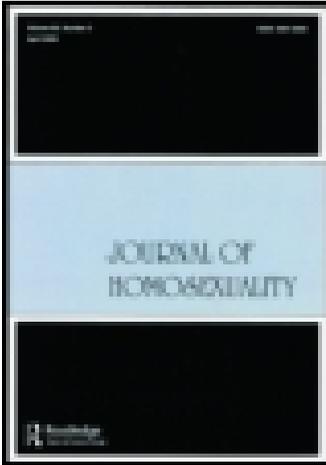


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### Ethnic Related Variations from the Cass Model of Homosexual Identity Formation: The Experiences of Two-Spirit, Lesbian and Gay Native Americans

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## **Ethnic Related Variations from the Cass Model of Homosexual Identity Formation: The Experiences of Two-Spirit, Lesbian and Gay Native Americans**

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*Synthesis of current research with the self-stories of Native American two-spirit, lesbian and gay people suggests differences in social locations that may produce sexual orientation identity development processes absent from the current literature. We employed a modified form of grounded theory analysis to explore the identity experiences of six self-identified two-spirit, lesbian or gay Native Americans recounted during in-depth interviews. The resulting five themes are presented with quotes from participants for clarification and support, along with a discussion of their fit with the Cass Model of Homosexual Identity Development and interpersonal congruency theory. Results suggest two developmental pathways, one following the course of Cass' model and a second path notable for its absence of many of the key experiences specified by Cass.*

**KEYWORDS** *two-spirit, lesbian, gay, identity development, Native American, Cass model, identity interconnections*

The past 30 years have seen a veritable explosion in research exploring the experiences and issues of lesbian and gay (LG) people, including models of their identity development processes (Altman, 1971; Cass, 1979; Chapman & Briannock, 1987; Ettore, 1980; Jenness, 1992; Kitzinger, 1987; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Moses, 1978; Plumner, 1975; Ponce, 1978; Rust, 1992, 1993;

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Troiden, 1988). Although these models have produced a wealth of knowledge and insights, their predominate reliance on Euro-American, middle-class, well-educated LGs as their database (Eliason, 1996) has neglected possible interconnections with other identity domains. This deficit may have the unintentional effect of misrepresenting or hiding the experiences of some LG people. In particular, Native American two-spirit, lesbian and gay (TsLG) people have begun to question the appropriateness of applying these models to their population, stating that they fail to accurately reflect their lived experiences (Tafoya, 1997; Wilson, 1996). Current research (Adams & Phillips, 2006; Brotman, Ryan, Jalbert, & Rowe, 2002), along with the voices of self-identified Native American TsLG people (Anguksuar, 1997; House, 1997; Red Earth, 1997; Robertson, 1997; Thomas, 1997; Wilson, 1996) suggest important differences in social locations (e.g., spiritual sanction, histories) between Native American TsLGs and Euro-American LGs. These differences have the potential to influence sexual orientation identity development experiences. By exploring the experiences of Native American TsLGs, this article aims to expand current knowledge of sexual orientation identity development through the consideration of possible interconnections with ethnicity.

#### TERMINOLOGY WITHIN THIS PAPER

The term “two-spirit” is currently used in academia to refer to a number of Native American identities (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997). These include, but are not limited to Native American people who are a) lesbian or gay, b) transgender, or c) who follow some or all of the parameters of alternate gender roles (may include specific social roles, spiritual roles, and same-sex relationships) specific to their tribe or panethnicity. In the first instance, “two-spirit” refers to a category that is primarily an issue of sexual orientation, while the latter two are issues of gender. Within the general population and in some earlier academic works, the term may be used to refer to individuals in all three categories indiscriminately or with nonspecification of the category. We use this designation to refer to contemporary Native American individuals whose sense of self is partially informed by their knowledge of alternate gender roles that functioned within some tribes prior to and briefly following the European invasions. Prior to the European invasions, these alternate gender roles were usually referred to by a term specific to the language of the individual’s tribe (e.g., *winkté*, *nádlee*), and we have used the tribal-specific term whenever the information is tribal specific. However, when speaking of these pre-invasion alternate gender roles across tribal groups (see Roscoe, 1998, for justification of grouping across tribal cultures), we have opted to employ the terms third-gender male-bodied (TGMB) and fourth-gender female-bodied (FGFB) people (terminology from

Jacobs et al, 1997). By distinguishing between pre-invasion and contemporary roles through different terminology, we do not imply a lack of connection (see Roscoe, 1998, for a specification of the continuity), but rather acknowledge the cultural disruption and decimation caused by the European invasions. We are aware that some contemporary individuals self-identify with the terminology specific to tribal membership, but as none of our participants employed a tribal-specific term as part of their self-description, we were unable to address contemporary usage of a tribal-specific term within this article or within our definition.

### CASS HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

After a careful review of current models, we selected the Cass Homosexual Identity Development Model (Cass, 1979) to serve as our point of comparison. We selected this model due to both its popularity and its methodological soundness. The Cass Model of Homosexual Identity Development describes six stages of identity development: a) identity confusion, b) identity comparison, c) identity tolerance, d) identity acceptance, e) identity pride, and f) identity synthesis. Cass assumed that all individuals, regardless of one's sexual orientation, initially self-identify as heterosexual due to the socialization processes within a culture; this carries the implied assumption that all cultures are heterosexist or homophobic.

In identity confusion, the individual begins to question one's self-perception as a heterosexual, wondering whether or not some of thoughts, behaviors, or feelings might be labeled as "lesbian" or "gay." In identity comparison, the individual's increasing self-identification as lesbian or gay combines with a keen awareness of the negative social attitudes toward LGs to produce a sense of alienation from family, friends, and society as a whole. During identity tolerance, one begins to seek out other LGs in an effort to decrease a growing sense of alienation. A critical factor in this stage is the emotional quality of contact with other LGs. Positive interactions contribute to a rejection of the negative societal image of LGs and development of a personal positive image of this population, leading to an increased commitment to a LG identity. Negative interactions reaffirm the negative societal image, leading to a devaluation of a LG self-image, which may culminate in self-hatred.

During identity acceptance, an individual negotiates whether the LG identity will be a private or public identity, deciding on whether to continue the "passing" behavior in which they have been engaging, or to "come out of the closet." During identity pride, a strong sense of group identity is developed through a growing commitment to LG issues; also, previous concealment strategies are abandoned, leading to disclosures to heterosexual others. Negative disclosure responses reinforce a dichotomized view of heterosexuals

and LGs, while positive responses disrupt this dichotomized view, leading to the final stage. In identity synthesis, the individual rejects the previously held dichotomized view, accepting similarities between the self and heterosexual others, along with differences between the self and other LGs. One begins to integrate the LG identity with all the other aspects of an overall sense of self.

## SOCIAL LOCATIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN TWO-SPIRIT, LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE

The Cass model has guided intervention efforts and served as a yardstick for assessing individuals' progress in developing a LG identity. However, as stated above, Native American TsLG people feel that this model does not accurately reflect their lived experiences (Tafoya, 1997; Wilson, 1996). Research (Adams & Phillips, 2006; Brotman et al., 2002) combined with the voices of self-identified TsLG Native Americans (Anguksuar, 1997; House, 1997; Red Earth, 1997; Robertson, 1997; Thomas, 1997; Wilson, 1996) suggest that this may be due to ethnically related differences in social locations. These differences include: a) degree of acceptance within one's ethnic community, b) spiritual sanction, c) histories, d) life guidelines, and e) inclusion within LG communities. Synthesis of the research and self-stories cited above indicates a greater acceptance of TsLG people and a lower homophobia in some (but not all) Native American communities—both reservation and urban. This differs greatly from the strongly heterosexist and sometimes homophobic attitudes held by a substantial portion of North America.

This greater level of acceptance may be a partial product of respect for traditional values/belief systems combined with a) spiritual sanction of TGMB, FGFB, and two-spirit (Ts) people and b) tribal histories of important TGMB and FGFB people. Many Native American religious belief systems recognize a spiritual aspect to TGMB, FGFB, Ts people, and, by association, sometimes LG people. Some hold that these individuals are acting upon directions received from the spirit world, while others view such individuals as having a special connection with the spiritual world (Anguksuar, 1997; Beauchemin, Levy, & Vogel, 1992; House, 1997; Lang, 1997; Thomas, 1997; Roscoe, 1998; Williams, 1992). This is vastly different from North American society as whole, where LGs are frequently seen as cut off from God. Recent research (Adams & Phillips, 2006) suggests that knowledge and acceptance of Native American belief systems explaining TsLG people in spiritual terms facilitates TsLG Native Americans' self-perception of that aspect of oneself as a gift or as possessing a valuable specialness.

Among the wealth of tribal histories and stories are those recounting the actions of important TGMB and FGFB people (Roscoe, 1998; Williams, 1992). Many Native Americans see these historical roles and the people who

filled them as sharing important similarities and connections with contemporary TsLG people (Brotman et al., 2002; House, 1997; Roscoe, 1998; Williams, 1992). These histories differ from the life stories of important LG people compiled by Euro-American LGs in that a) most TGMB and FGFB people were recognized as such during their life and b) many of these stories are part of tribal or panethnic societal knowledge as a whole.

A fourth point of difference is the presence of life guidelines for TsLG people. Included within the tribal histories are specific societal roles or activities that TGMB and FGFB people were expected to fulfill, such as educators of children, mediators, and certain spiritual roles. Not only do these provide clear guidelines for the roles of contemporary TsLG people within their Native communities, they also present them as valuable members of these communities (Anguksuar, 1997; Brotman et al., 2002; Red Earth, 1997; Tafoya, 1997). For some Euro-American LGs, the "gay lifestyle" may function as a type of life guideline. However, this lifestyle occurs within a marginalized subgroup, while Native American societal roles occur within the population as a whole. Research suggests that Native American TsLG people who are aware of tribal histories and the honored societal roles experience them as empowering, validating and supportive (Adams & Phillips, 2006). These findings fit with experiences recounted by other self-identified Native American TsLG people (Anguksuar, 1997; Red Earth, 1997; Wilson, 1996).

A final point of difference is the experience of racism within LG communities. Many Native American TsLG people experience racism within the LG communities, feeling alienated, silenced, or exotified by the predominantly Euro-American LG population (Adams & Phillips, 2006; Lang, 1997; Little Thunder, 1997; Jacobs & Brown, 1997; Wilson, 1996), whereas, as the dominant racial group, Euro-American LGs are not likely to experience any degree of racism.

In sum, research and self-reports by TsLG Native Americans demonstrate that ethnically related differences in social locations may alter the resources available to this population during identity development. These differences have the potential to influence almost every stage of the Cass model. For example, the Cass model assumes that the individual will be initially socialized as heterosexual. This reflects an underlying assumption that all individuals reside within a heterosexist or homophobic society. However, this assumption cannot be applied to all Native American communities. A greater degree of acceptance, combined with tribal histories, spiritual sanction and traditionally valuable roles within the community may produce an environment where children are not heavily socialized into heterosexuality. This may place the experiences of TsLG Native Americans completely outside the Cass model or modify their course through the model. For example, such individuals may not experience the alienation predicted in the identity comparison stage. Similarly, the decision to discontinue passing behaviors in Identity Acceptance may not be relevant for this population.

The increased likelihood of experiencing racism within LG communities may also influence identity development experiences. It may place TsLG Native Americans at greater risk for negative experiences with other LGs, which the Cass model predicts will facilitate development of self-hatred during identity tolerance. It may also inhibit her or his development of the strong LG group identity indicative of the identity pride stage. In addition, increased experiences of racism within some LG communities may combine with a greater likelihood of acceptance within some Native American communities to inhibit development of the dichotomized heterosexual/homosexual worldview that is revised during identity synthesis.

In this article, we explore these potential differences between the Cass Model of Homosexual Identity Development and the identity development processes and issues experienced by some TsLG Native Americans. This inquiry was guided by two research questions:

1. How do two-spirit, lesbian and gay Native Americans experience the development of their gender/sexual orientation identity?
2. How are these experiences influenced by their ethnicity?

## METHOD

### The Researchers

Working within a qualitative paradigm from a feminist theoretical framework, the researchers themselves constitute an important tool and should be discussed as such. As neither author is Native American, our authority to conduct research with this population may be questioned by some members of American Indian Studies (Champagne, 1998; Swisher, 1998; Wilson, 1998). These authors argue that such research will impose a Eurocentric worldview that will lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations (Swisher, 1998; Wilson, 1998). Other Native American authors hold that sensitive cultural understandings are more a product of “training, motivation, sensitivity, knowledge, and study” (Champagne, 1998, p. 183) than merely a person’s bloodline.

Sensitive to these arguments, we do not propose that through our research we have come to “know” what it is like to be a Native American in the same sense that we “know” what it is like to be ourselves. However, we do subscribe to the tenet of multicultural studies that people can develop a meaningful understanding of populations of which they are not members. As part of this, we bring a total of 14 years of study and work within various marginalized populations, including 2 years as a peripheral member of an urban Native American community. In addition, we follow the second author’s proposal of the concept of variegation of authority, in which the ability to speak about groups other than one’s own functions as a continuum, based

on points of overlap, experience and perspectives (Phillips, 1994). From this perspective, we bring our experiences as members the marginalized social groups of Black-biracial, bisexual, and disabled, which provide us some insights into the experiences of members of other marginalized populations. Furthermore, we are concerned that restricting the authority to speak about a population to members of that population may result in a certain degree of silencing if members of that population are a numerical minority or have limited access to the higher levels of education necessary for research production—both issues for today's Native Americans.

## Participants

Eight individuals were contacted through the snowball method, originating from personal contacts developed by the first author, with two individuals declining participation. The remaining six participants were all currently living in an urban area. All six participants were knowledgeable about TGMB and FGFB people and their roles at the panethnic level. The inclusion criterion was self-identification as a Native American TsLG person. A brief sketch of each participant is provided below, placed in the order in which they were interviewed.

Robert is an openly gay member of the federally recognized Western Cherokee Band in Oklahoma. Although unspecified, we estimate him to be in his 30s. Robert was raised on the Oklahoma reservation and maintains regular interactions with his tribe. He is currently single and works within the legal profession. He was enthusiastic about participating in the study and was very communicative throughout the interview, sharing many personal details.

Joe is an openly gay member of the federally recognized Potawanamie tribe, but identifies with the Menominee tribe due to family connections. He spent many summers with family members on the reservation and continues to visit. He is very involved in local Native American events and politics. In his 30s, Joe has been involved in a committed relationship for several years and works as a researcher. Although initially hesitant about participating due to concerns about representation, he was very communicative throughout the interview.

Stephanie is a partially open lesbian who is descended from the Choctaw tribe. She has not had any extended contact with her tribe and has limited interactions with her local Native American community. In her 60s, she is currently involved in a relationship and works as a professional. She was somewhat reserved during the interview and hesitated to disclose many personal details as she partially hides her sexual orientation for professional reasons.

Mikey is an openly gay member of the state recognized Cherokee tribe. Mikey does not specify the degree of his involvement with his tribe, but he

is moderately involved in his local Native American community, especially in the spiritual arena. In his 40s, he is currently unemployed and has been involved in a committed relationship for several years. Initially hesitant about participating due to concerns about representation, Mikey was very communicative throughout the interview, sharing many personal details.

Tommy is an openly gay member of the state recognized Pamunkey tribe. Tommy does not indicate his degree of involvement with his tribe, but does specify that he has little involvement with his local Native American community. In his 30s, he works as a professional and has been involved in a committed relationship for several years. He was somewhat reserved during the interview.

Spotted Eagle is a self-identified female-bodied two-spirit person, which she specifies as a gender identity. She is a member of the federally recognized Apache tribe. Spotted Eagle was raised on her tribe's reservation and maintains regular interactions with her tribe, participating in many of the spiritual ceremonies, but is not very involved in her local Native American community. In her 40s, she is currently unemployed and has been involved in a committed relationship with a self-identified lesbian for several years. Initially hesitant about participation due to concerns about representation, she was very communicative during the interview.

## Materials

A semistructured interview containing questions on identity, community, and development elicited both concurrent and retrospective data regarding the participant's experiences of self as both a Native American and a TsLG person. Sample questions used to initiate dialog on a particular topic included: a) What does it mean to you to be a [participant's selected label as two-spirit, lesbian or gay] person? b) What does it mean to you to be a [participant's selected label as two-spirit, lesbian or gay] who is also Native American? and (c) What would you say is the relationship between Native American and lesbian/gay communities? At the conclusion of the scripted questions, the interviewer asked participants if there was any further information relevant to their identity as a Native American and their selected label as two-spirit, lesbian or gay that had not been previously addressed in the interview. Any additional information was then further explored through questions and prompts. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours, with a mean length of 1.5 half hours.

## Procedure

All interviews were conducted by the first author in the participants' homes, offices, and shops during the years 1995 and 1996. Confidentiality of data was facilitated by requiring selection and utilization of a pseudonym as an

identifier for their data. All interviews were audio taped with a standard tape recorder and later transcribed with EthnoV-4.

Data was analyzed with a modified grounded theory method, in which dialog was chunk coded (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), rather than the line coding recommended by Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited by Dey, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited by Dey, 1999). These chunk codes, varying in size from 2 to 30 lines of text, were produced through careful examination of the dialog for salient features and comparison of these features for similarities and differences. When all responses were assigned a category, we began axial coding, relating categories to subcategories in search of relationships. Through the process of grouping, refining definitions, collapsing across and splintering categories, five themes were co-constructed between the first author and the participants' dialog. These resulting themes were then verified by repeated presence in the data.

## RESULTS

### Theme 1: A Subgroup of Three Participants Report Always Knowing They Were TsLG

. . . I've always known I was gay. I remember that since first grade . . . I remember that because there was this kid that I liked a lot. (laughs) And I even knew why. (Joe)

. . . I've always known I was gay, you know I didn't know what gay was. I knew I was different . . . I particularly realized that I was attracted to boys and men in a way that other boys and men weren't. (Robert)

. . . [being two-spirit] was always there and I always knew it. I grew up knowing that my primary physical connection was with women. (Spotted Eagle)

### Theme 2: Members of This Subgroup Report Always Being Comfortable With Their Sexual Orientation Identity

. . . That identity question is not a problem for me . . . I've never had a problem accepting my sexual orientation (Joe)

. . . I didn't have a lot of the problems about being gay growing-up that some people have. (Robert)

. . . That was the way I was created. That was the gift that was given to me. . . . however you are born is important. (Spotted Eagle)

### Theme 3: Most Members of This Subgroup Do Not Report Specific TsLG Identity Development Events or Processes

. . . I don't think that it [identity as a gay person] did [develop]. I've just always known I've been gay. (Joe)

. . . [my two-spirit identity developed] the same as my identity as a human being because they were all honored in those ceremonies (e.g., puberty ritual). I can't take that apart from who I am as a whole. I was taught that a two-spirit person, particularly a woman, has a particular responsibility to herself and her people or the rest of the world. However you want to encompass your people, you know. And I was taught those things as soon as I could learn, through my whole life. (Spotted Eagle)

### Theme 4: Members of This Subgroup Do Not Report Engaging in Passing Behaviors and Are Fully Out

. . . My parents know now. I think that it's brought us closer together . . . with my brothers and sisters it's never been an issue. I told them, they said, "Yeah, we know.," so I said "Fine." (laughs) . . . I have always been accepted in the family . . . [I'm out to] co-workers, people I've gone to school with, friends, just about anybody who is important in my life in some way and those that aren't important in my life, I don't care about. (Joe)

. . . I think it's very important for gay people to be openly gay and always have been so . . . I have made it clear, usually in the resume by some reference to some gay political activity and then I explicitly say it when I'm offered the job. (Robert)

. . . it's not something I hide . . . when we would have our social dances, you know, I always danced with women and it was never a problem . . . never a big deal. I don't think that there is anyone that I interact with that I would have withheld [two-spirit identity] from (Spotted Eagle)

### Theme 5: The Identity Development Experiences of Two Participants Fit Those Predicted by Cass' Model

- a. Experienced the development of their sexual orientation as a long, painful and difficult process, fitting with Cass' identity confusion stage:

. . . very long and painful . . . growing up is very hard . . . it's just been real, real long and real painful for the most part . . . I wouldn't do it again if I had the choice. (Tommy)

. . . it was a long and lengthily process to get through my own bigotries because of what the society puts on us, you know and I'm a homosexual and homosexual activity is against the law. I'm already a criminal . . . internally I have to decriminalize myself. (Mikey)

- b. Experienced a period of denying their sexual orientation, fitting with Cass' identity comparison stage:

. . . from trying to deny who I was . . . (Tommy)

. . . I've suffered from identity confusion at a young age . . . Everybody knew I was gay, but I was the last one to know it and admit it. (Mikey)

- c. Their awareness of the negative societal attitudes held toward gays resulted in self-destructive behavior and separation from society as a whole, fitting with Cass' Identity comparison stage:

. . . we went to the church. That's where I had the conflict . . . ya' know homosexuality is bad . . . growing up thinking that you shouldn't be this way . . . you consider yourself bad . . . I remember several times wanting to commit suicide because it wasn't normal (Tommy)

. . . for years the word God or Jesus carried the connotation of oppression, where they lay guilt on me . . . what the society puts on us, you know and I'm a homosexual and homosexual activity is against the law. I'm already a criminal . . . I found morphine . . . In my belief now, every time you stick a needle in your arm and shoot morphine or heroin or cocaine, that's an act of attempted suicide (Mikey)

- d. Previous period of hiding sexual orientation or passing, fitting with Cass' identity tolerance stage:

. . . to trying to lead a double life . . . "Well, I can be gay, I just won't tell anybody." (Tommy)

. . . I had sex with virtually everybody and I was mean about it. You know, "You tell anybody I done this and I'll break your nose." You know, and I punched a few people out" . . . I felt I had to protect myself . . . Beginning to come out as a result of prison [after age 18] (Mikey)

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that the Cass model does not provide an accurate understanding of the identity development experiences of all

Native American TsLG people. Accounts of passing, a sense that they are abnormal or wrong (as reflected in discomfort with their sexual orientation) and a sense of alienation from family, friends, or society as a whole are conspicuously absent from the life stories of some participants. These experiences and resolution of their associated dilemmas play pivotal roles in the Cass (1979) model, often serving as defining characteristics for locating the individual within the model (e.g., identity comparison, identity acceptance, and identity synthesis). Therefore, their absence within the dialog of some participants suggests that this model does not provide the best representation of their TsLG identity development.

The explanation for these absences may be found within the interpersonal congruency theory, which provides the impetus for movement within the Cass model. Interpersonal congruency theory proposes that both stability and change in human behavior are the result of either congruency or incongruency (respectively) within a person's interpersonal matrix (Cass, 1979). An individual's interpersonal matrix is a reoccurring functional relation between her or his perception of a) some characteristic that she or he attributes to the self, b) behavior as the direct result of that characteristic, and c) another person's view of that characteristic. A group of similar and mutually supporting matrices forms an interpersonal system.

Cass (1979) hypothesized that lesbian and gay individuals are impelled through their model of homosexual identity development by repeated attempts to resolve incongruencies within her or his interpersonal system. Implicit within her hypothesis is the assumption that the individual resides in a heterosexist society where social experiences and pressures produce an initial self-identification as heterosexual, combined with the perception of non-heterosexuality as wrong and problematic. Thus, the interpersonal congruency theory, combined with our dominant heterosexist society, provides an explanation of why a) lesbians and gays develop their sexual orientation identity through a series of stages (changes) and b) heterosexuals appear to develop an unquestioned sexual orientation identity (stability).

According to the interpersonal congruency theory, TsLG Native Americans residing with the unique social location of low-heterosexist communities would be expected to experience a congruent interpersonal system. Lacking the impetus specified by Cass (1979) as necessary for movement through her model, these individuals would not be expected to progress through a series of identity development stages, but rather would demonstrate a stable sexual orientation identity. This is exactly the pattern expressed by Spotted Eagle, Joe, and Robert. Of striking importance is the fact that these individuals share a pattern of absences, suggesting that this data does not represent individuals who differ from the Cass model at various different points, but rather a subgroup of individuals whose TsLG identity follows a different developmental course.

## A Pattern of Absences

Despite a specific request to discuss how their identity as a TsLG person developed, all three individuals failed to recount events or experiences specific to this aspect of their self. Rather, their brief responses (Theme 3) recount it as a natural part of growing up. This is in marked contrast to the response of two individuals who did follow the Cass (1979) model (Mikey and Tommy), where the same question elicited pages of response (outlined under Theme 5).

The three members of this subset clearly state that they have always been aware of and comfortable with their TsLG identity, with one individual recounting a specific event from the first grade. This difference places them outside Cass's model before it even starts, as it violates her assumption that the individual would initially self-identify as heterosexual. Nor do these individuals appear to enter the model at any later point in their development, as evidenced by the absence of experiences predicted by Cass' (1979) model. Specifically, members of this subgroup do not discuss experiences of discomfort with their TsLG identity, a key component of the identity confusion and identity comparison stages. Also, they do not report the experiences of alienation from family, friends and society expected in the identity comparison stage. Finally, members of this subgroup do not report engaging in "passing" behaviors, with two individuals explicitly stating that they have always been "out."

## Following the Cass Model of Homosexual Identity Development

This pattern of absences, however, does not appear to apply to all TsLG Native Americans. Two participants in this study, Mikey and Tommy, recount many experiences fitting with Cass' (1979) model. Similar to the subset above, these individuals share a pattern of experiences, suggesting that this data represents a second subgroup of individuals whose TsLG identity development follows Cass' model. As noted above, when asked to discuss the development of their TsLG identity, both of these individuals recount a lengthy, painful process. Fitting with the confusion and comparison stages, they both experienced extreme discomfort with their sexual orientation, as evidenced by accounts of feeling abnormal, and reported thoughts or indirect attempts at suicide. Their feelings of abnormality, criminalization, and suicidal ideation are also typical of the alienation from society experienced during identity comparison, as is their denial of homosexuality. Finally, their accounts of leading a double life and finally coming out as gay fits with the maintenance and rejection of passing behaviors of the tolerance, acceptance and pride stages.

## Two Identity Development Pathways

The results of this study suggest that Native Americans may experience the development of their TsLG identity along at least two different developmental

pathways. The first of these, as exhibited by Mikey and Tommy, is the pathway detailed by Cass (1979). The second, as exhibited by Spotted Eagle, Joe, and Robert, is an initial self-identification as TsLG that is experienced as a natural part of the self as a whole, without any sense of discomfort or alienation from others. These individuals engage in disclosure across the course of their life, without passing. Although one participant, Stephanie, did not follow either presented pathway, this may be due to a) her very recent identification as Native American and b) her childhood involvement in theater and dance—subcultures with low heterosexism. The presence of two apparently different developmental pathways raises the question of influential factors. Unfortunately, the current sample size reduces any discussion of potential factors to conjecture.

### Strengths and Restrictions

The sample size of six, although problematic with regard to generalizations, is in keeping with the number of TsLG Native Americans participating in other studies exploring the experiences of this population (see Brotman et al., 2002; Jacobs & Brown, 1997). Furthermore, as a qualitative inquiry, the primary goal of this inquiry is the development of a detailed understanding of a particular aspect of the participants' lives, rather than generalizations to other population members. As such, the in-depth nature of the interview format facilitated the collection of the rich, detailed data necessary for the development of a thorough picture of each participant's experiences. It is important to note that all participants felt that the interview addressed all aspects of the self relevant to the topic, resulting in an accurate picture of them as a person, with two volunteering that she or he felt "very good" about the interview. The rich, in-depth nature of the data and the participants' comfort with the thoroughness of the interview protocol combine with the authors' efforts to maintain the voice of the participants throughout analysis and presentation to produce a quality qualitative inquiry into the experiences of TsLG Native Americans. Although inclusion of member checking would have been preferable, the gap in time between data collection and final analysis made this step unattainable.

Several restrictions must be kept in mind when considering the results of this study. The first of these is location. Although two participants (Spotted Eagle and Robert) grew up in their tribal reservation, while another maintains close contact with family members living on his tribal reservation (Joe), all participants were living in an urban area at the time of the interviews. Thus, some of the issues, perspectives or experiences presented in this study may be more common to Native Americans living in an urban environment and may not apply to Native Americans living in other areas (e.g., reservations, rural communities). Second, the composition of the

participant sample is predominately gay males, which opens the possibility that the results of this study may be more reflective of the experiences of male TsG Native Americans than those of female TsL. Finally, all six participants evidenced some degree of knowledge regarding TGMB and FGFB people and their roles within some Native American cultures. Previous research (Adams & Phillips, 2006) suggests that this knowledge serves as an important variable in TsLG peoples' self-perceptions. However, despite these possible restrictions and the limitation of generalizations due to the small sample size, synthesis of the results of this study with other published works provides some insightful suggestions and contributes to an ever increasing detailed understanding of the identity experiences of TsLG Native Americans.

## CONCLUSION

This study adds empirical strength to the claims of self-identified TsLG Native Americans expressing a lack of fit between their lived experiences and those currently presented in the research literature (Anguksuar, 1997; House, 1997; Red Earth, 1997; Robertson, 1997; Thomas, 1997; Wilson, 1996). Grouping of participants based on identity related experiences produced two sub-groups, in which all members shared similar experiences. One subset (Mikey and Tommy) followed the course of Cass' (1979) model, while a second subset (Spotted Eagle, Joe, and Robert) demonstrated a notable lack of many of the key experiences specified by Cass. The presence of two subsets, each following a different pattern, suggests the presence of two TsLG identity development pathways. It is important to note that although the experiences of this second subset do not fit with Cass' model, consideration of differences in social location (Adams & Phillips, 2006; Brotman et al., 2002) reveals this pattern as consistent with the interpersonal congruency theory that Cass theorized as the impelling force for movement through her model. Further research with this population is necessary to firmly verify the presence of a different identity developmental pathway and explore potentially influential variables at both the cultural and individual level.

## NOTE

1. Due to the diversity of Native American tribal cultures, tribal membership is an important part of self-identification. This is reflected by most Native American authored texts' inclusion of the author's tribal affiliation within the respective table of contents and references. In respect for this, we have included authors' tribal affiliations throughout the reference, presented in parentheses immediately following each author's name, whenever the current authors knew this information.

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