EFFEMINATE MALES AND CHANGES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IN TONGA

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The earlier term *tangata fakafefine,* "a man behaving like a woman," denoted those males who preferred women's work. The modern term *fakaleiti,* derived from the English "lady," now refers to a much wider range of behavior, including homosexuality, Western-style transvestism, and drag queen beauty contests and cabarets. Contact with Western sexual mores and culture partly account for increasing numbers of *fakaleiti* in towns. More significant, perhaps, are the difficulties of constructing a viable identity as a Tongan man today, in contrast to the continuities of Tongan womanhood, which might encourage effeminate boys to accentuate their feminine characteristics and gain, thereby, a social identity and the protection of older women against the hostility shown towards male effeminates by masculine men in Tonga.

Male effeminacy and transvestism are well known in Polynesia from the accounts of Tahiti (Levy 1971, 1973; Oliver 1974, vol. 2), Hawai'i (Souza 1976; Williams 1985, 1986; Morris 1990), and Samoa (Shore 1978, 1981; Schoeffel 1979; Mageo 1992). But Tonga is rarely mentioned, although effeminates have been there for many generations and are increasing in number. This article brings the Tongan ethnographic record of male effeminacy up to date, as far as records exist, from the last century to the present. In some cases, the discontinuities between present behavior patterns and those of the *fakafafine* of former times are so marked that they constitute a structural transformation of the older tradition. I will distinguish between the older and the modern forms of behavior and go on to suggest possible explanations for the increased numbers of male effeminate apparent in Tongan towns today.

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Cultural constructions of *tangata fakafafine* (men who behave like [Tongan] women) appear clear-cut, possibly because the finer details of their comportment and behavior have been lost over time. ***Fakafāfine***, it seems, were defined primarily by a preference for women's work and company and only secondarily by feminine dress and mannerisms. They were not expected or known to engage in sexual relations with men. A few ***fakafāfine*** still live today in rural areas, cooking, sewing, and helping their female relatives make mats and tapa cloth. The more contemporary or modern *tangata fakaleiti* (males who behave like ladies) tend to live in town. Some have professional careers, marry and have children, but are still designated as *fakaleiti.* In this behavior they show marked continuities with the older cultural tradition of *fakafafine* (womanish or effeminate men). Others are creating a modern stereotype that emphasizes female European or Tongan transvestism, an exaggerated "feminine" manner, and same-sex objects of erotic desire (cf. Whitehead 1981:98).

Fakaleitī make status distinctions among themselves based on lifestyle and personal behavior, which can vary a great deal. Individuals play up or tone down the "camp" aspects of their behavior depending on the social context. Some attired in Western drag queen-style dress may "vamp" men in the bars, discos, and at *leiti* beauty pageants in the capital, Nuku'alofa, and engage more or less discreetly in same-sex sexual activity. From all accounts, however, the greater number of *fakaleiti* probably do not. In either case, they can perform usefully in business, particularly the budding tourist industry; in government bureaucratic positions; or as professional entertainers.

The more openly promiscuous *fakaleiti,* and male prostitutes, are not generally liked. Homophobia is strong in Tonga, especially among Tongan men, whether or not they use the *fakaleiti* "as women." Most of the customers and steady boyfriends of the *fakaleiti* are tourists and yachtsmen, many of whom come to Tonga expressly to meet them. The commercialization of sexual practices is said to have increased in the 1970s with the greater influx of foreign visitors (MacFarlane 1983:11). But neither the blatantly sexually active *fakaleiti* nor the female prostitutes *(fokisi)* with whom they frequently associate are well regarded in the society.[1]

Tongan law prohibits males from having sexual relations with one another, and some of the *fakaleiti* have been prosecuted (Danielsson et al, 1978: 13). Heterosexual Tongan men who use a *fakaleiti* simply as a substitute woman for sexual purposes regard the act as mildly degrading and may, later, threaten or physically abuse the effeminate partner

because of the liaison. Homosexuality was almost certainly made a crime in Tonga because of the influence of British law. But it may be disliked independently in Tonga because it upsets the social order and is socially unproductive: It results neither in children nor in other socially valued outcomes that marriage or heterosexual relations have, such as the creation of strong relationships beyond those of the extended family.[2] If anything, the practice is destructive of Tongan values that center upon fertility and fecundity.

The question of why effeminate males appear at all in the population remains unanswered, but I examine several explanations put forward by Tongans and others for their recent increase in numbers. The most fruitful area of inquiry may lie in the difficulties that Tongan men currently experience in the construction of viable masculine roles. The cultural construction and meaning of gender differences have changed, particularly in the main towns in Tonga, and, significantly, so has the playing out of sexual politics between men and women. Females who behave "like men" *(fafine tangata)* are also present in Tonga, as in Samoa and elsewhere in Polynesia (O'Meara 1990:71; Besnier 1994: 288). They also find their salience in the construction and politics of gender but I will not discuss them here because their numbers are few and their characteristics are far from being mirror images of those distinguishing male *fakaleitī.*

The Early Record

Reports of male effeminacy abound from visitors' early contact with Eastern Polynesian islands (see Danielsson et al. 1978:11; Levy 1971: 12-13; Levy 1973:132-141), but only three scant references to it are found in the early records of Tonga, and in neighboring Samoa there are none at all (see Mageo 1992:443). The earliest reference to Tonga--in the first decade of the last century--denies that effeminacy and homosexual practices exist there, the second nineteenth-century reference is obscure, and the third--from the early 1920s--is marred by a confusion of terms.

Mariner, who as a boy was shipwrecked in Tonga from 1806 to 1810, freely describes the heterosexual mores of the people but says that they know nothing of "certain preposterous habits, . . . which have been said to infect the natives of some South Seas islands." Martin, his editor, upholds the morals of the Tongans, comparing them favorably with those of the English and adding, "If, on the other hand, we compare them to the natives of the Society Islands, and the Sandwich Islands, we

should add insult to injustice" (Martin [1817] 1981, 2:330). Unless Mariner lied or we twist logical canons so that a direct disclaimer of such behavior is taken as obscure evidence to its presence, we have to accept that the boy Mariner met with no ***fakafāfine***. Either there were none, or they were few and their presence was unremarkable.

Fakafafine are not mentioned either in mission reports, which began in earnest in the 1820s, except for a single note that the Methodist missionary Rabone included in a vocabulary list published in 1845. The "noun" *fakafafine* is defined as "A Monster" and the adjective *fakafefine* merely as "Effeminate, womanish" or as a verb, "To act like a woman" (Rabone 1845:51).[3] The lack of detail is curious because the early missionaries did not flinch from describing in detail that which they regarded as sexual license (Campbell 1992:101; see also Mageo 1992:443). If effeminacy or transvestism were evident, even if only minimally, there would surely be mention of "unnatural vice" in the Tongan Wesleyan literature.

Why did the minister find a *"fakafafine"* to be a monster? We are not told. Another missionary, Baker, copied Rabone's definition into his own dictionary at the end of the last century. "Baker's definition" was then seized upon by Gifford in the 1920s for his brief account of Tongan "Berdaches" (1929: 203-204), which manages to confuse the issue further. "Berdache" is a term that has frequently been used ambiguously as a synonym for homosexuality, hermaphroditism, and transvestism in addition to effeminism: diverse characterizations that are incommensurable and not necessarily related empirically (Callender and Kochems 1983:443).

During a nine-month sojourn in Tonga in 1920-1921, Gifford found little evidence of *"fakafafine":*

> Only a single informant, a man of Nomuka Island [in Haʻapai, the middle group of islands in the Tongan archipelago], vouchsafed information concerning [berdaches]. He said that anciently "there were many," but in 1920 he knew of but one, a person of Maufanga, Tongatabu. The informant knew of no special activities of berdaches, except that they took part in fighting like men. (1929:204)

The informant's remark that *fakafafine* fought "like men" might possibly explain why they were not previously noticed. Mariner makes clear that fighting was regarded exclusively as a masculine activity. Gifford adds that the "[t]wo adjectives, *fakafefine* [plural] and *fakafafine*

[singular], are used to characterize 'men who have the habits of women and do the work of women' " (1929:203-204). Apart from his inversion of the singular and plural forms, Gifford's report from the Ha'apai man accords well with information that I received over sixty years later from people who were children in 1920 and who thought that *fakafafine* had never been numerous. Gifford's final statement, "The informant conceived the *fakafefine* as hermaphrodites rather than as real males with feminine tendencies" (1929:204), is much more contentious because there is no suggestion from people today that *fakafafine* ever combined physiological sexual attributes. Perhaps Gifford was already expecting that the answers to his questions about "berdaches" would involve hermaphroditism.[4]

Oral Traditions concerning *Fakafafine*

In the early 1980s, I asked a number of elderly people in their late sixties or early seventies to tell me about the *fakafafine.* Their own recollections went back no earlier than the 1920s when Gifford collected his material, but they sometimes added things that their parents had told them. All of these informants spoke in a very matter-of-fact way about the *fakafafine* and described them as men who simply preferred "women's work' (cf. O'Meara 1990:71 on Samoa; Levy 1973:130-132 on Tahiti), In the 1920s and 1930s, men's and women's work was clearly distinguished: Most women performed "light" work in and around the home where they were always effectively chaperoned by others, and men did "heavy" work some distance away, either fishing, cultivating crops, or making copra in their gardens. The bureaucracies of church and state were poorly developed and almost all the available positions were held by men. Only one or two women in the 1920s had jobs as clerk-typists for the government.

Temporarily carrying out tasks associated with the other sex because of illness or absence of family members would not of itself indicate a status change or excite comment (O'Meara 1990:72). But *fakafafine* were boys who from an early age wanted always to be with women and showed interest only in women's occupations, particularly in the manufacture of fine mats and decorated tapa cloth *(ngatu).* Mats and bark-cloth bore special cosmological associations with the cultural construction of Tongan femininity.[5] Goddesses were believed to have woven mats that are still of great mythical and political significance to the highest-ranking aristocrats. Tapa was and is still an integral part of chiefly installations and other important ceremonies (James 1988,

1991). The divinely countenanced work was women's essence, "their proper occupation," wrote Mariner (Martin [1817] 1981, 2:364). He noted also that women were valuable prizes in warfare because they could produce these wealth items for their captors (Martin [1817] 1981, 1:139). Most producers were women of "some rank"; that is, they were neither of the highest nor of the lowest order in society. By excelling in craft manufacture, they could earn prestige and become prosperous (Martin [1817] 1981, 2:297, 368). Girl babies commonly had their umbilical cords cut on the *ike* (tapa-beating mallet) and their afterbirth was buried beneath a *hiapo* (*Broussonetia papyrifera,* the Chinese mulberry tree whose bark is used for making tapa), practices that are still sometimes carried out to ensure womanly skills. "Women," thus, "were considered to be guardians of a mystical heritage and to have a close relationship with the gods, looking after them by creating traditional mats and weaving" (Taufe'ulungaki 1992). High-ranking virgins were valued more for their reproductive potential than for material production because in this highly rank-conscious society women were the conduits of birth rank. Significantly, special mats and tapa and children can be referred to in Tonga as "wealth" *(koloa).*

Fakafāfine could not substitute for women in marriage or through adoption, but their skill in production of the material articles that frequently stood in for people in ritual exchanges--in the same way as did fine mats *('ie toga)* in Samoa (Weiner 1989:38, 52) and *tabua* (whales' teeth) in Fiji (James 1992:91)--gave them a "womanly" identity. The work of *fakafafine* could earn them worthy reputations without endangering the elaborate Tongan mystique of domination, which was built, in any case, more upon rank than upon gender distinctions (James 1992: 86). Effeminate males were often welcomed to women's work groups because of their strength and stamina and, as in other societies, many became admired for their superior "womanly" skills (Besnier 1994:296).

Secondary Characteristics of the Fakafafine

Feminine mannerisms, such as coyness, rapid facial and hand movements, high soft voices, and delicate gait, were secondary to the definition of a male as *fakafafine.* Dress was ambiguous, because in Tonga clothing is usually a wraparound skirt and loose overshirt, a style that does not lend itself to precise gender identification. There is no suggestion that the *fakafafine* wore makeup or brassieres as *fakaleiti* might today. But, at the time, neither the commodities nor the money to buy

them were freely available. *Fakafafine* were not mocked unless they made themselves ridiculous. They were popular with women and free in their company, unlike other Tongan men. Women tease one another with sexual puns and allusions while they work and the *fakafafine* amused them greatly with salacious jokes often based on their combination of gender traits. Most of all, they enjoyed gossip, which made them in the Tongan view as being extremely "like women"! *Fakafafine* frequently became women's confidantes; but the confidences women shared were rarely guarded secrets because of the *fakafafine* penchant for gossip. Women also used *fakafafine* to get "news" around because *fakafafine,* as males, would speak out in an audacious manner not considered appropriate for a woman. Outspokenness is still characteristic of *fakafafine* and still used, especially by people of high rank who want to confront people but maintain their own dignity.

Past generations of *fakafafine* mostly married and often married women of quality because the males, though effeminate, were well regarded for their skills and, also, often came from good families. In the 1950s, two *fakafafine* lived together in a house in Nuku'alofa and ran a bakery. After some years, one moved out to marry. Others, who are relatives of my informants, then moved from Ha'apai, Tonga's middle group of islands to the north of Tongatapu, into the house, which became known as a *fakafafine* residence in Nuku'alofa but not with any connotation of sexual relations between the *fakafafine* residents. Married *fakafafine* retained the label for life, in contrast to the Tahitian *mahu* (Levy 1973:133). The term in Tonga was not derogatory nor did it designate a necessarily degraded status. Male effeminacy is neither welcomed nor morally condemned in Tonga, but promiscuous homosexuality on the part of effeminate men almost always is.

Were the Fakafafine *Homosexual?*

The question is important because, although homosexuality is becoming part of the stereotype of the modern *fakaleiti,* Tongans, including present-day *fakaleiti,* agree that the practice was formerly deplored and barred. I have been told repeatedly by different people, "Had any one of them tried anything like that, they would have been beaten within an inch of their lives or killed by the men." It is now unfashionable to say that homosexuality could never have existed in a society, especially when speaking of effeminate men (Besnier 1994:285; Callender and Kochems 1983:450). But, equally, how can one claim that homosexual-

ity must have existed when there is no evidence of it? The early missionaries would surely have been quick to point it out in their condemnation of all "sinfulness" (Campbell 1992:100).

Absolute certainty in private matters of sex is rarely possible, unless one has been a partner in the sexual exchange. But it is clear that homosexuality was not part of the "ideal type" of a *fakafefine* in Tongan culture as, indeed, it might not have been among the Samoan *fa'afafine* in the past, especially in rural areas (Schoeffel 1979:203-204; Mageo 1992: 454-455). Some people in the world have genuinely never heard of homosexuality (Whitehead 1981:81, 111n. 1). If individual ***fakafāfine*** had desired sexual contact with masculine men, the sheer social unacceptability of such acts and the negative controls exerted appear to have effectively prevented them from expressing such erotic desires.

In rural Tonga, there is a tendency still for effeminate males to be referred to as ***fakafāfine*** and for them to behave in accord with the older tradition. In 1989, I met a slightly built man in his mid-thirties, who lived quietly with his parents and worked as a dressmaker on the outskirts of Pangai, in Ha'apai. The man was dressed simply in a shirt and *vala* (wraparound cloth falling from the waist almost to the ankle), giggled behind his hand, shifted coyly, and spoke in a high, soft voice with lowered head and many shy sideways glances at my hostess, a well-respected Ha'apai woman, who had her children's school uniforms made by him. As we walked away, she explained that he was a good seamstress and added casually that he was a *fakafefine.* I asked if there was any suggestion of homosexuality regarding him. She shook her head and said firmly, "No, I've known him all his life. That sort of thing would never be tolerated here; it only happens in Nuku'alofa. If they [the *fakafafine*] want to do that sort of thing, they have to go to town." I have heard of a very few other *fakafafine* today who live in rural areas and help their female relatives sew, weave, make tapa, cook, clean, and launder. There is no suggestion that they have sexual relations with men or that their numbers are deliberately limited or, conversely, that every village has one, contrary to reports from both Samoa (Schoeffel 1979: 203) and Tahiti (Levy 1973:132).[6]

I met another man who comes from an extremely noble family and is known in Tonga today as a *"fakafefine."* Now in his mid-sixties, he has lived most of his life overseas where he worked as a musician. When he returns to Tonga he is treated with respect because of his aristocratic birth, his older brother's political position, and his knowledge of protocol, music, dress, and banqueting food for ceremonial occasions. His fits of artistic temper are attributed, characteristically, to his status as a

fakafefine. I was told that he had sexual relations with men, "but only in Sydney so he doesn't disgrace his family here." The remoteness of his alleged behavior might cast doubt on its substance; it also illustrates the social pressures against this behavior in Tonga, which may be relieved by the anonymity of living overseas in a different culture.

Rabone's idea early last century, that the *fakafafine* was "a monster," is not born out by Tongans who, after 150 years of Christianization, clearly do not regard them as such. No one I have spoken to has suggested that *fakafafine* are hermaphrodites or men forced into the pretense of being women in their physiological parts. Work established the female component of a *fakafefine's* identity as his anatomy did the male. The combination of the two dimensions gave rise to his special designation as a *tangata fakafefine,* a special status recognized by his release, particularly by senior women, from tabooed behavior regarded as binding upon masculine boys. The gendered components of the term (and the lack of a special gender-unrelated term to describe them in a language that has very few gender-specific words), suggest that, ontologically, Tongans never regarded the special status as being "liminal," necessarily "socially inferior," "betwixt and between" (Besnier 1994: 287), or as part of "Polynesia's third sex" (MacFarlane 1983). On the contrary, the *fakafefine* status, while neither wholly masculine nor wholly feminine, could gain distinction and even power from the combination of two distinct genders.

From the 1920s until Today

Fakafafine are not mentioned again in publications on Tonga between the 1920s and the 1960s. Beaglehole and Beaglehole (1941), for example, in their brief survey in 1939 of a rural Tongan village, Pangaimotu in Vava'u, made no mention of any *fakafafine.* They were not biased against reporting them since they had described a "wakawawine" in their ethnography of Pukapuka completed a few years previously. But they were in Pangai for only six weeks and may simply not have met any, especially if *fakafafine* were neither numerous nor noteworthy.

Perhaps rural *fakafafine* were already migrating to Nuku'alofa. By the early 1960s, an increasingly urbanized population led to the modest growth of commercial opportunities in the capital. As commercialization challenged Tongan gender conventions, new roles became available for *fakafafine* whose status was established sufficiently to provide a viable alternative to the family as a basis for business organization. Their common work roles may well have contributed to their coopera-

tion and consciousness of themselves as an entrepreneurial group at a time when mats and tapa were still seen as measures of wealth together with more newly introduced symbols of prestige (Walsh 1964:208). As Walsh remarked,

> The main activities in the bazaar sector are small-scale trading. . . . In some cases the people involved are middlemen acting for villagers, and one group, the *fakafefine,* have some form of loose cooperation which cuts across kin affiliations. The *fakafefine* . . . work in teams, each team jealously guarding its round of customers. Some have groups of women manufacturing the articles they sell and most have trading arrangements beyond Nuku'alofa and sometimes beyond Tonga. The *fakafefine,* however, are not typical. The unit of organisation (for most Tongans involved in the bazaar sector) is the family or people of the immediate neighbourhood. . . .
>
> A few local men are noted for their tortoiseshell work and a group of men locally labelled as *fakafefine* are organised into a loose association which supplies materials to local women who are paid by them either directly or when the finished articles are sold. (1964:116)

At the time, a woman would rarely engage in forms of activity away from home by herself for fear of accusations of sexual impropriety. But *fakafafine* could cross gender boundaries and transcend their social limitations. Although not uniting the sexes in their physiological parts, they were often the means of connecting them in practice. Accordingly, many *fakafafine* in these years became profitable "middlemen" by not only making handicrafts but also moving freely into the market place to get supplies and sales, haggling and negotiating with men, as Tongan women could not. The increasingly urbanized base, their links with one another as a self-conscious group, and their links with a range of new types of people and activities wrought changes to the older traditions of the *fakafāfine,* signified by the introduction of a new term--*fakaleiti.*

Fakaleitī: A New Term and New Behavior

The modern term *fakaleitī,* a man who "behaves like a lady," is fast becoming the generic term in Tonga for all effeminate males. The term almost certainly appeared first in the late 1950s in Nuku'alofa, which is always in the forefront of innovation and cultural change in Tonga.

More English-speaking foreigners pass through the main town and, in the 1960s and 1970s, more tourists and cruise ships called there than in other parts of the kingdom. The new government secondary school, Tonga High School, begun in 1948, gave instruction principally in English and was also coeducational. The generation of school pupils in the late 1950s and early 1960s was the first to be truly comfortable in English and boys, who would be beaten for their girlish ways in all-boy schools, could now hang out with girls at school. There were few effeminate boys in the Free Wesleyan boys' boarding college, Tupou College, located outside Nuku'alofa, but it is said that *fakaleiti* were numerous at the coeducational Anglican school, St. Andrew's, in town. One woman told me also that in the generation before her entrance to Form 1 at Tonga High in 1963 there were few effeminates but in the generations following, "you could hardly move at school for *fakaleiti!* Their use of the word for 'lady' was just part of their showy ways, to show off their knowledge of English and Western ways." As one *fakaleiti* told me in 1992, "*Fakaleiti* is 'the modern term for modern [effeminate] people' "!

Much of the behavior might have been a youthful flourish, a copying of currently fashionable mannerisms, because both the terms *fakafafine* and *fakaleiti* can be used loosely of a boy to describe girlish behavior, such as gossiping or staying in the house area cooking with the women rather than working outside the domestic compound. Studying, reading, and extended discussion may also indicate non-manly behavior to manual laborers. At the Tongan History Conference held in Ha'apai in 1989, an angry farmer said to speakers from 'Atenisi, a Tongan tertiary institution, "if you just talk, talk like this, you'll all end up *fakaleiti!*"--a comment that was greeted with derision by the Tongan scholars, but their laughter was uncomfortable. The negative image of Tongan manhood represented by *fakaleiti* acts as an effective reprimand although it by no means explains their presence (contra Levy 1973473).

In the rest of this article I will explore what "acting as a lady," with its self-consciously foreign-derived connotations, means today in Tongan society and culture. The *fakafefine* was defined primarily by his preference for Tongan women's work, but the distinctions between men's and Women's work are now not as clear-cut in the modern sphere as they were in the case of traditional activities. Newly introduced occupations have not been distributed according to traditional notions of gender and certainly do not have the slightest cosmological associations to buttress their significance. A *fakafefine* acted "like a [Tongan] woman" properly by Tongan standards, whereas not all *fakaleiti* feel the same constraints. Nevertheless, *fakaleiti* still prefer "light" clean work to heavy outside

work and tend to take on primarily women's jobs in Tonga, such as selling household goods or women's items in retail stores and acting as secretaries or receptionists for business firms (cf. O'Meara 1990: 71).

Their positions in the teaching profession and as government clerks are, however, rather more ambiguous and open to interpretation. Although primary and secondary school teaching is seen in many Western societies predominantly as women's work, a shortage of jobs and the strong desire for white-collar employment in Tonga motivates men to take up teaching as well as lowly office jobs, such as clerking, filing, and accounting, in both government and church bureaucracies. As a result, those jobs are not seen solely as "women's work." Many *fakaleitī* are clever, well educated, and hold influential positions in government bureaucracies; one is the principal of a government high school (cf. O'Meara 1990:71). He is known as a *fakaleitī* who has never consorted with men. He is married and, after school, he helps his wife with her work around the house rather than gardening or fishing with other men. He does not wear makeup or nail polish or dress in an obviously feminine way although he is effeminate in his voice and mannerisms. By demonstrating his ability in education and by marrying, this man has not relinquished either his *fakaleitī* status or his career ambitions. But then, he is clever, from a well-connected family, and not known to be a homosexual.

Many effeminate boys have been petted like girls by their doting mothers or grandmothers but opt for the masculine role when they begin secondary school. Others remain effeminate but do not later assume homosexual roles. One young man who was brought up as an effeminate by his parents holds a good position in a government bureaucracy. He is highly strung and temperamental, dresses in an ambiguous fashion, rarely wears makeup, but gossips continually. In his thirties, he is not married and still lives with his parents. He has neither male lovers nor girlfriends. After work, he helps his mother rather than help his father with more "manly" pursuits. Another male who was similarly brought up is now married with children. He was the youngest child and only son of nine children. His eight older sisters made a pet of him, plaited his long hair, dressed him in frills and flounces, and treated him "as a doll." He, too, now has a government position of considerable responsibility and is carving out for himself an enviable social and political niche. He neither cross-dresses nor is he homosexual. In these cases, male effeminacy is not associated with a lack of sexual restraint and decorum, as has been suggested recently for Western Polynesia (Besnier 1994:302-303). Instead, it is masculine men in Tonga who are stereotyped as sexually predatory, fathering numbers of children in and out of

wedlock and conducting numerous premarital or extramarital affairs. Partly by their sexual rectitude, many effeminates who are not practicing homosexuals also show that they are not masculine men.

Today, as throughout its history, it may be assumed that Tongan culture and society have shared complex structures of gender relations, involving several simultaneous sets of alternative conceptions and forms of expression of gender differences for individuals of similar or differing rank, kinship, birth status, and generation. Virginity is now highly valued in all unmarried Tongan daughters, particularly the eldest but, formerly, virginity was probably most carefully valued and guarded among only the highest-ranking women in the land because of its mystical potency and its political value in marriage and alliance. Tongans today have a choice not only between their own customary gender behaviors now that commoners are permitted to follow chiefly ways (a privilege not accorded to them before the 1875 Constitution), but also may choose from among models provided by the different gender relations and sexual behaviors that they perceive as normative among Europeans. *Fakaleitī* may model their "feminine" behavior from a greater variety of roles than was available to most *fakafāfine*. Thus, a *fakaleiti* may take part in a dignified Tongan ceremonial on one occasion and dress as a Western "vamp" of the 1940s on another. This is not, I think, because the Polynesian concept of personhood is any more "multifaceted' or determined by context than that of Westerners (Besnier 1994:303), but because, like people in many other cultures, they choose to behave in one way or another. Thus, *fakaleiti* can play out competing ideas in Tonga about gender roles and manifest the antimonies between traditional and European cultural accretions in their personal behavior, in *fakaleiti* beauty pageants, and in hotel cabaret acts, which capture and caricature both traditional and modern Tongan and Western stereotypes. *Fakaleitī* often act unlike either ordinary Tongan or European women but seek to create an exaggerated type of femininity associated mainly with Western stage transvestites and female impersonators, such as Danny la Rue or Dame Edna Everage, an observation that has also been made of Samoan *fa'afāfine* (Shore 1981:209; O'Meara 1990:71n. 13).

Somewhat surprising to Western notions, ordinary young Tongan men are also likely to appear suddenly sporting nail polish or wearing European dresses. The insignia are not Tongan and do not always have the same significance that cross-dressing has in Western society. Youths might do it to ornament themselves or to amuse (Cowling 1990:192).[7] On one offshore island in Vava'u, I accompanied a picnic party that included an extremely masculine youth who, having been roused with

some difficulty after a long night of kava drinking, deemed fit to don his mother's long pink dress for the day. He built fires, collected and broke open coconuts, killed and cooked piglets, and speared a large fish in the lagoon, all while wearing the dress "to make funny for the picnic," said my host.

Effeminate males, however, demonstrate a range of behavior today in Tonga that varies from simple or elaborate forms of transvestism, casual or desperately "romantic" (in Western terms) liaisons with tourists or resident expatriate men, to male prostitution with both European and Tongan men, These *fakaleiti* attract the greatest attention from Western observers and, increasingly, from the Tongans themselves. It is worthwhile, therefore, to consider the range of variation among the *fakaleitī* that they recognize themselves.

Class and Status Differences among *Fakaleitī*

I first began visiting Tonga at the beginning of 1981. Groups of young *fakaleitī* congregated in the hotels of the main town of Nuku'alofa, especially on "boat days" when male tourists from overseas cruise ships packed the bars. The "girls," as they prefer to be known, were eye-catching in exotic dresses, scarves, spangled headbands, high heels, brilliant lipstick, nail polish, and eye shadow. Their vivaciousness and wit contrasted pleasantly with the rather formal good manners that most Tongans present to an outsider on first acquaintance. Masculine Tongan men tend in manner to be either aloof and reserved or sexually predatory. After a time, I was better able to appreciate the deep vein of humor that lies behind the dignified personal presentation of most Tongans. I also learned a great deal more about the *fakaleiti.*

I sat often by a seafront park in Nuku'alofa in the late afternoon to watch netball, a sport usually reserved for women. The *fakaleiti* had their own netball team whose members wore very short gym tunics, full makeup, nail polish, and, in some cases, wigs. I went with them on beach parties and picnics, despite pointed advice from my earliest Tongan hosts to "find some nicer Tongans to talk to; we're not too proud of these ones." The team caused something of a sensation later, on a tour of New Zealand, when it was roundly disqualified as a "women's" team, and it later disbanded.

On the occasions when we went swimming together, the "girls" entered the water in long *vala,* clothes covering them from neck to knee, as do conservative Tongan women when they bathe. Each *fakaleiti* had assumed a girl's name and referred to one another as "she" (cf.

O'Meara 1990:71). Gender-specific pronouns do not exist in the Tongan language and English was used to convey the distinctive "camp" expressions, jokes, and references with which the *fakaleitī's* conversation was typically peppered, The *fakaleiti* joked a great deal, often at their own expense and almost always about sexual matters, as has been noted elsewhere (Mageo 1992:445). They bragged at length, perhaps not always accurately, about their own "sweethearts" and male lovers or luridly detailed other people's same-sex or heterosexual "affairs." Many of the young, urban *fakaleiti* affect histrionic airs on and off the cabaret floor so the gossip was usually highly exaggerated and entertaining. When considering the hand life had dealt them, however, they became somber and would reflect for hours about what it was like to be a *fakaleiti* in Tonga today.

After 1983, I spent less time in Tongatapu and began work in Vava'u, the main northern group of islands in the Tongan archipelago. There, in the principal town of Neiafu, I met several more *fakaleiti* around the ramshackle Vava'u Club. They were not as pretty and frivolous as those I had known in Nuku'alofa; many were fat, middle-aged, poor, badly dressed, and sad. On many a quiet Sunday when the streets were deserted, I talked to a hungover *fakaleiti* who would tell me parts of "her" life story or what had happened the previous night. Often, the "fat old broads, not girls, dear" of Neiafu had been sexually used and then bashed by either a Tongan or European man. Sex did not always feature in the stories of physical violence but money and alcohol did. Men would ask *fakaleiti* to buy them drinks or cigarettes with the promise of a wild fling or even a long-term caring relationship, which all *fakaleitī* seem to ardently desire. When the men did not make good their promises, or made up to another "girl," fights would break out. Some of the *fakaleiti* were shockingly abused in these fracases (see also Cowling 1990:193).

Over the years, I have become familiar with the stories of sex and violence and know in which bars and clubs in Nuku'alofa and Neiafu incidents are most likely to occur. The female proprietor of one nightspot has recently started a social club for *fakaleiti,* no doubt out of concern for the way they are treated but also to give her motel a better name. I learned which *fakaleiti* stayed out of trouble and who regularly did not, and began to identify status and economic differences among them. I have met at least thirty *fakaleiti* who have different backgrounds, life histories, and experiences to tell. I have kept regularly in touch with several of them and been able to piece together their biographies in some detail. This has allowed me to see several life courses change

markedly, into and away from different forms of homosexual experience. I am able now to ask for intimate details from six or seven *fakaleiti* to reach a deeper understanding of how they regard their own lives.

Family background and personal achievement are much more important in determining a *fakaleitī*'s life chances than the mere fact of his being effeminate. Boys are usually recognized as effeminate when very young by older female relatives who might then delight in "bringing him up as a *fakaleiti.*" This decision may be seen in Tonga as a play by the family for greater status by "showing they have enough money to bring their daughters up to do nothing, and able to afford to bring their sons up the same way!" To my knowledge, *fakaleiti* are usually brought up not quite as girls, as has been so often suggested (Morton 1972:47-48), but in a less harsh way than boys. They will be called on to do chores that are physically harder than those given to girls but not as rough as the jobs given to masculine boys.

The older women thus regard them as males but protect them to a degree. For example, at puberty the daughters of the family are separated from their brothers, by the observance of avoidance behavior and also physically, at night, when the girls are confined to the house while their adolescent brothers roam. The boys may sleep together in a separate building from the main house although in European-style houses they are often simply placed in another part of the house away from the girls. Mutual masturbation and same-sex erotic behavior take place between adolescents in the "boys' houses," although the experimentation is ultimately directed towards heterosexual prowess, even if only as wishful thinking (Cowling 1990:192-193). Adults attach no shame or importance to such adolescent homosexual behavior because these boys will mature as masculine men.

However, in protective families, the sons and brothers who are *fakaleiti* are not always sent out to the boys' sleeping houses but are allowed to sleep inside as are their sisters (Cowling 1990: 186). The *faka'apa'apa,* the strongly institutionalized protocol of respect, which is instilled into Tongan brothers and sisters from an early age particularly by mothers and aunts, is thus occasionally withheld by the senior women between sisters and *fakaleiti* brothers. The *fakaleiti* are not considered to be masculine boys and are also kept inside for their own protection from the frequently sexually boisterous male adolescents outside. Thus, it is wrong to infer without more empirical evidence, as Besnier does (1994: 301), that all effeminate males are seen as fair sexual game in Tonga because the brother-sister relationship does not shield them from the all-out sexual advances of masculine men. Besnier misses the intracultural

variation in the structure and praxis of Tongan kinship while overly idealizing the brother-sister relationship. A Tongan brother will not necessarily protect his sister if she shows continuously promiscuous behavior. *Fakaleitī* remain males in Tongan eyes and the loss of male virginity is not as important as a girl's. Boys cannot get pregnant and show to the world their family's lack of proper control. Nevertheless, well-cared-for *fakaleiti* from good families are treated somewhat as "daughters" by their older female relatives if not as sisters by their brothers.

One *fakaleiti* of my acquaintance was brought up by his grandmother after his mother died when he was a small baby. He was the family's pet. "My grandmother brought me up as a spoilt brat, but she gave me a proper Tongan upbringing [as a *fakaleiti*]. She taught me good manners, how to speak nicely to people, to wash clothes properly, set out a house nicely, and do the right thing to observe Tongan etiquette." On the death of a beloved uncle, he sat before his grandmother receiving and distributing on her behalf the gifts brought to the funeral as would a daughter of the house. He had known from an early age that he was *fakaleitī;* but, as he said, "had any man come near me, my grandmother would have killed him!" He was always dressed as a child in girl's clothes and continues to cross-dress in either Tongan or Western clothes and wear makeup, pancake foundation and lipstick, every day. In his case, as with other (but not all) Tongan *fakaleiti,* cross-dressing is assumed on a permanent basis although not always with Western women's dress (contra Besnier 1994:297).

As an adolescent, he "was always terrifically drawn to men, but romantically always." He performed fellatio regularly on Tongan boys that he "went with" in his late teens in the mid-1980s. Clearly, the elitist origins of a *fakaleiti* do not preclude same-sex sexual activity. He is aware that the boys just used him as a substitute woman. A torrid love affair with a New Zealand man living in Tonga introduced him to anal intercourse, which, he says, he found physically "uncomfortable." The New Zealander finally left him and "broke his heart." The young Tongan began to drink heavily and to "burn out." He and other *fakaleiti* affirmed that the *fakafafine* of previous generations were not thought to be homosexual and "would have been beaten to death had they attempted homosexual acts" and added that "men like that are still found in outer villages." But, with some of the newer type of *fakaleiti,* they said, "the sexual part of it may be a big thing," with Tongan as well as with European men. Why the switch? One *fakaleiti* said, "Look, we're confused too! But I can't abstract the culture like they do in school

Tongan courses, I've got to cope with living it. The sexual side is just part of the different way for newer, younger generations. Things have changed, that's all."

The *fakaleiti* finally got over the affair with the New Zealander and now has a Tongan male lover whom he rarely sees but to whom he is very attached. Photos of the lover show a masculine young man dressed in Western men's clothes. He was married for a short time but realized he preferred his *fakaleiti* lover. In the seven years of their relationship they sleep together when they are able to but have had sex, fellatio, "technically, only about seven times." The relationship is close and trusting and the young man, now in his late twenties, says, "I never feel that I am sexually used, the way I used to."

Clearly, elements of the Western gay culture have intruded into the Tongan *fakaleiti* scene. A small number resemble the *raerae* whom Levy observed in Papeete in the early 1960s (1973:140). They wear exaggerated male dress, such as leather jackets with metal studs and cowboy boots (in a semitropical climate), habits acquired self-consciously when they lived overseas (Cowling 1990:195). But in Tonga confusion reigns at present over categories and meanings, as occurred in the case of the Tahitian *raerae.* Most Tongans refer to these males simply as *fakaleiti,* although they see themselves differently from *fakaleiti* and try to place themselves socially as gay men. ***Fakaleitī*** say that they do not have sexual relations with one another and some say also that their sexual contacts with men are not homosexual because they are the "women" in the relationships. Heterosexual or bisexual Tongan men also maintain this fiction of using *fakaleiti* "as women" and only when women are not available. The fact that Tongans reduce same-sex relations to a heterosexual model suggests that Tongans have no concept of male love akin to that, for example, of the ancient Greeks.

The "gay" scene, by which *fakaleiti* commonly refer to same-sex encounters, has proved for many, however, to be not very gay. It is increasingly associated with violence and barroom brawls, which are more socially destructive than the mere fact of being *fakaleiti.* One remarked, "Some of the girls *[fakaleiti]* come in from the islands and just join in the scene, but they don't know the right behavior. They get abused, but they also get very mean and ugly." Low-born effeminate males from outer islands are much more likely to be regarded sexually as "fair game" by masculine men in Nuku'alofa because they have neither social position nor family to protect them. Often, their families have never cared for them in the way that some *fakaleiti* (and daughters) are guarded in better-off Tongan households. They tell of having been phys-

ically beaten as children by male relatives in an effort to masculinize them (see also Cowling 1990:196); or they have been introduced to same-sex practices at an early age, often by close relatives or family friends. Many *fakaleiti* told me that from the moment they were touched they felt "tainted" and even more socially unacceptable or, alternatively, they were "given a taste for" sex with men. In Nuku'alofa, young, poor, unemployed *fakaleiti* may easily drift into prostitution for the same reasons as unemployed youth do in other societies (Cowling 1990:177, 192).

It is also said that low-class people simply show low-class behavior, an observation made by the *fakaleiti* themselves in the matter of sexual and other conduct. As always in Tongan society, behavior is judged by the family origins of the person, their rank, social and economic position, and personal style. Homosexuality as a regular sexual preference and practice is still regarded by most Tongans as unnatural and abhorrent, but some *fakaleiti* manage the public presentation of their exotic life-styles in a more graceful and socially acceptable way than do others.

Status or Stigma?

Fakaleitī present no sexual threat to Tongan women and can become close to them in ways that almost all masculine men cannot.[8] As males, *fakaleiti* can go anywhere at any time by themselves. Women often use them as chaperons and this is allowed in Tongan society. Although the special status of the *fakaleiti* is never an acceptable substitute for birth rank, their assertive and outspoken manner makes high-ranking people like them (without necessarily respecting them). A high-born woman can clue in her *fakaleitī* minion as to what she wants known. Even if she is rendering an outrageous insult the *fakaleiti* will not hesitate to speak it on her behalf. The lady's message gets across and her dignity remains unsullied. *Fakaleitī* are liked by many women but, equally, they are frequently disliked and distrusted by Tongan men because the *fakaleiti* have either compromised the men sexually or know too much about their private affairs through their participation in women's gossip. Like the *fokisi* (female prostitutes), "flying foxes that flit about unseen in the night," they go where they should not and see and hear things they are not meant to, and may make connections that threaten established Power relations. In this way, both the *fokisi* and the *fakaleitī* may be seen as subversive of normal Tongan social relations (see note 1).

The current demand from masculine men to find sexual release with *fakaleitī* is possibly related to the value that even commoner Tongans

now place on virgin daughters. Men, especially young men who do not want to marry but want sex, can procure a willing or a drunken *fakaleiti* without getting into trouble with the family of a marriageable girl. Casual, fleeting encounters with *fakaleiti* are acceptable, although repeated visits to the same ***fakaleitī*** are frowned upon in case the man should become attached to the *fakaleiti* or develop a long-term relationship that would be socially undesirable and politically unwise.[9] Tongan males have an instrumental attitude towards these sexual transactions, often beating or reviling the *fakaleiti* afterwards. Their attitude might also reflect a more general contempt towards the females with whom men have sex. Wives must always stand in poor contrast to sisters who to their brothers always remain, in a sense, the unobtainable virgin. Some *fakaleiti* may be filling the role of "tramps," thereby helping to idealize the cultural value of the female virgin as reported for contemporary Samoa (Mageo 1992:454).

While young men may brag of their "conquests" of ***fakaleitī,*** the practice is not generally approved and prestige by no means passes "like a commodity" from the effeminate to the masculine man, as has been suggested by Besnier (1994:302). According to many Tongan youths, it is the masculine boys in the boys' sleep-outs who are vulnerable to the advances of ***fakaleitī,*** who are neither passive nor lack homoerotic tendencies but may even attempt anal intercourse (Cowling 1990: 193). Such contact is now fraught with physical and social consequences. Tongans are being warned of the dangers of AIDS.[10] Men prominent today in business or government are being blackmailed, not for money but for favor, influence, and promotion, because of their association with a *fakaleiti,* even if the relationship was casual, brief, and occurred many years ago. In most cases involving Tongan men, the *fakaleiti* fellates a man, who does little more than receive these attentions. The man then attempts to protect himself from future financial importuning by reviling the *fakaleiti.* But Tongan liaisons remain an ever-present threat to both ***fakaleitī*** and masculine men. Perhaps that is why most descriptions I have heard from *fakaleiti* of anal intercourse, of orgiastic gaudy nights, romantic attachments, expensive presents, and the like, involve Western rather than Tongan men. After all, the Europeans leave Nuku'alofa and all the secrets and braggadocio of the *fakaleiti* behind.

Members of the cosmopolitan, urban younger set, especially the women, tend to be more tolerant of the *fakaleiti* and of their sexual practices (see also Schoeffel 1979:203). The fourth annual Miss Drag Queen Contest in 1992 attracted a larger audience than the Miss Heilala Pageant, a national beauty contest for women.[11] The drag queen con-

test was given wide coverage in the government-run newspaper, *The Tonga Chronicle,* and members of the royal family were prominent patrons. The contest was organized by the daughter of a leading noble who with the king's only daughter is co-owner of a Nuku'alofa night-club. The prizes were awarded by the princess's eldest teenage daughter, the king's granddaughter. Twelve contestants competed in a talent quest that included the performance of the *tau'olunga,* a traditional Tongan women's solo dance, a ballgown competition, and an interview before an amused, highly entertained public.

"They want to be ladies and want men to see them looking good," said the noble organizer. "What they do in private is their own business. In public, they are very nice and useful--and I'm not ashamed of mixing with them" (*Tonga Chronicle,* 16 July 1992, 5).

Urban Sexual Politics

A great deal of sexual tension exists between men and women in Tonga. Men are commonly allowed a great deal of sexual license but women are allowed none. A wife is expected to forgive her husband his extramarital affairs but she may be beaten for suspicion of infidelity. Men have personal freedoms in public that are not allowed to women, who require chaperons at all times. Effeminate males move freely between men and women in ways that no man or woman could in business and in other dealings. Their articulation of male and female spheres of activity makes them instrumental in promoting affairs between people who are highly placed in society. They run to and fro on errands carrying gossip and messages between important people. Their jobs, in beauty parlors and hotels and as doormen, taxi drivers, and household servants, enable them to discover precisely who is seeing whom on the sly. Such "secrets" are potent in Tongan society where the ability to reveal illicit doings is a source of real power. As a result, the *fakaleiti* are useful to women, particularly the wives of unfaithful husbands, but bitterly disliked by the men.

Humor and burlesque are frequently associated with persons of equivocal gender in contemporary Polynesia, as noted elsewhere (Mageo 1992:455). It is not just effeminacy that is highly risible but the whole subject of sex: the ridiculous positions assumed, the people it holds in thrall, and the hypocrisies and deceptions that are entered into for its sake. Sex is probably the most frequently thought-about and talked-about subject in Tonga next to the competition for status with which it is closely linked.

Fakaleitī cabaret performers in satirical skits about modern-day manners play off not only their own "double" gender images, but also the antimonies between traditional and contemporary Tongan gender relations and their perceptions of Europeans' sexual and gender behavior. Imagine a skit in which an effeminate man plays a grimly upright and serious masculine Tongan husband ogling a pretty young girl who is played by another *fakaleiti* in high heels, short tight skirt, off-the-shoulder blouse, and long blonde wig. *Fakaleiti* play the scene as they themselves might tease and flirt with masculine men. In scene two, the errant husband goes home to his dutiful Tongan wife, played by another *fakaleitī,* who meekly submits to the male head of household. The husband makes excuses about having to go to an evening meeting that leave the audience, made up mostly of Tongan wives, all of whom appear to have heard these excuses before, shrieking with laughter. The husband meets his newfound sweetheart, who promptly tells him she is pregnant. The audience's howls of laughter double as the *fakaleiti* simulates advanced pregnancy in a tight European-style dress. As soon as the "husband" leaves the house, the "wife" transforms herself by throwing off her shapeless Tongan matron's costume, consisting typically of an ankle-length skirt covered by a long, waistless overdress, to reveal a slinky, skintight, European-type sheath dress underneath. The European clothes indicate the modernity of European women, whom Tongans perceive to be freer and less constrained socially and sexually by their husbands than are traditional Tongan women. Armored with modernity and European morals, the Tongan wife goes to meet her lover, who is played also by a *fakaleitī* aping a Tongan masculine male in the last gasp of the erotic arousal to which not only women but also *fakaleitī* can excite men, or so the audience is led to believe.

Despite the bewildering transitions, the message is clear and is directed against Tongan men who think that their wives (and everyone else in town) do not know what they are up to and with whom. Furthermore, just as *fakaleitī* can play at being women, wives can play at being faithful even as they are also playing sexual games and playing them more successfully than the husbands, with *fakaleitī* help. Just as the *fakaleitī* performers take on different roles, the wives take on the role of dutiful Tongan women but may turn into modern sexual predators behind the backs of their erring husbands, The *fakaleitī* parody the macho Tongan male image and portray Tongan men as clumsy lovers and as husbands who are so vain that they fail to see what is going on in their own homes. Europeans are portrayed as accomplished lovers to both *fakaleiti* and Tongan women, because they do not abuse them. The

fakaleitī use both Tongan and European cultural and gender stereotypes to criticize Tongan men's chauvinistic expectations and their dislike of the Tongan women and *fakaleitī* who assume modern Western ways.

Cabaret nights are remarkable for the numbers of high-ranking and socially prominent women who sit at tables nearest to the performers and laugh loudest when the jokes are directed towards well-known people, current scandals, or, nearer home, towards the women's own husbands! They spur the players to greater efforts by tucking money into their costumes. The women's husbands laugh uneasily or stand morosely along the wall at the back of the performance area, spatially separating themselves from the women, the performers, and, they hope, from the meaning of the performance. Or, they may simply retire to the bar for the rest of the evening and get sodden. They are caught in every way: They cannot admit that they recognize themselves or other men in the performances, and they may worry about the sexual probity of their severely tested wives. The *fakaleiti* and the wives here make common cause, even if only in burlesque, against the men's dominance in households and in sexual initiatives.

The negative image that effeminate males provide for masculine men by showing them what *not* to be has been noted, in Tahiti by Levy (1973) and in Samoa by Schoeffel (1979), Shore (1981), and Mageo (1992). Cowling suggests as much for the Tongan *fakaleitī* (1990:195). But a functional approach cannot explain the presence of effeminate males, as Besnier shows in his persuasive critique of Levy's argument (1994:304-308). After all, why should an effeminate have to show how to be not-masculine when there are so many large men walking about ready to punch them for their nonconformity to male cultural roles? Here, the *fakaleiti* are parodying Tongan husbands' behavior and how their wives might well be repaying them for their infidelities. The loudest laughs come from socially prominent women because they and their consorts play modern sexual politics for the highest stakes.

Explanations

The number of *fakaleitī* is increasing. Secondary schools now each have about twenty such boys among several hundred pupils, a significant increase over previous generations. I have been back to Tonga almost every year since 1981 and find many Tongans increasingly concerned about this increase. School principals, parish priests, and others, including members of the royal family, have asked me about the phenomenon, which suggests that no satisfactory indigenous explanation exists.

In Tonga, opinions vary as to whether ***fakaleitī*** are created only by socialization, or are born with certain propensities, which may be encouraged or discouraged. Most favor the second explanation. Men have frequently said to me about former schoolmates or ***fakaleitī*** in their families, "We bashed them and bashed them when they were young for acting that way, and they still didn't change. So, I think they *[fakaleiti]* must just be born that way." No chromosomal examination or study of hereditary factors has been carried out in Tonga to my knowledge. But a genetic factor may predispose some boy children to display light body forms, high voices, and small genitalia (although the last does not in any way prove a barrier to heterosexual behavior). *Fakaleiti* do seem to run in families but this might be a combination of "nature and nurture." Women soon perceive the physical characteristics that suggest a male child will not develop into a highly masculine man. Perhaps afraid the boys will fail in the competitive macho world of Tongan men, women direct them to other roles, ones in which they might prosper and be socially useful, but that are in the women's domain (see note 2). This idea accords with Oliver's explanation for the presence of the *mahu* in precontact Tahiti, that "males unable or unwilling to play the physically demanding and often hazardous roles expected of Maohi [masculine men] in climbing, canoeing, fighting, and so forth, were permitted and, perhaps, even encouraged or required to play female roles" (1974, 2:1112).

The blame that men place on women for bringing up boys in this unmanly fashion supports the contention that *fakaleiti* are not generally approved in Tonga. Men scorn them for not being wholly male and seek to direct responsibility away from themselves for "things having gone wrong."[12] A leading Tongan educationist and social commentator, Professor Futa Helu, has suggested that the number of young ***fakaleitī*** has risen because of the emigration of increasing numbers of men, which has led to more matrifocal families. He says that in urban areas young males find no land or reefs to work and so stay at home and perform "women's work"; they think women's thoughts, speak their language, and begin to feel like them. Thus, he says, the breakdown in the specialization of labor has led to an increase of *fakaleiti,* or, "transvestites," in the main towns.[13]

This explanation is also heard most often from expatriate Europeans resident in Tonga. Many a time I have been assured that Tongans bring boys up as girls and, so, they become ***fakaleitī.*** Tongan women disagree. One elderly Tongan lady exclaimed to me, "The mothers may pet boys and let their hair grow long, but the boys cut their hair when they go to

high school, and no one comments. Sometimes parents will bring boys up as girls and let them do the housework and the boys will be called *fakafafine,* but it has nothing to do with being a *fakaleiti!*"

Her statement here separates effeminate behavior associated with being *fakafafine* from the male homosexual behavior associated today with the *fakaleiti* stereotype. But effeminate boys, unless protected by their families, can be the target for older men's advances, and this may lead them to same-sex activity.

Other Tongan women say that homosexuality and the camp life-style affected by many *fakaleiti* is simply the Western "permissive society" of the 1960s in which "anything goes" arriving, finally, in Tonga. This explanation is favored by many *fakaleiti* today: "The sexual side is just part of the different way for newer, younger generations." Homosexuality, then, cannot be excluded from discussion of today's *fakaleiti,* although it neither determines nor defines their existence. The most fruitful inquiry lies in extending the analysis of gender into wider family, economic, and political spheres. The opportunities that *fakaleitī* have by virtue of their special combination of gender traits become clearer in the light of the differential power of men and women.

Men's Identity Crisis in Tonga

Far-reaching social changes have created difficulties for men in their construction of a satisfactory male identity today in Tonga. The achievement of prestige as a man is considerably more difficult now than the successful achievement of Tongan womanhood. Notions of Tongan manhood have undergone radical changes through the cessation of warfare, the Western cultural devaluation of traditional Tongan fighting methods, and the lessened need for skills and stamina associated with long ocean voyages by canoe (cf. Oliver 1974, 2: 1112). The abandonment of ancient ceremonies, such as the *'inasi* or offering of the first fruits annually to the Tu'i Tonga, and the increasing distance of contemporary nobles from their land and people has contributed to the devaluation of gardening skills (except for large-scale producers and growers of large yams), in favor of white-collar office jobs. In modern occupations, implicit comparisons with European standards help to maintain a sense of being underdeveloped and "second-rate" that was introduced with Western ways last century, which has never quite vanished and which affects men more than women since most of the foreign "experts" telling them how to improve and "develop" are European men.

Traditional notions of virility and male sexual prowess have suffered. The ability to seduce women and to father many children by different women is not condoned officially by the church or government, although the numbers of illegitimate births continue to rise. At a more mundane level, sexual adventuring is further discouraged by the possibility of being legally forced to financially maintain the children born either inside or outside of marriage. Some wives tell me that men who suffer from job frustration and stress are prone to poor sexual performance within marriage, which is further evidence of low male self-esteem and the strains to which it is subject. Men still frequently beat wives and children to subjugate them to male authority. But harsh physical chastisement is slowly becoming less socially acceptable and has led in some cases to legal prosecution.

Many men are too caught up today in the daily grind of poorly paid, dull, low-grade bureaucratic positions to feel much pride in their manhood. Football and brawling may not be at all an adequate substitute for the excitement and opportunities for personal display afforded by traditional male activities. Old songs and dances still performed in celebration of former pursuits and glories may only highlight the mundaneness of their present routines. When men get drunk, they sometimes roll about on the ground loudly protesting the loss of their manhood and their social impotence.

Women's roles, by contrast, have had considerable continuity in their activities around the home and the maintenance of their traditional prestige within the extended family, although the value given to tradition differs among families. The dominant images of Tongan women are still beauty, virginity, and fertility. Both the children and the craft items they produce are valued. The urbanized, "modernized" areas of Tongatapu are seeing a resurgence of barkcloth manufacture to meet a growing demand from the increasing numbers of people at home and overseas. The *ike* (tapa-beating mallets) resounding throughout Nuku'alofa are today wielded often by the wives and daughters of bureaucrats, In addition, new roles have opened to women through education and wage employment.

Female children, especially the eldest, are still commonly given preferential treatment within the family, but male children are made responsible from an early age for heavy manual work and may be physically and emotionally neglected when they are adolescents. Differential treatment of postpubescent siblings is the traditional norm, but many young boys today are confused, frustrated, and alienated by the callous treatment they receive. The absence of fathers and other male relatives

or, perhaps, of both parents through emigration contributes to a growing number of maladjusted and insecure Tongan males, who are ill equipped to take over the responsibilities of being head of the family. Many show signs of a weakening self-esteem and identity, as well as feelings of increasing helplessness (Galloway 1992:5, 7).

In a situation of role contraction and role confusion for men, more boys are increasingly uncertain of their success within the strongly competitive arena of Tongan masculinity. For the male effeminate, *fakaleiti* status may provide a viable alternative of identity and survival in the female domain. Their special status can gain them access to people of rank and the possibility of acquiring some prestige, albeit neither quite as a man nor as a woman. Their protection by women does not explain the origins of *fakaleitī*, but it may help to explain their increased visibility and number.

Conclusion

The *fakafafine* were defined in the past by their performance of women's work. They were not notably homosexual but this may have been because of the sheer social unacceptability of such practice and the threat of punishment. They often married and fathered children while retaining the designation of *fakafāfine*. They were respected because they produced people and goods, both highly valued in Tonga.

Today, *fakaleiti* is becoming the generic term for all effeminate males in Tonga, some of whom lead useful and productive lives, while many do not. Some marry and create families but others pursue activities associated with neither the attainment of Tongan womanhood nor social production and that may include same-sex activity.

Homosexuality is not generally liked or accepted by Tongans, but it is more tolerated by members of the young, urban, cosmopolitan elite, especially women. Tongan men generally show strong homophobia whether or not they sexually use *fakaleiti*. But a few *fakaleiti* even though they engage in same-sex activity may gain a good reputation because of their family background, personal style and discretion, and for their contributions to national festivities and their work for charitable organizations.

Male effeminacy is not purely a gender issue in Tonga today, but neither is it determined nor defined by the practice of male homosexuality (Besnier 1994:300). I have suggested one possible explanation for the increasing numbers of *fakaleiti* in the cultural construction and politics of gender. The attainment of a viable male identity today in Tonga is in

many ways more difficult than in previous generations and may be contrasted with the continued viability of many female roles and statuses. An effeminate male is an incomplete man but may, by enhancing his feminine qualities, partly exploit the social opportunities available to both genders. When men become hostile, ***fakaleitī*** may seek the protection and support of women who find uses for them, often in the highly wrought sexual politics of Nuku'alofa.

NOTES

A brief version of this article was first presented at a colloquium in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in April 1992, during tenure of a Rockefeller Fellowship for the Humanities at the Center for Pacific Islands Studies. I am grateful to both institutions for their support and a chance to work through these ideas as part of a more comprehensive project on changes in gender relations in the Kingdom of Tonga. Helpful comments were made at the colloquium by Alice Dewey, Ben Finney, Alan Howard, Jonathan Okamura, and Douglas Oliver. The present article was improved later by comments from Ian Campbell, Tupou Koenig, and Walter Williams. My special thanks to Joey Mataele and Tupou Koenig for their many hours of patient and careful discussion of the *fakaleiti, 'ofa lahi atu.*

1. In the early 1960s, Walsh's observations that "even prostitutes and *fakafefine [sic]* are accepted without too much reserve" might be due to the brevity of his observations and to the small numbers that existed because, he continues, "[There is] only one brothel in Nuku'alofa whose clientele are mainly overseas seamen. The *fakafefine* would appear to be not quite the same as the homosexual overseas. The overall attitude seems to be one of amusement that people do such things" (Walsh 1964:202). The Tongan reaction of amusement supports the notion that such behavior is unnatural but the increase in numbers of prostitutes, including *fakaleiti,* and the increasing rowdiness of their behavior have hardened the Tongan attitudes to ones of dislike and disapproval.

2. Alan Howard pointed out that the ***fakafāfine*** and some of the *fakaleiti* today clearly perform work that is socially useful. These activities contrast with the predilection of other *fakaleiti* for idleness and same-sex activity, which is merely "sex-for-sex's sake" and unproductive of children. Besnier's account of the only effeminate on Nukulaelae in Tuvalu partly underscores the logic of "usefulness," as does Oliver in one of his explanations of *mahu* (men who live as women) in precontact Tahiti (1974:1112), which I quote later in the text and which Besnier has also quoted (1994:565n. 114).

3. Grammatically both are incorrect because *fakafafine* is used in Tongan as an adjective and also as a plural noun (Churchward 1959:29). *Fafine* is the dual or plural and not the singular form of *fefine,* "a woman or girl." But it was rather early to expect European proficiency in the Tongan language.

4. Churchward, a compiler of a modern Tongan-English dictionary (1959), lists both *fakafafine* and *fakafefine,* following Baker who followed Rabone. Churchward defines the terms as "womanish, effeminate" and solves the possibly ticklish problem of cross-sexing by requesting in the English section that people wishing to know the Tongan word

for hermaphrodite look up *"fakafafine."* This sends us back to Rabone's word list, I suspect, rather than to an indigenous concept of Tongan male effeminates.

5. Myths tell of Tongan goddesses weaving fine mats in canoes from which the islands of Tonga were drawn up from the sea. Goddess figures carved in ivory were reverently wrapped in barkcloth or finely woven matting.

6. Tamar Gordon's work also bears out this observation (pers. com., 1992).

7. Several of my observations are similar to those recorded by Wendy Cowling since we were both in Tonga in the 1980s, I having begun a study of changing gender relations in 1981. Yet our arguments largely do not overlap nor our conclusions coincide, especially as regards the clear distinction I wish to make between the "ideal type" of the *fakafafine* and the emerging stereotype of the *fakaleitī.* Cowling appears to see the two as a continuous tradition when she asserts that "*fakaleiti* . . . existed in pre-modern times" (1990: 189).

8. It might once have been sufficient to say that "unrelated" men were the main sexual threats to women in Tongan society, but reports of incest cases between senior male members of families with their daughters, granddaughters, and nieces have increased to the point where all men, related or unrelated, must be seen as potential threats.

9. Tamar Gordon gave me this useful insight from her fieldwork in Tonga in the early 1980s, for which I thank her.

10. To date, five HIV-positive cases of men who have returned from overseas and one death from AIDS in Tonga have been reported in the national newspaper together with repeated health warnings. Several AIDS-prevention campaigns have been mounted in recent years and posters warning visitors of the danger are prominently displayed in the arrivals section of the international airport.

11. The *heilala (Garcinia sessilis)* is a fragrant flowering tree that is associated symbolically with the preeminence of women in the Tongan family.

12. I owe this point in the argument to Jon Okamura; cf. Helu's remarks that follow, which are contrary to Cowling's assertion that no blame is attached to the causation of *fakaleitī* (1990:196).

13. Helu made these remarks at a conference entitled "Pacific Islander Migration," held by the Centre for South Pacific Studies at the University of New South Wales, 19-22 September 1990.

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