed that not all potential ties are activated and that membership may be validated or invalidated according to need (1978:35). On the other hand, bonds of blood are incontestably strong. Bierwert contends that there is a "cultural attitude which accepts what comes in life, placing the love of close relatives above other judgment" (1988:307). While I was frequently told that "we look after our own" and that attitudes of acceptance²⁵ characterize the current treatment of people of alternative genders and sexualities, there are also undeniably individuals whose connection to their families has been severed. However, it is unlikely that the door is permanently closed. Not only is considerable pressure exerted to prevent disputes from arising in the first place, there is a prevalent ideology of connection, disconnection, and reconnection which encourages the repairing of relations (Collins 1974a:120; Kew and Miller n.d.:23; Bierwert 1988:320).

The traditional spiritual beliefs and practices already alluded to ensure individuals a considerable degree of personal autonomy and privacy, although a reluctance to intervene in the decisions and actions of others is shared by those not engaged in spirit dancing (Bierwert 1999:188). Longhouse practice revolves around personal connections with

supernaturals. A person's relationship with their spirit power is unique, private, and inviolable (Amoss 1977:1935). The exact nature of a person's guardian spirits and the associated powers is kept secret, despite public validation, and people always fear that some may conceal their power altogether (Amoss 1977:134-136). Power is potentially dangerous and the element of uncertainty promotes caution in interpersonal relations (Amoss 1977:136). The unknown quality of the spirit power possessed by the individual, reduces interference from even the closest relatives, and provides a socially acceptable means to refuse unwelcome requests, since one's prime obligation is always to one's spirit helper (Amoss 1977:137). First analysed by Amoss, this principle has come to be known as the non-interference ethic (1978:105). While this suggests a means by which people of alternative genders—and more recently people of alternative sexualities—might evade family control, kin support is essential to the fulfillment of the human-supernatural relationship in the public forum of the winter dances (1977:139).

At this point it is possible to reflect upon the paradox that attended the status of the alternatively gendered in much of the Coast Salish world. Some such people were reviled, others appear to have been honoured and were believed to have special powers, outcomes that are at odds with each other, but in accordance with the absence of a “master narrative” in Coast Salish culture. The cultural acceptance of a wide range of social performances enabled breadth of expression in the arena of gender, although this was considerably broader for Women than Men. Perhaps it was the narrower definition of Man that favoured the adoption of an alternative gender—such as the *xwtobš^vi' b'* of the Skagit—by successful males. Permanent institutionalized alternative genders seem unlikely, given the informal cultural dynamics of the Coast Salish. Thus, such a status,

when activated, was probably as much the creation of the person making the claim, as the product of any norms. It is not necessary to assume that the recognition of alternative genders cannot exist along side an equal recognition of cross-gendered individuals. Again, because of the greater gender flexibility enjoyed by Women, it may be that only females who wanted to be accepted as Men in every respect stretched the boundary of Woman so far as to be considered something else. The description of *SíÉ* Tom suggests that he may have been regarded as a social male, rather than as alternatively gendered. An overwhelming belief in the possibility of transformation, well attested in the traditional stories of the region, would have abetted such changes in gender. In terms of sexual behaviour, the story of two wives indicates that sexual difference, at least, might have been accommodated with minor fuss and it is highly improbable that same-sex sexual relations would have resulted in a transformation of gender.

In the past, high birth would have mitigated negative consequences for alternatively gendered individuals. Not only would a high-class family be in a better position to protect its own, but alternatively gendered children would have benefited from the same "advice" and training and have acquired, like their siblings, supernatural helpers. The special powers such people were believed to possess would have been highly valued by their families. For example, members of one Longhouse in *Stó:lō* territory today, act on the belief that a person of alternative gender who combines the attributes of Man and Woman also becomes an intermediary between human and non-human realms. This may be the explanation behind the assertion that, although marriage ties were prized, a considerable number of especially gifted Puyallup-Nisqually individuals did not marry, remaining with their natal families (Smith 1940:171). Further, the suspicion that an

alternatively gendered individual had unusually strong powers would have provided additional protection because of the fear that condition would have engendered.

Yet, birth into a high-class family would not have guaranteed protection.

Alternatively gendered children from such families may have been the targets of rival family's Indian doctors because of their potential to grow into spiritually powerful individuals. Snyder mentions that the Skagit thought shamans would kill the children of other families if they perceived them to be threats (1964:402). And, there is little reason to assume that all families would have responded in the same manner to such people in the past, anymore than they do now. Kin solidarity could be eroded if a member was considered defective, since such an individual detracted from the status of the family and carried the taint of supernatural disapproval. The validation, though not necessarily the acquisition, of spirit powers normally required family support, which may have been withheld. Mutable family membership could work both ways. Unwelcome kin might be denied recognition, and those uncomfortable with their position or treatment could activate kinship ties elsewhere. Those who were shut off from the protection of powerful kin would have been vulnerable and I was told that in the past some alternatively gendered people were banished or treated as outcasts.

Alternatively gendered persons born into the "worthless" lower-class families would have been most vulnerable. If the children of rival high-status families were sometimes killed despite the danger of retaliation, how much safer it would have been to remove these relatively unprotected future threats. Although there is little direct evidence for the Coast Salish that alternative gender was recognized in quite young children, the Skagit did raise some boys to an alternative gender role, and both Saylesh and a number of

his relatives told me that they had understood his difference when he was very young—certainly in many other cultures children were raised as alternative genders (cf. endnote 7). As initial spirit acquisition usually occurred around adolescence, this recognition would have preceded the acquisition of spirit powers and the danger they pose to others. Those born to these families would have had difficulty ascending to an honoured role, but if they survived childhood they might well be believed to attract unusually powerful spiritual helpers—as the oral traditions and stories suggest—and then they would be difficult and dangerous to thwart. Shamans, also spiritually dangerous people, were known to enter high-status families by forcing marriage upon them (Snyder 1964:137; Smith 1940:168). The seriousness of spiritual threats and the maneuvering room they provided cannot be overemphasized. Finally, as mentioned above, some alternatively gendered people were able to “maximize” their economic potential by pursuing the occupations of Men and Women and exercising their role as intermediaries (Callender and Kochems 1983:448). Female canoe builders and male blanket makers were both known, and the wealth obtained through such specialized production of prestige items, if judiciously applied, could pave the way to a permanent change in status.

The paradox surrounding the status of those of alternative genders in Coast Salish society, like that revealed for women, rests on conflicting attitudes. On the one hand, such people were depicted as inferior, unclean and disposable—as seen in the stories of *T'ámiya* Mountain and the Skagit data. On the other hand, oral traditions speak of the alternatively gendered as having special powers, even being honoured. To repeat Snyder's phrase “a bewilderingly ambiguous situation existed” (1964:256). Given an epistemology in which transformation was the norm, and in which the disadvantaged could become the

powerful overnight by revealing the power they had hidden, some alternatively gendered individuals could have indeed maximized their potential and become important people. Individuals and families operated in the space generated by this paradox, playing the “serious games” to which Ortner alludes (1996:12-13). Deeply rooted cultural patterns created stress points which were, and are, manipulated in individual and collective strategies.

THE CONTESTED PAST

That’s who I am, I’m a two-spirited person... That’s who I have right inside of me... One of those old ancestors... traditionally, in the old days, I was a gift...
Saylesh, interview May 8, 1998

When you say *t’amiya* we know what that means and we know how, you know the stories. That this was a special place for these people. Cause they felt they shouldn’t be mingling with others...
Elder, interview July 7, 1998

But for the men that dressed like women she [my grandma] said they were viewed as being special, not negatively or treated badly ...some of them had special powers.
Gwen Point, interview June 3, 1998

A long time ago there used to be men who lived as women. They wanted to be women. They would stay home with the women... They liked to dress up like women. They liked to be women. They would use the voice of a woman.
Sliammon Elder, quoted in interview July 25, 1998

Today, when the question of alternative genders and sexualities is raised among the *Stó:lō*, a situation as fraught with contradictions, as that evidenced in the past, is apparent. The patterns noted above persist, but two more contemporary issues stand out: the overriding importance of “tradition” in acceptance of claims to be an alternatively gendered, and the deeply contested versions of the past that are being invoked around this question. In the political realities of the 1990’s, tradition is powerful currency and the

external presentation of *Stó:lō* cultural is of necessity phrased in the language of a unique and traditional identity—a fact which has given tradition internal saliency as well. And, while some *Stó:lō* recognize that it is difficult to delineate traditional practice with any exclusivity, opinions can be quite heated concerning the inclusion of elements of pan-Indian practice within *Stó:lō* culture and just what constitutes *Stó:lō* traditions. For alternative genders this debate focuses on whether such are an imported concept or truly *Stó:lō*. And, if this is a *Stó:lō* concept, what were past attitudes and what should future attitudes be?

Introduced at the very beginning of this paper, Saylesh is well positioned to be a major player in this contest. The family to which he belongs is large, powerful, well-to-do, culturally and politically active, and has recognized high status—Saylesh has a “good” name. They maintain a longhouse for spirit dancing and own rights to the *sxwey'xwey* a valued inherited privilege. At the same time they are strong advocates of the powwow, a pan-Indian practice. Saylesh, himself, holds a BA in education and is extremely articulate, a cherished skill in the Coast Salish world. Evan Adams of the Sliammon reserve, who is openly gay, also comes from a high status family, is a successful actor and is pursuing a medical degree. Both are well regarded by many in their communities.

In sharp contrast, are those of alternative gender and sexualities that I only heard about through the endemic gossip of small community life. Most of these people were mentioned as signs of “low” family status or are at the margins of powerful families. As well, Saylesh told me about encountering other *Stó:lō* men in the gay bars of Vancouver who have suppressed their *Stó:lō* identity, and who have either been cut off from their families or have themselves severed all ties. Despite a tendency towards reconnection,

these men seem to have fallen, if only for the time being, outside the *Stó:lō* moral universe.

A different light is shed on the interplay between status and alternative genders and sexualities in a story I was told by a Sliammon man. A teenage boy from a low status family was with a high status man and his younger son when they visited traditional brothers living on a remote island. The men asked that the low-status boy be left with them to cook and act as their woman sexually. The other boy's father refused. It was implied that a boy of high status would never have been the target of such a request. It is still true that for the *Stó:lō* your kin are to large extent who you choose them to be. Equally, who your family is matters very much.

The importance of an individual's relationship with spiritual entities and the multiple layers of protection that this relationship affords remains very powerful. Saylesh spent much of his childhood off reserve, near Terrace, where he was exposed to the homophobic and heterosexist attitudes that prevail in much of the dominant culture. He remembers that "I was always aware that I was different," and his mother punished him for playing with Barbies and wearing dresses, fearing the consequences should others find out. Although her intention was to shelter, Saylesh says "That was something I learned really young, shame. And that's something no kid should learn." As a teenager he moved with his mother to her family's reserve near Chilliwack. But the warmth and support of his new family was not enough to shelter him from abuse because of his obvious girlishness, both in the *Stó:lō* world and outside. At that time, he recalls, all he knew about being gay was that it "was the ultimate wrong ... that they were perverted and to be killed." This changed when Saylesh joined the Longhouse as a spirit dancer with his family's full backing and encouragement.

As he describes it, this was the first time in his life that he had pride and felt a sense of belonging: “For once in my life I felt a sense of respect. And it was for my culture which was a part of me and therefore it was respect for myself... I went full force into it ... I became part of it, the winter ceremonies. That gave me respect from people I never, ever, had respect from.” Saylesh observed that his being a spirit dancer “was the one thing that I guess saved me from being emotionally gay-bashed. Because a lot of other people, normally if you weren’t a dancer or something, then you were an easy target to beat up...” The unique role Saylesh occupies within his family’s Longhouse practice and the special gifts attributed to him afforded him protection. Respect for an individual’s choices in life, the high status of Saylesh’s family and his own remarkable eloquence as a speaker, place him in a prime position to assert his claims to a *Stó:lō* alternative gender and his vision of a future in which the skills of people like himself won’t be lost to their communities.

Participation in traditional *Stó:lō* spiritual and cultural life gave Saylesh an anchor, fulfillment, a sense of belonging but it was through a UBC course in which the concept of two-spiritness was raised, that he came to adopt a two-spirit identity. He realized: “That’s who I am, I’m a two-spirited person. I’m not a transgendered person. I’m not a queen. I’m not this woman trapped in a man’s body.” From that time on, he has nurtured that positive image of a past when two-spirit people were highly regarded, powerful, special and gifted. Saylesh relates that as he read about these traditional alternatively gendered people he came to understand that he has one of those old two-spirit ancestors inside of him, and that this was the source of the special gifts which he is recognized to possess by his family.

In a second interview, Saylesh states to the community that he is taking the opportunity of my research to address them directly, to break the pervasive silence on this question which stems from the non-interference ethic, but which also prevents access to support and information. In this interview, the nuanced understanding Saylesh has of the ways in which this issue falls within the arena of dispute around what constitutes legitimate *Stó:lō* tradition is revealed. Here he does not assert that there was a specific *Stó:lō* tradition that contemporary *Stó:lō* of alternative genders can resurrect, since there was then little evidence to support such a stance. Instead, the tactic Saylesh applied highlights those values which are embraced as received tradition from the past, particularly non-interference and acceptance, while he argues that “it was probably something that was just normal...” Nevertheless, the people of his own longhouse, and probably others in the community since Saylesh is the subject of much gossip, understand that Saylesh plays a unique spiritual mediating role which derives from his alternative gender status. In this manner, his claims to a *Stó:lō* two-spirit identity are set within practices which are understood to be traditionally *Stó:lō*, while making no claim to a specific preexisting tradition.

As already mentioned, there is pronounced disagreement in the *Stó:lō* community as to the status of alternatively gendered people in the past. This division loosely follows the rift formed in the struggle between those who maintain the incorporation of pan-Indian practices engenders cohesion, and those who believe that such practices are an impediment to the resurrection of traditional *Stó:lō* ways. Again, the relationship between private practice and public avowal is frequently paradoxical. Individuals who deny that there were any people “like that” in the past and who regard homosexuality as a white

man's disease, will be accepting and protective of family members of alternative gender. What is significant for individuals like Saylesh is the way in which these divergent claims about the past reflect opposed versions of a *Stó:lō* future.

One woman Elder that I interviewed told me that: "They allowed them to live around here. But they know what the person is. And they protected them. Protect them, just like retardation". An Elder outside the interview context that "We never had that here. Only after white people came. Then it started coming out." Yet another Elder, began by telling me that she had called Elders across the province who are very upset by the term two-spirit, that being "that way" is something that they cannot agree with. She objected strongly to the term because it is "a fancy new term" that might encourage our people "in that," because "something like this is totally against our ways," and because "two-spirited is certainly against the bible." She told me that *T'ámiya* mountain was a "special place" that these people were sent to prevent them from being with others, and later, that such people will corrupt the young. When she was small, Elders only spoke of "homos" to ensure none of their children turned out "that way". Mostly, it was a matter for secrecy because if the concept was unknown, then no child would be able to recognize themselves as having this difference. She also made the point that as long as "they don't go broadcasting it in any way" the community will take care of them. An Elder who has a child who is "that way" sent the following verbal message to me, "We look after our own, just tell them to leave it alone".

There exists a related question around which silence is invoked. Over the past few decades the spirit dancing complex has become increasingly private, although community opinion varies widely as to what is appropriate. Some want a total ban on discussion of

practices with non-dancers and particularly non-Natives, while others feel generalized information can and should be shared—still others believe that non-Natives committed to working with the people gain crucial understanding of spiritual matters by observing winter dancing. As secrecy is declared in the powerful name of tradition, it is impossible for any outsider to probe the collective memory around the place of people of alternative genders in past spiritual practice. Nor, can present practice be discussed. Here, too, the term two-spirit is objectionable, because it is seen as referencing the relationship between an individual and their spirit helper. As one person said when she heard the term “It’s nobody’s business how many spirits I have”.

A very different perspective on the position of alternatively gendered people in the past is offered by Dorris Peters and others who share her support of pan-Indian practice, while remaining firm advocates of *Stó:lō* traditions. Spared early incarceration in a residential school she grew up surrounded by Elders to whom she listened with great attention. She remembers that they used to say that two-spirit people were honoured “because of the two spirits that they had. And they weren’t punished, but that they were respected...” She also affirms that they were “put in a different place,” but not to protect the community from a potential evil, but rather from reverence for the special nature of these individuals. Like Saylesh, she alludes to those values which are perceived as traditionally *Stó:lō* to add weight to her narrative. Dorris Peters asserts that two-spirited people have always been among the *Stó:lō* people, and that they were an accepted part of traditional life and spirituality. She is involved in HIV/AIDS education and she points out that when she appeared on a talk show about AIDS and Native health issues that her fellow Elders told her “That’s good, you said the right thing...” Having experienced raising

a gay foster son without community counseling or support, she hopes that the *Stó:lo* will emulate the tolerance of the past in the future.

Gwen Point told me that she first became aware of the concept of alternative genders while watching *Little Big Man* with her blind grandmother, to whom she would describe the action. She asked her grandmother about the very feminine male character who wore women's clothing. Her grandmother told her "Oh yeah, there was people like that, we had people like that and they were viewed as special... they had special powers". She later asked a male Elder about this question and received a similar response. To her it is obvious that such people did exist and she wants to understand better how they fit into *Stó:lō* culture, "how they were special and how they were utilized.

Gwen Point explains that in *Stó:lō* tradition "we understand that everybody is male and female." The idea that the two sexes have opposed and distinct qualities is, she says, an imposition from the outside world. And she posed a startling question: How do we know that being two-spirited, being able to "swing back and forth while we stay on one side ... how do we know that's not normal?" She has reservations about the two-spirit term simply because she thinks it is confusing in a culture where an individual can have several attendant spirits. Yet, she thinks this term is appropriate if an individual comes back as the opposite sex, "then to me [the term] two-spirited works." Like Dorris Peters and Saylesh she draws on important values, such as respect, tolerance and non-interference, in stating her case for the acceptance of alternatively gendered people. She also wants the past she has invoked to serve as a model for the future. For her homophobia is a white disease spreading fear, driving people from their communities, and leading to suicide.

The willingness of the *Stó:lō* Nation to allow me to conduct this research shows respect for the diversity of the community and a concern for some of the pragmatic issues posed by the presence of those of alternative genders and sexualities. Plans are in place to address the needs of gay and lesbian individuals and families through counseling. While some *Stó:lō* reject homophobia and heterosexism as unwanted imports, public education programs are clearly indicated. Policy makers and service providers may soon face such questions as the recognition of same-sex couples in housing, health care, child custody and adoption, and job security regardless of sexual preference. It is vital that the silence surrounding this issue be broken. While non-interference and secrecy aid personal autonomy, they are deadly in the face of HIV/AIDS. The fact of clandestine same-sex sexual behaviour must become a health issue and the attitudes which promote secrecy in the first place need examination. What matters in this context, where no absolute tradition was ever paramount, is not even so much how people talk about the past, but how they talk about tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

Gender, as a social construct, is open to a vast range of permutations. For the Coast Salish a multiple gender system—which included a range of genders if we listen to what Barnett (1935, Folder 1-4:118) and Moses (1999) were told—appears evident. Minimally, we know that there are a number of accounts in which males, and sometimes females, are reported to have dressed and behaved like the “opposite sex.” Since there is some indication of special associated roles and exceptional powers, since they were linked with hermaphrodites in conversation and story, and since there are specific linguistic markers, we can assume that the males were conceptualized as something other than

Woman or Man—alternative genders. *Sié* Tom, conversely, may represent something else. I have proposed that females may have had to push much harder to rend the fuzzy boundary of Woman, that most of the unusual women recorded in the data, the warriors, chiefs, canoe makers and carvers were “gender radicals,” not alternatively gendered. *Sié* Tom, as described, fits better with the notion of a female crossing gender to become a Man, than an individual of alternative gender. Possibly females could assume an alternative gender, but there is no direct evidence to either support or reject this idea. However, I doubt cross-gender behaviour and alternative genders are a matter of either/or, but rather varied manifestations along the gender continuum.

By privileging Coast Salish epistemology and cultural context over rigid categorization and Western conceptions a locally meaningful interpretation of alternative genders has emerged, having relevance for the present experience of such people, not just the understanding of the past. The position alternative genders is governed by cultural patterns which retain their saliency today. Personal autonomy, kin solidarity, class and status differentiation and the absence of a “master narrative,” are consistent forces in Coast Salish life. Secrecy and the non-interference ethic which once provided strategic opportunities for those of alternative genders now deny recognition. Both have become excuses for not talking about this issue, restricting both discourse and the dissemination of information. At the same time, the cultural violence of contact, the ensuing shifts in the Coast Salish gender system, and the spread of homophobia and heterosexism have generated additional sources of harm for the alternatively gendered. It must be recalled, too, that the contemporary material is largely *Sto:lō* and that Coast Salish communities faced unique historic circumstances, which have resulted in different circumstances for

those of alternative genders. Yet, it is apparent that people of alternative genders had no more assurance of a recognized place in past Coast Salish culture. No formal roles offered sanction, instead an ad hoc approach marked the response to alternative genders with the outcome resting on the position of the individual and her/his family and their ability to maneuver within social constraints and situational obstacles. It was this potential to transform a relatively stigmatized status into an honoured role that made the position of the alternatively gendered paradoxical.

Much of the previous work in the study of alternative genders has focused on egalitarian societies with institutionalized recognition of alternative genders. In contrast, the Coast Salish world offers a model in which contradiction and ambiguity are the norm, and where status and class have significance. Here, it appears, cross-gender roles and alternative genders may have coexisted under a multiple gender system. We are directed to look beyond the question of two gender or multiple gender systems to how Man and Woman are perceived, to view no gender in isolation. What is crucial is how these how genders are expressed. Are the boundaries between them solid or fragile, are they more permeable in one direction than the other, or is the very concept of boundaries meaningless because gender is viewed as relative? More essential, is a deep consideration of the cultural context, the framework and epistemology in which the struggle to maintain alternative genders occurs. What are the patterns that influence the lives of people of alternative gender? Which features of the culture impose constraint, which can be turned to the advantage of the alternatively gendered in their strategic survival games? Most important, how are these issues being played out today? For the *Stó:lō*, at least, we know

that the insistence of a single alternatively gendered individual is beginning to replace crushing silence with dialogue:

We can't tiptoe around this. We can't pretend like it's not there... I can promise you there's going to be more in the future. And if they're going to be your children and they're going to be your grandchildren, if they're going to be your nieces nephews, if they're going to be your parents... Are you going to hate them? You can't hate them... I'm not starting anything, I'm just the first one to come out and say it. Yep, I'm gay and I'm not ever going to stop being gay. But I'm not ever going to stop being *Stó:lō*.
Saylesh, interview May 31, 1998.

¹ Gender is being defined as, in Scott's (1991:16) terms, "a social category imposed upon a sexed body." Thus, gender is a social construct which refers to the set of behaviours, characteristics, statuses and roles which are considered appropriate to the sexes in any culture.

² Prime examples of cultural groups for which alternative genders have received considerable analysis, and which are frequently cited Native North American examples include: the Mohave (Devereux 1992 (1937); Blackwood 1984; Herdt, 1991), the Navajo (Hill 1935; Thomas 1997; Epple 1997, 1998) the Zuni (Stevenson 1902; Roscoe 1992, 1994; Pilling 1997) and the Lakota (Medicine 1997(1979), 1983; Williams 1986, DeMallie 1983).

³ Those who can be named are Saylesh; Gwen Point, Skowkale reserve; and Dorris Peters, Peters reserve for the *Stó:lō*, Evan Adams of the Sliammon reserve near Powell River and Johnny Moses of the Tulalip.

⁴ A *Halq'eméylem* term used in reference to people of European ancestry, translates as "hungry people."

⁵ The Tafoya Principle of Uncertainty states that "in cross-cultural research one can have context or definition but not both at the same time. The more one attempts to establish a context for a situation or process, the more one will blur a clean, simple definition for a situation or process" (Tafoya 1997:198). This compliments Mahmood and Armstrong's (1992) cognitive perspective which utilizes unbounded categories.

⁶ Some terms not discussed here include: mixed gender (Whitehead 1981), intermediate gender (Callender and Kochems 1983), cross-gender (Blackwood 1984), alternate gender role (Roscoe 1987; Williams 1986), no term has gained overall acceptance.

⁷ The use of the term third gender in the anthropological study of alternative genders can be traced to Jacobs' (1983:459) review of Callender and Kochems' 1983 article "The North American Berdache."

⁸ Roscoe (1992:366-368) refers to "the berdache as a "traditional gay role," stressing the multiple dimensions of the social role, a point of little contention. What is problematic is the claim of undisrupted continuity between the "berdache" past and the gay present. Similar views are presented by Gunn Allen (1992), Roscoe (1992) and Williams (1986) who also posit the overwhelming acceptance of the alternatively gendered in the Native past.

⁹ The possibility of more than two genders is still debated. Schlegel (1990:23) insists that gender systems derive from the existence of two sexes. Thus, she finds that no societies socialize children for "anything but two genders, depending on their sexual identification" (Schlegel 1990:39). Herdt (1994:30,78), Weeks (1989:53-54), Ingraham (1994:214), and Kehoe (1997:265-266) are among those who note that the notion of sexual duality in humans is currently being reassessed in the biological sciences, and they suggest sexual morphological differences may inspire multiple gender systems. A partial list of cultures in which children are raised as alternatively gendered includes the Balkans, Grémaux (1994:224); the Kaska, Honigmann (1954:129-130) (disputed by Goulet 1997); the Tewa, Jacobs (1983:460); the Navajo, Thomas (1997:159-160) (disputed by Epple 1997); the Miamis, Katz (1976:288); the Tlingit, de Laguna (1954:178,183); the Mohave, Devereux (1992:502-503); the Sambia, Herdt (1994:440); the Lakota, Williams (1986:49).

¹⁰ One of the unintended consequences of the romanticization of the "berdache"—by those looking for positive models for themselves, and for lesbian and gay Native North Americans—was the ignoring of the unpleasant contemporary realities the alternatively gendered faced amongst their own people, so at odds with the idealized past. In contrast, Gutiérrez (1992) posits that all "berdache" were coerced into this "demeaning" role, through failure to meet the expectations of manhood or because they were vanquished enemies. Texler (1995), in *Sex and Conquest*, argues that "berdache" were almost universally despised.

¹¹ Unfortunately, Albers (1989:138) conclusions are marred by the assumption of egalitarianism, a common perspective in this field. The failure to account for include the stratified societies of the Northwest Coast in analyses of Native American gender systems is discussed in Miller (1994:58).

¹² Other proponents of the constructionist perspective around the same time include Katz (1976) who was one of the rare scholars outside of anthropology to include material on alternative genders in Native North America, Weeks (1977), Padgug (1979) whose name is also occasionally mentioned in alternative gender studies, Smith-Rosenberg (1975) and Trumbach (1977). In 1973, the symbolic anthropologist Douglas had declared "nothing is more essentially transmitted by a social process of learning than sexual behaviour," rendering sexual behaviour learned and therefore neither instinctive nor "natural" as in "normal" (1973:93). Two years later, Geertz was writing that, not only is the dichotomous gender system

of the West far from universal, but also the belief in only two sexes in the face of human sexual anomalies (1983(1975):80-84).

¹³ D'Emilo (1993) also sees the rise of capitalism and the modern homosexual as concurrent, but he stresses the opportunities provided by urban life away from natal families.

¹⁴ Epstein (1994:196) notes that studies of sexual minorities have too frequently been positioned as studies of 'marginal' experience. In contrast an "'epistemology' of the closet" seeks to analyze how various ways of construing sexual marginality shape the self-understanding of the culture as a whole" (Epstein 1994:196). Fuss (1991) and Namaste (1996) provide similar analyses of the politics of inclusion and exclusion.

¹⁵ Of the Coast Salish groups mentioned in this paper the Sliammon, Halmalco and Klahooshe are North Coast Salish while the Squamish, *Stó:lō*, Cowichan, and Nooksack are Central Coast Salish. These groups live in the region around the Strait of Georgia and along bodies of water that lead into the strait. The Twana, Skagit, Snoqualmie, Snohomish, Tulalip, Klallam and Puyallup-Nisqually are Southern Coast Salish. They occupy lands around the Hood Canal and Puget Sound. All these groups have a strong cultural affinity and shared social and ceremonial networks continue to link groups together despite language differences (cf. The Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7).

¹⁶ Surgical sexual reassignment can help individuals feel unified, but a major source of disjunction is our culture's binary gender system which refuses the equal expression of alternative genders.

¹⁷ Snyder's (1964) application of Western medicalized terminology and theory to her findings tends to obscure local meanings. For example, she uses the term homosexual, but her list of named categories lacks a category for Men who engage in same-sex sexual relations—what we would consider "homosexuals."

¹⁸ I assume the term psychosexual inversion is used to imply a contravention of gender roles and not only same-sex sexual behaviour, therefore the word *sali?i'b* might be similar in meaning to alternative genders.

¹⁹ It has been noted by many researchers working the area of alternative genders that "berdache" were distinguished from "homosexuals" in many Native North American cultures. As their gender was neither Man nor Woman they could have relations with both and were only restricted within their own gender. In the same way if a woman became a social male, her sexual relations with a woman would not be considered improper. Sexual relations were sanctioned across gender boundaries, not within them, although the partners of alternatively gendered people faced ridicule in some cultures (cf. Callender and Kochems 1983:444; Blackwood 1984:35; Devereux 1992:519; Jacobs and Cromwell 1992:55-56, Thomas 1997:163, Jacobs 1997:29). Similarly, today in Latin America and related cultures, relations between an "active" masculine male and a "passive" feminine male are not considered homosexual. And only the receptor who is associated with the female gender is stigmatized (Murray 1995:49-70; Almaguer 1993, Lancaster 1992).

²⁰ There is an oral tradition that Mink, a male, becomes pregnant after eating trout with the birth occurring via an explosion of the stomach wall. Both Coyote and Mink boast of their experiences of motherhood—Coyote treats his feces infant as any mother would. Snyder interprets these myths as deriding anality and people of ambiguous gender identity (Snyder 1964:92-93).

²¹ In wrens the sexes are identical and play similar parenting roles. In this seeming sexual ambiguity at least, this bird seems well chosen to represent an hermaphroditic character.

²² Elmendorf (1960:481) tells us that "Human beings unaided by spirit power were poor, weak, miserably ineffective, their efforts in any direction doomed to failure." The denials and training that accompanied the quest for spirit powers can be seen not merely as purification and a demonstration of worthiness but also as an exaggeration the naturally pitiful state of humans.

²³ Sherpa women face a similar paradox in their society, a "contradiction of simultaneous encouragement and undermining of women's agency" (Ortner 1996:17).

²⁴ Ortner made a similar observation in her analysis of Grimms' fairy tales which operate to unmake agency in girls (1996:9). The parallels between Skagit and Grimms' heroines is striking. The feminine ideal in Skagit stories is good-natured and modest, she is perspicacious and not completely passive, but neither does she take initiative away from male characters (Snyder 1964:312-317,330). A Grimms' heroine may be active in the first part of the tales, but to prove of worthy of marriage to a good man she

must pass through trials “of utter passivity and/or total inactivity, as well as practices of humility and subordination” (Ortner 1996:9).

²⁵ Although kin solidarity would have promoted acceptance of recognized family members, it is arguable whether acceptance in general characterized Coast Salish life in the past. Where cooperation would have been necessary—as in affinal relations—rivalry may have been dampened, but Snyder observed that these very relations were fraught with hostility (1964:390). The current rhetoric of acceptance fits better with pan-Indian egalitarian ideals.

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