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Callender, Charles & Kochems, L. M. 1983. "The North American Berdache". *Current Anthropology*
24(4): 443-56.

Callender and Kochem's article is a comprehensive and exhaustive review of the historical literature on the Berdache of North America. The authors review pieces from as early as the 1500's to as current as two years before the article itself, to try to gain the most accurate picture and understanding of Berdaches. They specifically explore differences in categories of dress and behavior to examine the similarities and differences in Berdaches among tribes across North America. Unlike scholars before them, Callender and Kochem emphasize the gender mixing and dualism as the source of power for both Berdache men and women.

Berdache are individuals both male and female who exhibit characteristics and dress of the sex opposite to their biological one. The most common characteristics of these individuals is transvestism and engaging in activities of the opposite sex. However, no characteristic of Berdaches is universal to all of North America. Berdaches were almost always not biologically inter-sex, something that confused many early explorers and ethnographers. However, Berdaches became such because of one of two reasons, sometimes in combination. Either because they exhibited an interest and propensity for the activities of the opposite sex, or because of a spiritual vision. The first reason often had to be confirmed spiritually, by the second.

While many past publications emphasized the power of Berdaches because of their spiritual connotations, the authors disagree. Callender and Kochems instead argue that the power of Berdaches

came instead for their gender mixing and inter-sexuality. They explain that the ability to flow between both genders gave Berdaches more economic value , and the ability to have a self sufficient household. Their activities were allowed, as long as they did not upset the order of heterosexual marriages which produced the future of the tribes. Homosexual behavior was common among Berdaches, but not always practiced. Many were either heterosexual or bisexual in their behavior. Even though Transvestism was common, dress often varied. Berdaches may dress according to the activity in which they were engaged , or mix the clothing of both genders. Women Berdaches were much less common than their male counterparts. While women Berdaches did sometimes engage in warfare, their status was much more related to their active role in hunting. The authors argue that being naturally feminine was not enough to make a man Berdache, as women who were unfeminine were not considered to be Berdache.

Berdaches were widespread across North America, but much less common in the Easter US than West of the Mississippi. They were seemingly more numerous before European contact and influence, as earlier accounts state much larger numbers than those past the 19th century. Berdaches may perform special or spiritual duties within their communities, but this was not universal to all tribes. Of the tribes that were examined, 113 groups had good evidence of Berdaches. Only 30 groups had evidence for female Berdaches. The authors explain decrease in their numbers of Berdaches as most likely related to the influence of Christian values and ideologies from settlers and colonists. Berdaches were often misunderstood as solely homosexual or hermaphrodite, but this was almost never the case. The authors conclude that based on their exhaustive literature review, it is the social aspects and activities of Berdaches that mattered over their sexuality or sexual activity.

Overall, I really enjoyed this article. It was clear that the authors took a lot of time and energy researching all the literature they would on the subject. For this fact alone, I think we can assume that their conclusions are probably the most realistic on the topic thus far. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the majority of the literature is spotty and influenced by the values of those who wrote it. Regardless, the authors did an amazing job of summing up the Berdache across North America.