

Wilson's Indigenous American Perspectives* on Sexual Orientation and Racial Identity

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“How We Find Ourselves: Identity Development and Two-Spirit People”

by Alex Wilson

Short Abstract: 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.

“Despite the relationship between sexual and racial identity development presented in European American models, for Indigenous American lesbian, gay, or bisexual people, the effects of racism and homophobia cannot be separated from each other or from the rest of their experiences. The emphasis of the Indigenous American worldview on the interconnectedness of all aspects of an individual's life challenges the compartmentalized structure of developmental stage models. Therefore 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.”

*It is fair to predict, given Wilson's analysis, that there is and will be no “model” which helps define the commonality of Native American racial identity nor one which would do the same for Native American gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. Furthermore, the common stages exhibited in other identity development models which focus on an individual's anger and resistance to mainstream society may not manifest outwardly in Native cultures.