

Native not Queer: Performance and Identity Conflict for Sherman Alexie's Native Americans

Cultural images of Native Americans obscure representations of the lived experience of this identity group, also preventing queer/two-spirit identity variations. Examining works of the popular Native American author/filmmaker Sherman Alexie, I argue that Native American identities require a performative element deriving from stereotypes to seem authentic and legitimate, thus precluding queer representations. Complex diversity among tribes is often conflated into one monolithic Indian identity as a lingering effect of colonialism. My paper utilizes Lisa Tatonetti's framework in her essay "Visible Sexualities or Invisible Nations," in which Native American identities are unable to be queer due to pervasive "legacies of settler colonialism in their depictions of LGBTQ Native people." These representations subsequently lack the intersectionality available for other racial identities. For example, Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing* presents the tension between the reservation and the gay urban space in which the main character is unable to synthesize both identities. Alexie's characters frequently utilize and juxtapose cultural stereotypes to examine how they differ from expected components of Native American identity. In this film and other works by Alexie, I argue that the performative demands to appear "Indian" enough prevents the synthesizing of authentic queerness and lived Native American experience.