

## UNspoken Assumptions: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Sexual Ambiguity

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In her introduction to *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body*, cultural historian Riane Eisler (1995:4) states, "No subject arouses more curiosity than sex." For anthropologists, the behaviors, roles, and norms associated with human sex and sexuality have been the subjects of a great deal of research. Only in recent decades, though has inquiry into such marginal areas of human sexuality as homosexuality and hermaphroditism been of significant interest to the general scientific community (Bell and Gordon 1972; Caplan 1987; Herdt 1982). Several researchers have explained this recent upsurge of scientific interest in sexual variation as a growing challenge to the traditional Western model of human sexuality, that supports only two categories of human sexual classification -- female and male (Pile and Thrift 1995; Fausto-Sterling 1995; Nanda 1999). However, all societies at times must face those who do not conform to the entire set of behaviors, roles, and norms associated with either men or women (Nanda 1999). Such sexual variation can include sexual orientation, sexual physiology, sexual practice, and sexual identity -- subjects of growing interest also in the fields of biology, psychology, sociology, medicine, and gender studies.

In the political and social arenas of the West, there is great resistance to the notion of accommodating these marginal groups, due in large part to the long histories of oppression and persecution of homosexuals and other sexual "deviants" (Greenberg 1988; Clinard and Meier 1998). However, recent challenges to existing Western policies governing sexual marginality, such as the Hawaii and Vermont movements for legalized same-sex unions, reveal a growing flexibility and openness to change. Proposed changes to the present binary sexual model are also more common, such as geneticist Anne Fausto-Sterling's (1995) proposition of a five-sex model to represent more accurately what she describes as a continuum between the extremes of female and male. In addition, many recent biological, entomological, and zoological studies have shown conclusively that sexual variation is not an exclusively human phenomenon. Sexual ambiguity in non-human creatures exists in such diverse animal species as fruit flies (Waterbury, et al. 1999), eels (Beullens, et al. 1997), and placental mammals including cattle and swine

(Hunter and Erickson 1995; Cole 1997; Hunter 1996), adding further fuel to the growing controversy surrounding traditional Western standards of sexual classification.

This paper focuses on the issue of "sexually ambiguous" individuals - that is, those who exhibit traits that are neither exclusively female nor male -- and the problems associated with their existence within a sexually dimorphic cultural context. It examines studies that investigate various innovations in Sambian, Indian, Navajo, Omani, and Samoan cultures that actively incorporate sexual ambiguity into their respective social and cultural systems. Specifically, it describes the nature of the social interactions, cultural significance, and adaptive strategies of these groups in relation to the respective cultural frameworks within which they exist. Looking at cultures whose constructions of sexuality acknowledge (and therefore legitimize) the existence of sexual ambiguity with the incorporation of a third sex class, this paper also discusses alternatives to the binary Western model of human sexuality.

The individual cultures reviewed in this paper reflect not only the large degrees of geographical, historical, religious, social, and technological difference among them, but also demonstrate a wide range of counterexamples to the traditional Western cultural and social attitudes towards sexually ambiguous individuals. Herdt's (1981) pioneering research describing male initiation rites among the Sambia of New Guinea illustrates a complex pattern of institutionalized sexual ambiguity within the context of a twosex system. In India, frequent references to androgynous figures in Hindu mythology, for example, plays a great role in the determination of the cultural definitions, perceptions, and functions the *hijra* community. Similarly, the history of the Navajo *nadle* is firmly entrenched in within Navajo mythology, while the social attitudes toward them, as well as their cultural roles, differ markedly from their Hindi counterparts. The *xanith* of Oman, on the other hand, represent a cultural innovation that circumvents Islamic proscriptions against homosexual practices between men, while preserving Omani cultural and social constructions of masculinity. In contrast to all of these, the *fa'afafine* identity reflects Samoan cultural resentment and retaliation against the imposition of Western sexual values by Christian missionaries, as the deliberate construction of a third sex class designed to communicate disapproval of the forced changes to traditional Samoan definitions and conceptions of sexuality.

All of the cultural examples presented in this paper represent individuals who Western science defines as either male or intersexed (hermaphroditic) individuals who -- whether defined physically, psychologically, or socially -- live a sexually ambiguous existence. The reason for this is that, in sexually binary cultures, resistance to cultural accommodation of

sexual ambiguity is primarily attributable to threats perceived by Western patriarchal and heterosexual power structures to Western definitions of manhood and masculinity (Pile and Thrift 1995). Sexually ambiguous women, such as the *hwame* (Williams 1986) and *mutarajjulal* (Bullough and Bullough 1993), also represent a largely unexplored frontier, with many further potential implications concerning the nature of Western attitudes and strategies regarding human sexuality.

### **The Sambian Male**

The Sambia of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea number more than two thousand people, whose cultural and social structures have developed under the continued influence of warfare. Organizationally, the Sambia maintain patrilocal and patrilineal patterns of residence and descent, respectively, while the state of relations between men and women are polarized and generally range from tense to hostile (Herdt 1982). Although the Sambia, similar to Western cultures, have a binary sexual classification system of male and female, it is the dynamic process by which boys are transformed into men that renders Sambia male sexuality ambiguous (Herdt 1997).

In Sambia sexual culture, an important distinction between the conceptions of male and female sexuality is that the men consider women to be more or less sexually complete from birth, requiring semen only to produce breast milk. Men, on the other hand, are innately sexually deficient until they make the transition into manhood. This disparity of sexual completeness between the sexes owes itself to the Sambia beliefs about human sexual anatomy, in which both men and women possess a menstrual blood (*tingu*) organ that is non-functional in men, whereas in women the organ is believed to be completely developed from birth. Additionally, men alone possess a semen (*keriku-keriku*) producing organ which, from birth through boyhood, remains empty and useless (Herdt 1982).

It is during boyhood, usually between the ages of seven and ten years, that any residual traces of femininity are ceremonially removed from the boy's body through a dramatic and painful nose bleeding ritual, purifying him so that his initiation into manhood may begin. This ritual occurs roughly every three to four years and involves boys from all surrounding villages. It is accomplished through a ritualized insemination process involving oral intercourse with young, unmarried, unrelated men that provides the initiate with the semen necessary to fill his *keriku-keriku* organ, thereby physically commencing his transition into manhood (Herdt 1997).

Once the initiation process is complete, the boys become men within the men's house, a process and setting both expressly forbidden to women, as their semen-depleting influence is seen as a direct and constant threat to the integrity of male sexuality. At this point, these newly transformed men assume the dominant role in fellatio, providing semen for subsequent initiates. Upon marriage, however, all homosexual activities are expected to cease, as the Sambias also maintain strict prohibitions against such relations, with severe penalties imposed as a consequence of their transgression (Herdt 1981).

Despite the apparent contradictions in the Sambian sexual worldview concerning sexual relations between men, these rites serve other symbolic purposes than solely becoming a man. According to Herdt (1997), these initiation rites also serve to strengthen feelings of solidarity among Sambian men, to reinforce the importance of power relations and subordination to older men, and to act as a test of individual courage. Finally, given the intensity and frequently unpleasant nature of the initiation ceremony, the Sambian manhood rites also reinforce the culturally prescribed aversion to homosexual activity during manhood, though in rare cases such behaviors continue between men after completing their transformation (Herdt 1981; Herdt 1997).

### **The Indian Hijra**

The *hijras* (a term that equally means both "eunuch" and "hermaphrodite") of India are a religious community composed of men whose worship centers on the female deity *Bahuchara Mata*, one of several incarnations of the Hindu Mother Goddess. They are also the physical embodiment of other mythical Hindu figures who express sexual ambiguity, including such personages as *Shiva*, who exhibits androgynous characteristics and whose symbol is a phallus set upon the *yoni* (the Hindu symbol for female genitalia), and the sex-changing *Vishnu* (Bulloughs and Bulloughs 1983; Nanda 1999). What distinguishes the *hijras* from other Hindus is that they actively adopt the dress and behavioral mannerisms of women, even to the extent that many undergo a dangerous (and illegal) emasculation operation in which the penis and testicles are surgically removed (Nanda 1999).

Emasculated men alone do not account for all *hijras*, however. Intersexed individuals, or hermaphrodites, may also become *hijras*, though they represent only a small proportion of the overall *hijra* community. In fact, the idea that all *hijras* are born hermaphroditic and are actively sought after by the *hijra* community is widespread, although no empirical evidence to date supports this. In either case, it is the lack (whether actual or symbolic) of male genitalia, along with the inability to bear children as a woman, that de-

fines *hijras* and explains their sexual identity as neither man nor woman, but instead comprising a third sex class (Nanda 1999).

Socially, there are several means by which the sexual intermediacy of the *hijra* is expressed. For example, when referring to themselves, *hijras* prefer the feminine equivalents of "she" and "her." They also adorn themselves with traditional women's cosmetics, clothing, and accessories such as the *sari*, a large (usually seven to nine yards) length of fabric that is wrapped about the body (Nanda 1999). Also, *hijras* may take "husbands," though such occasions are rare. Interestingly, in such cases the "husband" retains his heterosexuality, since he assumes the "active" or "dominant" role in sexual relations, as well as the fact that, according to the definition of a *hijra*, he is not married to another man. Nanda (1999) describes one *hijra* who even managed to become a grandmother, by divorcing her "husband" and adopting him, so that when he remarried and became a father, she then had a son, a daughter-in-law, and a grandchild.

Through their sexual ambiguity, the *hijras* reinforce their identification with *Bahuchara Mata*, as they symbolically embody Her generative qualities, including female creative power, even though the *hijras* are obviously incapable of bearing children. As an institutionalized third sex, they hold exclusive license to perform after the birth of a male child, at weddings, and at temple festivals dedicated to the Mother Goddess. These performances are called *badhai*, a term that refers to the gifts and cash that they receive at such events, and are participated in by a band of, on average, between three and seven *hijras* dancing like caricatures of women. Beyond the dancers, three other *hijras* are also present for the *badhai* performances -- one who plays the drums, another who plays the harmonium, and the third, the group's *guru*, who does not perform but instead stands in a supervisory role over the proceedings and negotiates payment for the *hijras'* services. Performances for newborn sons and weddings are the most important and best known role of *hijras* within mainstream Indian society (Nanda 1999).

As ascetic mystics, the *hijras* command a strong influence over Indian society, in that they share an intimate and powerful relationship with *Bahuchara Mata*. Examples of this influence include the popular belief that whatever a *hijra* predicts (whether good or ill) will most certainly come to pass, and that *hijras* can predict (or even cause) male impotence (Preston 1987; Nanda 1999). Such ritualized and ceremonial roles are the means by which *hijras* are accorded respect and validation in Indian culture, and are the most approved of means by which they earn a living. The *hijras'* authority to perform these occupations is even supported through legislation of Indian states in the past that guaranteed these rights to the *hijra* community (Nanda 1999).

On the other hand, the *hijras* fill other roles that are not looked upon with nearly as high esteem by mainstream Indian society. *Hijra* "impostors" -- that is, those who dress like *hijras* but do not undergo emasculation, or *jankhas* -- who masquerade themselves as ceremonial performers, once discovered, are punished in such forms as beating and public humiliation by the *hijra* community, *non-hijras*, or both. Many *hijras* are also well known for the roles that many assume as prostitutes and street beggars, the former being the least valued of all *hijra* occupations. Street begging is common among the *hijra* community and often draws mild criticism or teasing from *non-hijras* (usually children and adolescents), but it is generally accepted without attracting severe persecution or formalized, negative sanctions (Nanda 1999). Prostitution, however, is not only looked upon with general disdain by mainstream Indian society, but by the *hijra* community, as well. According to the *hijras*, such practices detract from their authenticity as mendicants and ascetics, whose self-deprivation practices serve to symbolically reinforce their connection with the supernatural (Nanda 1999).

### **The Navajo Nadle**

Of the North American Indian tribes, as many as 113 maintained a sexual identity specifically reserved for sexually ambiguous individuals (Callender and Kochems 1983). Many anthropologists have applied the term *berdache* (a French term referring to a male prostitute) in describing these various "third genders" (Forgey 1975). Callender and Kochems define a *berdache* as

a person, usually male, who was anatomically normal but assumed the dress, occupations, and behavior of the other sex to effect a ... slightly intermediate status that combined the social attributes of males and females ... as a distinct gender status, designated by special terms rather than by the words "man" or "woman." Literal translations of these terms often indicate its intermediate nature: half man-half woman, man-woman, would-be woman.

The gradual waning of the prominence of the *berdache* status is thought to be the result of hostile European and American attitudes towards sexual ambiguity (Forgey 1975). Callender and Kochems (1983) describe this hostility as a general outrage expressed by Westerners towards not only the existence but also the tolerance of sexually variant individuals. Accord-

ing to them, this basic sentiment is one of the most influential factors behind the decline in both the popularity and the number of academic studies conducted on *berdache* groups. In addition, they claim that several *berdache* studies are characterized by negative observer bias, informant silence, or unfounded speculation.

In the Navajo culture of the American Southwest, there exists a third sexual identity, the *nadle*, which in many respects parallels the *berdache* definition, although it is more narrowly defined. Linguistically, *nadle* means "changing one" or "one who is transformed" (Williams 1986) and specifically refers to an intersexed individual; however, the term is also frequently applied to "those who pretend to be *nadle*" (Hill 1935:273) -- that is, non-intersexed persons. Other than these points involving intersexuality, the *nadle* participate in both men's and women's work, adopt female mannerisms and affectations, and interact socially in ways similar to the *berdache* (Callender and Kochems 1983). The Navajo make several distinctions, though, between the *nadle* who is born intersexed (a very rare occurrence) and the *nadle* who exhibits sexually ambiguous traits and behaviors, but is in all physiological respects male (Hill 1935).

Several symbolic elements from Navajo myth suggest a strong relationship between the *nadle* and the realm of the supernatural. For example, mythologist Lewis Spence describes one of the more prominent Navajo deities Ahsonnutli, the principal deity of the Navaho Indians of New Mexico, who was regarded as the creator of the heavens and Earth ... He was believed to possess the qualities of both sexes, and is entitled the Turquoise Man woman (1994:121-122). Elman Service (1978) describes a mythical Navajo figure known as Changing Woman, whose name suggests a connection with the *nadle* definition, "changing one." According to Service, Changing Woman is also called Turquoise Woman, possibly indicating an alternate portrayal of the Turquoise Man-woman.

Although being a *nadle* is not required in order to become a practitioner of the Navajo religion, the *nadle* shaman is especially valued (Callender and Kochems 1983). As Williams (1986:35) summarizes, *nadle* shamans are "considered particularly excellent as chanters. They have special chants for curing illness and insanity, and for aiding childbirth." Like many other *berdache* groups, the ability of the *nadle* to exist in both men's and women's roles is considered a supernatural power (Callender and Kochems 1983), and the *nadle* is said to be inherently both holy and sacred (Hill 1935). The great deference accorded to the *nadle* by the Navajo (Doyle 1995; Doyle and Paludi 1995), in addition to the Navajo belief that the *nadle* is predestined at birth to be wealthy and control wealth are further examples of the supernatural quality inherent to the *nadle* (Callender and Kochems 1983).

Socially, the *nadle* is fully integrated into the fabric of the Navajo community as a legitimate third sex and, like men and women, generally adhere to certain behavioral norms specific to their sex. Callender and Kochems (1983), however, describe instances in which these norms may differ based upon Navajo distinctions between the respective identities of the "real" (intersexed) and "pretend" (male) *nadle*. For example, a "real" *nadle* is expected to always wear women's clothing, while the "pretend" *nadle* dresses according to the sex traditionally associated with various Navajo labor tasks. Also, a "real" *nadle* is only permitted to marry and have sex with men, while the "pretend" *nadle* has the option of choosing either a man or a woman as a spouse or sexual partner. As a result of this particular distinction, the "pretend" *nadle* is able to effect a sexual identity shift, becoming a man by adopting the sexual and behavioral norms associated with Navajo maleness (Callender and Kochems 1983).

Economically, the *nadle* is particularly advantaged in comparison to the men and women of Navajo society. Similar to the way in which their "co-sexual" existence enhances them spiritually, the *nadle* also enjoy enhanced opportunities for economic prosperity. This is in large part due to the physiological characteristics of the *nadle* -- including muscular density, bone mass, physical strength, and the freedoms from menstruation and pregnancy - - that enable the *nadle* to be more productive and to invest more time into work activities than both men and women (Callender and Kochems 1983; Doyle 1995; Doyle and Paludi 1995). Although given great deference and respect by the Navajo community, the *nadle* is somewhat restricted in terms of being allowed to perform certain tasks, specifically hunting and warfare, as these are reserved exclusively for men (Doyle 1995; Doyle and Paludi 1995). The *nadle* is also enable and encouraged to engage in a wider array of economic pursuits than both men and women, since the *nadle* is entitled to hold both men's and women's occupations (Callender and Kochems 1983; Doyle 1995; Doyle and Paludi 1995). In addition, the *nadle* serves in the capacity of mediator between women and men, mostly to help settle domestic quarrels (Maybury-Lewis 1992). In the Navajo view, the most prosperous and admired of all households are those in which a *nadle* has taken a husband (Callender and Kochems 1983).

### **The Omani Xanith**

Located on the Saudi Arabian peninsula, the Islamic nation-state of Oman is the home of another group that constitutes a sexual identity distinct from

male and female -- *the xanith*, which in Arabic means "impotent," "effeminate," or "soft" (Bulloughs and Bulloughs 1993). Physically (with respect to genitalia), they are men; and like other "third sexes" such as the *hijra* and the *nadle*, the *xanith* retains several important qualities and social freedoms normally reserved for men, despite the identification of the *xanith* as an intermediate sexual identity. For instance, the *xanith* keep masculine names and are linguistically referred to in the masculine form. Also, they have the right to testify in court and are free to worship in the mosque with men, both of which are expressly forbidden to Muslim women. On the other hand, the *xanith* adopt many of the traditional behaviors and qualities of women. These include cooking and housekeeping, using women's standards to judge beauty, and visiting and gossiping with women. Also, they are grouped with women for many social purposes, including the seclusion of women from men in social interaction, a policy known as *purdah* (Wikan 1977).

The primary social, economic, and sexual functions of the *xanith* are rooted in his role as a male, homosexual prostitute who assumes the receptive, passive role during sexual intercourse -- the role otherwise associated with women (Wikan 1977; Gregor 1985). In fact, the most important and definitive distinction between the sexual identities of *xanith* and man has to do with the roles assumed by each during sexual intercourse. In Omani culture, it is the role of "penetrator" that validates a person's identity as a man, even if his sexual partner is a *xanith* (Wikan 1977). Conversely, a *xanith* who demonstrates publicly -- by the public display of a bloodied towel indicating a consummated, male-female marriage -- the ability to assume the man's "penetrator" role allows the *xanith* to become male, if he chooses (Wikan 1977).

Beyond the adoption of both men's and women's mannerisms, many *xanith* behaviors and practices symbolically represent the intermediacy of his sexual identity. For example, Omani wear their hair cut short, while women wear theirs long. By contrast, the *xanith* wears his at mid-length. Also, while both men and women cover their heads, the *xanith* is bareheaded. Clothing options and styles available to the *xanith* are also chosen according to prescribed modes for dress for the *xanith* that combine both male and female modes of dress (Wikan 1977).

With respect to religion, the sexual role of the *xanith* serves to reconcile certain Islamic prohibitions concerning homosexual activity between men with the Omani assertion that sexual deviance cannot be repressed (Wikan 1977; Nanda 1999). The *xanith* also maintain a long history in Arabic religious writings, such as those by Al-Bukhari, the noted ninth-century Koran commentator who described these "men who wish to resemble

women" (Bullough and Bullough 1993: 12) and applied to them the term *mukhan-nathun*.. Also, as historian John Boswell states,

Although the Qur'an and early religious writing of Islam display mildly negative attitudes toward homosexuality, Islamic society has generally ignored these deprecations, and most Muslim cultures have treated homosexuality with indifference, if not admiration .... The Arabic language contains a huge vocabulary of gay erotic terminology, with dozens of words just to describe the types of male prostitutes.

The *xanith* identity, therefore, provides a culturally acceptable outlet for what are otherwise considered to be shameful sexual practices, effectively circumventing Islamic and social prohibitions against male homosexuality, while preserving the integrity of Omani cultural constructions of masculinity (Wikan 1977).

### **The Samoan Fa'afafine**

The *fa'afafine* of Samoa provide an example of sexual ambiguity that owes its origins to contact with an outside culture, both colonial and Christian. The word *fa'afafine*, which the Samoans use to mean "transvestite," is composed of the *rootfafine* ("woman") and the *prefixfa'a* which carries multiple meanings approximating the terms "to make," "false," and "not extremely." The entire term, *fa'afafine*, then, roughly translates to "made woman," "false woman," "not completely a woman," or "the way of women" (Mageo 1998). Rather than being identified by sexual behaviors or physiology, Samoan culture constructed the *fa'afafine* sexual identity as a performance medium through which the cultural anxieties of Samoan men are expressed and alleviated using self-deprecating jokes, theatrical clowning, and ceremonial transvestitism (Bullough and Bullough 1993; Mageo 1998; Nanda 1999).

In Samoa, the long-standing tradition of using jokes as insults (*uta*) has the effect of reinforcing social identity roles at the expense of the individual's self-concept (*loto*), which the Samoan culture de-emphasizes (Mageo 1998). With the success of missionary conversion efforts in Samoa, many sexual liberties previously enjoyed by Samoan girls were gradually lessened, unbalancing the traditional relationship between Samoan male and female sexual roles. According to Nanda, "Unlike alternative gender roles in India

and North America, in Polynesia gender-divergent roles do not seem to be associated with [Polynesian] religion" (1999:137). Mageo (1998) instead suggests that *the fa'afafine* role, as an ambiguous sexual identity, stems from culturally perceived internal conflicts within Samoan boys, who act them out in exaggerated *ula* performances. By targeting these jokes at themselves, the *fa'afafine* satirically portray the damage they feel has been done to traditional sex roles by Christian missionaries.

Describing the degree of change upon pre-Christian, Samoan sexual identity constructions, Mageo (1998 :261 f) writes, "In the Samoan mythological view the husband and wife are portrayed as two halves of a larger whole, rather than as vehicles for oppositional meanings." Describing the Samoan transition from a two-sex to a three-sex identification system, Mageo asserts That

[t]ransvestism is not mentioned by early visitors to Samoa .... Yet it is not plausible that Samoan transvestites sprang full-blown, like Venus arising from the sea foam. Early records of transvestism among Samoa's Polynesian cousins evince an ensemble of behaviors that resembles contemporary Samoan transvestism. ... [T]oday male transvestites are conspicuous in their numbers. If in contemporary Samoa boys have an increased tendency to become transvestites, it follows that historical factors have contributed to a destabilization of the Samoan sex-gender system.

(1998:207-208)

By responding with a sexual classification of their own design, Samoan boys can use the *fa'afafine* persona as a means of "acting out" sexual and cultural anxieties in such formerly female-centered social arenas as "Joking Nights" and "village princess pageants." Such theatrical mockery, exaggerated by the feigned mannerisms, dress, and sexual appetites of girls, offers an illustration of how sexual ambiguity can be effected by extra-cultural forces such as religion.

According to Bullough and Bullough, "[A] number of variations from the traditional Western practice of recognizing only two sexes and two forms of gender behavior exist in a number of societies" (1993:5). These examples of sexual ambiguity among the Sambian, Indian, Navajo, Omani, and Samoan cultures, however, represent a viable practice of sexual flexibility that is conspicuously absent in the West, where sexuality is assumed to be binary, with predetermined and segregated social cultural roles and expectations that distinguish men from women. Examined individually, the cultures described here illustrate five distinct adaptive strategies by which sexually ambiguous

individuals are incorporated into the overall social fabric, practices that have been more or less successful for hundreds of years. Seen together, they suggest that the traditional, Western sexual dichotomy is inefficient with respect to its capacity to accurately define and represent its total population.

The examples discussed in this paper also illustrate the creativity of different societies in responding to perceived cultural needs and pressures. Other groups useful for further study in this direction include the *kathoey* of Thailand, the Mojave "two-spirit" people, the *gordjiguene* of Senegal, and the *comunidade gay* of Brazil (Herdt 1997). In all of these situations, such sexually marginal peoples exist within a general framework of a patriarchal, heterosexual power system that enjoys virtually exclusive control over determining standards of proper and improper behavior. This point is supported by theorists such as Susan Basow (1996), who points out that, rather than manifesting themselves solely on the basis of genotype and physical examination, the elements of many stereotyped sex roles primarily depends upon other factors. Specifically, she refers to the tendency of environmental, social, and situational factors that overpower physiological traits in order to conform to the sexual norms of the dominant culture.

With many heated debates currently surrounding Western social policy issues such as civil rights protections for sexually diverse peoples, same-sex marriages, and demographic reporting techniques such as the United States Census, the study of sexual ambiguity is especially relevant. Considering alternative models of sexual identity and classification provides us the opportunities to reconsider the implications of differential treatment towards sexually ambiguous and divergent peoples in Western society, to reevaluate and potentially redefine Western cultural assumptions about sexual "normalcy" and "deviance," and to renew our commitment to embracing human diversity.

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