

## The Third Gender of the Inuit

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Bernard d'Angulare's article introduces the Inuit concept of a third gender and its close association with spirituality and shamanism among the group. He presents this concept through two myths collected through a combination of d'Angulare's field work since the 1950's and previously published literature dealing with this third gender. The first involves a man with attributes and behaviors traditionally assigned to a woman, while the second involves a woman with those traditionally assigned to a man. D'Angulare argues that the symbolism within the stories creates a direct connection between these individuals, which justifies their statuses as between male and female.

D'Angulare first recounts the myth of the “ Strange Man” , a male that dressed and behaved as a woman. When the brothers of the strange man became upset that he acted not as a male, he wept to the Maker of All. The Maker of All listened to his problems, and told him he would give him something. The Strange Man began to grow as if pregnant, and The Maker of All told him to float underwater to give birth. There, The Strange Man gave birth to a whale. The Whale then would follow the Strange Man to shore, bringing with it other whales that his brothers could hunt. In this way, The Strange man's gender disparity was solved. He bridged the gap between male and female by giving birth to an animal traditionally associated with men. He also was given a special location spritually and had a direct connection and relationship with the Maker of All.

In the second myth, a woman named Itijjuaq becomes the first healer of the Inuit. Born female but unable to perform the skin scraping and sewing tasks of women or conceive children, she occupied a special place in her society. She had two husbands, and learned a great deal of knoweldge from both her grandparents both in life and death. From this knowledge, she was able to heal individuals by farting in their direction. When a man became jealous of her abilities and unusual role and

circumstances, he attempted to murder Itijjuaq with two blows to the head. However he fell ill, and when she was summoned to heal him, she offered him redemption if he changed his ways. He refused, and dies from the wounds cast back on him which he had tried to inflict upon Itijjuaq. Like Strange Man, Itijjuaq could not engage in the activities traditionally associated with her sex. Also like him, through this inability she was granted even better ones on a spiritual plane. She was accepted for her ability to heal individuals, and even had two husbands. While Polygamy was found among the Inuits, especially among those of significance or rank, polyandry was unheard of. When a big man got jealous of Itijjuaq and tried to kill her, her spiritual powers brought the violence back on himself. d'Angulare argues that this is indicative of the third gender's connection to the spiritual and their respect and high ranking within the community as a result.

d'Angulare also connects the third gender to grandparents within Inuit society. He explains that as names are not associated with a specific gender, individuals are named after someone who has recently passed in their family. The individual is said to come in a dream and ask that the child be named after them. If the child is the opposite sex of the ancestor, they may be raised as that sex. In the story of Itijjuaq this was the case, as she was named after both grandparents who were actually alive at the time of her birth, and thus took on attributes of both of them. Her spiritual connection was established through them once they passed away. When a family had a disproportionate number of children of one sex, they often raised one child as the opposite gender. This would sometimes end at puberty, and in other instances continue throughout the individual's life. The one constant however, is that those who occupied this third gender were seen as bridging the gap between the natural and supernatural, and thus respected in the culture.

D'Angulare's article was concise and well written. It painted a vivid portrait of the third gender of the Inuit and where they are placed within their society. By presenting the myths of the culture, he provides two examples of how third gender individuals are closely connected to the spiritual, whether biologically male or female. It is interesting to note that this stands as similar to the ideas of third

gender individuals in other cultures as well, such as the Mahu of Hawai'i. The article could have been improved however, by some expansion on cases of third gender individuals encountered in fieldwork. While myths are reflective of the ideologies of a people, it is always interesting to see how their real life counterparts play out.