CHAPTER 24

HOW WE FIND OURSELVES: IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND TWO-SPIRIT PEOPLE

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Psychological theorists have typically treated sexual and racial identity as discrete and independent developmental pathways. While this simplifying division may make it easier to generate theory, it may also make it less likely that the resulting theory will describe peoples' real-life developmental experiences. In this article, Alex Wilson examines identity development from an Indigenous American perspective, grounded in the understanding that all aspects of identity (including sexuality, race, and gender) are interconnected. Many lesbian, gay, and bisexual Indigenous Americans use the term "two-spirit" to describe themselves. This term is drawn from a traditional worldview that affirms the inseparability of the experience of their sexuality from the experience of their culture and community. How can this self-awareness and revisioning of identity inform developmental theory? The author offers her personal story as a step toward reconstructing and strengthening our understanding of identity.

The interconnectedness of sexual identity and ethnicity contributes to the complex nature of the process of identity development. As educators, we must acknowledge that fact in the supports and services we offer to our students. Although the research on lesbian, gay, and bisexual Indigenous Americans is extensive, these inquiries are typically from an anthropological perspective.[1] Much of this research is based on the rereading and reinterpretation of early field notes, testimony, and biographical sketches, twice removed from Indigenous American experiences, and twice filtered through non-Indigenous eyes (C. McHale, personal communication, March 21, 1996). Anthropologists and historians such as Evelyn Blackwood (1984), Beatrice Medicine (1983), Harriet Whitehead (1981), Walter Williams (1986), and Will Roscoe (1988, 1991) have contributed to a body of work that describes and documents the construction of sexuality and gender in Indigenous American communities. Their work provides a critique of Western assumptions about sexuality and gender, but generally fails to recognize the existence of and to acknowledge the contributions of "two-spirit" Indigenous Americans today.[2] From my perspective as a two-spirit Swampy Cree woman, I will critically assess current theory in identity development through reflection on my life and identity development.[3] This reassessment has implications for developmental theorists, counselors, and educators who engage with two-spirit people.

I have chosen the terms "two-spirit" and "Indigenous American" carefully. Until recently, anthropologists claimed authority to name two-spirit people by labeling them the *berdache* (Blackwood, 1984; Jacobs & Cromwell, 1992; Jacobs & Thomas, 1994; Weston, 1993). *Berdache* described anthropological subjects who did not fit neatly into European American gender and sex role categories, meaning a category of (gendered and sexual) "other." The term was imported to North America by

Europeans who borrowed it from the Arabic language. Its use, to describe an "effeminate" (Blackwood, 1984, p. 27) or "morphological male who does not fill a society's standard man's role, who has a non-masculine character" (Williams, 1986, p. 2), spoke articulately about European assumptions about gender roles and sexuality (Weston, 1993). The metaphoric power of the term grew over time; the role of *berdache* acquired, at least within gay history and storytelling, considerable spiritual power. In Tom Spanbauer's (1991) revisionist story of the American West, his narrator explains:

> Berdache is what the Indian word for it is....
> I don't know if berdache is a Bannock word or a Shoshone word or just Indian. Heard tell it was a French word but I don't know French so I'm not the one to say.
> What's important is that's the word Berdache. "B. E. R. D. A. C. H. E. means holy man who fucks with men." (Spanbauer, 1991, p. 5)

Because of the historical and spiritual connotations that had been vested in the term, some members of Indigenous American communities embraced it as their self-descriptor (Roscoe, 1988). More recently, in recognition of the poor fit of the term *berdache*, we have looked for language that more accurately describes our historic and present-day realities.

The growing acceptance of the term two-spirit as a self-descriptor among lesbian, gay, and bisexual Indigenous American peoples proclaims a sexuality deeply rooted in our own cultures (Brant, 1995; Fife, 1993). Two-spirit identity affirms the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity, including sexuality, gender, culture, community, and spirituality. That is, the sexuality of two-spirit people cannot be considered as separate from the rest of an individual's identity (Jacobs & Thomas, 1994). Two-spirit connects us to our past by offering a link that had previously been severed by government policies and actions.

Pueblo psychologist and educator Terry Tafoya (1990) states that there have been "direct attempts [by] the federal government to regulate, control, and destroy Native American behavior patterns. . . . There are more than 2,000 laws and regulations that only apply to American Indians and Alaskan Natives and not to other American Citizens" (p. 281). The religious freedom of Indigenous peoples in the United States was not legally supported until 1978 (Tafoya, 1990). The

Canadian federal government made a similar effort to separate Indigenous peoples from their cultural traditions (York, 1990). Two-spirit reconstitutes an identity that, although misstated by anthropologists, had been based on the recognition of people with alternative genders and/or sexualities as contributing members of traditional communities. In contemporary European American culture, sexuality is perceived as a discrete aspect of identity, constructed on the basis of sexual object choice (Almaguer, 1993; Whitehead, 1981). This conception stands in sharp contrast to two-spirit identity.

There are over five hundred Nations (tribes) in the United States and Canada. In spite of the vast physical distances between the autochthonous people of North America, few ideological barriers exist between these Nations (Sioui, 1992). Each of our traditional worldviews recognizes the deep interdependency between humans and nature, that our origin is in the soil of the land, and that we are bound to each other in an intimately spiritual way. This shared understanding of the world shapes the life experiences of North America's Indigenous peoples and, in turn, their identity development.

The existence and value of two-spirit people's difference is recognized in most Indigenous American cultures, oral histories, and traditions. In some cultures, two-spirit people were thought to be born "in balance," which may be understood as androgyny, a balance of masculine and feminine qualities, of male and female spirits. In many Indigenous American cultures, two-spirit people had (have) specific spiritual roles and responsibilities within their community. They are often seen as "bridge makers" between male and female, the spiritual and the material, between Indigenous American and non-Indigenous American. The term two-spirit encompasses the wide variety of social meanings that are attributed to sexuality and gender roles across Indigenous American cultures. Many gay historians, anthropologists, and other researchers have struggled with the "epistemological differences in Native American concepts of gender and sexual behaviors" (Tafoya, 1990, p. 287) and veered into dangerous generalizations about the specialness and spiritual power of two-spirit people. Today, academics argue over whether or not two-spirit people had a "special" role or were special people in Native societies. In my community, the act of declaring some people special threatens to separate them from their community

and creates an imbalance. Traditionally, two-spirit people were simply a part of the entire community; as we reclaim our identity with this name, we are returning to our communities.

Since European contact with the Americas, many of these Indigenous American traditions have been misrepresented and misinterpreted. Within an imposed construct based on eighteenth-century European values, difference became deviance (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988; Jacobs & Cromwell, 1992; Tafoya, 1990; Williams, 1986). It is difficult to understand the concept of two-spirit from these perspectives. Within the European American perspective, the male and female genders are the only two acknowledged. Transsexuals who surgically alter their bodies to become physically the "opposite" sex, individuals who choose to dress in clothing thought to be only appropriate for the "opposite" gender, or those who choose not to adhere to either of the dichotomous gender types are seen as abnormal and, therefore, as deviant.

Cartesian definitions of gender, which impose dual roles defining the respective "acceptable behaviors" for women and men, have procreation as their ultimate goal (Jacobs & Cromwell, 1992). These notions of gender categorization have been misapplied to Indigenous Americans. For European explorers, philosophers, and anthropologists, too many Indigenous American people did not fit into the two categories found in Cartesian theories.

The anthropologist Sue-Ellen Jacobs has reconstructed her own notions about gender and sexual identity. In her ethnographic observations of Tewa Pueblo people, she observed a number of gender categories reflecting an individual's "sexuality, sexual identity and sociocultural roles" (Jacobs & Cromwell, 1992, p. 48). This conception of gender reflects a fluid understanding of sexual identity that has persisted for many present-day Indigenous Americans who consider themselves bisexual, rather than strictly lesbian or gay (Tafoya, 1990).

Traditional teachings, however, have also been influenced by events that have altered the construction of sexual identity in contemporary Indigenous American communities. In an attempt to assimilate Indigenous Americans, government policy has been directly involved in the destruction of many aspects of Indigenous American life (Ross, 1992; York, 1990). For almost one hundred years it was illegal to practice traditional religion in both the United States (Delo-ria, 1969) and Canada (Cardinal, 1969; Miller, 1989). Generations of children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in residential schools, where they were punished for speaking their own language, for practicing their own religion, or for any other expressions of their "Indian-ness" (Berkhofer, 1978; Ing, 1991; York, 1990). In spite of these assaults on traditional values, they still shape the lives and communities of Indigenous American people. Today, most leaders in Indigenous communities express a commitment to traditional spirituality and an Indigenous worldview.

Indigenous Ethics

Our worldviews are shaped by our values, our ideologies, theories, and assumptions about the world. They circumscribe our encounters with the world, creating and re-creating our cultures and our epistemologies, pedagogies, psychologies, and experiences. How are Indigenous American worldviews constructed?

The Mohawk psychiatrist Clare Brant, in his work with Iroquois, Ojibway, and Swampy Cree people, has identified five ethics that, he believes, underpin these Indigenous peoples' worldview (1990). These cultural ethics and rules of behavior include: an Ethic of Non-Interference, an Ethic That Anger Not Be Shown, an Ethic Respecting Praise and Gratitude, the Conservation-Withdrawal Tactic, and the Notion That Time Must Be Right. As Brant himself points out, these Ethics cannot be assumed to describe all Indigenous American people. At the same time, these Ethics resonate deeply with me and describe the emotional substance of much of my own experiences in the Cree community. Although Indigenous American cultures have changed since first contact with Europeans, and continue to change, it is important to realize that these traditionally based Ethics exist in some form today and will persist in some form into the future. Brant's Ethics are further developed by Rupert Ross (1992) in his book *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*, which includes an important reminder:

> Until we realize that Native people have a highly developed, formal, but radically different set of cultural imperatives, we are likely to continue misinterpreting their acts, misperceiving the real problems they face, and imposing, through government policies, potentially harmful "remedies." (p. 42)

These Ethics shape our worldview and direct our behavior. The Ethic of Non-Interference refers to the expectation that Indigenous Americans should not interfere in any way with another person. This has shaped culturally distinctive child-rearing practices in Indigenous American communities. Generally, children are allowed to explore the world without the limitations of punishment and praise, or of privileges withheld and rewards promised by members of the community. Children are taught through the patient practice of modeling, by stories, and by example. There are unwritten rules against giving advice or telling someone what to do (Ross, 1992; B. Wilson, personal communication, ongoing).

The Ethic That Anger Not Be Shown is demonstrated by the absence of emphasis on or displays of emotions in speech and other forms of communication by Indigenous American people. Implicit in this ethic is a prohibition against showing grief and sorrow. Ross goes so far as to say that it is not acceptable even to *think* about one's own confusion and turmoil; in this way, one does not "burden" others with one's own personal emotional stress. The Ethic Respecting Praise and Gratitude may appear as a lack of affect to a non-Indigenous observer. Rather than vocally expressing gratitude to someone, a person might simply ask the other to continue their contribution, because voicing appreciation may be taken by an Indigenous American as creating an embarrassing scene. Because the idea of community is inherent in the Indigenous American philosophy and existence, an egalitarian notion of place within a society exists. To call attention to one person is to single them out and to imply that they have done better or are better in some way or at something than others are.

The Conservation-Withdrawal Tactic emphasizes the need to prepare mentally before choosing to act. Thinking things through before trying them or thinking thoughts through before voicing them is seen as a well-calculated preservation of physical and psychic energy. According to Ross (1992), the more unfamiliar the new context, the more pronounced a withdrawal into stillness, silence, and consideration may become. This concern that time should be taken to reflect on the possible outcomes of a particular action and to prepare emotionally and spiritually for a chosen course of action is reflected in the Notion That Time Must Be Right. Attention to the spiritual world gives a person the opportunity to examine her or his state of mind before initiating, or participating in the task at hand (Ross, 1992).

Additionally, an important part of Indigenous American traditional spirituality is paying respect to our ancestors, to those who died tens of thousands of years ago as well as those who have just recently entered the spirit world. The land that we live on today is made up of our ancestors; the food that we eat (for the most part) is grown from the soil that our ancestors went back to when they died; and the animals and plants in our world have also grown out of and been nourished by this soil. We thank the spirits of animals, minerals, and plants, and turn to them for strength and continuity. This gratitude helps to maintain or regain the balance that is necessary to be a healthy and complete person. We understand that the spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual parts of ourselves are equally important and interrelated. When one aspect of a person is unhealthy, the entire person is affected. This too is true for the entire community; when one aspect of the community is missing, the entire community will suffer in some way.

Some Current Models of Sexual Identity and Development

Within the context of these basic principles, identity development can be examined. How do these ethics become incorporated into who we are or whom we identify as? What impact do they have on our responses to experiences? How do they shape our identities? For Indigenous American Nations now in contact with European American culture, racism and homophobia are inevitably present to some degree. Currently, the way some Indigenous Americans deal with homophobia and racism and the way that they construct their sexual and racial identity is framed by an Indigenous American spirituality and worldview.

This traditional Indigenous worldview can inform current theories of sexual and racial identity development for theorists and educators. I will examine three developmental theories, one of which addresses sexual identity, another racial identity, and a third sexual and/or racial identity. Sexual identity formation is typically presented in stage theory models. In her book *Psychotherapy with Lesbian Clients: Theory into*

Practice, psychologist Kristine Falco (1991) presents a review of theory on lesbian identity formation.[1] Finding many similarities in the five models she examines, Falco sketches a generalized model for the sexual identity development of lesbians by combining and summarizing others' models. In the first stage, a person is aware of being different and begins to wonder why. In the second phase, she begins to acknowledge her homosexual feelings and may tell others. Sexual experimentation marks the next stage, as the person explores relationships while seeking a supportive community. She then begins to learn to function in a same-sex relationship, establishing her place in the lesbian subculture while passing as heterosexual when needed. In the final stage, she integrates her private and social identities.

Racial identity development theory examines the psychological implications of membership in a racial group and the resultant ideologies. William Cross's Black Racial Identity Development model is often assumed to represent the racial identity formation experience of people of color in general (Tatum, 1992, 1993). Cross's model representing the racial identity formation experience of people of color in general doesn't hold for Indigenous Americans. In the Preencounter stage, which is described in the model as the initial point, an individual is unaware or denies that race plays any part in the definition of who they are. Thereafter, they move through a predictable series of stages: Encounter, after a sequence of events forces them to realize that racism does affect their life; Immersion/Emmersion, as they respond by immersing themselves in their culture, and reject with anger the values of the dominant culture; Internalization, as they develop security in their identity as a person of color; and Internalization/Commitment, when they have acquired a positive sense of racial identity (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991; Tatum, 1992, 1993).

Susan Barrett (1990) offers a developmental theory that attempts to encompass the experiences of all "others," including those of us who have been "othered" because of racial and sexual identity. This is the five-stage Minority Identity Development Model, which Barrett suggests can be applied to anyone who is not part of the dominant European American male heterosexual culture. In the Conformity stage, a person is ashamed of her membership in a minority culture, and accepts the devaluing judgments of the

dominant culture. In the Dissonance stage, she wants to express her membership in a minority culture, but is still restricted by discomfort with it. She then moves into a Resistance and Immersion stage, as she becomes aware of the positive value of her membership in a minority culture and rejects the dominant culture. Following immersion in her minority culture, she enters an Introspective period, as she realizes that she cannot express herself fully within the constraints of an isolated minority identity. Finally, in the stage Barrett calls Synergetic Articulation and Awareness, she finds self-fulfillment when she integrates her minority identity into all aspects of her life.

Each of the above identity development models was constructed in an attempt to fill some gaps in developmental psychology. They attempt to recognize the diversity of human experience by describing the developmental sequences that occur in response to the experience and context of homophobia or racism. They do not, however, describe the effects of the *simultaneous* experience of homophobia and racism. These models assume an availability of supportive experiences that provide the means for an individual to progress from one stage to the next. Although each of these models is claimed to be nonlinear and nonhierarchic, each posits a final stage that represents a developmental peak of mental health. In this self-actualized stage, a person's sexual identity is no longer problematic and their bicultural adaptation (comfortably being the "other" within the dominant culture) has become a source of empowerment. Therefore, the underlying assumption is that a supportive bicultural experience is available to all "others." We (two-spirits) become self-actualized when we become what we've always been, Empowered by our location in our communities (versus the micro-management of an individuated identity).

Indigenous American Perspectives on Sexual and Racial Identity

Despite the reationship between sexual and racial identity development presented in European American models, for Indigenous American lesbian, gay, or bisexual people, the effect of racism and homophobia cannot be separated from each other or form the rest of their experiences. The emphasis of the Indigenous Ameri-

can worldview on the interconnectedness of all aspects of an individual's life challenges the compartmentalized structure of developmental stage models. As Pueblo psychologist and educator Terry Tafoya states, "[D]etermination of an individual's identity on the basis of sexual behavior makes no conceptual sense to many American Indians" (1989, p. 288). That is, any presentation of sexual and racial identity development as two distinct phenomena and any analysis proceeding from that assumption cannot adequately describe the experiences of Indigenous American people.

Furthermore, Indigenous Americans may respond to homophobia and racism in markedly different ways than people from other cultures. For example, if she respects the Ethic That Anger Not Be Shown, she may appear not to react to the "-isms" that affect her. If she uses the Conservation-Withdrawal Tactic or the Notion That Time Must Be Right in her response, the strength of her resistance might not be recognized. Also, the Ethic of Non-Interference would require her friends and family to respect and trust the choices she makes.

Two-Spirit Identity Formation

Because there is limited research and few case studies available on the developmental experiences of gay and lesbian Indigenous Americans, in the following section I will use my life experiences to illustrate both the impact of racism and homophobia (including sexism) on identity development, and the ill fit between current identity development theory and an Indigenous American reality.[5]

I grew up in northern Canada in a very small, isolated Cree community that could only be reached by boat in the summer or by plane in the winter. After I was born, as was the custom, elders came to visit, bringing gifts and blessing me as the newest member of their community. We returned to my father's home community, a reserve on the edge of a pulp mill town, before I was five. Some of my first memories of that town are of racism, although at the time I did not have a name for the meanness I experienced. I knew that unfair things were happening to me because I was an Indian, but I couldn't make the conceptual leap required to understand that racism meant, for example, that I was not allowed to play inside the homes of some of my White school friends. My family was

a place of strength and support, where we spoke, listened, and answered with respect. I was never made to feel wrong there. As I grew older, I dreamt of hockey and minibikes. I preferred to play with "boy's toys," so my parents sensibly brought me Hotwheels instead of Barbies. Later, I was allowed to hunt with a gun, and *moosum*, my grandfather, taught me and my brothers how to make snares to trap ermines and rabbits on the frozen creek behind our house. In my family, I was taught what I wanted to learn.

I remember dancing at a gathering when I was ten or eleven. Everyone was dancing around and around the reserve hall to the pow'wow music that was piped in over the bingo loudspeaker system. Back then the dance was an ordinary thing. Some people wore bits of regalia. Most of us, though, just wore jeans and sweatshirts. I was really enjoying myself, dancing the way that I wanted to. I was picking up my feet and even taking spinning steps at times. The old people were watching from the chairs on the side in encouraging silence, clapping their knees and smiling, inviting us to continue. Everything seemed so natural. I was learning new steps by watching what others were doing and learning the Cree songs in my head.

Then a friend danced up along side of me and told me to quit dancing like a boy. Confused, wondering how I could dance the wrong steps, I stopped. After that evening, I became self-conscious about the toys I wanted to play with. Knowing became not knowing, and the sureness of my experience was replaced by a growing certainty that I could not be the girl that was wanted outside of my family. Being "different" was no longer a gift, and my self-consciousness led me to learn ways to pretend and ways to hide myself. I would play sports with my younger brothers and their friends but was wary around kids my own age. When I was fourteen, I was given the hockey skates I wanted, but when we had skating at school, rather than showing up in "boy's skates, I pretended that I didn't have any. By that age, I understood that sexist judgments directed at me had a homophobic subtext, but I did not grasp the extent of their effect on me. I sat alone on the sideline benches that winter.

As I grew older, racism continued to erode my self-confidence and pride. Eventually I refused to identify as Cree, acknowledging only my Scottish heritage, although everyone in our small community knew my family. When I was in town I would avoid my relatives. I would even

pass right by *moosum* without saying hi, acknowledging him only out of the corner of my eye. He knew what was going on: I was embarrassed to be related to him. At the same time as I struggled with my Cree identity, I was beginning to realize that I was a lesbian. The combination of racism and homophobia, much of it internalized, was very devastating for me; I didn't finish high school. I moved to the nearest city, in part to get away from the racism of the small town that surrounded our community, and in part to explore my new-found sexuality in a more anonymous way. I was looking for the idealized gay world that I had caught sight of in movies, in books, and on television. Somehow, I had lost my place in my own community as a result of the move, combined with how I felt.

In the city, I began a pre-medical study program at a university by enrolling as a mature student.[6] There were twelve Indigenous students in the program; six of us were two-spirit. However, we did not acknowledge it, and it was only when most of us had quit university that we realized we had experienced the same struggles at the same time. The "coming out" process was not easy for any of us. For example, as an Indigenous woman, I could not find a positive place for myself in the predominantly White, gay scence. I looked there for support in my lesbian identity, and instead found another articulation of racism. Although a large number of gay and lesbian Indigenous people live in the city, the Indigenous community remains segregated from the mainstream, non-Indigenous gay and lesbian community.

Immersion in the White, gay party scene became a way to numb a growing depression. I remember the excitement of getting ready to go out for the evening. I studied the culture: the way people danced, dressed, talked, moved, and even the way everyone greeted each other with a hug. This was all new to me, and I dove into that culture with anthropological zeal, hoping to uncover the secrets of it strangeness. I cut my hair, as though proclaiming a new identity was enough to make me belong in the lesbian and gay community. I know that, in Cree tradition, we cut our hair when we are in mourning. When someone we are related to or someone we love dies, a part of ourselves dies. It is a personal ceremony. The hair, usually a braid, is buried in a quiet safe place where no people or animals can step on it or disturb it. There I was with a flat-top, shaved on the sides and short, spiky, and

flat on the top. My hair was everywhere on the floor of the flashy salon of a new-found friend. People were stepping on it, walking through it, and eventually it just ended up in the garbage along with everyone else's. A connection with my community was buried in that garbage can.

The support of my family, culture, and spiritual traditions helped me through this period. When I "came out" to my parents, they were not shocked by my confession and told me that they already knew. This puzzled me. How could they know and I didn't? I understand now that they respected me enough not to interfere, and enough to be confident that I would come to understand my sexuality when the time was right. Throughout my life, my family had acknowledged and accepted me without interference: my grandfather gave me hunting lessons and my parents brought me the toys that I would enjoy. As I was told by another child that I danced the "wrong" dance, the elders of my community smiled and clapped, quietly inviting me to continue. My development has obviously been shaped by a traditional Indigenous worldview.

I came to be empowered by who I was, rather than disempowered by who I wasn't. In the context of Native spirituality, I learned about the traditions of two-spirit people. I acquired strength from elders and leaders who were able to explain that as an Indigenous woman who is also a lesbian, I needed to use the gifts of my difference wisely.

Even my "maladaptive" responses to homophobia and racism can be understood as at least in part shaped by traditional values. The Conservation-Withdrawal Tactic and the Ethic That Anger Not Be Shown are both resistive responses that can easily be misread as passive acceptance. In Cree culture, "Silence" does not equal "Death," and to "Act Up" should not lead us to remove ourselves from our community. If it does, we seem most often to quietly find our way back home.[7] When confronted with racism and homophobia, I had internalized many of the devaluing judgments of the dominant culture. As I struggled with my racial and sexual identity, I had looked for affirmation by immersing myself in the minority cultures to which I belonged. Most significant, though, is the fact that when I sought support in the mainstream lesbian and gay community, it simply was not there.

This struggle is very typical of the "coming out" experiences of Indigenous people. As I reflect on the lives of my Indigenous friends, I

realize that those of us who are happy have achieved our presence within the Indigenous American community. Two-spirit identity is rarely recognized in the mainstream lesbian and gay community unless it is accompanied by romantic notions that linger from the concept of the *berdache*. We are either Spanbauer's "holy man who fucks" or "just a fuckin' Indian."[8]

What this means, then, is that the positive bicultural adaptation that sexual and racial identity development models prize is simply not available to most of us. Although elements of my life could be neatly arranged into these identify models, this partial fit does not mean that a model expresses a life story, or even a simple developmental sequence.

It is possible for psychological theory to illuminate our understanding of the identity development of two-spirit people. Unlike the three theories discussed earlier, Robinson and Ward's (1991) work with African American adolescent girls uncovered an important distinction between strategies for survival and strategies for liberation. While survival strategies move the girls further from their true selves, liberation strategies strengthen their voices because they are "alternative avenues to personal empowerment and positive change" (p. 96). Robinson and Ward place the girls' experiences within a worldview that emphasizes an identity that is strengthened by a sense of interconnectedness with others.

This extended sense of self that Robinson and Ward offer is similar to an Indigenous worldview and includes a sort of timelessness, one that includes not only those of us here now, but also those who have come before us and those who will follow. Within this worldview, the girls' strategies are forms of resistance. Within Robinson and Ward's construct, the choices I made throughout my adolescence and early adulthood could be seen as short-term survival strategies. For two-spirit people, this can emerge from a commitment to community and collective experience, to creative and courageous action, and to an intimately spiritual worldview. This is how I have negotiated my own identity in the distance that stretches between the values of my culture and the values of Western culture.

Gloria Anzaldua (1990), in the introduction to her collection of writing by women of color, calls such survival strategies "making face," the way that we must become "like a chameleon, to change color when the dangers are many and the options few" (p. xv). Quick fixes, like wishing away my skates, dropping out of school, and walking past *moosum*, were strategies that pushed me away from my sense of self and my sense of community. Did racism force me out of my home town, or did I choose to distance myself from my community? When confronted with racism and homophobia, I internalized many of the devaluing judgments of the dominant culture. Leaving my home community was an attempt to leave behind my devalued status, to become "raceless." However, it removed me from the strength and support I found in my community. I was even more of an "other" in the city than I was at home, even farther from a place where my self could be found.

Returning Practice to Theory

Last summer, I was part of a gathering of two-spirit people. When I first arrived, I was cautious. Everyone seemed cautious, as though we were all unsure of how we should act. On the wall of the main cabin a sign was posted; it said, "pow-wow, Saturday night." When I read it, I felt dizzy, overwhelmed by my imagining what the dance might be. Two-spirit people dancing. I have lived with dreams of dancing, dreams where I spin around, picking up my feet. I have many feathers on my arms and my body and I know all the steps. I turn into an eagle. Arms extended, I lift off the ground and begin to fly around in big circles. Would this be my chance?

For the rest of the week I listened for tidbits about the pow-wow. I learned that a local drum group would be singing. I heard about a woman who was collecting her regalia—"Her regalia . . ." —and wondered, did that mean men's? I waited patiently for Saturday night to come. Listening.

When the drumming started, I was sitting still, listening and watching. The first people to dance were women. They had their shawls with them. Next, some men came in; they were from different Nations, but still danced in distinctively male styles. I watched with disappointment in my heart but said to myself that I would still enjoy the pow-wow. And then a blur flew by me and landed inside the circle of dancers that had formed. It was a man in a jingle dress. He was beautiful and he knew how to dance and he danced as a woman. It was a two-spirit dancing as it should be. After that, more two-spirits drifted into the circle. I sat and watched, my eyes edged with tears. I knew my ancestors were with

me; I had invited them. We sat and watched all right, proud of our sisters and brothers, yet jealous of their bravery. The time for the last song came. Everybody had to dance. I entered the circle, feeling the drumbeat in my heart. The songs came back to me. I circled the dance area, in my most humble moment, with the permission of my ancestors, my eleven-year-old two-spirit steps returned to me.

The aspect of my own experience (and that of my two-spirit friends) that current sexual and racial identity development models cannot encompass is that my strength and identity, along with the strength and identity of my peers, is inseparable from our culture. Educators and school counselors need to acknowledge that this is the reality for our community. This means that we need to stop assuming that all lesbian and gay people can find support in mainstream gay culture, and that we make a point of creating opportunities for two-spirit Indigenous people to find their place in their traditional communities. There has been little research done on the developmental experiences of Indigenous American people, and there is almost no research on the experiences of two-spirit people, despite grim statistics that reveal the urgency of addressing the needs of these groups. Gay and lesbian youth are two to six times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual teens (Kroll & Warneke, 1995), and Indigenous Canadians have the highest suicide rate of any racial group in the world (York, 1990).

Whenever possible, we need to ensure that two-spirit youth have access to the history and unwritten knowledge of their community, and that it is available to them in a culturally congruous way. Educators can also easily access written texts by important Indigenous American leaders, such as Beatrice Medicine (1983), Terry Tafoya (1989, 1990), Chrystos (1988, 1991, 1993), Connie Fife (1992, 1993), and Beth Brant (1985, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995). These authors ground their work in their identities as Indigenous Americans, and they offer insight into the historic and present-day realities of two-spirit people. Tafoya's work as a psychologist and educator has made invaluable contributions to an effective approach to AIDS education for Indigenous American people. Two-spirit writers such as Chrystos, Connie Fife, and Beth Brant provide stories and narrative texts that record the contemporary life of two-spirit people. Their body of work is a rich resource for identity development theorists, and an invaluable affirmation for two-spirit youth.

Educators and developmental theorists need to study the resistance, strength, and liberation strategies two-spirit people employ as part of their development of an empowered identity. By examining the meaning of these strategies relative to an Indigenous American worldview, educators and theorists can increase their awareness in a way that will inevitably have a spill-over effect. They will learn to look beyond the limits inscribed by mainstream lesbian and gay culture and into the lives of the women, men, and children who are lesbian, gay, and two-spirit. We, whether educators, Indigenous Americans, or two-spirit people, must abandon the assumptions of a European American worldview in order to understand the identity development of two-spirit Native American and Canadian First Nations people, and to develop our theory and practice from within that understanding.

Notes

1 The term "Indigenous American" in this article refers to Canadian First Nations and Native American peoples. I acknowledge that, in a sense, this term presents our diverse cultures and communities as monolithic. However, my use of the term here is an appeal to the commonality of our origins and colonial/post-colonial experiences.

2 The term "two-spirit" will be used in this article to describe lesbian, gay, and bisexual Indigenous Americans.

3 The Cree Nation spreads in a wide swath across central Canada, from Quebec in the East, west through Ontario and Manitoba along the James and Hudson Bays, across Saskatchewan to the plains of Alberta, and South from there into northern Montana. Most of these communities are located in remote areas. I am from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, located five hundred miles north of the border between the United States and Canada. The Cree Nations form one of the largest groups of Indigenous people in North America. There are over twenty-three Cree dialects.

4 I choose Falco because lesbian identity formation theory is the most appropriate focus for the use of my own narrative as a critique of contemporary developmental theory. Theorists who describe the developmental stages of gay men's sexual identity use similarly structured models (e.g., Coleman, 1982).

5 Sexism, when directed at children, is often a homophobic attempt to regulate or direct the development of their sexual identities.

6 "Mature student" is a category similar to "non-traditional," referring to students who have been out of high school for a few years before entering university.

7 In last year's "Indian Days" celebration at a reserve neighbouring my own, the community celebration included a drag show by two-spirit people in traditional clothing.

8 These words were hurled at me by a lesbian who had been, I thought, one of my closest friends for ten years.

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