

Interview with Anne Bolin, Ph.D.

by Dallas Denny

Dr. Anne Bolin is an anthropologist who teaches at North Carolina's Elon College and does research in women's bodybuilding, which she categorizes as a frontier in which women are redefining what it means to be a woman. In the spirit of participant-observation, Anne herself is a bodybuilder.

Anne's doctoral research was also a participant-observation study. She attended meetings of the "Berdache Society," a fictional name for a male-to-female transsexual support group in an undisclosed Midwestern city. Her dissertation was published by Bergin and Garvey in 1988 with the title *In Search of Eve: Transsexual Rites of Passage*.

Anne brought a new and important perspective to transsexualism. Because she is not a clinician, her interactions with transsexual people took place in the real world rather than in the artificial and highly structured treatment setting which had previously generated the majority of the literature of transsexualism. She discovered that many of the clinical "truisms" of transsexualism were not supported by her observations. For instance, just as in any other diverse group of women, the members of the Berdache Society had a wide variety of personal styles, modes of dress, and feminine presentations ranging from ingenu to matron to seductress to business executive to earth mother. She did not find the exaggerated feminine characteristics and stereotyped modes of dress so often reported in the clinical literature.

In fact, when Anne looked at the interactions between caregivers and transsexual persons, she discovered that each party had objectives which affected the relationship. Caregivers served as "gatekeepers," and transsexual persons had to convince the caregivers to open the gates. For this, they used a variety of tactics, including the stereotyped feminine presentations which have been so often written up in medical journals and which their caregivers expected. The caregivers seemed to have "clinical blinders" which kept them from seeing what was actually happening. In fact, transsexual persons themselves often looked through the same blinders.

The importance of *In Search of Eve* is that it reframed gender dysphoria, enabling those who bothered to look to see that transsexualism is much more than a phenomenon of patients sitting in waiting rooms in doctors' offices. Transsexual persons come in all shapes and sizes and they need not conform to the expectations placed on them by psychologists and physicians.

We interviewed Anne in the summer of 1991 at her home in Burlington, North Carolina. We began by asking a question which had been on our mind for some time.

CQ: Anne Bolyn was one of the wives of Henry the Eighth. Are people always remarking on the similarities of your names?

Bolin: Yes they are, and there is an interesting story behind my name. My mother gave it to me on purpose. She's Italian. During World War II, she emigrated to England, where she worked for the BBC. She met my father there, and must have been impressed with his name, which was George, the same as Anne Bolyn's brother, with whom Anne was accused of having incest. So she named me Anne on purpose. I have a picture of Anne Bolyn on my office door.

CQ: Who were your biggest influences in the field of anthropology?

Bolin: Oh, strong women figures! Ruth Benedict, who was truly a pioneer. She never really fit in with her culture or her society. And her very close friend, who also is a very famous woman anthropologist, Margaret Mead. Both have influenced me a great deal, and they've influenced the field as well. They stood outside their time. Margaret Mead went off in 1928 to Samoa, when women just did not do things like that. Benedict and Mead are truly pioneering women—lineage elders. They had the kind of perspective that comes from being able to stand outside your own culture.

CQ: As you did when you were working on your doctoral dissertation, which later became your book, *In Search of Eve*. You did a participant-observation study with male-to-female

transsexual people. You studied another culture without having to leave the country. I know you talk about it in your book, but tell us again: how did you get interested in working with transgendered people?

Bolin: In the early '70s, I wrote my master's thesis, which was entitled *God Save the Queen: A Study of a Homosexual Community*. In 1972, it was not particularly popular to write about this subject. But it was the most incredible of times. I had the opportunity to be the token heterosexual in the gay liberation front. I was, I think, the only heterosexual in the front. It was the result of having a friend in anthropology. He would take me out on weekends. We would go to the gay bars. He assured me that he was not gay, but he had gay friends he was sure I would like; maybe I could do one of my anthropology papers on them. Later, he revealed to me that he was gay.

So I ended up doing my honors paper in anthropology on the gay community as I came to know it through participant observation. It was his friendship which led me to pursue it for a master's thesis.

By that time, I was getting interested in gender in anthropology, and I noticed that there was not a lot of information available. It turned out that one of my mentors, the late Dr. Omar Stewart, who was the expert on peyotism in the United States, had written an article on homosexuality. He had looked at the cross-cultural record on the expression of homosexuality. I also ran across a little book called *Mother Camp* by Esther Newton, who reported on the phenomenon of transgendered people in the gay community—gay male crossdressers. It was a fascinating account, and it started me thinking about gender identity.

I got into the literature, and found that there were some real definitional problems. Our labels emerge from psychiatric traditions, which are firmly rooted in bipolar Western notions of gender. There are two genders—male and female—and those are the only two choices. In other cultures, there are other, supernumary

genders—alternative genders. There were gender options out there in the world besides just two.

I began to think that it would be a good dissertation topic to study those who were expressed their gender in alternative ways in the gay community. I was originally going to go to Hawaii to study ethnic variations through a gender clinic there. There is a native indigenous role, the Mahu, in which a person, usually a male, takes on the characteristics of another sex. I thought I might find the Hawaiian tradition of the Mahu overlaid with Western conceptions of homosexuality and transsexualism. And in Hawaii, there are other cultural traditions as well—for instance, a large Asian population, and a Caucasian population. I thought Hawaii had fascinating research populations. I still think so. I think one of the things missing in this field is cross-cultural data. In terms of those who get sex reassignment surgery, there seems to be a definite white, middle-class bias—the people who can afford to get it, get it. What about our Hispanic population, the Native American population, the Black population? Where do they fit in?

The Native Americans are particularly interesting, because they have a berdache tradition, in which a person can become the other sex, when there are two, or a third or fourth sex, depending upon how many categories the culture has. How do our psychiatric categories work in such a situation? We need to consider cultural variations.

CQ: Do you think transsexualism is becoming a cultural institution in the Western world?

Bolin: How are you defining cultural institution? Are you asking if transsexualism might becoming a third gender category for humans?

CQ: Yes. Certainly, the term is of relatively recent origin, but most Americans have by now at least seen transgendered persons on television. Many have had some personal contact with one or more transsexual persons. Do we now have a new category, with a new set of social expectations?

Bolin: That is an absolutely fascinating question! It even relates to the

issue of our stereotyped conceptualization of gays and lesbians. Are they also considered transgendered populations? Because the stereotypes—and the stereotypes are not dead—are associated with gendered kinds of behaviors: how people look. On the other hand, peoples' histories, and how we perceive them, are important. So—do we have another gender category, or are transsexual people and homosexuals perceived to be “sick” people of their gender? Is there becoming an alternative gender category, or are these people continuing to be stigmatized members of the two categories we acknowledge?

If there was another category out there, that would be a very interesting kind of thing. We have only two categories. It makes absolute sense that there be a surgical option for someone who feels conflicted enough to want sex reassignment surgery in order to have the full experience as we define it in the American culture, to be a woman—which is to be a person with a vagina, or a man, which is to be a person with a penis. I'm just saying that people with vaginas are considered women, and the surgery sustains our two category system. But could we in fact have a new category, or categories? We could have a third gender, or two alternative genders—another way of being a man, so that people would not necessarily go so far as to have the surgery. They could be social men with clitorises and vaginas. And could we not have another category of social women with penises? Could that be a possibility in our culture? I think not at this point, because we are so biocentric—that is, permeated with our belief in biology and genitalia as the sine quo non of gender. But I do see murmurings of this in the transgender approach and in androgyny.

CQ: Here's a related question: Women's roles in American society have changed. If you were to take today's woman in her manner of expression and dress and compare her to a woman of 1920's America, she would seem highly transgendered. Largely, the change in female gender role has been attributed to economics—the Rosie the

Riveter phenomenon of World War II, when American women first entered the work force in large numbers. Do you see this kind of slippage occurring for men, and could it be done outside an economic context? In other words, with a sufficient number of gender pioneers and gender activists, do you think a change could be brought to the perception of what men are like in America?

Is the feminist movement a threat? You'd better believe it. It's a big threat. When my male students get concerned in my classes on gender and sex, I tell them. "You bet it's a threat. It's going to change everything."

Bolin: The Changing Men movement is a very interesting movement. The men's movement is not really a political movement. It is very different from the feminist movement. It is not concerned with dominance and power. These are men who are working from the inside. Their primary focus seems to be on the kind of emotional crippling that has occurred as a result of the more rigid stereotypes about expressing themselves emotionally. From my perspective, men and women have the same sets of emotions, but we learn to express them differently. What the men's movement seems to be addressing is in fact this very issue of the denial of expression of men's nurturing qualities. I think that a political statement needs to be made here. Right now, from what I understand, this incipient movement is composed of small groups of men who are learning to express themselves, exploring their relationships with women, getting in touch with the “natural” pasts.

Have we made headway? I think things are changing. We are seeing paternity leave. But are men taking advantage of it? We've made some steps forward, but it does seem that we have also taken steps back. There is a lot of regional variation in the United

States, so far as men's roles are concerned. I don't want to engage in regional stereotypes here, but I do think we need to be aware of local climates, where we find pockets with less sex role disparity between males and females, and areas where there is greater sex role disparity. We have to look at these differences according to class and status.

I do see it is very difficult on a personal level. It is a constant struggle to have an egalitarian relationship and not slip into sex role stereotypes. An example is the Cinderella complex, where one waits for one's knight to come and rescue one—no matter how professional one is as a woman. Those are things that many in the baby boomer population have grown up with. I think that for male persons, no matter how egalitarian they are trying to be, it is easy to slip into traditional male roles as well. Males have more to lose, in terms of power, and women have a whole lot more to gain as they proceed.

Is the feminist movement a threat? You'd better believe it. It's a big threat. When my male students get concerned in my classes on gender and sex, I tell them. “You bet it's a threat. It's going to change everything.” But what do you get from it? You get partnerships in life. You're both on equal footing. You can work it out with your partner according to your different likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. But to break roles down just because of some gender script is not the way to achieve egalitarian status. I do think that ultimately, for women to achieve equal status, we're going to have to get equal pay. And in a capitalist society like ours, when women have achieved economic equality, then we will be a long way towards achieving equality in other areas. I think we're in the process of achieving economic parity. We're a long way from achieving political parity, but we're making inroads. And as far as our somatic selves, that is the last area. It's where my present research is going. It's the ultimate area for change. We are denied what physical efficacy. We are on our way to achieving some economic, and hopefully political equality, but

we're still denied our physical selves, our bodies, and our ability to feel ourselves in the universe.

CQ: Much of your current research has to do with women bodybuilders, and you're a bodybuilder yourself. How did you get interested in that? Why women bodybuilders? How did you get interested in that, and what is the significance of bodybuilding for the expression of gender?

Bolin: My experience working on *In Search of Eve* was the most wonderful experience in any endeavor. I have never learned so much in my life. I stopped taking gender for granted. I mean, you can talk all you want in theory about gender as a learned and constructed process, about gender as cultural, but nothing brings it home like living it. The people who helped me understand it the way they did created a whole new set of questions for me, about gender, and about the limits of gender, and about taking it in the direction of the physical self, and the relationship of the biological to the cultural. About how we construct the biological in our society, and the meaning we give to biology, and the meaning we give to bodies. So when I saw this movie called *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, I found it very interesting, because in it was a woman bodybuilder, Bev Francis, who is the strongest woman in the world. They zoom in on her, and when you look at her physique, the first response—and I've shown this to numerous students—their first response to her is horror. She has the muscles of a man. In fact, my students will say, "She looks like a man." She looks like a man as we in our society picture men with large muscles to look. She was a former power lifter, so she has very big muscles. So she seriously challenges our notion of femininity in this movie.

At first you're horrified by her, because she looks like a quote "freak". And of course the issue of steroids always comes up. Some of my students said, "She certainly looks like she did steroids. She's a female taking male hormones."

I thought, "Well, I know a little bit about that."

I don't know if Bev took male hormones, but her physique was definitely the kind of physique that a pre-operative female-to-male might think would be one way to be a man, would definitely be desirable. And yet, as I listened to this woman talk, she was talking about just seeing how much she could subject her body to. And I thought, "This is very alien. I'm a woman, and I've always been taught to stop when it hurts. I've always been taught not to push myself physically. To get out of physical education class. To use my period as an excuse." I had always been taught this, and here I was listening to these words. And rather than alienate me, Bev Francis really intrigued me. And I know she alienates my students at first, but as they listen to her story, they begin to develop an empathy for her. She is truly challenged by pushing herself to the limit. That's where she has really excelled. And she was punished for being a freaky-looking bodybuilder. In fact, in the show in the movie, she came in last place. We are also presented with several other archetype women, one of whom is Rachel McLish, who has muscles, but is very quote "feminine." If you see the movie, you will really see some gender stereotypes being enacted here. I thought, "That's anthropology."

I had never in my life been in a gym. But I thought, "This is a very intriguing idea. Here we have women who want to get muscles. Some of them want to get muscles as long as they are 'feminine' muscles. But what are feminine muscles? What does that say? How far is too far? We have these two archetypes. Bev Francis has gone 'too far.' Rachel McLish hasn't." I decided I would like to explore this.

CQ: But back when you were a graduate student, you didn't go to Hawaii. You stayed where you were and studied transsexual people.

Bolin: Yes, I stayed in the United States, in a large midwestern city.

CQ: Because transsexual people were there?

Bolin: Yes. Because I found them. It was wonderful. I was still working on my Ph.D. I was teaching sex and gender

courses at a university, and I called up the gay community one day, and I put in my order. You'll like this. I said, "Well, I would like some speakers. I would like a lesbian woman, a gay male. Can you help? I would like an S&M person. And do you happen to have a transsexual?" And they said, "Oh, yes, we have all of those. And we have a therapist who works with transsexuals. And we have some transvestites. We'll send some people over to you." And sure enough, in the course of two lectures, I had gays and lesbians, I had an S&M practitioner, and they sent me over—I'll never forget that day. I describe it in the book. They sent me over a therapist, and a pre-operative transsexual, and a transvestite, and I had no idea who was who. I had never ever met a transsexual before in my life. In fact, I kind of pictured the therapist as one of the cultural women, even though she was the one who had been born and raised as a female.

I told them I was interested in doing my dissertation research on transsexual people. So they invited me to their group. It was incredible. I was terrified. I had no idea what to expect. I was sitting out in my little Volkswagen. It was freezing cold. I had on my bold slingback high heels, had to walk in them in the snow. Everything was so vivid that night. I hadn't known what to expect, whether or not to look like an anthropologist nerd. I expected something quiet, subdued, and I walked into this Christmas party. And there they were. A whole group of people who identified themselves as transsexuals and transvestites, and they were warm to me, and invited me in. I told them I was an anthropologist, and I said, "I'd really like to know what this is all about. Who are you?" I mean, the basic anthropological question: "Who are you? What are you up to? What is this all about?"

They took a vote to see whether they accepted me to come into the group to study with them.

In this group, there were two identity options—transsexual and crossdresser. In this culture, we have transvestites and transsexuals. Harry Benjamin's model of a continuum I think is a good concept, despite its Western psychiatric bias. When you

study other cultures, you see that there are many kinds of options out there. In fact, different cultures don't even define the self in the same way. In many cultures, genitals will serve as your original designation as a male or female, but in terms of whether you are going to be a man or woman, the work you choose to do may be far more

My experience working on In Search of Eve was the most wonderful experience in my life. I have never learned so much in my life. I stopped taking gender for granted. I mean, you can talk all you want in theory about gender as a learned and constructed process, about gender as cultural, but nothing brings it home like living it.

important a determiner of gender than what genitals you have. For example, there is a wonderful tradition called woman marriage—and I like to use terms like wonderful liberally, because I'm so absolutely impressed with human diversity that I like to celebrate it all the time. There's a great capacity for variation by human beings. Woman marriage is well-known in African cultures like the Nuer. It serves as a recruitment strategy. A barren woman—and don't forget the name of the evolution game is of course reproduction and kinship and lineage—so a barren Nuer woman who cannot have children may take a woman for her wife, and she will become a social male and husband. The woman husband will make arrangements for her wife to have children, and she will become the social father of those children. So what we have is an opportunity for a woman to become not just a social male, but a father as well. How does an option such as woman marriage affect an individual? These women husbands are considered very good husbands. There needs to be more research in terms of what the relationships are like in the marriage. In terms of gender identity—what does it mean to be a social male? I mean, it's very nice that our researchers say, "So this is an opportunity for a Nuer woman to be a social male." But what does that mean? How do the Nuer construct gender as a category and how is sexuality expressed within these kinds of mar-

riages? Those questions are still not answered.

And there are some other options as well. They show us the multiplicity and complexity of gender and how cultures provide social identities. Into such options are squeezed a pantheon. Serena Nanda gives a fascinating account of the hijras of India. The

hijras show us these multiple layers of social identity and personal identity, of nature being shaped by culture.

The hijra caste originated from the hermaphroditic status of its members. For us in the West, a hermaphrodite is someone who is born with physical characteristics of both sexes. The genitalia are very ambiguous. The hijra are a caste of people born with ambiguous genitalia. However, there is an alternate route so that non-hermaphrodites may have surgery to become like hijras. These people are not born hijras, but they too can achieve a hermaphrodite-type status. Other avenues allow for hijra pretenders.

The Navajo nadle also challenge our bipolar gender paradigm. They have a hermaphroditic status that is valued by the culture. The Navajo people have a recessive gene in which some people are born with ambiguous genitalia. These people become nadle. But both biological males and biological females can also assume the status of nadle without modifying their genitalia. If you are born into the category, it's on the basis of what the genitalia look like. However, one can become a nadle, even though the genitalia are not hermaphroditic. Biological males and females can become nadle pretenders

CQ: How do they become nadle?

Bolin: Nadle is a very special role that has certain behaviors and tasks associated with it.

CQ: So it's not a physical process, like it is for the hijras, who undergo surgery of the genitals?

Bolin: Absolutely not. It's a cultural process of behaving in ways in which nadle behave. Nadle are considered to be really good at babysitting, very good at economic tasks that traditionally are associated with females. They're allowed to do some tasks, but denied others. They're not allowed to go to war, as I recall. So it isn't a role where nadle take on the behaviors of the other sex, but rather a blended status. It has some characteristics from the male gender repertoire, and some from the female repertoire, and some unique to nadle. But it isn't based solely on genitalia.

Now what's really interesting is that nadle can marry and have relationships with either males or females, but they cannot have relationships with other nadle.

So what have we here? Five categories of people. We've got nadle, which is your hermaphrodite. Male nadle pretenders, female nadle pretenders, females, and males. But the nadle and nadle pretenders are really one category of personhood. They have the option of intimate relations with anyone but another nadle. The Navajo culture does not allow homosexuality. That is, they do not allow women to have sex with women, or men to have sex with men. But nadle are not considered women or men. Nadle are nadle. Thus a physically male nadle who has a sexual relationship with a non-nadle male is not in a homosexual relationship. So I hope this begins to show us that our concept of homosexuality as we know it is really inappropriate cross-culturally. When we begin to think, "Well, what do you mean, the same sex?" I'm sorry; nadle are not the same sex. Nadle are something else. They are nadle. And some of them may have the same genitalia as you, but they're not the same sex.

I think that should give us all a little bit more relativistic perspective on the world, to not be judgmental in our terms. So when you go to other cultures, you can't even use the term

homosexual in the same way. It's a completely different kind of thing. So Gilbert Herdt goes up to New Guinea—and these highland New Guinea types are known for hypermasculinity. We are talking about machismo culture par excellence.

CQ: With penis sheaths—

Bolin: —and institutionalized homosexuality. Where, in fact, every male in that society will go through a fairly long process at some stage in his life, where at one point he will become a fellator, and then later a fellatee, or the fellated upon. Are these men homosexual? We can't assume that. It is such a different experience for them. It is what all men do. Sperm is an important substance, and boys must acquire it from other men, since they aren't born with it. Therefore, young boys must ingest it, so that they can continue to have it. They believe that later in life, women diminish the sperm. Sounds like football coaches, doesn't it?

So here again, we have the ethnographic spectrum showing us that we have to really be careful with our assumptions. Even though our clinical terms are really meant to help us be scientific and impartial, they are bound up in our own Euro-American gender paradigm and don't apply cross-culturally because other cultures define sexuality and self differently.

CQ: Speaking of Euro-American notions of gender, what did you think when you started discovering things that weren't reported in the clinical literature? You found that a lot of these things in the clinical literature just weren't holding for your subject population. What were your reactions then?

Bolin: What I thought was going on was that clinicians are in a very special kind of relationship with the quote "treatment community." As an anthropologist, I'm not in a relationship with the treatment community. I was in a relationship with people who became my friends, or I wouldn't have been given the kind of information I put in my book. Although I maintained my scientific objectivity, I myself was transformed.

I necessarily had a very different type of relationship with transsexual persons than did clinicians. My field is anthropology. It's a very critical and self-aware discipline. We are critical of ourselves as anthropologists and cautious about other peoples' stories. We don't want to create exotic others. We want the diversity of voices to be heard in our accounts. But clinicians can also take the position of being self-aware and self-critical and stepping outside their own professions to analyze themselves and their discourses. That's the only way we're really going to begin to get a real feel and a real understanding for the humanistic attributes of science.

How do we tell other peoples' stories? Is it better for me to take somebody's narrative, translate it totally into my own scientific anthropology jargon, or is it better for me to intersperse throughout my story peoples' own words so that the reader has their vision and can hear their words? Is that better, or shall I just translate scientifically? Well, a little bit of both is what I have chosen. Caregivers could begin to be self-aware of their own circumstances—and I'm not being critical—but it would be interesting for therapists, who are incredibly self-aware people, to begin to look at themselves as part of the culture of the interaction patterns that occur between caregiver and patient. I think it would be really revealing. And this is occurring in the clinical literature. The reason I took such a different perspective is that I was an anthropologist. No one had to prove their gender identity to me. I simply accepted the group members for what they were. They were not my clients looking to me for guidance or a recommendation for surgery. It's not my position to decide to what degree someone is conflicted or whether the surgery is warranted. If you tell me you're a woman, I accept you for who you are, just as you accept me for who I am.

The transgendered people I worked with gave me my Ph.D. That's how I see it. So what can I give them? Well, hopefully, I can give them a book that will help other people who are in

a similar position by telling their stories in a way that is meaningful to the reader. I wanted their voices to be heard. When they were transsexual, their transsexual words are there, and as they become women, then their womens' words were there, too. They gave me so much. What could I do in return? I helped them with a history they hadn't experienced. I was happy to tell them what it was like from my perspective as a woman and an anthropologist.

CQ: When you got into the literature of transgender, what was your first impression? And as you continued to get into it, what was your evaluation of this literature?

Bolin: As I got into it, I thought that there was going to be some sort of model in which Mommies did it. A Mommy model, as it were. For example, the literature of homosexuality claimed that mothers smothered their little boys and made them homosexuals.

I discovered that transsexualism also had this theory attached to its etiology. Mother blame theories are based on traditional notions of parenting, including absentee fathers and over-protective mothers who violated their respective roles. The mothers are blamed for smothering and over-protecting their little boys, turning them into transsexuals with nurturance and love. And so I looked at those models. I saw a lot of them in the literature. And then I ran across Richard Green's work, and I was really impressed with his approach, because what he did was to look at behavioral patterns that went beyond the immediate family dynamics. He incorporated a contextual approach which included culture and society.

I finally centered on a social learning model—and you have to understand—I arrived at this from my examination of the literature. I had never met any transsexual persons at that point. I hypothesized that some are born with physically feminine characteristics which made them appear effeminate. I just didn't realize how much variability there was. I still think people get channeled into certain social careers. For example, if a male

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was effeminate, this has to limit his options. Such men would become stigmatized and their circumstances could lead to self-identification as a transsexual. Their options begin to be limited, they become labeled, and they find themselves in a trajectory. Because I was so naive, I didn't realize how many transsexual persons out there were really good at being men. Darn good at being men, but feeling like women inside.

I came to realize that there are multiple avenues for expressing gender variance. For example, Ariadne Kane's endorsement of androgyny is one option. I think that would be comfortable for many people if our Euro-American gender paradigm wasn't so bipolar. However, it may not be such a comfortable one for other people. But I do think that as a complex society, we are on the way to having a greater complexity of social identities which attributes of physical sex, social gender, and even sexual orientation are rearranged. I really believe that gender identities are experienced on much more of a continuum than I ever expected. For some, the option is definitely going to be surgery, yet other people may not be so firmly committed. And the gender centers and organizations like AEGIS have a vital role in helping these people become actualized—to help them to negotiate society—it's very impor-

tant to do that. Would you see that for AEGIS?

CQ: Oh, I think so. We're always telling people, "Surgery. No one ever sees it. Who knows if you've had it or not? Don't be so worried about it until you get the rest of your life in focus."

Bolin: I know of a person who will probably go back and forth all of his/ her life. And this occurs in other cultures as well. In some other cultures there are options to take on another gender role for certain periods of your life, and then to switch back. For example, the xanith in Oman is a status option for males. Xanith is more like an intermediate and often temporary gender. Males can take on the xanith role, which provides them economic opportunities they wouldn't have as males. When they've become financially sufficient, they can shed their xanith role and become men and husbands.

CQ: Any concluding remarks?

Bolin: There's much more work to be done, particularly in regard to deciphering these alternative genders. So often, we look at the ethnographic record, with its gender variance, and say, "Oh. The exotic other." But what can we learn from other cultures? After all, we're pretty exotic, we Americans, with our bipolar gender paradigm. The transgender community has a very anthropological perspective in this regard, and is way ahead of most Americans in recognizing that gender is very diverse. **CQ**

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