

THE FA'AFINE, GENDER BENDERS IN SAMOA
On Cultural Construction of Gender and Role Change

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Summary

The Fa'afafine, Gender Benders in Samoa; On Cultural Construction of Gender and Role Change is a study of the gender liminal males in Samoa. The fieldwork took place in the capital Apia, from January until July 2001. The dissertation relies heavily on my interaction and conversations with fa'afafine informants, most of them between the ages of 17 and 30.

The two primary objectives of the research have been, firstly, to study how and in what way the gender role of the fa'afafine can be perceived as a culture specific construction, and secondly, to focus on how the fa'afafine role appears to have changed over the past decades, and more importantly, how the gender role seems to continue to change. In connection with these overriding goals, I have researched three subtopics: how the fa'afafine gender identity can be perceived as a social role, which criteria are fundamental in order to define a fa'afafine gender identity, and lastly, which attitudes concerning the fa'afafine prevail among Samoans in Apia.

Schema theory and the perception of the fa'afafine gender identity as a social role based on scripts are basic for this dissertation. Schema theory is used to explain the variance and change within the gender liminal role of the fa'afafine. I argue that there is a cultural model for gender in Samoa, where the schema for the fa'afafine gender identity influences fa'afafine's behavior and causes fa'afafine to have certain behavioral traits in common.

Fa'afafine are generally recognized by their feminine behavior and physical appearance, and they typically express homosexual interest in gender conforming men. I propose that the cultural model for gender in Samoa is changing as a consequence of Western influence. I argue that the fa'afafine gender is increasingly viewed as emotionally based rather than behaviorally based, which is a common Western perception of gender. A consequence of this new gender-defining criterion is that the fa'afafine identity is rendered inborn and permanent instead of temporary. Also, fa'afafine appear to identify more easily with previously foreign concepts such as "gay" and "homosexual", which are concepts that emphasize the sexual aspect of the gender identity rather than the behavioral aspect.

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“He, he, are you serious? Study the fa’afafine? Well, you’ve come to the right place!” The cabdriver, a friendly Samoan in his forties, was driving me from Faleolo Airport into Apia. Apia is the capital of the Independent State of Samoa and also the only town in the country. The cabdriver was obviously amused. He could not quite get over the fact that a young girl had crossed the world to come to his little Pacific island to study the effeminate¹ men, and he shook his head and chuckled again.

In the following introduction, the reader will be provided with a short presentation of the fa’afafine and an outline of the research goals towards which I have worked. I present theories that have inspired and shaped the outcome of this thesis, and lastly, I explain central concepts that need clarification.

Subjects of Research

From 15 January to 30 July 2001, I conducted fieldwork in Apia. Inspired by the Australian documentary on fa’afafine called *Paradise Bent: Boys Will be Girls in Samoa* by Heather Croall (1999), I decided to make the gender liminal males of Samoa the subjects of my research. In short, the fa’afafine are males who characteristically behave in a feminine manner and perform women’s chores instead of, or in addition to, men’s chores. Many fa’afafine also modify their appearance and body language in order to resemble women. The fa’afafine identity constitutes what could be described as a gender role separate from that of women and men, yet containing aspects of both genders. The intermediate gender status grants them access to many women’s domains that non-fa’afafine males generally have limited social access to. Legally, however, fa’afafine are categorized as males².

It should be noted that I have not included the gender liminal females, the *fa’atama*, in my research. The term *fa’atama* literally means “in the manner of a boy”, and refers to females who act like men. They are commonly called “tomboys”, a term that appears to be

¹ The word “effeminate” is defined as an adjective with a derogatory connotation (Longman 1987: 326). I use “effeminate” in an unbiased way as a synonym for feminine, intended to mark the contrast in appearance and/or behavior between fa’afafine and the generally more masculine males who are not fa’afafine.

² The personal pronouns “he” and “she” are not differentiated in Samoan.

used for *fa'atama* of all ages. I met and observed a few *fa'atama*, but the data and conclusions presented here cannot be assumed to apply to the *fa'atama*.

My key informants have been *fa'afafine*, and when I write “informant”, I generally refer to a *fa'afafine*. If the informant of whom I write is not a *fa'afafine*, it is clearly stated. Many of the *fa'afafine* have had the dual role of informant and friend. Among the *fa'afafine* I observed, the ages varied from early teens to mid-fifties. The informants I interviewed and primarily spent time with were approximately between the ages of 17 and 30. Two informants were in their forties and fifties. Needless to say, other Samoans that are not *fa'afafine* have also been informants and supplied me with valuable information, without which the research goals could not have been reached. The names of the informants have been changed and made anonymous, with the exception of pastor Nu'uausala Siaosi, whose work on suicide prevention is presented in chapter 2. All conversations with informants took place in English, and it has therefore been unnecessary to translate quotations.

Research Goals

The overriding purpose of the research has been twofold. Firstly, I have aspired to shed light on how and in what way gender can be perceived as a culture specific construction. I have sought to learn how the *fa'afafine* role is molded by Samoan culture and prevalent ideas in their time. Novel trends among *fa'afafine* that appear both individualistic and/or Western in character have been studied with special interest (see chap. 9).

Secondly, it has been an objective to study changes in the role of the *fa'afafine*. Croall states in her documentary that the Western drag scene represents a threat to the traditional role of the *fa'afafine*, and that the influence is apparent in the form of drag shows and drag queens (1999). The theme of change recurs throughout this thesis, and the process is approached from various angles. I have explored what many of these modifications entail in data regarding *fa'afafine*'s physical appearance, occupational opportunities, concepts concerning *fa'afafine* and sexuality (see chap. 5), and in historical accounts of entertainment (see chap. 8), among others. The element of change apparent in the *fa'afafine* role is closely

connected to the first objective, because changes accentuate how gender roles can be viewed as constructed.

In supplementation to the primary objectives, I have researched the following issues; how the fa'afafine gender identity can be perceived as a social role, which criteria are fundamental in defining the fa'afafine role, and which attitudes prevail in the Samoan society concerning fa'afafine. Ensuing is a more thorough description of these research goals.

The first issue deals with the perception of the fa'afafine identity as a role-performance. Fundamental to the analyses are Jeanette M. Mageo's writings on gender in Samoa (1996a, 1998) and schema theory (D'Andrade 1987, 1992, 1995, Strauss 1992, Strauss and Quinn 1994). I have searched for causes that could explain the composition of what I perceive as a fa'afafine stereotype. I have also explored ways to account for how the fa'afafine, despite their individual differences, collectively are termed "fa'afafine", in an attempt to define the boundaries of the role (see chap. 4).

The second issue concerns the criteria and characteristics that make the categorization, communication, and recognition of the fa'afafine identity possible (see chap. 6). I discovered that there are contrasting views concerning which criteria are perceived as fundamental for the fa'afafine role. I have interpreted this data and presented the discrepant views in a cross-cultural, comparative light, with the intention of illustrating how the nature of definition criteria may influence public perception of a gender role (see chap. 7).

Lastly, I have explored prevailing attitudes towards fa'afafine and towards changes that have evolved in the fa'afafine role (see chap. 10). I have searched for data on former common attitudes and questioned some fa'afafine informants on how they experience present public attitudes. According to Niko Besnier (1994: 296) and Mageo (1998: 208), there has been an increase in the number of fa'afafine over the past decades. Croall (1999) and Tim O'Meara (1990: 71) present the view that fa'afafine are accepted and not stigmatized. Accordingly, it seemed relevant to explore possible connections between the proposals of an increased acceptance of fa'afafine and an increase in the number of fa'afafine. Furthermore, widespread Christianity (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 74) and the

apparent acceptance of fa'afafine urged me to look into the policies and levels of acceptance in various denominations regarding fa'afafine and homosexuality. Fa'afafine's relationship to the Church became a point of interest as well.

The two ensuing segments constitute a presentation of theories that have influenced the approaches taken during fieldwork and the analyses made after fieldwork.

Many Shades of Gray

In the 1960s, anthropology was inspired by women's movements to rethink gender (Yanagisako and Collier 1987). Former "natural facts", like sexual inequality, were questioned and redefined as "social facts", and anthropologists challenged the concepts "male" and "female" and ceased to look upon them as cross-cultural universals (ibid.:14).

Thinking in terms of a universal "man"/"woman" dichotomy can have disadvantages. One consequence of the binary view is that it may lead to oversimplified categorizations of data, and give the impression that the main difference among humans is necessarily between men and women. Differences among males and among females may be more easily ignored, perceived as insignificant, or perhaps forgotten. Alternative gender identities like the fa'afafine in Samoa, the *berdaches* among North American Indians, the *xaniths* of Oman, and the *hijras* of India (see chap. 7), are reminders that this dichotomy is insufficient as an indicator of people's perception of existing gender identities. Between the categories of "man" and "woman", black and white, there are many shades of gray, which the binary opposition "man"/"woman" overshadows.

Not only is there a diverse range of gender variants, but one can also assert that there are many masculinities and femininities (Chodorow 1999: 4). The growing awareness and hesitation within anthropology of homogenizing groups of people or making inductive generalizations uncritically is apparent in the work of Chodorow (1999). Like Yanagisako and Collier, Chodorow is concerned with variations in gender perception, but discusses gender idiosyncrasies at the level of the individual rather than at a cultural/societal level. Chodorow has developed a view of psychoanalysis that affects understandings of gendered subjectivity and gender identity. She describes gender as an inseparable part of culture and

writes that “individual psychological meaning combines with cultural meaning to create the experience of meaning in those cultural categories that are important or resonant for us (ibid.: 69).” Knowing what these culturally situated practices and discourses are, does not entail that one knows what they mean to the individual who experiences and constructs gender and gender identity (ibid.: 90). Perceiving a person’s sense of gender as an individual creation and a fusion of personal and cultural meaning, explains how there can be numerous masculinities and femininities.

The research presented in this thesis may be described as person-centered in character. Person-centered anthropology is research that concerns the relations between individuals and the contexts within which they exist (Levy 1994: 180). The individual is studied as “an active center of history and context and of psychological and biological potentials and constraints” (ibid.: 183). Concepts and topics such as “self”, “identity”, personal “realities”, and cognitive organization, are typical subjects within person-centered anthropology, and are discussed in the chapters to come³ (ibid.: 183-186). Connectionism⁴ and schema theory constitute a central tool in the discussions.

Theoretical Tools

The changes that appeared to be taking place in the fa’afafine role, and the variations in mindsets, physical appearances, and behaviors that I observed among fa’afafine informants demanded that I implement a theory that could explain change, as well as the coexistence of idiosyncrasies and shared cultural traits among people living in the same cultural context. Schema theory draws on connectionism to explain how an individual is influenced by its cultural environment, but also how a person can recreate or change its environment (Strauss and Quinn 1994: 284). Schemas are “cultural understandings”, which mediate thought and

³ Levy writes that researchers conducting person-centered anthropology must be fluent in the local language and cannot make use of another language or interpreter. He also writes that interviews must be tape-recorded (ibid.: 186-187). Although I do not meet these specified requirements, I perceive my fieldwork to be person-centered in character and view the presentation of person-centered anthropology as relevant.

⁴ The term “connectionism” originates from neuro-biology. The models in schema theory are connectionist in character because they consist of cognitive schemas that are idiosyncratically connected to each other in each individual’s cognition. (Hansen 2001: 28).

action in the individual. In contrast to other folk models⁵ that presume that knowledge is serially processed, schema theory depicts knowledge as links in a network of processing units. This latter approach has two important advantages. First of all, learning can take place without evident teaching. Secondly, such learning goes well with adaptable reactions to novel situations (ibid.: 285-286). In other words, schema theory offers ways of explaining variations among people and changes in societies.

In writing on gender roles, it could have been a natural choice to use role theory (Goffman 1971) as the primary theoretical tool. Indeed, Erving Goffman's presentation of self as a performance appears compatible with the Samoan perception of gender as a social role being played (Mageo 1998). Also, Goffman's writing on gender socialization (1977) could be viewed as relevant for communication of gender identity. However, he appears to view a role as socially determining for a person's actions, and renders the individual bound and compelled by expectations and thus resistant to change and individual variation (1961: 85-87). Also, Goffman proposes that each individual participates in more than one "system", which causes each person to have many roles⁶, and thus many selves⁷ (ibid.: 90). In contrast, I focus on observable variations among fa'afafine, and perceive the variations to prevail within the outer frames of the fa'afafine gender role—a role that they share. I am also interested in changes that have taken and continue to take place in the fa'afafine role. Also, I do not interpret variations in the behavior of an informant as evidence of the informant showing different social selves. Rather, I write about contextual behavior, and perceive variations in behavior as different ways of communicating the self. Schema theory is thus the preferred theory when aspiring to explain changes in the fa'afafine role and idiosyncrasies noted among informants.

⁵ Strauss and Quinn do a critical comparison of schema theory with the practice theory of Bourdieu. In contrast to Bourdieu's theory, schema theory concerns all societies, not only "traditional" ones, does not distinguish between "said" and "unsaid" knowledge, gives individuals a sense of care which motivates them and generates social process, and finally, accounts for variation and change (ibid.: 285).

⁶ Early notions of "role" can be traced back to Radcliffe-Brown, who defined social organization as an arrangement of activities, or "a system of *roles*" (Radcliffe Brown 1959: 11, orig. italics). He writes that the activities within an organization are generally subject to regular arrangements (ibid.) See Goffman (1961: 86-87) for a comparison.

⁷ Goffman writes, "A self, then, virtually awaits the individual entering a position; he need only conform to the pressures on him and he will find a *me* ready-made for him (ibid.: 87-88).

Clarification of Basic Concepts

Lastly, in an attempt to avoid any unnecessary misunderstandings caused by ambiguous concepts, I will explain how I employ the following terms; “she”, “he”, “she”, “man”, “woman”, “sex”, and “gender”.

During casual conversation, fa’afafine may often be referred to by the female pronoun “she”. In writing, however, I consistently refer to fa’afafine by the male pronouns “he”, “him”, and “his”. An exception may be quotes where an informant uses “she” or other female pronouns to denote a fa’afafine. The female pronouns will then, and only then, be written in quotation marks. Female pronouns without quotation marks imply that the person is biologically a female; a “woman” or a “girl”. Similarly, male pronouns refer to all persons who are biologically male.

I apply the term “man” to males who are socially perceived as masculine and who conform to the normative role of a (heterosexual) man. Although a fa’afafine and a “man” are both male, only the “man” has the gender role of a man. Lastly, I distinguish “sex” from “gender”. “Sex” is used in the physiological sense, and is the state of being either male or female (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 36, Longman 1987: 972). “Gender” differs from “sex” in that “gender” is not physiological and needs not correspond to a person’s sex. Rather, “gender” can be described as cultural and learned (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 36)⁸. A person who behaves in gender-nonconforming ways acts in a manner untypical for the sex he/she belongs to. All Samoan words are written in italics, with the exception of “fa’afafine”, which generally is written in plain text and without quotation marks.

I have outlined the issues researched during fieldwork, and concepts that could potentially lead to misunderstandings have been defined. Finally, I have submitted an explanation for the main theoretical choices made, as well as presented theoretical tools used to inspire and analyze the research undertaken. The physical and cultural background for the fieldwork has however not been sufficiently dealt with. In order to place the research in its cultural setting and context, the next chapter elaborates on the Independent State of Samoa.

⁸ Cornwall and Lindisfarne are critical to distinguishing “sex” from “gender” in this manner. They describe the distinction as constructionist and confusing.

The Heart of Polynesia

Protruding out of the vast blue waters of the South Pacific are the mountainous and volcanic islands of the Samoan archipelago (Meleisea 1987: 1). These islands have been described as “the heart of Polynesia” as they lie south of the Equator, and east of the International Date Line. Fiji in the southwest is the closest neighbor to the Samoan islands (O’Meara 1990: 1, Shore 1982: 1). As a result of a compromise between colonial powers at the turn of the 19th century, the archipelago was divided politically in two. Today, the eastern islands are the US territory American Samoa, while the group of islands to the west comprises the Independent State of Samoa⁹ (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 11, Central Intelligence Agency 2001)¹⁰. When one speaks of the Polynesian Triangle, one refers to the region’s shape formed by its extreme points; Hawai’i in the north, New Zealand to the southwest, and the Easter Islands to the east. Within this triangle are other islands like Tonga, Niue, the Cook Islands, Tokelau, Tuamotu, Pitcairn, the Marquesas Islands, and the Society Islands with Tahiti as the largest of them (Stanbury & Bushell 1984, Robillard 1992). Some sources incorporate Fiji in Polynesia (Williksen-Bakker, Roalkvam, and Hoëm, 1996: 67), but many do not (Stanbury & Bushell 1984, Robillard 1992, Denoon et al. 1997).

The following chapter is a thorough presentation of the Independent State of Samoa¹¹. I touch on a wide range of topics, such as geography, demography, national economy, history, the system of government and the system of chiefs, flora and fauna, schooling, and the concepts of *mana* and *tapu* and the brother-sister taboo. I also include a segment on suicide and the Mead-Freeman controversy.

⁹ Samoa was formerly called Western Samoa, but “Western” was dropped in 1997 (CIA 2001).

¹⁰ Hereafter, the source Central Intelligence Agency will be abbreviated to CIA.

¹¹ American Samoa is not included, as the fieldwork was undertaken only in Samoa. Due to differences in the histories and political situation of these two island groups, data from Samoa is not intended or expected to apply for American Samoa.



Figure 1. Map of Samoa and Location Map (www.southpacificdirect.com/WSmap.html)

Samoa, a Paradise Far From Eden¹²

The lush vegetation and the traditional small *fale*¹³ scattered along the fringes of the sandy beaches make an idyllic picture of Samoa. Combined with the slow pace typical of the villages and its friendly people, the Western notion of a tropical paradise is easily nourished here. This Samoan paradise is not one heavenly garden, but rather fourteen islands of which nine are inhabited: Upolu, Savai'i, Manono, Apolima, Fanuatapu, Namua, Nu'utele, Nu'ulua and Nu'usafe'e (Shore 1982: 1, Meleisea 1987: 1).

Typically, the volcanic topography of the islands is characterized by low coastal areas, from where the land rises towards the middle into green mountains covered with a dense flora of bushes, ferns, grasses, and vines (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 12). Apart from several inland villages, most villages lie like pearls on a string along the coast with the main road winding through them. The plantations are located inland behind the villages.

Upolu and Savai'i are the two main islands where the majority of the population of approximately 180.000 lives (CIA 2001), with Manono and Apolima being the only other islands with any substantial inhabitation (Huffer and So'o 2000: XIV). Despite being the smaller of the two main islands, Upolu has approximately 165 villages¹⁴, and is the most densely populated (Shore 1982: 2). The capital Apia, which seats the Samoan government and functions as the primary center for business, is situated on Upolu. Samoan is the official language, but English is widely used within government and commerce (CIA 2001). Most schools throughout the country use English and Samoan interchangeably.

Savai'i is a two-hour ferryboat ride away from the northwestern shores of Upolu. Savai'i is known for its laid-back life style, and the peacefulness there makes Apia with its bustle and commotion of cars, buses and pedestrians passing through every day seem "fast",

¹² O'Meara describes the rural Samoa as "a delightful world in many ways, but far from Eden. Contrary to popular Western belief, it is not a world of ease and leisure, except for those who are old and important. Nor is it a world that can presently pay for the things its people want (...)" (ibid.: 19).

¹³ The *fale* is the traditional open-sided Samoan house. It is usually oval shaped and has a thatched or corrugated iron roof supported by pillars. Increasingly, European *fale*, meaning houses with walls, are being built.

¹⁴ The exact number of villages can be difficult to determine, as boundaries separating village, subvillage and district are shifting (Shore 1982: 303). Another source shows a map indicating 62 villages in Upolu and 45 in Savai'i (Huffer and So'o 2000: XIV).

like some Samoans described their capital. Although being the largest island, Savai'i has no town and only about 85¹⁵ villages (Shore 1982: 1) .

Savai'i has developed noticeably since the 1980s, when the government built the asphalt round-island road and extended electricity to the villages. New government buildings, various new stores and improved housing are also part of the changes (O'Meara 1990: 16).

National Economy

Samoa has been classified by the United Nations (UN) as one of the world's least developed countries (LDC). The UN has designated 48 countries as LDCs based on three criteria: a low income (gross domestic product), weak human resources, and low level of economic diversification, which commonly entails a high export concentration with one or two major lines of commodity (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2000).

The economy of Samoa depends heavily on three sources of income; export of agricultural products, private remittances¹⁶ from relatives overseas, and foreign aid (O'Meara 1990: 20). Foreign aid has become an essential source of income since independence in 1962. In 1999, the country's external debt was more than twice the debt of 1990 (Government of Samoa 2001).

¹⁵ See footnote no. 14.

¹⁶ Remittances are gifts in the form of cash and goods from Samoan relatives abroad to their families in Samoa (O'Meara 1990: 20). Approximately 200 000¹⁶ Samoans live overseas, primarily in New Zealand, Australia, American Samoa, Hawai'i and mainland USA (ibid.: 15, Huffer and So'o 2000: 4).

In 1999, the economical situation in Samoa was as follows (Government of Samoa 2001):

Exports	ST\$ 54.7 million
Imports	ST\$ 348.47 million
Net services and income	ST\$ 110.43 million
Private remittances	ST\$ 125.2 million
Foreign aid	ST\$ 70.4 million
External debt	ST\$ 445.4 million
Exchange rate: Samoan tala per US dollar–3.3400 (CIA 2001)	

Samoa's economy is vulnerable to natural disasters and unfavorable international financial changes (ibid.). Two major cyclones in 1990 and 1991, and a taro leaf blight in 1993 caused a decline in the GDP in the period from 1989–1995. Export earnings have generally increased during the period 1995–2000, although a decline in all major exports during 1999 resulted in lowered income in 2000 (Samoa Treasury Department 2001). One cause of the decline was the closure of the coconut oil mill in 1999. Copra, coconut oil, and coconut cream, used to be Samoa's main export products. Over recent years, fresh fish exports have largely increased, and tuna has now become the most important export article. Cocoa beans, taro, bananas, and kava¹⁷ have been other important agricultural exports, but kava continues to lose market. Non-agricultural export products such as garments and beer have generally increased, and garments constituted the second largest export article in 2000 (ibid.)

Two-thirds of the labor force is employed within agriculture (ibid.), and more than 65% of the households rely on a combination of cash income and subsistence (Government of Samoa 2001). Semi-subsistent planters who control approximately 80% of the land produce most of the export crops. Commercial plantations owned privately or by the Government supply the remainder of the export crops (O'Meara 1990: 20-21). However, due to the fact that forests and woodlands constitute 47 % of the land, only half of the land is left arable. Tourism is expanding and presently accounts for approximately 15 % of GDP (CIA

¹⁷ Kava is a traditional drink made from the pounded root of *Piper methisticum*, a pepperbush. The drink has a slight numbing affect on the mouth (O'Meara 1990: 37).

2001). In 2000 the total number of arrivals with tourist visas reached 87 690. The major tourist source markets are New Zealand and American Samoa (Samoa Treasury Department 2001).

Apia

Apia is the capital and commercial focal point of Samoa. It is the location of more than 90 % of Samoa's paid employment, which includes private and public sectors, such as educational, health and social services. Through mainly secondary and tertiary sectors like manufacturing, restaurants, hotels, and government, the capital can account for over 40 % of GDP. Apia is actually a conglomerate of 50 villages. If one includes peri-urban areas that stretch to the east and the west of the center, nearly 50 000 people inhabit Apia, or what may be called Greater Apia (Storey 2000: 86-87, 95).

In general, urban and peri-urban villages differ from rural villages in the way they are socially organized. Organizational differences between rural and urban villages will be presented later, but first it is necessary to appreciate the fundamental role that the *matai* (chief) system and the *aiga* (kin group) play in village organization. An understanding of the *matai* system is also helpful when looking at governance on a national level.



Photo 1. Apia Harbor (right: The Government Building)

The Role of the *Matai* (Chief) and the *Aiga* (Extended Family)

The *matai* (chief) system constitutes a significant part of Samoan culture (Shore 1982: 59). This complex system is the foundation on which the political structure of the village is based. *Matai* hold power through their chiefly title and have authority over the members and land of their descent group. They are chosen by the whole family assembly through consensus. As there are no rules of inheritance, the family selects the person based on individual personal character. Dignity and honor follow holding a title, and should the family be discontent with the *matai*'s behavior, they can reclaim the title. Thereby, they are able to exercise some control over the *matai* (Tcherkézoff 2000: 116).

Matai differ from each other in terms of rank, prestige, amount of power and kind of power. There are two kinds of *matai*; *ali'i* and *tulafale*. The *ali'i* have formal powers to command, while *tulafale* are orators for the *ali'i* and therefore hold executive power.

The *matai*-system is also of relevance on a national level. In order to become a Member of Parliament, the person has to be *matai* (Shore 1982: 59, Macpherson and Macpherson 2000: 32). Women are allowed to become *matai*, although the title is usually bestowed upon men: less than 10 % of *matai* are female (Tcherkézoff 2000: 117).

Another element of Samoan culture which is necessary to understand in order to realize the complexity of village organization, is the *aiga* (extended family). It is through membership in the *aiga* that the members' individual identities are defined and rights and obligations conferred. Members of the *aiga* are expected to serve (*tautua*) the family as best they can, whether it is through providing beneficial knowledge, physical strength, or money. In return the members have a right to moral, physical, and financial support, as well as the prestige that follows as member of a large group. Members also often gain access to land for housing and agriculture. The respect one is shown increases proportionately with one's effort to serve the *aiga*. A Samoan proverb describes service as the road to power. To be held in high respect for the effort one puts into the *aiga* is greatly relevant for a person aspiring to be elected *matai* (Macpherson and Macpherson 2000: 30-31).

Government

Samoa is a monarchy, and since independence from New Zealand in 1962, Malietoa Tanumafili II has been the Head of State. According to the Constitution, parliament chooses the Head of State for a five-year term. Nonetheless, in 1962 a special amendment caused two *matai* to be awarded the title for life. They were Malietoa Tanumafili II and Tupua Tamasese Meaole, who both had held important positions during the New Zealand administration (Tcherkézoff 2000:120). In 1963, Tupua Tamasese Meaole passed away, leaving Malietoa Tanumafili II as the sole holder of the title Head of State (Meleisea 1987: 159).

The Constitution states that a successor to the title of Head of State is eligible as long as he is qualified to be a Member of Parliament, which means that the person must be a *matai*. However, as an unwritten rule, the successor should hold a *tama aiga* title. This is a classification of titles and refers to the four families who respectively have been holders of the titles, Malietoa, Tupua Tamasese, Tuimaleali'ifano, and Mata'afa. These families have had preeminent roles in the interaction with foreign powers throughout the last two centuries. European colonials needed kings and chiefs to facilitate the rule of the Samoan people and referred to leading factions in royal terms, aiming to have one of them designated as sole king. Kingship shifted between the four families above, which will continue to be the case as long as successors are expected to hold a *tama aiga* title (ibid.).

The political system in Samoa can best be described as a three-layered system. The Head of State is elected according to the criteria above, Members of Parliament need to be *matai*, and since 1990, universal electoral suffrage allows everyone above the age of 21 to vote at elections. As only approximately 10 % of *matai* are women, primarily men constitute Parliament (ibid: 110, 115).

A full universal suffrage, where all adults have a right to become Members of Parliament, has never had full support in Samoa (ibid: 117). Though perhaps surprising to foreigners, the reasons are clear. Parliament is composed of representatives from the various districts. The system is perceived as democratic because the kin group chooses *matai* through consensus. As previously mentioned, the kin group can reclaim the *matai* title if dissatisfied with the *matai*. If the *matai* in question were a Member of Parliament and his

title was reclaimed, it would force him to withdraw from politics, making his supporters' indirect power apparent. Also, because all *matai* are chosen the same way, they are in this sense equals. Critics claim that consensus is not as democratic as voting, since certain people will have more influence than others. Defenders, on the other hand, assert that voting creates winners and losers, while consensus does not. In addition, many see it as an advantage that a person's experience and respect is taken into consideration, and that new and inexperienced people have less of a say (ibid.: 115-117).

Urban Growth and Social Differences Among Villages

Looking again at governance on a local level, it is evident that the growing urban population has led to noticeable changes in the social life and unity of many urban villages in and near Apia. Today, in urban as well as rural villages, the *fono* (council of chiefs) continues to be an important forum for governance. *Matai* with their power and honor remain central in resource allocation and in regulating village life, including taking care of their *aiga*.

However, some *matai* in urban villages may differ from rural *matai* in the extent to which they fulfill their role. Wealth, political power, and social organization vary, as some *aiga* have greater access to land and crops than others. In some villages, Europeans or the Church own the land and lease areas to wage dependant migrants. Consequently, a village may neither have ties to specific land nor *matai* titles of their own, which can lead to weak traditional village cohesion. As these villages tend to be located on swampy land near commercial and industrial centers, they often have the worst housing and environmental and social conditions in the country (Storey 2000: 86-88).

Young people from outside of Apia will often move in with relatives who live in or near town in order to obtain higher education or find employment. Many informants and other Samoans I spoke with found that town life could offer more personal freedom than life in more rural areas. As mentioned above, there are urban villages that have a weak social unity, and some *matai* may not have the same amount of social control or possibility of surveillance as in more cohesive villages. Considering the shops, bars, clubs, hotels, restaurants, and multitude of businesses, Apia contains a variety of job opportunities and

activities that rural villages cannot offer. In addition, the prospect of more personal freedom and a chance of meeting new people are likely motivating factors that will attract the younger generations to a life in town.

Unfortunately, the population growth in and near Apia proves to be problematic for the state. “Increased impoverishment in the cash economy has been a catalyst for several demonstrations against the government and for demands to increase the minimum wage, which was raised to US\$ 0.46/hour in 1998” (ibid.: 88). Every day I met children who worked as street vendors, selling products like matches, glue and toothpaste during the day and flower garlands late at night outside the bars and hotels. These children and the development they represent have become a concern for the state. The population growth is also expected to severely affect coastal and water catchment areas, which in turn will degrade freshwater and coastal marine habitats, water quality, and people’s health (ibid.: 95).

The Colonial History of Samoa

The colonial rivalry that dominated in the Pacific during the last two centuries involved the United States and the European imperial powers Germany, France, and Britain. In the second half of the 19th century, Britain did not want more colonies, but feared that their Pacific islands would be colonized by the other imperialists. It was in the British’ interest to hinder Germany and France in their quest for new colonies. The Industrial Revolution had reached these two latter countries almost a century after it had started taking place in Britain. In order to compete with Britain in economic development, Germany and France needed new colonies. Germany was especially interested in the harbor Apia, which would be used to gain economic foothold in the South Pacific. The United States was involved in whaling and in the China tea trade, and depended on safe harbors with deep water for their steam ships. The USA was granted a naval base at Pago Pago in the Samoan archipelago in 1878 and annexed Hawai’i twenty years later. Germany and Britain, however, were also offered bases on the Samoan islands by high chiefs, and competition among the colonials started to escalate (Meleisea 1987: 48-49).

In Apia, officials from the USA, Britain, and Germany struggled for control by each supporting one of the leading Samoan factions, respectively the *tama aiga* mentioned above. However, a hurricane destroyed all warships but one, and war was avoided. The colonial powers made a treaty and a convention was finally signed in 1899. Consequently the western Samoan islands came under Germany, while the USA took control of the eastern islands, later known as American Samoa. Britain pulled out and instead obtained political rights in other Pacific islands (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 20-21).

Germany's rule in Samoa was short-lived and ended in 1914 when New Zealand peacefully took over the territory. However, a tragic influenza epidemic in 1918 that wiped out nearly a fourth of the Samoan population triggered an increasing resentment to the New Zealand government that knowingly had let contagious passengers ashore (O'Meara 1990:4). In addition, the New Zealand Administration enraged the Samoans through its paternalistic rule and imposition of regulations, and the resentment augmented into a nonviolent resistance named the Mau Rebellion. The Mau's goal was independence from New Zealand rule and complete Samoan self-government. At the end of World War II, a Labor Government came into office in New Zealand (ibid.). It felt a commitment to give Samoa its freedom, and preparations for self-government were initiated. Samoa gained independence in 1962, and became the first independent island country in the Pacific (Meleisea 1987: 143-144, 157).

Religion

Prior to the British missionaries' arrival in the late 1820s, Samoans were polytheists. They distinguished between gods of non-human origin, *Atua*, and those of human origin, *Aitu*. The latter, which were ancestral spirits, visited people in the form of animals, humans and other natural objects, and were consulted through mediums. In the early 1820s, beachcombers introduced Christianity to the Samoans, followed by missionaries from London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Wesleyan (Methodist) Church after 1828. Many Samoans saw the materialistic possessions of the English as an indication that the Christian God was superior to theirs. Evening prayers addressed to family gods were replaced by evening prayers (*sa*) to

the Christian God. More and more groups of Samoans converted, but not necessarily to the same church. Previous diversity of gods was now replaced by a diversity of denominations (Meleisea 1987: 35-60). This wide variety is still there today, and increasingly so.

LMS became exclusively associated with the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS), who had given LMS the most support (ibid.: 55). The other major denominations apart from CCCS and the Methodist Church are The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (LDS), and the Roman Catholic Church. Others include Assembly of God, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, New Wine, and The Worship Center. 99.7 % of the population is Christian (CIA 2001).

Christianity brought changes to the hierarchical system in Samoa. Prior to the missionaries, the highest *matai* were sacred, due to the heavenly power, *mana* (see below, this chapter), they received from the gods. After the introduction of Christianity, the power of the *matai* came from the Christian God, and *matai* needed to follow God's law like everyone else. Sacred power, previously the privilege of *matai* only, was given to pastors instead (Meleisea 1987:68-69).

The high rank and social position of the pastors is physically visible, as the pastor's home often distinguishes itself by being larger than the other houses in the village. "There are within the village two fundamental and irreducible sources of authority. One is the *matai* council; the other is the church and pastor. Normally, the pastors work closely with village chiefs to run the village, and cooperate in supporting each other's authority in various village activities" (Shore 1982: 107). Conflicts of interest may disturb an otherwise complementary relationship between pastors and *matai*. It is not always clear who should have the final word, and disputes may for instance arise when *matai* and pastors intervene in each other's areas of jurisdiction (ibid.).

In most villages there are evening curfews, which is the responsibility of the village *matai* to see are enforced. One blow of a conch or a toll of a bell signals an approximately twenty minute long curfew around 6 or 7 pm. Village areas are to be cleared of people, and *sa* (evening family prayer) begins (ibid.). Singing of hymns is heard from every house, and roads are usually empty except for roaming pigs and stray dogs. During a visit to Savai'i, the

impact of the curfew was clear. Planned walks or visits to others in the village were cancelled or postponed if curfew was about to begin. Although I had neighbors in Apia who gathered at home for *sa*, there were no curfew bells or patrolling men on the roads to influence my evenings.

A village generally has various church-based organizations. One of them is the congregation, which functions as a distinct village group where the members participate in church-related activities and cooperate in monthly cleaning of the church and grounds. The youth groups constitute another church-based organization. The youth organize fund-raising, sports events, and dances, and have their share of responsibilities in maintaining the church grounds. They are also expected to work in the pastor's plantations. A third church-based organization is the Pastor's school and the Sunday school (Shore 1982: 106).

Schooling

The missionaries established the first schools, and today education is a priority in most families. Although schooling is not compulsory, the adult literacy level is 97 % (CIA 2001). In 1999, there were 168 public schools, 3 private schools, and 35 schools run by various Christian denominations. There are primary schools in almost every village, but the facilities are generally poor and insufficiently equipped. Many urban schools suffer from overcrowding. Secondary education is less accessible than primary and is due for improvement this coming decade. There are several institutions for post secondary education, and the National University of Samoa, an agricultural branch of the University of the South Pacific, and The Polytechnic of Samoa, offer tertiary education. Pre-schools are not provided by the Government, and the demand for pre-schools has been met by non-governmental organizations (Government of Samoa 2001). In Apia, where one finds the greatest variety of schools, parents choose schools for their children primarily based on student fees, location, religious affiliation, family traditions, and the reputation of the school.

From Taro to Corned Beef

A lot of the locally grown Samoan food is nutritionally rich. The main agricultural crop throughout Samoa is taro, which is a basic ingredient in most hot meals, along with cooked or baked bananas and breadfruit. These three constitute the most important staple crops grown in the country (O'Meara 1990: 57-58).

Coconuts are in plenty supply and have several functions. Coconut cream is used in cooking, and coconut milk is a readily available drink. In town, fresh coconuts are sold from coolers. By scraping the inside of the coconut, you get a white gel-like substance that has the taste of natural yogurt and is sometimes fed to children.

In Apia there are three large markets: the fish market, the Flea Market, and Fugalei Market, also called the New Market. The fish market offers a rich variety of seafood and is a busy place every Sunday morning when Samoans come to buy fish for the Sunday lunch. While the Flea Market specializes in hand made art crafts¹⁸, clothing, and jewelry, Fugalei Market has a rich variety of food in addition to artifacts.

A visit to Fugalei Market gives a good impression of what kinds of food are available and commonly eaten. The vendors display their products indoors, or sit outside in the sun with their crops in baskets or on mats. For sale are large bunches of long green bananas, clusters of small ripe bananas the length of a finger, single yellow bananas the size of a slender lower arm, papaya, taro, cucumbers, tomatoes, pine apples, cabbage, cocoa beans, onions, coconuts, passion fruits, *palusami* (taro leaves in coconut cream wrapped inside banana leaves), breadfruit, kava, etc..

At the markets and several other places in town, hot meals are sold at reasonable prices as well. Plates of cooked bananas, taro or rice with fish, pork or chicken, rice and curry, egg foo yon, noodles, chop suey, stir-fry, sausages, turkey tails, and mutton flaps, are all common dishes. Imported foods, like rice, flour, sugar, butter, canned fish and meat, pork, mutton, and soda, are generally found in small shops located in every village and in the larger grocery stores down town (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 133). Canned food has become extremely popular, especially *pisupo* (corned beef), to the extent that it has been

¹⁸ The artifacts include traditional weapons, fly whiskers, kava bowls, *tapa* (cloth made from the bark of tree), mats, and woven bags and baskets.

incorporated into the food traditionally given and distributed at ceremonial occasions. Apples, wine, cereals, and milk products like cheese, yogurt, and chocolate, are imported and quite expensive compared to the amount of local food available for the same price.

With the modernization of the last half century, Samoan diet has been modified. A tendency for developing countries that experience dietetic changes is a general increase in people's body weight. Samoans "seem to have surpassed everyone else in the world in their propensity to achieve massive weight gains," concludes Lowell D. Holmes (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 133). He writes that lowered daily energy expenditure in addition to the cultural association of corpulence with high social status is part of the reason for the general weight increase (*ibid.*).

Among elderly Samoans, the link between corpulence and high social recognition is still apparent. A typical appearance of a *matai* is a gray haired man with a large, protruding belly and a muscular upper body, majestically decorated from above the waist line to the knees with the *pe'a*¹⁹ (men's full body tattoo). Nonetheless, Holmes' explanation cannot fully account for the overweight population in Apia, as corpulence as an ideal appears to belong to the past. Although one finds numerous overweight Samoans of various ages, corpulence does not appear as an ideal among people of the past two generations in Apia. Many Samoans made comments about dieting and gave compliments to slender people who "kept their figure", while uninhibitedly remarking someone's weight gains.

Fauna: A Benign Jungle

Pork is a central part of ceremonial food display, and pigs are among the domesticated animals along with chickens, dogs and cats, all of whom roam around freely. Occasionally you can come across horses and cattle. Of wildlife there is the wild bush pig, two nonpoisonous snakes, a variety of lizards, land crabs, bats, rats and mice, and finally thirty-four different types of birds. There are no deadly animals, but bites from two varieties of centipedes and one kind of scorpion may cause great discomfort. Vicious stray dogs have become a public concern in Apia, and people with bandaged legs bear witness to the

¹⁹ The proper term for *pe'a* is *tatau*, which is where the English word "tattoo" derives from (O'Meara 1990: 72)

problem. Cockroaches and flies represent a daily nuisance, and mosquitoes are at times carriers of diseases (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 12). The rhinoceros beetle that destroys coconut trees can be a financial threat (ibid.), and cars leaving Upolu headed for Savai'i must have their tires hosed down to avoid bringing across a certain kind of land-snail that destroys taro crops.

Mana and Tapu and the Brother-Sister Taboo

Mana and *tapu* are concepts that traditionally have served the role as gate-keeping concepts for the Polynesian region. Cultural idiosyncrasies make unambiguous definitions of the two words difficult (Williamson 1939). Handy defines *mana* and *tapu* as concepts based on a systematic theory of dualism, where divinity and masculinity of the heavenly sphere are seen in opposition to earthly secularity and femininity (Handy in Williamson 1939: 263).

Williamson objects to Handy's definition and denies the connection between *mana* and masculinity. He states that *mana* is a manifestation of the gods' special powers, which can enhance the authority of powerful and successful individuals in special social situations. He asserts that *tapu* merely indicates that certain forms of conduct are socially demanded and sanctioned through punishment from either supernatural powers, the public, or authorities (ibid.: 264-265).

Differing from Williamson on the concept *mana*, Shore explains how a dual division of political power corresponds to the two types of *matai*. He writes that political power is comprised of two aspects; *mana* and *pule*, which are respectively female and male power. As stated previously (p. 15), the two types of *matai* are *tulafale* and *ali'i*. *Tulafale* supposedly hold the male power *pule*, while *ali'i* have the female power *mana* (1981: 207).

Correspondingly, *tulafale* are known as "secular" chiefs, while *ali'i* are referred to as "sacred" chiefs (Meleisea 1987: 35).

Holmes writes that although the concepts *mana* and *tapu* are recognized in Samoa, they "seem strangely unimportant" compared to eastern Polynesia (1992: 72). In Samoa, areas on land or at sea can be made *tapu* (taboo/forbidden) by the village council if they fear resource depletion. The concept *mana* has been closely linked to status, but the concept and

idea of *mana* has died out like some titles have (ibid.)²⁰. However, the division of political power into a male and female aspect is relevant for discussions of gender in Samoa and will be elaborated in chapter 6.

Mead writes of a brother-sister taboo in Samoa, where strict avoidance pertains to all individuals of the opposite sex who are within five years apart in age and who are related or have been brought up together. A strict code of etiquette forbids the children above nine or ten years of age to touch each other, sit close, eat meals together, “mention any salacious matter in each other’s presence”, walk together or dance on the same floor (1961: 44).

The brother-sister taboo appears to have changed over the years since Mead wrote *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928. Few signs of the prohibitions she mentions came to my attention in Apia during fieldwork. I found the relationship between boys and girls who regarded each other like a brother or a sister to be characterized by trust and the absence of sexual tension.

Based on my experience with teenagers and young people approximately between the ages of 17 and 30 in Apia, I found that boys and girls who were siblings or who regarded each other as such would dance together on the dance floors in nightclubs and tease each other candidly about each other’s love affairs. Among the Samoans that I spent time with, there was talk of dating, lovers, and sex on numerous occasions. Typically, the persons present knew each other well, and senior adults and young children were absent. The conversations were characteristically humorous and involved teasing, joking, and laughter, keeping the atmosphere lighthearted. This is not to say that friends or siblings of the opposite sex do not confide in each other or have serious talks.

A prominent tendency I became aware of among siblings was the protective manner in which many boys acted towards sisters or close female friends. A male friend who coincidentally visited the same nightclub one evening as his younger sister kept a watchful eye on her all night and disapproved of the young men glued to her side. He gullibly believed my joking remark about seeing his sister leave the club with one of her admirers,

²⁰ See Mageo (1994) for symbolic associations between *mana*, head/hair and sexuality.

and when he quickly scanned the club and caught sight of her where he last had seen her, he tartly replied to me, “That’s *not* funny.”

Similarly, the members of a family I came to know well sometimes introduced me to other people as their sister or daughter. In categorizing me as a sister/daughter, they conveyed the close ties that existed between their family and myself. It also communicated to me that I could trust them and count on them. I experienced the protective aspect of having “a brother” as well. One night at a club with one of the sons of this family, he introduced me as his sister to group of his friends. In calling me his sister, he appeared to signal to the boys that I was somehow off limits, and it put a stop to the boys’ flirting remarks.

Perminow depicts the brother-sister taboo in Tonga in *The Long Way Home* (1993). Similar to Samoa, the taboo was concerned with avoidance between classificatory brothers and sisters. Perminow, however, found sources that described the avoidance as less imperative now than in the past. One source from 1960 asserted that siblings of the opposite sex could be seen riding on the same bicycle, an act which would have been unacceptable twenty years previously. In addition to changes over time, Perminow became aware of variations between geographical areas and among people. He found that although classificatory siblings were theoretically equals, in practice the closeness in relation affected the siblings’ behavior toward each other (ibid.: 85-86).

The observation that the brother-sister taboo in Tonga is less imperative today than in the past supports my impression of the similar tendency in Samoa. As is the case with many other issues, ways of life in Apia are not necessarily representative of general Samoan norms, which are better preserved in rural areas. The brother-sister taboo appears to be more prevailing in rural Samoa than in Apia, although less stringent today compared to the 1920s Mead writes of. During a visit to a village in Savai’i, I became acquainted with a small group of boys and girls between the ages of six and twelve who either were siblings or had grown up together as neighbors. They sat, walked, and ate together, and they touched each other without visible complications or awkwardness. However, boys and girls do commonly sleep in separated quarters, especially in their teenage years.

On Suicide in Samoa

During the 1970s, there was a sudden increase in cases of suicides in Samoa. Statistics from the early 1980s showed that Samoa had the highest record of suicide incidents per capita of all the independent nations in the world (Meleisea 1987: 168). 75 % of the suicide victims were young people between the ages of 15 and 24, of which two-thirds were male²¹ (O'Meara 1990: 109). Various causes to the high suicide rate have been suggested. The world recession hit Samoa like it hit other lesser developed countries in the 1970s, and political uncertainty dominated the early 1980s. The easy access to a toxic chemical often used to commit suicide was another contributing factor (Meleisea 1987: 167-168). This segment on suicide is relevant for the dissertation, because the developmental changes that are depicted below have likely affected new trends among fa'afafine that appear to be individualistic in character (see chap. 9).

In Apia, I contacted pastor Nu'uausala Siaosi, who was greatly involved with suicide work. His engagement led to the establishment of the Suicide Awareness Organization (ca.1983), and crisis hotlines and workshops were set up. According to Siaosi, the two most important factors that can lead young Samoans to suicide are scolding from parents and failed love affairs. He explained that parents live by the patterns from the older days, where "children are supposed to shut up when being talked to. Now, children internalize it (their reactions), they keep it inside, especially children who have been overseas and who have learned to talk and stand up for themselves. Here, that only leads to more scolding." Siaosi's approach to suicide prevention is to teach about the changes in the Samoan society. He tries to teach parents as well as children about developmental changes in a child's life that may become a crisis if understanding and communication between parents and children are deficient.

According to O'Meara, it is not a coincidence that the suicide epidemic correlates with the swift modernization after independence in 1962 (op. cit.: 110-111). Western influences through media in addition to increased migration, travel, and schooling have

²¹ According to Mageo, there was an epidemic of spirit possessions among Samoan girls during the suicide period (2001: 192, see Mageo 1996 for interpretations of spirit possessions in Samoa). I have not found reasons for why the majority of the suicide victims were male.

given young people unprecedented hopes and expectations. The problem is not the rapid social development in Samoa, but rather the disparity between young people's desires and the social and economic reality of their lives. Wealth and freedom are two common and closely related goals among young people, and higher education is necessary in order to reach those goals (ibid.: 109-112).

Personal freedom is not easily obtained, however, in a rigidly structured society where parental attitudes call for obedience. The relationship between senior family members and young people can be stressful and ambivalent. The seniors who perhaps are authoritarian and use physical punishment when raising the young are the same elders the young depend upon for personal and financial support. To show rage towards one's parents or senior family members is not condoned, and feelings are left unexpressed. Fistfights after bars' closing hours, early pregnancies out of wedlock²², and suicide have become ways of redirecting, and thereby venting, rage (ibid.).

In Samoa, care is expressed by serving and helping others. Elders will show that they care for their children by giving them advice, orders, and responsibilities, and making sure orders are obeyed. Children, on the other hand, are expected to care for their elders by serving and working for them. If the children talk back or fail to serve, this will be interpreted as lack of care and perhaps physically punished (Mageo 2001: 194-196). Mageo argues that the concept of care has undergone changes in Samoa as a consequence of Christianization. The Samoan understanding of care has existed among groups, where all have obligations to take care of the members of related groups. With Christianization, the meaning of care became individualized and interpersonal rather than social and intergroup. In the modern world, young people grow up with largely unsatisfied care needs, as they are confused about how much their elders care for them. They are children of a generation who live by a different concept of care from that of their elders. Mageo concludes that young people have two care models, one Samoan and one Western, which compete and end in a crisis of faith (ibid.: 192-198).

²² Couples who conceive out of wedlock are often encouraged by their families to get married. Shore writes that many adoptions involve children of unwed mothers, whose relatives take over the responsibility for the child (1976:171). Children born out of wedlock do not appear to be stigmatized by society.

In an article called “Generation gap is causing havoc”, Dr. Unasa L. F. Va’a, professor of Social Anthropology at the National University of Samoa (NUS), sheds further light on root causes of suicide in Samoa (*The Samoa Observer* 24 June 2001). He writes that between 25 and 35 people commit suicide per year. He confirms the conclusions above when he states that in addition to rapid social and economic changes in the ‘70s, scolding from parents and quarrels between spouses are common stories behind suicides. He describes the attempt to bridge the gap between the needs of the old and the young generations to be a difficult one, where old people likely are authoritarian while the young boys and girls are outspoken and assertive and do not obey their elders blindly. Dr. Va’a adds that matters are made worse by the fact that the younger people have in general a much higher education than their parents, which widens the generation gap. Additionally, he writes that “different styles of upbringing which characterized different eras, one during a basically colonial and early post-colonial era, and one during an advanced post-colonial era, (...) is a contributing factor to the high rate of suicide in Samoa” (ibid.). He states further that what needs to be done is not merely to ban the paraquat herbicide²³ that many suicide victims use, but to introduce “a different social climate of opinion and practice” within society. He calls for a reform of attitudes, opinions, values, beliefs, and practices, which is needed to reach a peaceful middle ground (ibid.).

During my fieldwork, the presence of this suicide problem was unmistakable. In addition to the article by Dr. Va’a referred to above, there was a minimum of five other articles on suicide in *The Samoa Observer*, one of the country’s largest newspapers. In addition, there was a suicide-awareness concert at NUS, and at least three suicide attempts took place. One case was reported in the newspaper, while the second attempt came to my attention because it took place in a friend’s family. The third attempt was by a teenage boy I came to know quite well. His wrist was still bandaged the first time we talked.

²³ Paraquat is one the most widely used herbicides in the world. It has a bad reputation due to its acute oral toxicity and can represent a health hazard to the people using it in the plantations. One tablespoon of the active ingredient is fatal, and there is no antidote (*The Samoa Observer* 23 June 2001). Since 1979, 363 people in Samoa have drunk paraquat to commit suicide (*The Samoa Observer* 6 July 2001).

The Mead/Freeman Controversy

The debate on nature vs. nurture was at its height when Margaret Mead embarked on her voyage to the Manu'a islands of American Samoa in 1925. Discussions on whether biological or social factors were determinant for human behavior and the development of human society were heated. In the light of this debate, the results of Mead's eight months long fieldwork were perceived as a triumph for those who saw culture as the most determining force (Freeman 1983: 4-5). Therefore, when in 1983 Derek Freeman refuted Mead's findings in his book *Margaret Mead and Samoa: the Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* and criticized cultural determinism, he triggered what has been described as "anthropology's greatest controversy in 100 years" (Holmes 1987: viii).

As a dedicated student of the culture determinist Franz Boas, Mead was of the same conviction as her professor. Boas was her official supervisor, and had instructed her to study heredity and environment by focusing on the adolescent girl (Freeman 1999: 56-57). In Mead's world famous book *Coming of Age in Samoa* written in 1928, she describes how the goal of the research was to test "the effect of civilization upon a developing human being at the age of puberty" (1961: 6). The method available was the method of the anthropologist. Ideally, one needed "primitive peoples" who lived under different conditions than those found in America (ibid.: 7). The young Samoan girl was to be compared to the young American girl, in order to determine whether the turbulent adolescence typical of American teenagers was biologically determined and therefore inevitable, or whether the turbulence was culturally conditioned and therefore a consequence of being adolescent in America (ibid.: 4-5). Mead concluded that adolescence in the Manu'a islands was not a time of upheaval like in America, and that adolescent behavior therefore was molded by cultural conditions (op. cit.: 234). Freeman states that Boas readily accepted Mead's findings, and that they confirmed Boas' beliefs that "social stimulus" was "infinitely more potent than the biological mechanism" (1983: 4).

When Freeman went to the western Samoan islands in 1940 to undertake ethnographic research, he had full credence in Mead's work. However, after nearly three years of learning the language and studying the Samoan culture, Freeman realized he needed

to test Mead's research and refute many of her findings. In the years 1966-81, he examined Mead's writings, sources, and conclusions, and compared them to his own findings. In addition, he undertook a thorough investigation of the history of anthropology and of biology, and the interrelation between them. He wished to fully understand the trends of time that had influenced Boas and Mead, and others. Not only did Freeman wish to refute Mead's findings, but he also discussed aspects of what he called "the wider myth of absolute cultural determinism" and called for a "more scientific doctrine" to replace it with (ibid: XIV-XVI).

In *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead* (1999), Freeman states that "her exciting revelations about sexual behavior were in some cases merely the extrapolations of whispered intimacies, whereas those of greatest consequences were the results of a prankish hoax" (ibid.: 1). The revelation about the hoax came about quite by accident in 1987, when Freeman assisted the film producer Frank Heimans in making a documentary about Margaret Mead's fieldwork in the Manu'a islands (ibid., see Freeman 1999: 1-3 for a complete account of the hoax).

To Freeman and Heimans' great surprise, one of Mead's informants was still alive. Apparently, the woman named Fa'apua'a Fa'amú wanted to meet Freeman and Heimans to "set the record straight" and have her statements permanently recorded. In March 1926, Fa'apua'a and Fofoa, another female informant, had accompanied Mead to the island Ofu and Olosega. During the stay on Ofu, Fa'apua'a and Fofoa had played a prank on Mead. Mead had asked the two girls what they did at night, and they had answered that they spent the nights with boys (ibid.: 1-3). On the videotape, Fa'apua'a said, "As you know, Samoan girls are terrific liars when it comes to joking. But Margaret accepted our trumped up stories as though they were true (ibid.: 3)." Fa'apua'a and Fofoa continued with the joke, and despite Mead's numerous questionings, the girls' answers remained false and in accordance with each other. Fa'apua'a confessed that the jokes had led to misconceptions about premarital promiscuity in Samoa (ibid.).

According to Freeman, there were several reasons why the hoaxing was "fateful". Mead had come to American Samoa with the strong belief that culture was the primary determinant for human behavior. She had also agreed to do ethnological research for the

Bishop Museum, which was undertaken at the expense of her original fieldwork. Freeman writes that Mead relied on Fa'apua'a and Fofoa to show her the cultural patterns she needed to find. Another important element was that Dr. Edward Craighill Handy at the Bishop Museum had installed her with a false preconception of the sexual climate in Samoa (ibid.: 14). He had presented Polynesia as one culture area, and when he generalized from the premarital promiscuous Marquesans to Samoans, Mead believed him (ibid.: 74-75). In addition came Mead's fervent admiration for Boas. Freeman asserts that she desired to find data that would support Boas' convictions about cultural determinism. A fifth contributory factor was the Samoan tendency to joke about sexual matters, which Mead either was unaware of or did not heed sufficiently. Freeman adds that the hoaxing also can be perceived as "fateful" considering the effects it had on anthropology, and the ideas prevalent of the time period (ibid.: 14-15).

Margaret Mead died in 1978, five years prior to Freeman's publication of *Margaret Mead and Samoa: the Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. Freeman and Mead did however get the opportunity to discuss Samoa in 1964. Freeman presented her with rich data that he had accumulated over time, all of which contradicted her work. A few days later Mead had admitted to her former student Lola Romanucci-Ross, a medical and psychological anthropologist, that she "had been proven wrong" (ibid.: 205). Despite this insight, she refused to alter *Coming of Age in Samoa*. In the preface to her book in the edition of 1973, Mead states clearly, "It must remain, as all anthropological works must remain, exactly as it was written, true to what I saw in Samoa and what I was able to convey of what I saw; true to the state of our knowledge of human behavior as it was in the mid-1920s; true to our hopes and fears for the future of the world" (1961: preface: II).

What became clear after Freeman's refutation of Mead's work was that Mead was a highly cherished anthropologist whose conclusions had been "central to the belief system of American cultural anthropology, being viewed as one of its glories and a solid proof of Boasian culturalism" (Freeman 1999: 208). Many anthropologists were enraged, and perceived Freeman's findings as a personal attack on the "Mother-Goddess of American Anthropology". Freeman writes that what at once appeared to be embarrassment turned to

fury, as people saw the foundation on which they had based their beliefs shattered (ibid.). The American Anthropological Association arranged a meeting where a motion was put to the vote and passed that described Freeman's refutation as "poorly written, unscientific, irresponsible, and misleading" (ibid.: 208-209).

Freeman's scientific purpose had been to eliminate erroneous information about Samoa by attempting to falsify Mead's conclusion, using Karl Popper's method of error elimination²⁴ (1983: XII). Freeman denies that Mead was to have engaged in deliberate falsification, and is convinced that she was misled (1999: 212). Anthropologists' reactions after his refutation brought Freeman to conclude that the significance of the controversy was "the light it shed on the way in which a set of beliefs, once implanted, impels even highly educated individuals to cling fervently to doctrines that have been shown to have no scholarly or scientific basis" (ibid.: 209).

Lowell D. Holmes was a Professor of Anthropology at Wichita State University who earned his Ph. D. on a methodological restudy in 1953-54 of Mead's research in American Samoa (Holmes and Holmes 1992: VII). In *The Restudy of Manu'an Culture: A Problem in Methodology* (1957), he presented his evaluation of the validity and reliability of her work. His motive was to understand how differences in an investigator's status, like gender, age, and marital status could influence the interpretation of data and the availability of data (Holmes 1987: 14-15). Although not to the same extent as Freeman, Holmes' conclusions differed in many ways from Mead's. Their work did not coincide on matters like the degree of sexual freedom among young Samoans, the aggressiveness of behavior, the degree of affection and commitment among couples, or the competitive nature of Samoans in general (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 142).

Holmes' restudy proved to be extremely relevant in the debate brought on by Freeman's publication in 1983 (Holmes 1987: viii). According to Holmes, Freeman was ethological in his orientation, and tended to discard cultural explanations of behavioral differences although he denied being a sociobiologist (ibid.: 13). Holmes states that Freeman

²⁴ Karl Popper's *Logik der Forschung* (1934), where Popper writes on the need for rigorous testing of one's theories, was not yet published when Mead conducted her fieldwork. On the contrary, scientists would do their utmost to prove their theories (Freeman 1983: 60).

intended with his book of 1983 to present more accurate information about Samoa, but adds “although his observations of Samoan behavior were in another village, on another island, in another country²⁵, and fourteen years later” (Holmes and Holmes 1992: 140). Holmes asserts that Freeman’s case of Samoa is inaccurate and built on selective material (1987: 173)²⁶.

The Mead/Freeman controversy represents one of several discussions²⁷ in the nature/nurture-debate concerning whether respectively biological or cultural factors are the primary determinants for human behavior. The controversy also deals with fieldwork, and questions whether universal criteria of truth exist, or whether fieldwork is an idiosyncratic experience that will lead anthropologists to reach dissimilar conclusions (Williksen-Bakker et al. 1996: 65-66).

The debate of nature versus nurture in molding human behavior ties closely to the discussion of the cultural construction of gender. As mentioned in the Introduction, anthropology in the 1960s began to regard the “man”/“woman” dichotomy and its alleged universality with a critical eye. Relevant for the ongoing discussion of nature vs. nurture is Yanagisako and Collier’s criticism of gender dichotomies and biological determinism (Yanagisako and Collier 1987). Yanagisako and Collier oppose the assumption that variations in gender categories are simply alternative elaborations on the biological differences between the sexes. They have as one of their premises that “there are no “facts”, biological or material, that have social consequences and cultural meanings in and of themselves” (ibid.: 39). A question to be dealt with here is how the role of fa’afafine can be perceived as a distinct product of Samoan culture.

²⁵ Freeman undertook his research in Samoa, while Mead had primarily lived in *Ta’u*, a village in American Samoa.

²⁶ In his book *Quest for the Real Samoa* of 1987, Holmes presents critics from other anthropologists who partook in the controversy (see 1987: 174-177). Many readers have viewed Freeman’s work as accentuating the “dark” side of Samoa, while Mead’s account has been criticized for focusing on the “light” side. Holmes finds his own study to be “somewhere in between” (ibid.: 172).

²⁷ The debate between Gananath Obeyesekere and Marshall Sahlins concerning the reasons for the natives’ murder of Captain Cook in Hawai’i in 1779 represents another nature/nurture discussion. Obeyesekere and Sahlins interpret Cook’s death in two different ways. Sahlins views the murder as a product of prevailing myths in Hawai’i that had a structuring function in serving as models for action. Obeyesekere, on the other hand, argues a psychological explanation where he focuses on cognition and practical rationality. He writes that the myth of Cook as the god Lono is a European idea based on the Western notion of Europeans being as gods for the primitive peoples (Obeyesekere 1992: 19, 153, 177).

Summary

In this chapter, aspects of Samoa and Samoan culture have been depicted, among others the country's geography and history, and the national and local systems of governance. A presentation of the country's financial situation and level of development has also been included. I have discussed Polynesian gate-keeping concepts like *mana*, *tapu*, and the brother-sister taboo, and portrayed the (in)famous debate between Mead and Freeman. I have also elaborated on the suicide epidemic and the various causes perceived to have brought about the high suicide rate.

During the six and a half months of research in Samoa, I spent nearly every day in the center of Apia, where a majority of my informants were employed. I moved three times, and resided in the outskirts of town in the villages of Malifa, Alafua, and Vaivase-Uta.

Relocating allowed me to become familiar with new parts of Apia, as well as to become acquainted with new neighbors, bus drivers, cab drivers, and local shop vendors. The following pages draw a realistic picture of the settings and contexts in which I conducted research. I also describe the methods of research I applied in order to reach the academic goals I had set.

Down town Apia is shaped like a crescent in the way it encompasses the harbor. The two main roads, Beach Road and Convent Street, connect like a T at a roundabout with a clock tower in the middle. While Beach Road follows the waterfront, Convent Street runs directly inland from the clock tower. Other smaller roads intersect, or touch, on the main roads, and each of them is relatively busy during the daytime.

For the many people who do not own their own vehicle, there are plenty of buses and taxis available. The public buses are inexpensive and cost a tenth of a taxi fare. The buses are used diligently all day, until they stop running at 5 pm. When schools finish for the day, or people get off work, the buses are literally filled to the brim with passengers of all ages. To watch the seating and reshuffling of passengers when more people climb on the bus, is like a hands-on lecture in Samoan status hierarchy. In the end, a full bus will likely have old people and women with infants in front, men and women without infants seated anywhere from the front towards the back of the bus, boys primarily cramped together in the back, and young girls and small children spread out evenly on empty laps.

Most of what Apia has to offer of goods and services is to be found within a few kilometers' radius. The Government building, the post office, the police station, the fire station, the New Zealand High Commission, the library, four banks, and several churches are all located on Beach Road. The three markets, a diversity of stores, four Internet locations,

movie theatres, video outlets, travel agencies, and an array of restaurants, motels, hotels, bars, and nightclubs are situated within walking distance of the clock tower.

Between the sea and Beach Road, the sea wall stretches from the docks east of Apia to the western side of town. The sea wall consists of large rocks and boulders that once replaced the beaches when the harbor was built. On top of the wall, a few meters above sea level, runs a cemented path with several deep steps that face the road. The sea wall offers a scenic route to walk or a place to sit and talk. It is particularly a popular place to sit at night after the bars' closing hours.

Various construction sites bear witness to the rapid city development. A new building for the New Zealand High Commission was in the making in July 2001 when I left, and a big, new movie theater opened shortly after. Modern office buildings and restaurants like Mc Donald's give an idea of the direction the town is heading. As the stores and business offices are concentrated in the center of Apia, one finds mostly private homes, schools, churches, small shops, and an occasional gas station in the surrounding villages.

In Apia, bars and nightclubs are popular places to meet and socialize. Of approximately nine bars and nightclubs that I visited on numerous occasions, there were especially three bars/nightclubs that were the settings for many conversations with informants and other individuals that constituted my social network. Two of the bars were located on Beach Road, while the third was several blocks away on Convent Street.

Bar A was on the second floor of an old wooden building, and consisted primarily of one large room with a bar, plenty of seating booths and tables, one pool table, and a balcony also equipped with tables. Although it was a popular place to eat, it was first and foremost a bar. The pool table in one end of the room was always in use, with a distinct preponderance of young men around it. The balcony facing the harbor offered not only a beautiful view and fresh air, but also an opportunity to watch the nightlife on the street below. People would shout back and forth, and wave to friends and people in familiar cars driving by. Especially on Friday nights, the place would be packed, and as the night wore on, certain Samoan songs would be requested, and people got off their chairs to *siva* (to dance in a traditional Samoan dance) in front of the tables to the clapping of hands.



Photo 2. Beach Road (left: People walking on the sea wall.)



Photo 3. Convent Street.

Bar B started out as a restaurant, but gradually transformed into a nightclub. The DJs were the main attraction, as they played more house- and techno-music than other dance clubs. The club became known as a hangout for young Samoans or *afa tasi*²⁸ (half-castes) who often had more money to spend than other Samoans the same age. Unlike Bar A and Bar C, the club never played Samoan or island music, and few people above the ages of 30-35 frequented the place.

Bar C was located on the second floor of a shabby looking wooden building. Under the weight of the people, the dance floor would sway to the beat of the music, threatening to collapse any time. There were a couple of pool tables, a big round bar, several tables inside as well as outside on the balcony, and a spacious dance floor with a booth for the DJ. The room would get hot and stuffy and was always poorly lit apart from some neon lights that made white shirts look fluorescent. Like at most clubs, people either played pool, danced, hung around the bar, or mingled among friends²⁹.

The methods I applied for collecting information were primarily qualitative: participant observation, unstructured interviews, and structured interviews. In addition, I employed text reading, and I took photographs and slides to document settings.

I spent a great deal of time as a participant observer. I experienced that my status as a young unmarried female facilitated my acceptance into the role of a girl friend, to which I aspired. Fa'afafine's common socializing with women is a noteworthy sign of their gender liminality, considering how often segregation of sexes is important in social gathering in Samoa and other parts of Polynesia (Nanda 2000: 60). Being young and female also eased my access into the social arena to which many of the fa'afafine belonged or frequented, like bars and nightclubs. I generally under-communicated my role as a researcher, while I over-communicated my role as a private person. I regarded it as an academic advantage, as well as a personal comfort, to predominantly be perceived as a private person. Nevertheless, with regard to research ethics, I never attempted to conceal my objectives, and was quick to

²⁸ *Afa tasi* means literally "half one" and refers to half-castes; people with one Samoan parent and one "white", or *afa tasi*, parent. Typically, *afa tasi* have lighter skin and come from middle to upper class families.

²⁹ Three other clubs down town differed in particular from Bar B and Bar C. Contrary to the latter clubs, the music was live and played by bands that performed cover versions. Many regulars were on an average older than the people coming to Bar B and C, and fewer were foreigners, *afa tasi*, or middle/upper class Samoans.

explain my presence in Samoa when introduced to new fa'afafine and other Samoans (see Engelstad 1998: 298). A young male in my place had very likely been the object of attraction and desire for many fa'afafine, which could have complicated the conditions under which he would have to work. One disadvantage about being female, however, was that it restricted my access to Samoan men's thoughts on, and experiences with, fa'afafine. Men normally did not tell women about their sexual experiences with fa'afafine. Contrarily, fa'afafine appeared relatively uninhibited about disclosing personal information of this sort.

Above, I described three bars that often were the settings for participant observation. Common for these bars was that they attracted many of the same people. In addition, the facilities consisted of a single room, which made it possible to get an overview of who was present. This meant that I coincidentally ran into the same people numerous times, which was a contributing factor when I established or strengthened social ties to informants and other acquaintances. The context³⁰ was in general one of ease, humor, and pleasure, as well as flirtation, and at times exhibitionism. Some fa'afafine informants would talk, flirt, dance, or dress in ways that attracted attention. Basically, the time I spent with fa'afafine at the clubs, or on the sea wall, not only allowed me to observe contextual behavior, but it also gave me an opportunity to participate in their evenings out, and to get to know them better. Last but not least, it gave my informants a chance to get to know me better as well, which appeared essential for establishing trust. How well the informants and I knew each other could affect which questions I posed, and also which answers the informants chose to give. For instance, at the beginning of my fieldwork, one fa'afafine presented me with a baffling story about a young fa'afafine who had fooled his way into attending a girls' school until a medical check at the school gave him away. During another interview several months later, this informant laughingly admitted it was nonsense. He said that he and his friends enjoyed fooling new people (see the hoax on Mead, chap. 2).

Another kind of setting for participant observation was the informants' workplaces. Most of my fa'afafine informants were employed in town, and I regularly dropped by their

³⁰ As some of the bars had fa'afafine employed as bartenders or waiters, I could also observe fa'afafine in a work context. However, when writing about contextual behavior at nightclubs, I consider the fa'afafine informants primarily as guests, and not as employees.

work to chat. Since most of them worked in stores, at hotels, in bars, or at restaurants, they were generally accessible to me. They usually had time to talk, and most often they appeared to appreciate the visit. The visits, like the evenings spent at clubs, gave me insight into contextual variations in behavior, as well as more time to socialize with the informants.

For example, I would often stop by for a cup of coffee at a restaurant on Beach Road. The restaurant was decorated like a Western hotel dining room with carpeted floors, cushioned chairs with arm rests, and starched cloth napkins on the tables. The room was relaxingly air conditioned, and many *palagi*³¹ (white foreigners), or well-off Samoans, came to dine here. My visits were generally before lunch, when the restaurant would be empty apart from the employees and myself. One of the waiters was a fa'afafine in his early twenties. We gradually came to know each other, and a friendship developed. He also became an enthusiastic informant. We would keep a conversation going while he set the table, or ironed the napkins, or I would join him when he went grocery shopping for the restaurant. His behavior at work contrasted with the behavior he displayed when we were out at clubs, where he was much more flamboyant and vivacious compared to the calm and collected figure he portrayed at work. It demonstrated contextual variations in people's behavior, and encouraged me to mind the relevance of context.

A method I employed throughout my fieldwork was informal, unstructured interviews. The unstructured interviews resembled casual conversations, but entailed that I had a general outline of topics I wished to discuss, including certain questions I normally posed. However, the interviewees were free to bring up new topics, and I encouraged them to elaborate on issues that engaged them. I would often think of new questions as we spoke.

During the first three months, I visited various churches, schools, and NUS, where I conducted primarily unstructured interviews with priests, pastors, principals, teachers, and professors. I also used unstructured interviews with four fa'afafine informants at the beginning of my research, which was a good starting point for learning what issues could be

³¹ *Palagi* is short for *papalagi*, which is the term used for white people. The term was coined when the first European explorers came to Samoa and means sky-breakers, or to have burst through heaven. Samoans pictured the universe as a dome with many layers above, where the gods lived. The Europeans were thought to have broken through the domes of heaven and that they, like gods, were of supernatural origin (Meleisea 1987: 42).

interesting to pursue. In general, I took hand written notes during the conversation, although sometimes I waited until afterwards before jotting down information.

As originally intended, I waited to carry out structured interviews with my fa'afafine informants towards the last three months of my fieldwork. By structured interview I mean an interview where all the questions are formulated beforehand, and where every question is posed. I did not use questionnaires, but asked the same 36 questions to each informant I interviewed. Posing the same questions allowed me to compare answers, and see conformities and discrepancies between the informants more clearly. Some questions were very specific and closed, while others were more open (Ellen 1984: 231). Although structured, the interviews were never so stringent as to discourage an interviewee from commenting on other topics, or to hinder me from asking spontaneous questions that came to mind. The interviews were conducted in an informal and relaxed context, and time and place was the choice of the informant. Usually, we would sit at a café or restaurant, or in the privacy of their home. The interviews were time consuming, and would often demand more than one meeting. During structured interviews, I took notes continuously and did not use a tape recorder. I did not take pictures during the interviews either. I generally wished to keep the interviews casual, and I was concerned that photographing the informants during interviews would create a sense of formality.

There are several reasons why I scheduled the structured interviews for the last months of my fieldwork. The interview questions probed into the informants' private life, and several questions dealt with the fa'afafine's sexuality and sexual experiences. I feared that questions of this sort would not be received well, or not be answered truthfully, when posed by a stranger. I therefore wanted to establish as strong ties as possible before commencing the structured interviews. Also, the structured interview would be an opportunity to clear any misconceptions and confusion that had surfaced. Importantly, the knowledge of cultural conventions accumulated during the first months was beneficial when formulating questions, and choosing relevant topics to discuss and elaborate (ibid: 230). It was also fundamental when interpreting answers, and deciphering the answers' referential

versus indexical meanings³² (Briggs 1992: 196). Many of my informants liked to joke around, and interview sessions were no exceptions. Some jokes were subtle, and it became apparent that the referential meaning of the answers was not necessarily the meaning intended. For instance, there is a Samoan type of joke called *ula*. It entails making fun of another person's dignity, while appearing to make a fool of oneself (Mageo 1998: 208). In other words, the communicative competence I had accrued likely improved the various aspects of the interview process, and thereby helped reduce misunderstandings (Briggs 1992: 197).

In addition to these interactive methods of gathering information, I made use of text reading. I bought the daily newspaper *The Samoa Observer* regularly, from which I saved articles that were, or could prove to be, relevant for my fieldwork. Naturally, reading the newspaper kept me up to date on Samoan news and events, and editorials and debates gave an understanding of which issues people were concerned with. I also searched the public library for books that could shed light on the role of fa'afafine in Samoan history, but could unfortunately not locate any. I made an attempt at the library at NUS, but was dismayed to find it more or less restricted to NUS students. Local bookstores, however, supplied me with several useful books, among others on Samoan governance and history.

Variations in settings often entail dissimilar contexts, which in turn can bring about a range of different behaviors in persons. When I compared contextual behavior within the city, it was primarily based on the settings and contexts where I was a participant observer: workplaces, private homes, and nightclubs. Furthermore, I spent much leisure time with a few fa'afafine informants/ personal friends in restaurants, driving/walking around, or in our homes. These experiences, including the structured interviews with informants usually conducted on a one-to-one basis at cafés or restaurants, offered several other kinds of settings and contexts. In addition to researching urban contextual variations, I looked at variations between rural and urban contexts. I made two visits to the rural island of Savai'i, a total of ten days. Many of my informants had originally been brought up in rural villages and

³² Briggs defines referential meaning as the "perceived correspondence between the "content" of expressions and some state of affairs in the "real world"", while indexical meaning hinges on characteristics of the context in which the words are expressed (1992: 196).

then moved to Apia later in life. They could therefore offer some insight into the various effects a rural or urban context could have on people's lives.

During my preparation for fieldwork, I contacted Heather Croall, the documentary producer previously mentioned (see chap. 1). She gave me valuable advice when she urged me not to be "pushy" towards the fa'afafine, and to take time to have fun with them. The advice, combined with her documentary and my own inquiries, created expectations to the fieldwork that proved to be realistic. My planned line of action and methodological advancement remained therefore relatively unaltered. Roughly generalized, the methods applied progressed from being fairly passive, unstructured, and observing, to being active, structured, and participating (Ellen 1984: 232).

To summarize, I have described central settings and contexts in which much fieldwork was conducted. Spending time downtown Apia, and visiting bars and accessible work places have made the study of contextual behavior possible. I have relied primarily on qualitative methods, like participant observation, and structured and unstructured interviews. The primary purpose of describing methods, settings and contexts, has been to provide the reader with a basis on which to better appreciate and evaluate the data and analyses I put forward in this dissertation.

Defining “Fa’afafine”

Fa’afafine; *fa’a* can be translated to “like” or “in the manner of”, and since *fafine* is the word for “woman”, the term literally means “like a woman”. The *fa’afafine*³³ are biologically male, but show and convey significant signs of distinction from other males. Differences may be found in physical appearances, body language, preferences for lines of work, choices of house chores, access to social settings, and sexual desires.

Put quite simply, *fa’afafine* can be described as effeminate males who often, but not always, dress as women. Regardless of attire, they are commonly recognizable due to feminine body language, and sometimes by conspicuously elaborated behavioral details like a soft voice, plucked eyebrows, jewelry, and makeup. They are known to take the woman’s role, and perform women’s chores. *Fa’afafine* generally take a sexual interest in men that they perceive as straight.

These gender liminal idiosyncrasies are cultural markers through which these males convey to the rest of society a self-identification as *fa’afafine*, which prompt people to perceive them as such. In turn, that perception generally affects people’s behavior, and generates a different behavior from that which would be expected towards a masculine man. Some *fa’afafine* will argue that dressing like a woman or behaving like a woman comes natural to them, from which follows that these *fa’afafine* may not view these traits as being consciously signaled, but rather as products of innate tendencies.

This chapter aims to give a broad introduction to the gender identity *fa’afafine*. It starts off from an empirical basis, voicing *fa’afafine* informants’ descriptions of their *fa’afafine* identity. The intention is to supply the reader with some empirical data on *fa’afafine* before discussing the *fa’afafine* identity in light of schema theory. After the elaboration of schema theory follows a discussion of what I perceive to be a *fa’afafine* stereotype. Again, informants’ statements are used to illustrate the stereotype and how it is upheld. The statements elucidate emotional aspects of *fa’afafine* identity, and demonstrate

³³ Singular and plural form of the word *fa’afafine* is the same in Samoan, and the English plural form –s will be omitted.

how many fa'afafine assert that they feel like women. The segment ensuing deals with motivation, and the motivational strength of cultural models. Here, social roles are considered, and Mageo's theories about gender as social fiction (1996a, 1998) are central to the analysis.

Diverse Definitions

The diversity among the fa'afafine I met or saw was striking on many levels. Some dressed like women, while others dressed like men. One fa'afafine alternated and wore women's clothes for several months, before he switched and dressed as a man for a long period. While some used their given male birth names, others went by a chosen female name³⁴.

When I asked fa'afafine informants how they would define "fa'afafine", some of the comments focused on the semantic meaning of the word, stating that it meant "in the manner of a woman", "effeminate", and "being a woman". Others offered adjectives they associated with fa'afafine behavior, like "colorful", "flamboyant", "creative", "independent", "happy-go-lucky", "friendly", and "open-minded". All the descriptions they offered were positive, apart from one who said that many fa'afafine were "back-stabbers", and meant that they gossiped about other people behind their backs.

Roughly nine out of a dozen informants focused on psychological and sexual aspects when asked to describe a fa'afafine identity. One fa'afafine answered, "It's someone who really wants to be a girl, who feels and acts like a girl," and another said, "You're attracted to men, and you feel you're a female." A third informant said he had the mind and soul of a woman, and that the only difference between himself and a woman was the biological difference. Along the same line, one comment described a fa'afafine as a female trapped in a male body. A fifth fa'afafine depicted a fa'afafine as an imitation of a woman, and said of himself that he might look like a man, but that he was a woman inside. Another informant spoke of the social implications of being a fa'afafine and said that considering much of the work many fa'afafine performed, fa'afafine could be seen as the bridge between male and female work.

³⁴ The use of names will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Among the statements above, a common denominator appears to be the stress informants place on fa'afafine's effeminacy. There is a strong focus on fa'afafine's affinity with women, up to the point that some fa'afafine reduce the difference between fa'afafine and women to one of anatomy and reproductive ability. Another frequently expressed similarity is the divide between mind and body. They stress having a female mind with feminine interests and feelings in a male body. Not all fa'afafine feel they are women however, which presents an important divergence among fa'afafine.

The following is a presentation of schema theory, in light of which informants' descriptions of fa'afafine will be looked at shortly.

Schema Theory, Fa'afafine, and Cultural Models

In person-centered ethnography, the focus is on particular individuals rather than on the people of a society as a whole. Individual and situational variations in actions among individuals are explained by viewing social action as a consequence of idiosyncratic interpretations of social events. Persons' interpretations affect which motives they will strive for and thereby influence how they choose to act. These actions result in novel social events, which may contribute to change (Strauss 1992: 16).

Strauss lists three underlying assertions of the socializing process that many anthropologists, including her, rely on when studying knowledge structures and motivation. The first one is that public social messages may change, be contradictory, or difficult to read. The second assertion states that to internalize a message does not necessarily mean to copy it. The last point reads that motivation is not automatically attained when social reality is learned (ibid.: 10). All three points are relevant for understanding individual variations among people, and especially among people sharing the same culture³⁵. However, before discussing motivation, one needs first to understand how people can acquire cultural knowledge in the first place.

³⁵ Shore suggests that culture should be conceived as a "large and heterogeneous collection of models or (...) *schemas*" (1996: 44, orig. italics). The models reflect a social group's understanding of reality, which may be projected into forms of matter and conventional sets of actions. Shore writes that the conception of culture as a stock of public and mental models allows for culture to be empirically and cognitively manifested in respectively objects as well as knowledge structures (ibid.).

In schema theory/connectionist theory, the models used for learning and explaining how people internalize their social world are “connectionist” in character, a concept borrowed from cognitive psychology (ibid.: 11). The connectionist model explains culture in such a way that it permits contradictory tendencies like change and consistency to characterize culture. It allows for culture to be partly accepted as well as partly challenged by its actors (D’Andrade 1995: 147). Schema theory proposes that semantic information and episodic information are stored in the mind together, not separately. Episodic information will generally vary from person to person, as it is knowledge derived from experience. It explains how people can generate very different associations to a concept although living in similar cultural settings (Strauss 1992: 12). All the various information about a social event is collected in a cognitive schema, which is activated by input, for instance a word. From a connectionist standpoint, rather than perceiving words as entailing information in and of themselves, words indicate schemas (D’Andrade 1995: 149).

“Schema” is a term not easily defined. A simple definition given for schema is “memory structure” (Atkinson 1996: 595). D’Andrade, in his work on the development of cognitive theory in anthropology (1995), presents several definitions of schema given by various psychologists and anthropologists. Mandler, for instance, describes schemas as “abstract representations of environmental regularities” and “processing mechanisms” (ibid.:122). In other words, schemas not only reflect the perceived regularities in our surroundings, but as processing mechanisms they affect how people perceive their environment as well. By influencing our selection of data, the schemas affect which data that is to be interpreted (ibid.). The dialectic nature of schemas is more eminent in Donald Norman’s definition. He states that schemas are flexible in that they adapt to mirror the mix of past and present conditions (ibid.: 142). Along similar lines, Strauss writes about how schemas reconstruct memories in meeting with on-going experience (Strauss 1992: 3).

Charles Fillmore discusses schemas in connection with discourse analysis, where the events are found in the text. He writes that when a person reads a text, the beginning of the text activates certain schemas that form an outline, or a general expectation of what is to come. Empty gaps, or slots, are filled with details as more of the text is read, but “the

ultimate nature of this text-internal world will often depend on aspects of scenes that are never identified explicitly in the text” (Fillmore in D’Andrade 1995: 123). My understanding is that these aspects are what D’Andrade names as “default values”, which are one’s automatic expectations. For instance, prototypes are formed when the gaps in a schema are filled with a person’s standard default values. D’Andrade defines a prototype as a stipulated expectation, and a schema as “an organized framework of objects and relations, which has yet to be filled in with concrete detail” (ibid.).

Stereotypes are stipulated expectations in the sense that they are “minitheories of covariation”, based on perceived correlations among certain people (Atkinson 1996: 598). A stereotype is defined as a schema of the personality traits or physical attributes of a class or group of people. The schema in question is usually an overgeneralization, leading us to assume and expect that every member of the group possesses these particular characteristics (ibid.: 706). Stereotypes leave little room for variation. A question to ask is why a certain stereotype contains the information it does. In a capital like Apia, where the variations in fa’afafine’s dress styles and general appearance are great, what information is given priority in shaping the stereotype? There is also the possibility that more than one stereotype prevails.

This introduction to schema theory is relevant for the following discussion on the stereotype of fa’afafine. Under the next heading, more informants’ thoughts on the issue of what it means to say one “feels like a woman” will be presented. As will become apparent, describing all fa’afafine as males who feel they are females, is misconceiving. This description perpetuates the stereotypical image of fa’afafine as being males, who dress, act, and feel like women.

“Feeling Like a Woman”–a Stereotype

When I asked Frieda, a fa’afafine in his late twenties employed at a travel agency, whether all fa’afafine felt they were women and if he felt that way, his reaction was, “Yes! Yes! That’s a stupid question you asked me there. We sit like a woman, walk like a woman, fuck like a woman...”, and he threw his head back and laughed. According to Frieda, what made

him different from a straight man was that he felt more feminine, and that he acted on those feelings. He said, “What’s in your head and in your heart is not like a straight man. You feel like a woman, and your feelings are special. Falling in love with a man is a climax. If you fall in love with a man, and he doesn’t fall in love with you, it breaks your heart. If you’re a strong fa’afafine, strong in the heart, and make decisions and know where to go, know what’s best for you, you’ll feel stupid when that happens. You want to be a strong person and make the right decisions. For some fa’afafine, that’s their only target; to fall in love with a man. Not for me. I prefer to fall in love with my family.”

When comparing himself to a woman, Frieda said, “Some women are different in their way of attitude. Fa’afafine are outgoing and fight for what they want. If they want to imitate something, they do it. For instance, a nice gown; the woman will be too shy or timid to make the dress. She might say it’s too revealing, for example, but the fa’afafine will go, “*I will wear that!*”” It appears that Frieda perceived fa’afafine as generally more assertive than what Samoan women commonly are. Sarah was another fa’afafine informant in his late twenties, who spent his days working in a fashion store. He also had a few things to say about himself compared to other men and women: “I’m not straight. I’m not a man! I can’t have kids. That’s it. Apart from that, I’m a woman.”

Not all agree on the importance of feeling like a woman, however. I spoke to Damion, a fa’afafine in his mid-twenties who worked in an office, about differences between women and fa’afafine. He stated, “I definitely don’t think I’m a woman. Get that down on paper!”, and he giggled. The major discrepancy between Damion’s comment and the definitions of fa’afafine listed above has to do with the psychological part of a fa’afafine identity. Damion’s comment is important because it points out that not all fa’afafine feel or act like they are women.

Tiresa, a fa’afafine in his early thirties who worked at a travel agency, also asserted decisively, “I don’t feel like a woman. I feel like a fa’afafine,” despite having been the one to remark that fa’afafine were females trapped in a male body. It is worth noticing that Tiresa does not feel like a woman, and yet he describes fa’afafine as females. He is essentially presenting a stereotype, which in this case is a description that does not fully

apply to him. I found Sam, a hotel employee in his teens, making a similar inconsistent statement. He characterized fa'afafine as cross-dressers, despite not fully cross-dressing himself³⁶. When I pointed this discrepancy out to him, Sam changed his focus. He spoke less of appearance and more of emotions and actions. He added thoughtfully, "It's your actions, your attitudes. Femininity, it's your natural self. It's expressing how you feel. I feel I'm a girl, but my public image is that I'm a male."

Tiresa and Sam represented contradictions of the characterizations they offered of fa'afafine. The contradiction suggests that when asked to define fa'afafine, many will formulate their answers based on the most feminine of the fa'afafine. These fa'afafine dress in women's clothes, behave effeminately, and say they are or feel like a woman. Plausibly, such answers create, as well as perpetuate, a stereotype. The stereotypes also have consequences for interaction, as they likely influence non-fa'afafine's expectations and behaviors towards fa'afafine. The following segment will discuss reasonable causes of why two fa'afafine give similar definitions of fa'afafine that to some extent are inconsistent with how they perceive themselves.

Stereotyping Fa'afafine

The definitions offered by informants on the gender identity fa'afafine suggest that many informants share a similar schema on fa'afafine. It is this schema that is activated when informants define and describe the nature of fa'afafine behaviors and personalities. Phrasing the issue in schema theoretical terms, the blank slots in the fa'afafine schemas appear to have been filled with similar default values by the informants, thus creating a fa'afafine stereotype. As the information in the schemas does not necessarily reflect fully the informants themselves, their information must at least partly be drawn from other sources than their own appearances and feelings. A majority of the informants state that fa'afafine feel and act like they are women. How can one explain the similarity in default values? In other words, why does the stereotype contain this specific information? I will here treat the

³⁶ Sam's manner of dressing shifted between being neutral or slightly effeminate in style. He often wore a loose fitting short-sleeved shirt with a wrap-around for men at work. Going out at night, he often wore three-quarter long pants, which have a feminine look. In addition, he used accessories like barrettes, eyeliner, jewelry, and handbags. Nonetheless, I never saw him wear skirts or dresses.

phrase “to act like a woman” to include using feminine body language as well as dressing in effeminate attire. However, I stress that feminine body language and effeminate attire do not necessarily always belong together, as generally all fa’afafine show effeminate body language regardless of attire.

Many cognitive psychologists point out that the vividness of information influences how easily we notice and remember information (Atkinson 1996: 594). First hand visual experience is vivid information while for instance statistics is non-vivid information. Observations of fa’afafine, whether dressed in male clothes or female clothes, are equally vivid in this sense. However, it is plausible that femininely dressed fa’afafine are more noticeable than neutrally or masculine dressed fa’afafine, and therefore make a stronger impression on observers. Males in female clothes are in minority, but the memory of them may appear most vivid. My observations indicate that femininely dressed fa’afafine usually stand out more than other fa’afafine. The fa’afafine I met rarely looked like women to the degree that I mistook them for women or was left in doubt as to their sex. If impressions of effeminately dressed fa’afafine are perceived as more vivid than fa’afafine who do not dress like women, it follows that many people’s schemas on fa’afafine are likely to be based on the idea of the effeminately dressed fa’afafine.

A similar logic can apply to fa’afafine’s body language. The contrast here lies not among fa’afafine, but between fa’afafine and Samoan men. The opposition between the fa’afafine’s behavior and the general behavior expected of men increases with the level of effeminacy in fa’afafine’s actions. The greater the contrast, in other words, the more feminine a fa’afafine acts, the more people are likely to notice him.

If the widest in-group variation among fa’afafine is found in Apia, other stereotypes may prevail elsewhere in Samoa where homogeneity is larger, and variations among fa’afafine fewer. If there are rural villages where dress codes are strict and where fa’afafine are banned from wearing women’s clothes, the idea of fa’afafine as males who dress very effeminately will not necessarily be included in a common description of fa’afafine. Thus, scripts for fa’afafine may be at variance in rural and urban areas.

Although entailing a circular explanation, it is a general rule that it is easier to remember events on which one has a well-formed schema than events for which one does not (D'Andrade 1995: 184). It suggests that if the stereotype of fa'afafine depicts males in feminine clothes with effeminate body language, persons holding such stereotypes will better remember information that fits this idea, and more easily ignore information that may not fit. This also efficiently upholds and perpetuates stereotypes.

From an analytical viewpoint, there is at least one difficult question to be answered. Evidently, many fa'afafine stereotypically define fa'afafine as males who feel like women. Under these statements lies the apparent assumption that all women feel the same. Chodorow, for instance, advocates that gender is individual, but that most people utilize common elements like anatomy, culture, and internal object-relations to create their personal gender (1999: 4). Even if one ignores the problematical assumption that all women feel the same, one is left with the puzzle of why some fa'afafine who do not feel like a woman choose to describe a fa'afafine as someone who feels like a woman. Importantly, informants' possible motivations for asserting that they or other fa'afafine feel like a woman may not necessarily coincide with an analytical interpretation of informants' motivations, as will be demonstrated below.

Supposedly, schemas are partly interpretations of one's experiences. Therefore, fa'afafine who do not feel like women cannot base their stereotypical fa'afafine-schema only on personal emotional experiences. Contrary to what is tangible or visible, emotions are usually internal and private, and therefore not observable like dress attires or body language. To observe that some fa'afafine feel like women is possible if the fa'afafine express their feelings audibly in words. However, there must be other causes for why a fa'afafine who does not feel like a woman, permits other fa'afafine's emotional expressions to take precedence of their own feelings when they define "fa'afafine".

A clue to the puzzle may lie in the following statement by a fa'afafine informant. He denies feeling like a woman, but claims that fa'afafine who dress effeminately are, "(...) the real ones, or not the *real* ones, but they think they are women." This informant's initial thought that "real" fa'afafine are the ones who think they are women, and dress and act like

women, is an important point. One cannot see what a fa'afafine is thinking or feeling, but one can interpret the combination of feminine clothes and body language to be a consequence of a self-perception of oneself as a woman. In other words, one can deduct from what is visible to what is not visible, and assume that fa'afafine who behave very effeminately and who dress in women's clothes perceive themselves as women. These fa'afafine appear to have embodied the fa'afafine role in the sense that "senses and perceptions of the body are culturally elaborated into the experience of self and other" (Hollan 2001: 56). The coherence of physical and emotional aspects of many effeminate fa'afafine's identities indicates that the role has been embodied.

The occasional incoherence between informants' definitions of fa'afafine, and informants' perception of self as fa'afafine, indicates that the stereotypical fa'afafine-schema is not synonymous with informants' schemas for self (self-schemas). Individual and situational variations in actions and appearance observed among fa'afafine also imply that the motivations behind informants' actions are diverse. Schema theory proposes that people's schemas always have an idiosyncratic element as the schemas are based on each individual's experiences. Concurrently, the schemas are usually idiomatic, as important components are based on common cultural constructs.

Relevant for the following segment on motivation is my proposition that there is a cultural model for gender in Samoa. I put forward that the cultural model consists of a number of schemas, of which the schema for fa'afafine is one. For persons familiar with Samoan culture, the cultural model constitutes to a large degree shared, implicit knowledge of the Samoan gender roles, and the correlations between them (D'Andrade 1987: 113, 1995: 151, 180). The cultural model likely affects expectations concerning fa'afafine, and aids in interpretations of fa'afafine's actions and interactions. Under the next heading, the question of why some fa'afafine assert they feel like women, will be dealt with.

The Motivational Power of Cultural Models and Social Roles

According to D'Andrade, the central connection between schemas and motivation³⁷ is that schemas can instigate action by being motivational. Although not all schemas are goals, all goals are schemas (1992: 29, 31). The motivational strength of a schema will depend on the emotions connected to the experiences on which the schema is founded. Cultural models are culturally constructed cognitive schemas that are “intersubjectively shared by a social group”³⁸ (D'Andrade 1987: 112). A cultural model can be a schema in itself, or it can be made of many (D'Andrade 1995: 151). Cultural models influence how people perceive their world, and are motivational because they evoke desires by setting forth goals (Strauss 1992: 3). Importantly, schemas may also motivate negatively. For instance, the male assuming a fa'afafine gender role would refrain from communicating male gender markers.

I have suggested that there is a cultural model for Samoan gender roles, and that the model elicits guidelines for fa'afafine in actions and interactions. The gender identity of fa'afafine can be perceived as a social role, which is what Mageo proposes. Mageo writes that gender identity in Samoa is role-based, and that to assume a fa'afafine identity is to adopt a social persona, or a social role (1996a: 591). Social roles contain scripts (Mageo 1998: 209), which influence and guide the actors' behaviors in their roles. It is conceivable that the cultural model for Samoan gender, with its schemas and scripts for actions, constitutes an important part of the foundation on which individual fa'afafine base their schemas for self. Accordingly, Mageo writes, “Gender is a powerful form of self-definition, and in our need to define ourselves we make choices. But we are also captives, captives of a collective cultural imagination—an imagination that is invested in cultural figures” (1998: 209).

³⁷ Motivation is subjectively apperceived as a desire, and positive or negative reactions result depending on the success or failure in achieving the goal (D'Andrade 1992: 23). D'Andrade states that it is generally possible to judge whether an identified schema functions as a goal for an individual by observing an individual's behavior, and assessing whether it appears goal directed (ibid.: 32).

³⁸ Shore criticizes D'Andrade's definition for being “too vague”, as the definition does not distinguish between what Shore terms as “special-purpose” models and “foundational models”. Additionally, Shore writes that the definition does not indicate to what degree a model must be shared before it is a “true cultural model” and not a “personal construct”. Lastly, the definition does not distinguish between models that are “publicly available” and those that are only “mental constructs” (Shore 1996: 45).

Perceiving the gender identity fa'afafine as a social role based on scripts gives a plausible explanation for characteristic and stereotypical common denominators among fa'afafine. When persons are guided by similar scripts, their behaviors will likely resemble each other. However, variations among fa'afafine are evident and need to be accounted for as well. According to Strauss and D'Andrade, inconsistent public social messages combined with the individual internalization of experiences cause the motivational force that the various experiences have on a person, to be highly idiosyncratic (1992: 10, 27). Consequently, although there are numerous common traits among fa'afafine in their actions and appearance, each fa'afafine's self-schema is unique and tied to self-identity and self-presentation, causing individual and situational variance in expressive behavior (verbal and nonverbal). Situational variance has been discernible by observing individual fa'afafine in a range of contexts (e. g. work places, night clubs, church), and comparing the behavior patterns.

Having stressed that not all fa'afafine state that they feel like women, one may ask what motivates those fa'afafine who say they feel like women to present their emotions in those terms. Simple logic compels one to conclude that as males, fa'afafine cannot know exactly how females feel. However, bearing Mageo's assertion that gender identity in Samoa is conceived as a social role, it appears plausible that having the emotions of a woman is perceived as part of the scripts to the role of fa'afafine. The meaning of the term "fa'afafine" suggests that what fa'afafine do will be, or be expected to be, in the manner of a woman. A reasonable consequence of assuming the role of fa'afafine would be that the emotional aspect of the identity entail saying that they feel like women. From an analytical standpoint, informants' statements of feeling like a woman can be interpreted as a consequence of the informants assuming a gender role based on scripts. In contrast, informants may not perceive their actions as determined by scripts and culture, but rather by nature, as many informants emphasize that they were born fa'afafine, and that their feelings are natural.

Samoan men are required to behave in a masculine, or perhaps more importantly, in an unfeminine manner, to be recognized as "man" (see Shore 1981: 209). For instance, a man is expected to perform male chores, and preferably only do women's work when need

demands it. He is expected to dress and carry himself in a masculine fashion. He is also expected to desire women, and to marry, whereby becoming head of his household. When males do not display male gender markers, but rather show signs of femininity, they are easily defined as fa'afafine. Not all fa'afafine feel like a woman, but all fa'afafine appear to establish gender differences that distinguish them from the gender role of men. By being male but not men, they become fa'afafine. Thus, the fa'afafine identity is situated and defined in relation to the gender roles of men and women. Fa'afafine are neither man nor woman, but they are males who to a great extent imitate women. The imitation, however, is often exaggerated in style, which paradoxically can be perceived as unfeminine (ibid.).

Similarly to learning which domestic chores traditionally belong to women's domain, many fa'afafine appear to have acquired concepts for interpreting and formulating their emotions. I propose that the assertion of feeling like a woman derives from scripts and schemas connected to the cultural model of Samoan gender roles, which provides fa'afafine with general outlines for action. The assertion is an important component in many fa'afafine's self-presentations. In saying they feel like women, fa'afafine demonstrate that their gender is natural, and consequently establish their legitimacy as fa'afafine (see chap. 7).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide the reader with a broad introduction to the gender identity fa'afafine. Submitted are informants' definitions of the term "fa'afafine", as well as informants' descriptions of themselves and/or other fa'afafine. Common denominators in the informants' descriptions, including statements that depict emotional aspects of the identity, draw a stereotypical image of fa'afafine as males with an explicit effeminate body language, who dress in female clothes, and who feel like women. The fact that some informants present similar descriptions of fa'afafine that do not correspond to their own actual experience of being a fa'afafine, supports the assertion of a fa'afafine stereotype.

In discussing the fa'afafine stereotype, I have offered plausible causes for the stereotype's composition using schema theory and basic cognitive psychology concerning

memory. Generally, vivid information is remembered better than non-vivid information, and information that corresponds to one's schema will be remembered more easily than information that is inconsistent with the schema. Consequently, the most femininely dressed of the fa'afafine are likely more noticeable than the neutrally or masculine dressed fa'afafine. Also, the more effeminate the body language is, the more fa'afafine will contrast with, and distinguish themselves from, Samoan men. I have also pointed out that fa'afafine who do not assert they feel like women themselves often claim that other fa'afafine feel like women. A possible explanation for this apparent contradiction is that some fa'afafine draw the conclusion that fa'afafine, who dress and act in a feminine manner, will also have feminine feelings. Additionally, by asserting that fa'afafine feel like women, informants convey that being a fa'afafine is more than merely acting like women. Informants indicate that fa'afafine are genuinely different from men, thus legitimizing the fa'afafine gender.

I have proposed that there is a cultural model for Samoan gender roles that entails implicit knowledge about the gender identity fa'afafine generally shared by people familiar with Samoan culture. The knowledge the model comprises is likely to influence fa'afafine's behavior, as well as affect expectations and interpretations of interaction among fa'afafine, as well as among non-fa'afafine and fa'afafine. Similarly, if one views the fa'afafine identity as a social role based on scripts, the scripts become general outlines for fa'afafine's actions. I interpret the fact that many informants maintain they feel like women to be a consequence of these fa'afafine following scripts. In not taking the role of the masculine Samoan man, the alternative is for these males to take the role of fa'afafine. Taking the role of fa'afafine typically entails imitating women and refraining from implementing male gender markers. A plausible consequence of imitating women is that many fa'afafine express their emotions in terms of feeling like a woman, thereby further marking their distance from men. Informants, however, do not appear to perceive their actions as a consequence of scripts underlying the fa'afafine gender role, but rather as natural, innate behavior.

The chapter also contains testimony of diversity among fa'afafine, which schema theory partly can account for. Schema theory asserts that schemas instigate action by being motivational. Schemas constitute implicit knowledge that to a large degree is shared by a

social group, but schemas' motivational strengths rely on each individual's internalization of experiences. Consequently, a schema's motivational strength varies from person to person, and will contribute to variation and change in society.

5 CONCEPTS—How They are Used and What They Mean

This chapter concerns concepts regarding fa'afafine, gender, and sexuality. I aim to illuminate the gender role of fa'afafine by conveying informants' diverse uses of, and views on, the two Samoan terms "fa'afafine-*tama*" and "fa'afafine-*teine*", and concepts such as "gay", "homosexual", "closet", and "transvestite". I will also discuss how some fa'afafine can be perceived to be transsexuals.

Throughout the chapter, informants' self-descriptions and definitions of concepts generate emic self-presentations that accentuate how the fa'afafine identity can be viewed as a cultural construction that is specifically Samoan. The final section deals with name-calling. There are several nicknames used for fa'afafine, and the names contain various meanings and connotations, indicative of ways fa'afafine are perceived.

"Fa'afafine-*Tama*" and "Fa'afafine-*Teine*"

Informant Damion made a distinction about fa'afafine's way of dressing already the first night I met him. We were introduced through a mutual friend, and he was eager to share his views once he heard about my project. He told me that there was something I needed to understand. "There are two kinds of fa'afafine, it's "her" kind and there is my kind; fa'afafine-*teine* and fa'afafine-*tama*³⁹." "Her" referred to Fran, one of the other fa'afafine he had come with. Fran was hard to overlook, in his miniskirt and stiletto heels. Damion, on the other hand, was dressed in a T-shirt and shorts. Only his body language and verbal expressions communicated a fa'afafine identity.

A few months later, Damion explained in more detail, "I think there are two types; fa'afafine-*tama*, the ones who dress like a boy, and fa'afafine-*teine*, who dress like women. (...) I think to be a fa'afafine is a way of thinking, to be like—or as—a woman. It would be like your set of mind. It's not male or female, but fa'afafine-way of thinking."

I found Damion's description enlightening. It supplied me with concepts I had been unaware of, but that matched my observations of fa'afafine's dress styles. It also shed light

³⁹ As a rule, the distinguishing terms "fa'afafine-*teine*" and "fa'afafine-*tama*" were not used in everyday speech. The terms primarily used were *mala*, and "fa'afafine", which are without reference to dress style.

on differences in how fa'afafine could view their gender identity, as well as point to a possible link between self-perception and dress style.

After this first introduction to a dual categorization of fa'afafine, I asked several other informants whether there was more than one kind of fa'afafine. One informant, Frieda, who dressed effeminately said, "There are two kinds, some are like us (pointed to Sarah and himself), fa'afafine-*teine*, and some are like Mani, fa'afafine-*tama*." Mani was an informant of about twenty years of age, who worked as a waiter in a restaurant down town. Sarah gave a similar answer but called the two varieties "girl-fa'afafine" and "boy-fa'afafine", while Tony, also a fa'afafine-*teine*, named the two types "drag queens" and "straight dressing ones". Tony was in his mid-twenties and was employed in a firm down town. Tiresa, a fa'afafine-*tama*, gave a fuller explanation: "Well, the *teine*-fa'afafine is a real feminine fa'afafine, and then there are macho fa'afafine, but they're all fa'afafine to me. They go for the same thing (i. e. men)."

Apparently, a number of the informants are familiar with the dual categorization of fa'afafine based on dress styles. The informants' awareness of the terms "fa'afafine-*teine*" and "fa'afafine-*tama*" suggests that the terms are functional concepts that bear meaning in the local context. As the terms are descriptive and uncomplicated, they will be employed later for analytic and clarifying purposes.

Idiosyncratic Perceptions of "Gay" and "Homosexual"

Early during fieldwork, I realized that while fa'afafine identified with the term "fa'afafine", many did not relate to the concepts "homosexual"⁴⁰ and "gay". Most fa'afafine were explicit about a sexual interest in men but not in women, and all fa'afafine informants spoke of boy friends and sexual encounters with men.

In order to clarify the difference that most Samoans appeared to discern between "fa'afafine", "gay", and "homosexual", I bade my informants to enlighten me. For instance, when I asked Frieda whether he was gay, he quickly replied "No." When I then asked whether he was homosexual, he answered, after a moment's hesitation, "No, I'm a

⁴⁰ A homosexual is defined as: "a person who is sexually attracted to people of the same sex" (Longman 1987: 502).

fa'afafine.” I received the same response from Sarah. A third informant, who also denied being gay, gave the following unambiguous answer when I asked if he was homosexual: “Homosexual? Well, I am heterosexual. A pure heterosexual woman. I have never been attracted to women, and I have never done it (had sex) with women. I have millions of girl friends, but not in a sexual way. If we sleep together, I feel like I sleep with my own sister.”

Two other informants who were critical of the concepts “gay” and “homosexual” said, ““Homosexual” is a yucky word for me. It’s degrading. It’s like naming a species. Too scientific. I wouldn’t identify myself as homosexual, but yes, I am (homosexual).” The other informant stated, “I prefer “fa’afafine” rather than “gay”. I don’t like the word “gay”. (...) I don’t feel gay. It’s not an appropriate word.”

Three other informants referred to themselves as “gay”, one of whom also identified with the term “homosexual”. Another informant, however, described gay people as being “in hiding”, in contrast to fa’afafine whom he claimed dressed and acted like girls all day. Nancy, a fa’afafine in his mid-twenties who worked in a fashion store, stated that “the gay could be a fa’afafine if society would accept him,” and referred to males who do not become fa’afafine due to disapproving families or because they live in villages where dress codes are stringent. Another informant defined “gay” to be “when a gay man is attracted to another gay man, whereas fa’afafine are attracted to straight men only. And we lead our everyday lives as women.”

Several informants had spent time overseas and were familiar with the concept “gay” from their experiences abroad. Informant Sina was of the opinion that “gay” was very different from “fa’afafine”: “I’ve been overseas. Gay people aren’t so interested in wearing women’s clothes, and they’re not so much interested in having the appearance of a woman. Feelings are different too. They might not feel so feminine. Their interest in men is a little bit different. Fa’afafine are interested in straight men, but gays are interested in gays—their own people.”

Damion, who grew up abroad, offered a different view than most other informants. He made an important point when he portrayed how gays, by acting in a masculine fashion, are perceived as straight by fa’afafine. He stated, “When I came back from overseas, I told

some fa'afafine, "You guys are actually gay, you just don't know it." For ages I was confused. They saw two *mala*⁴¹ when I pointed out two gays." It appears that Damion's experiences overseas caused him to look past outer factors like dress wear and gendered Samoan behavior, and generalize those he perceived to be homosexual as "gay".

The last comment gives an indication of how important actions and gender markers are in determining and demonstrating gender in Samoa. For instance, one informant remarked, "Gay men are more likely to have sex with women, because they are straight acting." Straight behavior is perhaps best described as acting in a non-feminine manner. If masculine behavior is perceived as a sign of heterosexuality, this could explain why some fa'afafine informants call *palagi* boy friends that they have had a long-term relationship with for straight. The same *palagi* would in his home country, for instance Australia or New Zealand, most likely be recognized as a gay man.

In theory, if you are a Samoan male, you are either a man, or you are a fa'afafine. Phrased in Damion's words: "You're either a full fa'afafine, or you're not. No in-between." "Man" refers to a male who is traditionally and normatively masculine in behavior and attire. He is, or is believed to be, straight (heterosexual), and will typically have a girl friend, or wife and children. In general, fa'afafine seek Samoan men, or foreign males who they perceive as straight, for sexual pleasures.

Informant Isak illustrates how one operates primarily with man and fa'afafine as opposing male gender identities in Samoa. Isak was part Samoan and had lived most of his life overseas. He represented an exception, because contrary to all other informants, he denied being a fa'afafine. Isak commented bluntly, "I'm not a fa'afafine, I'm gay. I'm a bit despised as a gay, but I'm still hit on." He was aware, however, that he was generally perceived as a fa'afafine. During a sexual encounter with a Samoan man, the man had mentioned something about Isak being a fa'afafine. Isak responded by denying he was fa'afafine, whereby the man jumped terrified out of bed, and cried, "What? What are you then?" "I'm gay," Isak had answered. The man became furious and accused Isak of devilish temptations.

⁴¹ *Mala* is slang for fa'afafine (see this chapter for further discussion of *mala*).

As a rule, fa'afafine do not seek other fa'afafine. Having sexual relations with other fa'afafine is socially unacceptable, or “taboo”, as one fa'afafine worded it. One informant admitted with a giggle that sex between fa'afafine was known to happen. “A fa'afafine with a fa'afafine is a no-no, but it can happen, if they are desperate enough or drunk. And we tease each other for it.” Another fa'afafine claimed, “For fa'afafine, having sex with women is a no-no. We want straight men. We don't like *kaleve*⁴². *Kaleve* is slang for lesbian⁴³.”

Generally, fa'afafine's perceptions of the various concepts proved to be rather idiosyncratic, and diverse definitions appeared. A (straight male) teacher at a Catholic school described the term “fa'afafine” as an “umbrella” that included various people with non-conventional characteristics. Perceiving the term “fa'afafine” as an umbrella concept accords with Nancy's remark. Nancy found it difficult to define “fa'afafine” because there were “so many types. There are some like Andy⁴⁴, who dress like men, go with men, and feel like girls. Then there are some that swing both ways, who go with both men and women. Some only sleep with gays. Some are a mix; they may dress like men or girls. And then you have the “closets”.” Despite a culturally clear divide between “man” and “fa'afafine”, Nancy's statement gives an idea of the diverse and ambiguous sexualities that pertain within the clear-cut category of “fa'afafine”.

What becomes evident when regarding the numerous explanations of the terms “gay” and “homosexual” is that informants' associations to the terms vary greatly. Before embarking on a discussion of the diversity in meanings assigned to the concepts “homosexual” and “gay”, the term “closet” will be introduced. In contrast to the two former terms, informants appeared more in agreement on “closet” and its connotations. The concept is included because it sheds additional light on the role of fa'afafine, as well as on the terms “gay” and “homosexual”.

⁴² *Kaleve* means gravy, or a stew, where everything is blended together.

⁴³ Sex between fa'afafine and women would be “lesbian” in the sense that fa'afafine also are “female”.

⁴⁴ Andy was a fa'afafine in his early thirties who worked in a travel agency.

“Closet” versus Fa’afafine

In commenting on the concept “closet”, Damion had reached the following conclusion: “I’ve found that he (the “closet”) is actually gay, but he’s masculine. He acts straight to them (fa’afafine). (...) I’ve found *mala* who go with straight-acting gay men. I tell the other *mala*, “You know he’s gay, he just acts straight.” And they go, “No, no, he’s straight!” or “Oh, yucky!” (...) There are a lot of “closets” who really try hard to hide. They overact their masculinity, overdo it, and we (fa’afafine) laugh at them.” Informant Maggie also depicted “closets” as gays in hiding. Maggie, being in his fifties, was my oldest informant. He said passionately, “I tell them, “Get out before you suffocate!”” He asserted that as the gays are practically three quarters fa’afafine, the fa’afafine do not want them. “Two gays don’t go out together here,” he explained.

According to Tiresa, the “closets” he knew were mostly married, and they were unfaithful behind their wives’ backs. Concerning these men, Tiresa uttered, “It’s just a cover-up. Deep down something is missing. There are fa’afafine who fall in love with women, but not forever. They are still looking for men.” Informant Tom, a fa’afafine in his late thirties who worked at a hotel, attempted to explain why “closets” did not come out in the open and assume a fa’afafine identity. Tom declared, “Some fa’afafine can’t really come out because of the culture and family pressure⁴⁵. They are “closets”. They look straight, they don’t dress up or wear makeup, but the bottom line is, they have sex with men. Some have their own personal reasons for not coming out, family reasons. Some families can’t bear a relative being fa’afafine. Maybe they can accept fa’afafine, but not in their own family. They want to protect their image and reputation.”

From a connectionist standpoint, rather than perceiving words as entailing information in and of themselves, words indicate schemas (D’Andrade 1995: 149). As mentioned previously, connectionist theory/schema theory explains how people can have very different associations to a concept although living in similar environments (Strauss 1992: 12). Semantic and episodic information constitute people’s schemas, but as episodic information is knowledge derived from personal experience, it will vary from person to

⁴⁵ This is very similar to Nancy’s comment about gays, when he said that gays could become fa’afafine if society would let them. See p. 61.

person (ibid.). Considering the perception that words indicate schemas rather than information in and of themselves (D'Andrade 1995: 149), the theory above would also explain how people living in different surroundings, like different cultures, would have different associations to a common concept. Especially informants Isak and Damion, who both had grown up overseas, diverged from other informants in their perception of the term “gay”.

Below, I will discuss two other factors I deem relevant for understanding the diversity in concept perception.

Understanding Conceptual Diversity

The apparent diversity in meanings informants assign to the concepts “homosexual” and “gay” make it difficult to extract shared and general perceptions of the concepts. Nonetheless, informants’ statements point to primarily two factors that may help explain the diversity. Both factors could be perceived as consequences of a Western influence on Samoan culture.

Firstly, the Samoan language contains no equivalent word for “homosexual” or “gay” (Shore 1981: 209). One informant states it clearly: “In Samoa, a gay is a fa’afafine. We only have one word, “fa’afafine”. *Palagi* (white foreigners) have many, like “gay” and “homosexual”. It’s the same, “drag”, “gay”, “fa’afafine”....” Another informant relayed, “I’ve been educated enough to be able to compare, and there is no other word in English than “homosexual” for “fa’afafine”. (...) Use “homosexual”.” In her writing, Mageo uses the concepts “transvestite”, “fa’afafine” and “homosexual” interchangeably (Mageo 1998, 1996a). This is inaccurate for several reasons. A transvestite is “a person who wears or gets sexual pleasure from wearing the clothes of the opposite sex” (Longman 1987: 1129). Since dressing in female clothes is not universal for fa’afafine, not all fa’afafine are transvestites. Also, not all transvestites are homosexuals (Butler 2000, Benestad 2001). Additionally, one fa’afafine said he was bisexual, and some Samoans assert that there are heterosexual fa’afafine. Last but not least, while “homosexual” has an obvious sexual connotation and

stresses the sexual aspect of the gender identity, “fa’afafine” primarily denotes the social aspects of the identity.

One woman in the Ministry of Women Affairs asserted that it would be wrong to translate “fa’afafine” to “homosexual” due to the sexual connotations. She claimed that “homosexuality” must be translated to *tauatane*, meaning “men having sex with men”. She continued to say that homosexuality had nothing to do with the term “fa’afafine”, which she defined to be males who were like females in manner of behavior, and who could do “the female roles, and just as well as the women too.”

Mageo writes that the term *tauatane* is an old word that is practically never used anymore (1996a: 591). I asked several adult Samoans for a Samoan word for “homosexual”, but they only offered “fa’afafine” as an equivalent. “*Tauatane*” was never mentioned. Perhaps this is because *tauatane* not only refers to male-to-male intercourse, but also applies to other acts between men, like dancing. Importantly, *tauatane* does not refer to a type of person, as does “homosexual” (ibid.). For instance, engaging in homosexual practice does not necessarily make a Samoan man a fa’afafine. Men who have sexual encounters with fa’afafine do not have their masculinity or heterosexuality questioned. According to various Samoans, men will brag among themselves about having had sex with a fa’afafine, but will not mention it for women. In contrast, it is socially not accepted for two men (e.g. two males where neither is a fa’afafine) to have sex.

The social aspect of the fa’afafine schema is important when assuming a fa’afafine role, as the male’s actions are fundamental in communicating his gender identity. The contrast to the term “homosexual” that denotes primarily a sexual aspect of the gender identity rather than a social aspect may partly explain why some informants do not identify with the concept “homosexual”.

The second factor that may contribute to the diversity in meanings assigned to the terms “homosexual” and “gay” has to do with influence from countries overseas, like Australia, New Zealand, and the USA⁴⁶. Some informants identify with the foreign concepts

⁴⁶ New Zealand, Australia, and the USA, are common destinations for traveling Samoans, and large Samoan communities are situated there (O’Meara 1990: 15). Many Samoans have television, or access to television, where foreign TV-series and movies are shown. In the capital Apia, there are a couple of movie theaters, and several video stores, which provide foreign, and primarily Western, movies.

“homosexual” and “gay” and do not find them offensive. It appears that scripts underlying the fa’afafine gender role have changed, and that the sexual aspect of the role has become increasingly emphasized. In answer to the question of whether fa’afafine’s role in society had changed, the mother of a teenage fa’afafine gave an extensive reply: “I believe that there are social changes that have given fa’afafine a drag queen outlook. The different exposures Samoans experience have remolded it (the fa’afafine role) to a more daring outlook and sexual orientation. Not that the sexual orientation wasn’t there before, but now even more so. (...) It (the fa’afafine role) is being associated with gays, but not all fa’afafine are gay. Many of them have a moral and ethical upbringing that could prevent the daring homosexual. (...) Here the fa’afafine are viewed first and foremost as individuals, as Samoan heirs to their family titles and family land; that is the Samoan context. (...) It’s about family love and family belonging. They (fa’afafine) should be judged on their cultural existence rather than the sexual. The focus now is more on their sexual orientation. They themselves may also be focusing more on the sexual side. It’s like a fad, where they copy and are influenced by movements abroad. I am afraid that if this change continues, they will not be appreciated for their social value. Society might go against them as homosexuals. Today their presence is obvious. It also has to do with emerging awareness of diseases. I think that was when people started to look at them in various contexts, and at their sexual orientation. It would be stupid to deny that homosexual activity hasn’t always been there, but it is much more obvious now, during the last 30-50 years, and especially the 21st century. There’s also joking that goes with it. (...) They (fa’afafine) exaggerate, like talking about sexual contact with people they never have had contact with. It is destructive bragging because they are endangering themselves. They are so sexually oriented in their thinking, and a lot of the times it is an exaggeration of what they actually do.”

This statement suggests that there has been a change in Samoa concerning the role of fa’afafine, and that the sexual focus may have been enhanced as an effect of influence from abroad, where gender liminals are liminal based on their sexual orientation, rather than on their social role in society.

Another possible indication of Western influence is the differentiation of fa'afafine based on dress style. Informant Mani sheds some light on the matter of terms and changes in terms, as he states that one used to speak only of "fa'afafine", but now one distinguished between "fa'afafine-*teine*" and "fa'afafine-*tama*", which he translated respectively to "drag" and "gay". Tony supports Mani's translation when he notes, "To me, "drag queen" is the English word for "fa'afafine", but it is different from "gay"."

Interestingly, the three fa'afafine above who identify with the term "gay" are all fa'afafine-*tama*, which means they dress like men. Sarah and Frieda, who oppose the terms "gay" and "homosexual", are fa'afafine-*teine* and dress effeminately. The fa'afafine-*tama* generally resemble the stereotypically feminine Western gay men, in the sense that they dress generally masculine, while body language, tone of voice, actions, and interests, are feminine in style. The fa'afafine-*teine*, on the other hand, do not resemble this stereotype of a gay man. Rather, they would likely be labeled "transvestite", "drag", or "queen", in a Western setting. Some fa'afafine use the term "queen", or "sister", when referring to another fa'afafine. Fa'afafine-*teine*'s typical behavior has been compared with, and found similar to, the behavior of Western stage transvestites (O'Meara 1990: 71).

The increased focus on the sexual aspect of the fa'afafine identity in Samoa, as well as the growing familiarity with foreign concepts, could explain why some fa'afafine do identify with "homosexual" and "gay". The change in focus and continuing westernization suggest that an increasing number of fa'afafine may come to identify with foreign concepts like "homosexuality" and "gay" in years to come.

Before changing the focus to more vernacular terms and nicknames, the next segment deals with the concept "transsexual". To my knowledge, informants and other Samoans did not use this term, and fa'afafine do not appear to identify with the term "transsexual". The term may be argued relevant as several statements from informants suggest transsexuality. The point here, however, is not whether one should categorize some fa'afafine as transsexuals. Rather, informants' views on body and sex change may enrich our understanding of the fa'afafine gender role and underlying scripts.

Transsexuality and Change of Sex

Psychologists define transsexuals as individuals who belong physically to one biological sex, but who identify psychologically with the opposite sex (Atkinson 1996: 708). Some transsexuals choose to undergo surgery or use hormonal treatment to become physically more similar to the other sex. An interesting point is that transsexuals do not usually consider themselves homosexual, although they have sexual interests in persons of the same biological sex as themselves (ibid.). If a male individual identifies himself as a female, it follows that he will not necessarily regard himself as a homosexual because of his sexual interest in men. Several of the Samoan informants fit the transsexual prototype. These informants identify with the opposite sex, but have a biologically male body. They are sexually interested in other males, but do not perceive themselves as homosexual.

To my knowledge, there are two fa'afafine in Samoa who have undergone sexual surgery. One was an informant of mine. He had acquired breasts, but had not completed a full sex change. Interestingly, he stated that Samoa was "too small" for a sex change. He explained that there was one fa'afafine who had undergone full surgery and acquired the body of a woman. Nonetheless, the individual did not acquire the status of a woman, and was still regarded a fa'afafine. In Samoa, where a fa'afafine's past will be known, the change of status from fa'afafine to woman is not a feasible conversion. This indicates that one purpose of a full sex change would be to be considered an authentic woman, and not be identified as a fa'afafine after surgery. As that appears difficult in a small country like Samoa, one possible motivating factor for undergoing a sex change falls through.

Skepticism towards a full surgical operation where genitals are manipulated appeared significant. I asked my informants whether they would consider an operation of any kind in order to become more like a woman. Their comments suggest that there are three major reasons for not undergoing surgery. The first reason is that many believed that having sex would not be very satisfying after full surgery. One informant said he did not think he would have orgasms, and a second stated, "The *mala* overseas tell the *mala* here that they still get satisfied during intercourse, but it's not true. That's why I wouldn't want it."

The second reason for not undergoing an operation has to do with their Christian beliefs. One informant said, “God has already given you a body”, while a second explained, “Because I grew up in a Christian world, I don’t really believe in that (operating). It’s what you feel on the inside that’s important, and that you should appreciate the body given to you by God.” A third informant was of the opinion that if he had an operation, it would mean that he regretted what God had given him.

The third reason for not having an operation is finance, as surgery is an expensive undertaking. One fa’afafine mentioned all three reasons when answering my question. “I was really into the woman’s world when I was younger. If I’d had money in the bank, I’d probably have done it (sex change) straight away. Now I’ve heard and learned about the effects of a full operation, and I don’t want that. It (sex) wouldn’t feel good, so only breasts in that case. I have some Samoan friends who have got the operation done overseas, and they tell us they don’t feel a thing (during sex). Some regret it (the operation). Just the breasts, to have a cleavage to tease the men with,” he concluded with a smile.

Two fa’afafine-*teine* said they would not mind only having breasts fixed, while yet two other fa’afafine-*teine* contrarily made jokes about how strange they would look if they only had their breasts changed, but not their genitals. Sarah exclaimed, “What if I’m in a car accident, and they bring me to the hospital. They would say, “Who the fuck is this? A fucking alien?”” He roared with laughter, and added, “Even if I’m dead, just the thought of it. It’s weird! I’m more comfortable with this body. I’d freak out too. Might as well go all the way. I would think the man would prefer either or, although a lot of weird stuff turns guys on these days.”

One fa’afafine-*tama*, Damion, replied, “No”, flatly when I posed the question of undergoing an operation of some kind. Another fa’afafine-*tama* said he had considered it when he was young but “could not be bothered” now. There were four other fa’afafine-*tama* whom I did not ask, but whom I would expect to react similarly to Damion. This is because they dress masculine, wear their hair short, and never use stuffed bras or other tangible effects to create a feminine look. However, all of them, including Damion, use effeminate body language and a somewhat soft voice.

***Mala* and Other Nick Names**

“*Mala* is fine. It means a curse. It’s just slang, it’s another word for fa’afafine. Some families think it’s a curse (to have a fa’afafine), and that it’s hard to deal with.” Tony was telling me what he thought about the word *mala*, a term often used instead of “fa’afafine”. Tiresa seemed to agree, as his comment was, “*Mala* is more slang. “Fa’afafine” is what they called the *mala* in the olden days. It’s okay, it depends on how they say it,” and he gave two examples. The first time he had a neutral expression on his face, and said, “Look at those *mala* over there,” in a friendly voice. Then he frowned and repeated aggressively, “Look at those *mala*! (stress on *mala*)”, pretending to be someone who expressed dislike towards fa’afafine. Damion remarked that *mala* had lost its real meaning, and that it did not seem derogatory to him.

“*Mala*—wonder how they came up with that word. A curse... hmm..., not very nice. We use *mala* among ourselves. I don’t have anything against it,” Sam concluded. He added, ““Fa’afafine”—I think it’s an ugly word. There should be a more respectful word, like in English; “queen”. I’m really alarmed if I hear “Oh, there is a fa’afafine!” (stress on fa’afafine), but I guess it’s more the people than the words. If it’s meant negative, it’s offensive. If it’s not meant negative, it’s okay.” Like Tiresa, he was concerned more with the way the words were said than the choice of term. Considering that *mala* and “fa’afafine” are used among themselves, it cannot be the term itself that offends them. Rather, it would be the tone of voice and facial expression with which *mala* and “fa’afafine” are said.

The first time I really became aware of the term *mala*, was when I sat in the car with Sarah, Frieda, and Maggie. We had just been to a fa’afafine beauty pageant and were on our way to a bar to drop Maggie off. They were discussing the use of *mala* versus “fa’afafine”. I asked what *mala* meant. Frieda explained that it meant being cursed, or a curse. Sarah was of the opinion that “fa’afafine” was a better term, and that it was more correct, more traditional. He claimed *mala* had a negative connotation. “*Mala* is not so good, I prefer “fa’afafine”,” agreed Frieda.

Pio, a highly educated teacher nearly fifty years of age, pondered on the matter before answering, and I found his reflections interesting. First he said, “*Mala* is the Samoan

concept of disaster, a curse. You can laugh it off easily, but at the same time, it's not an appropriate term. It's not as official as "fa'afafine"." Pio, however, was more interested in the term "fa'afafine" than *mala*, and maintained that the Samoan people needed to come up with another word for fa'afafine. "It ("fa'afafine") used to be derogatory, but it has changed. Now it's just a label, but it's still not as neutral as *tama* (boy) and *teine* (girl). Some fa'afafine prefer *teine*. In the 1960s and '70s, the term "fa'afafine" was not popular. It was more like an accusation. Maybe that's why *mala* came; in spite, 'cause that's what people thought of them; a curse. We have gone back to the term "fa'afafine"; there is no other term that can substitute it. The term is very loaded—it has a derogatory tone. I'll keep on using it. Eventually it'll become neutral, like *tama* and *teine*. The more educated the fa'afafine are, the more they realize that *teine* is not the proper term to define themselves. If you look at it ("fa'afafine"), it's a very apt word. It's the closest they (Samoans) can come. I don't know how far back the term "fa'afafine" goes. We used it when I was growing up. We used to call fa'afafine *ai paneta*, which literally means "eat planet". I think it meant that fa'afafine were like aliens, from other planets. Also *ai lalolagi*, meaning to roam the world; in other words, they don't belong."

While the word "fa'afafine" is based on the word for woman, fa'afafine are often referred to as *teine* (girls). Being a woman implies being a wife, which again involves a sexual aspect. A girl, however, is a sister, and nominally a virgin. Mageo stresses the contradiction in being called a woman as well as girl (1998: 210). She also mentions the term "eat planet", but unlike Pio, says it alludes to fellatio. She points to other jocular names that are sexual too, like "eat carrot", and *fagufagu*. The latter refers to a male waking up to another male by initiating sex. While these names play on sexuality, terms like "talking *pipi*" stress virginity. *Pipi* is slang for a girl's genital (ibid.).

Mageo also elaborates on the prefix *fa'a*, saying it tags fa'afafine as cultural, while *fafine* stresses a sexual-biological femininity. She explains that *fa'a* can be used to mediate extreme cases, making "femininity, as an absolute and contrastive difference, less different, suggesting a devolution of gender categories" (ibid.). She goes on to argue that *fa'a* can mean "to make", and that the term *fa'afafine* suggests that the gender is made or invented.

Also, *fa'a* may denote something flippant or pretended, false. The term *teine pepelo*, lying girls, or false girls, is another term used for fa'afafine (ibid.).

Summary

This chapter has focused on concepts connected to fa'afafine. The concepts selected were “fa'afafine-*teine*”, “fa'afafine-*tama*”, “gay”, “homosexual”, “transvestite”, “transsexual”, “*mala*”, and nicknames that are synonymous with “fa'afafine”. The informants' self-presentations can be perceived to support the theory that fa'afafine schemas and cultural models for Samoan gender roles are scripts that lie at the basis of the fa'afafine role-repertoire and influence fa'afafine's behavior and self-perceptions.

To summarize, a few informants identified with the concept “gay”, and some others could perceive how they were “homosexual” but did not necessarily identify with the term. Other informants, however, denied being “gay” or “homosexual”, and were likely to stress that they were “fa'afafine”. The dual division of fa'afafine into fa'afafine-*teine* and fa'afafine-*tama* appeared well known among most informants. These latter terms are primarily categorical terms, and are not used referentially about specific individuals.

“Transvestite” and “transsexual” were included because of their descriptive and analytical function. Evidently, “transvestite” and “transsexual” are generally not used among informants, although many fa'afafine fit the formal definitions of the terms. Naturally, informants usually spoke Samoan when I was not included in the conversation, and would for that reason alone not employ foreign terms like “transvestite”, “transsexual”, or “homosexual”. The Samoan term most equivalent to these words is probably “fa'afafine”. As Mageo asserts, the term “*tauatane*”, which can denote male-to-male intercourse, is an old word that is seldom used now. The fact that several adult Samoans were ignorant of the word “*tauatane*” supports Mageo's assertion. The term “queen” has to some extent been adopted, but “queen” appears to refer to fa'afafine in general and not exclusively femininely dressed fa'afafine. Among informants, “*mala*” was most frequently used when referring to other fa'afafine.

Informants appear neither to hide nor suppress sexual aspects of fa'afafine scripts, which statements in this chapter should have illustrated. The mother of a fa'afafine asserted that the sexual aspect of the fa'afafine role has become more prominent over the past years. A general difference between the term "fa'afafine" and for instance "homosexual" is the contrast in what aspect of the scripts underlying the liminal gender role that is stressed. While "fa'afafine" implies to socially act like a woman, "homosexual" stresses the sexual orientation of the person. As will become increasingly clear in the following pages, it is possible to argue that a fa'afafine identity is primarily communicated and determined through gender marked behavior. This behavior is of a social, rather than a sexual, character.

The gender identity of fa'afafine is viewed by some Samoans as potentially temporary. Apparently, a male can choose to assume or shed the role of fa'afafine at any point in time. I am therefore in agreement with Mageo who proposes that gender in Samoa is presently best understood as social fiction (Mageo 1996a: 590), and consequently an ongoing accomplishment (Berk 1985: 202). By perceiving gender as an aspect of our identity that we “do” rather than “have” (West and Zimmerman 1987 in Dunne 1999: 30), gender can be appreciated as a dynamic component of identity achieved through actions and interaction, instead of an indisputably constant, innate, part of identity. Perceiving gender as a product of actions offers an explanation for how males can “become”, and “stop being”, a fa'afafine. In the words of Judith Butler:

(...) gender is in no way a stable identity of locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. (...) If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (1997: 402, orig. italics)

I have previously proposed that there is a cultural model for Samoan gender that comprises schemas and scripts for gender roles in Samoa. Consequently, when a person follows the scripts on which a gender role is based, the person will signal to the environment that specific gender identity. Altering one's actions, and thereby changing gender markers, communicates a change in gender and makes a person's transgression between gender roles feasible. Scripts underlying the fa'afafine gender role will delineate specific behavior.

Importantly, all my informants asserted that they were born fa'afafine, and a few stated specifically that the cause was biological. A number of them referred to God as the One with the answer to why they were fa'afafine. Several times during fieldwork, Samoans

confronted me with the assertion that boys become fa'afafine because the family needed a girl in the house to take care of specific chores. The fa'afafine informants who commented on this folk theory were all critical⁴⁷ and generally stated that being clothed in dresses and set to do women's work did not make a boy a fa'afafine. Bearing in mind also informants' statements about how they feel like women indicates that most fa'afafine would not agree that they become fa'afafine through their actions. However, the aim is not to reduce gender to pure action, and thereby disregard the psychic element of gender. Writing on drag, Judith Butler takes the psyche into consideration when she defines gender as "the play *between* psyche and appearance" (2000: 111, orig. italics.) The primary issue discussed here is how fa'afafine produce the gender role fa'afafine, and communicate this identity to the rest of society, through everyday actions.

The upcoming section will delineate various actions through which my informants convey a fa'afafine gender identity. Importantly, it is the combination of their choices of action that express that they are fa'afafine. House chores, modes of dress attire, body language, choice of nicknames, and leisure activities, are some of the topics below that illustrate ways the fa'afafine gender is played out. In order to illustrate how characteristic fa'afafine action diverges or is similar to men's and women's actions, the topics are presented in light of Samoan norms. Also, as settings and contexts may influence a person's actions, I portray several common settings and contexts that my informants were familiar with. Based on informants' statements and observations of informants' behavior, I make assumptions as to how these settings and contexts appear to affect informants' actions. Finally, I situate the "doing of gender" in a cultural context, by delineating a Samoan dual cognitive system of organization where gender associations are shown to not necessarily link directly and respectively to the sexes. Relevant in this connection is the prominent emphasis on performance in Samoa, of which I present several examples. The well-known figure of the conductor-clown is offered as an illustration of how an individual's social roles can be recognized by characteristic behavior.

⁴⁷ The theory and data concerning the theory is discussed on p. 113.

Division of Domestic Labor

Women's and men's domains are quite distinct in the distribution of labor tasks. Shore points out a light/heavy and clean/dirty dichotomy present in the Samoan division of labor (1982: 225-226). In general, women and girls are responsible for work that is light, clean, and/or concentrated around central village and household areas. Female tasks include sowing, ironing, weaving mats and baskets, washing, cleaning the house and the grounds around the house, weeding plantations, collecting shellfish in the lagoon, taking care of children and elders, preparing foods that does not entail using the *umu*⁴⁸, and participating in projects in the village. Men's work is typically heavy, dirty, and/or associated with the bush or other areas peripheral to the center of the village or the home. Masculine responsibilities are plantation work, climbing coconut trees, making the *umu*, cooking staple foods in the *umu*, deep-sea fishing, house building, canoe building, tattooing, and participating in village or inter-village political affairs (ibid.) Although the divide of labor between men and women is not absolute, it serves as guidelines for everyday interaction.

Regarding chores around the house, fa'afafine differ from other Samoan males in that they are known to perform women's chores instead of, or in addition to, men's chores. According to Berk, the division of household labor aids not one, but two processes of production (1985: 201). The first one is the production of goods and services. The second one is the production of gender (ibid). When fa'afafine perform traditional women's chores in the home, they accomplish more than getting necessary housework done. Their actions also produce and perpetuate their gender role as fa'afafine.

Fa'afafine are well known for performing good work around the house, and this was brought to my attention repetitiously by fa'afafine and other Samoans. Statements below from my fa'afafine informants strongly support the assertion that fa'afafine often perform women's chores in the home. Damion, for instance, accounted the following: "I do the washing, cleaning, tidying up, house work—it comes naturally. When I was really small,

⁴⁸ The *umu* is an earth oven, prepared early Sunday mornings for the traditional lunch. It is known to be a man's job to make the *umu*.

during the Sunday *to'onai*⁴⁹, I used to play with the frying pan and the towel. The towel was a pancake. All the other kids were out playing with their toys.” The teenage fa’afafine Uelese said, “I wash the dishes, clean the house, cook food. The boys have to make the *saka*: boys’ chores, like make the *umu*, and carry water. I like doing the women’s chores. My mother tells me to do them.” Tony also preferred the women’s responsibilities. He stated, “We had our own chores to do. Usually I would do the ladies’ stuff; sweeping, washing dishes, food. Never hard labor, like cutting the lawn and digging.” He added, “We feel we are women, and do the women’s role and women’s stuff. We think and act that way.”

Many fa’afafine’s ability to do both genders’ chores is often regarded as an especially beneficial asset. Tile, a female relative of the fa’afafine Maggie, noted, “Old people love having a fa’afafine around the house—they do all the chores.” In accordance with this assertion is fa’afafine informant Sara’s grumpy remark: “Cooking, scrubbing, picking the rubbish, cleaning the house, I did *everything*, ‘cause I was the only one at home. The others had gone out, I had to stay at home.” Sarah was referring to his brothers and sisters, whom he felt his parents had been more lenient with than with him.

Frieda and Sam appeared less displeased with having to perform men’s tasks as well as women’s. Frieda explained, “I did both kinds of chores. As a fa’afafine, you’re strong enough to do the male chores, but you also know how to arrange things, and we keep the house clean. Don’t want it to be messy, you know.” Sam uttered, “I normally do the girls’ chores. I clean the dishes, clean the floor, and do the laundry and the cooking. I did some of the boys’ chores too; planted plants and cut the grass. (...) Some men don’t know how to cook, it’s not their role, but fa’afafine can cook. They can also do gardening and flower arrangements. But now it’s changing, now also guys are working with flowers, but the majority are females and *mala*.”

Tiresa defined a fa’afafine as “someone who looks after the younger brothers and sisters or cousins, who does the motherly jobs.” He explained, “If there is one boy and one fa’afafine, the mother will ask the fa’afafine to look after the younger kids when she has to

⁴⁹ *To'onai* is the lunch on Sundays, and is served after church. The family is usually gathered, and traditional food is prepared, preferably by the use of the *umu*, an earth oven. Guests and the eldest are served first, children last.

leave the house. (...) I did both men's and women's work. I prefer the women's work. It's not as hard as the men's. Plantation work, cutting wood—that's not me. I prefer to sit by my husband and weave a mat." Two seconds later, he burst out laughing. The self-irony was detectable from the facts that Tiresa has no husband, works in an office, and leads an urban life in town.

Although fa'afafine are known for doing women's chores, the execution of these chores does not automatically give a male a fa'afafine identity. The theoretical divide of work is not absolute in praxis. A family's needs must be met, and necessity may determine that the eldest brother cooks dinner, or takes care of his baby siblings⁵⁰. However, it appears that for many fa'afafine, doing women's chores is not first and foremost about meeting the family's needs. Most of my informants have sisters, indicating that there have been other females in the house suited to perform the women's chores instead of the fa'afafine. More importantly, a fa'afafine who spends hours ironing, weaving baskets, doing the dishes, and sweeping the floor, is producing and fulfilling his gender role as fa'afafine. The role is further unambiguously communicated when the Samoan male who performs these domestic tasks on a regular basis, also displays typical fa'afafine characteristics like feminine body language and a soft voice.

Appearance; Dress Styles and Body Language

Many fa'afafine are easily noticeable because they choose to dress like women. Dressing in drag is, as Judy Butler asserts, an endeavor to negotiate cross-gendered identification (op. cit.: 112). However, cross-dressing is not necessarily a sign of homosexuality, although it may be one. Many cross-dressers are straight⁵¹, and certainly not all homosexuals are cross-dressers (ibid.). All my fa'afafine informants expressed homosexual desires, but not all were cross-dressers. This difference in dress styles among fa'afafine has resulted in the labels

⁵⁰ On Bonerate, Indonesia, when the eldest child of a sibling group is a boy, he will be delegated to perform more female chores than if he had an older sister (Broch 1990: 80).

⁵¹ The African American NBA basketball player Dennis Rodman has received wide mass media attention for his unconventional sexual behavior (e.g. kissing the female impersonator talk show host RuPaul) and effeminate styles of dressing. However, Rodman's heterosexuality is not jeopardized by his actions. Rodman's physical and social dominance allows him to play with gender markers without drawing his own sexual preferences into question. He is "so much a man" that dresses and make-up cannot feminize him. On the contrary, they confirm his masculinity (Dunbar 2000: 263).

fa'afafine-*teine* and fa'afafine-*tama* that Damion pointed out (chap. 5). Accordingly, the descriptions below of effeminately dressed fa'afafine do not apply to all fa'afafine, but I will refrain from pointing it out repetitiously.

Perhaps the most basic and typical piece of clothing in Samoa is the *lavalava* (sarong). The fabrics usually have flowery prints in bright colors, and men and women generally use the same patterns⁵². Males and females alike of all ages wear *lavalava*, but there is a difference in the way they tie it. Men will draw the *lavalava* together in front of their stomach, twist the upper part of the two sides around each other, and tuck one side in at the waist while letting the other hang loosely in front. Women, on the other hand, usually wrap their *lavalava* around their waist, and tuck the remaining end neatly in at the side. When wearing only a *lavalava*, women tie it underneath their arms, thus covering their upper bodies. Fa'afafine often tie the *lavalava* at the waist like a woman. Also, a fa'afafine may choose to cover his upper-body instead of baring his chest the way men frequently do. Fa'afafine could often be observed in town wearing *lavalava* fastened the way women commonly do.

The *ie faitaga*, more informally called a *sulu*, is a piece of clothing worn only by men. It is like the *lavalava* in the sense that it is a piece of cloth that is to be wrapped around the waist, but it has pockets on the side and ribbons to tie it with. It is also of a plain, thicker material, in blue, gray, black, or brown colors. Worn together with a white short-sleeved shirt and a tie, it is the business suit of Samoan men. Government officials and policemen, for instance, wear them. It is also proper attire in church. A fa'afafine who likes to dress effeminately would not wear the *ie faitaga*, considering it is a masculine piece of clothing. The only exceptions I have witnessed were two fa'afafine, who due to their jobs had to wear the *ie faitaga* as part of their uniform. One was a waiter at a hotel, and the other was employed in the Government. Two other informants would wear them from time to time, but these fa'afafine did not usually dress like women.

The *puletafi* is a two-piece dress used by women and fa'afafine. The top is figure sown and comes down below the hips. The bottom-piece is ankle-length and may be sown

⁵² An exception is the *lavalava* made from silk. I only observed women and fa'afafine wearing them.

like a wrap-around or a skirt. Cuts, details, and choice of materials, is up to the seamstress, and the variations seem endless. As I had two sown for myself, I asked the seamstresses when would be a proper time for me to wear them. I was told, “Anytime!” Women employed in town often wear *puletasi* to work, and numerous work places like restaurants, hotels, and banks, have them as uniforms for their employees. While the women will wear identical *puletasi*, men employed there might wear a plain *lavalava* or *ie faitaga* with a short-sleeved shirt matching the women’s *puletasi*.

The *puletasi* is not uncommon attire for fa’afafine-*teine*. Tony, for instance, would often wear one of his *puletasi* to work. On other days he would wear long skirts and various tops and blouses. He was always impeccably dressed, with styles that complimented his figure. He used stuffed bras, and he kept his hair long and neatly fixed. He embellished his clean-shaven face by applying a foundation, powder, mascara, and bright red lipstick. The result was an appealing feminine face.

The *puletasi* is also used as a school uniform for the girls attending the National University of Samoa and The Polytechnic of Samoa. Every school has its uniform, and the students are compelled to wear it. Boys at all levels usually wear a shirt and *lavalava* to school, although I noticed some of the youngest ones wearing shorts. Girls will wear nearly the same as the boys, perhaps with a different cut to the shirt, and a skirt instead of a *lavalava*. When it comes to the fa’afafine, they must comply with school rules and dress in boys’ uniform. It will not be tolerated that a fa’afafine dresses in a girl’s uniform. In Croall’s documentary, one of the fa’afafine tells how hard it was for him to have to wear a boy’s uniform, since he had been raised as a fa’afafine and really thought he was a woman (1999).

Despite the male school uniform, young fa’afafine still have ways of communicating a fa’afafine identity. One afternoon when I was down town with two of my informants, I was introduced to the fa’afafine Naomi. I could tell from the color of his uniform that he attended a well-renowned Catholic high school. However, more noticeable than his uniform were his plucked eyebrows and the thick layer of metallic blue eye shadow over his mascara-blackened eyelashes. His nails were painted pink, and the strap on his rubber sandals was also pink. His body language struck me as extremely effeminate. Several of his gestures

were so exaggerated that they bordered on being a caricature of typical Samoan female body language.

A distinctive feature of the way many Samoans express themselves, is the active use of eyebrows and head/chin. If you ask someone a question and receive a quick raise of the eyebrows, the answer is yes. I also experienced that individuals raised their eyebrows as a substitute for “hello”, sometimes combined with an upward flick of the chin. This latter gesture is very common, and I found women especially prone to do it repeatedly while talking excitedly. The gesture is also a way of pointing, as the chin indicates a direction or a person.

Naomi displayed these two gestures as well as an array of other feminine gesticulations. He sometimes reacted to surprising news from the other fa’afafine with exasperation, and showed it by rolling his eyes and exclaiming “*Oka!*” (Wow!). He would also lean into the hip with his hands around his waist, if he were not waving them around. I was under the impression that makeup was forbidden even for girls in many schools, and was therefore surprised by Naomi’s appearance. Later, I asked a friend who had attended the same school whether this no longer was the case. He confirmed that it was still forbidden, and most certainly for boys. He felt positive that Naomi had put the makeup on after school before going into town. Bearing Naomi’s effeminate gestures in mind, it should be apparent that a male uniform on a young fa’afafine is not sufficient to make his gender identity ambiguous. Naomi, with his effeminate body language and plucked eyebrows, does not need makeup or a dress to signify his identity as fa’afafine. Similarly, fa’afafine who do not cross-dress are generally easily identified as fa’afafine, which again shows the significance of other gender markers like body language.

Apart from feminine wear, there are also other decorative details that many fa’afafine use to enhance their feminine appearance. As mentioned already, Tony uses nail polish, makeup, and a stuffed bra. Many fa’afafine have long hair that they put up in a bun, like most Samoan women do. Sarah has many pairs of high-heeled shoes, and delights in fancy purses, handbags, hats, perfumes, and other accessories like jewelry, and clips and pins for

his hair. A typical Samoan way of embellishing a woman's⁵³ and a fa'afafine's looks is to place a fresh flower, like a bright red hibiscus, behind the ear.

Having a distinct recollection of many of my informants' dressing habits, I was surprised to read the following by Niko Besnier, who conducted extended fieldwork in Tahiti in the 1980s:

The Tahitian mahu's presentation of self, like the Samoan fa'afafine's and Tongan fakaleiti's, typically includes some "feminine" characteristics. Some cross-dressing is evident, particularly in urban centers and on festive occasions like dances, although there is no report of any gender-liminal individual cross-dressing on a permanent basis anywhere in Polynesia.

(1994: 297)

Opposing this statement, I contend that informant Sarah cross-dresses around the clock. The assertion that Sarah dresses effeminately at all times derives from time spent with him in public as well as in the privacy of his home. It goes without saying that as long as I was present he was by definition not alone. I could not observe how he dressed when he was alone, or in other contexts and settings where he perhaps did not feel compelled to uphold gender markers. Nonetheless, I have never seen him dress in a masculine or neutral manner, regardless of setting, context, or time of day. For instance, one time coming out of the shower at his home, Sarah had wrapped a towel around his upper body and swooped his long hair up in a second towel. Another time, working alone in his secluded garden (I was resting inside his house), he was dressed in a bra and a *lavalava*, the ends of the *lavalava* fastened to the bra- straps. Based on my understanding of him, I do not believe he uses feminine clothes as gender markers that lose their meaning when there is no one to see him. Clothes can play a constitutive role in building the self-image, given that dressing in a certain way affects "self-esteem and feeling good *even* on one's own" (Tseëlon 1995: 63, orig. italics). Sarah's self-perception of being a woman suggests that dressing as a woman substantiates his self-perception and is equally important whether he is alone

⁵³ Men have traditionally also used to decorate themselves with flowers, but I find that generally only women and fa'afafine use flowers behind their ears on a daily basis.

or with other people. In other words, the role has become internalized and embodied, making it a consistent element of his identity. Tony, Frieda, Maggie, Keri⁵⁴, and Nancy are other, to my knowledge, consistent cross-dressers.

Gender in Ink

Tattoos are an important part of the Samoan culture, and traditionally signify adulthood for men and women. The two full-body tattoos *tatau* and *malu* are gender specific. The men's *tatau* reaches from the middle of the upper body all the way down to below the knees, front and back. It is an arrangement of dense and intricately made rectilinear designs. The designs of the women's *malu* are sparser, and extend from around the thighs to directly below the knees (O'Meara 1990: 72).

The tattoo ceremony involves agonizing pain, but reasons for subjecting oneself to the toothed combs of the tattoo master are many⁵⁵. One reason derived from oral tradition is that the sight of the tattooed skin evokes romantic interest in the opposite sex. Another reason is that it signals cultural pride. Also, the tattoo ceremony brings praise to the young man, and honor to the family that shows it can afford the ceremony (ibid.: 75-76). However, I was told that a tattoo symbolized courage and bravery as the ordeal of making a tattoo demonstrated the person's ability to withstand enormous pain. It would be very embarrassing to leave a tattoo half-done, because it would testify to lack of courage. According to O'Meara, machoism is a highly valued Samoan virtue of which especially the *tatau* is a demonstration (ibid.: 76).

None of my fa'afafine informants had the male *tatau*, but I knew of a fa'afafine who did; Andy. He was in his early thirties and had come out as a fa'afafine only a few years ago. He came from a well-respected family of high social status, which acquaintances of his offered to me as the reason for his late coming-out. Based on the meaning of the *tatau* and the rarity of *tatau*-tattooed fa'afafine, I find it reasonable to assume that Andy's tattoo was made while Andy had the social role of a man, and not a fa'afafine.

⁵⁴ Keri was a fa'afafine-*teine* in his late twenties, who worked in a restaurant as a waiter and a cook.

⁵⁵ Today, it is more rare than in the early 1900s for young women to receive a *malu* (O'Meara 1990: 72), but I observed many women with tattooed bands around their upper arms.

I vaguely recall an incident from a charity show that illustrates the contradiction between being a fa'afafine and having a *tatau*. Andy and several other fa'afafine were on stage performing various dances. When Andy was introduced, the fa'afafine MC passed a remark along the lines of Andy being “the only girl with a *pe'a*”⁵⁶, triggering a few laughs in the audience. Andy was then beckoned to show the audience his impressive *tatau*.

My impression is that fa'afafine would not wish to have a *tatau*, as the *tatau* is indisputably a sign of masculinity and thus a clear male gender marker. While doing gender to a large extent involves actively employing gender markers that represent the gender one identifies with, doing gender can also entail avoiding certain actions. In this case, a fa'afafine cannot decorate himself with a female tattoo, but he can refrain from attaining a particularly manly tattoo like the *tatau*.

Personal Names

Numerous Samoan first names are not gendered as a consequence of being ordinary words, or preferably words that refer to important events (Mageo 2001: 191). However, some names are gendered, among them indigenized Christian names like Mele (Mary) (Mageo 1998: 211), Viliamu (William), and Pika (Peter).

Fa'afafine commonly take an English girl's name, as is apparent in the names of entertainment artist Cindy and several informants (e.g. Maggie, Sarah, and Nancy)⁵⁷. There are a number of ways a fa'afafine may appropriate a girl's name. One informant had translated the meaning of his Samoan name into English, thus creating a short, English-sounding, feminine name. Several informants had merely selected a name of choice without apparent connection to the birth names⁵⁸. Mageo asserts that the fa'afafine usually adopt English names that begin with the same letter as their Samoan names (op. cit.). Although I did not find this to be a general rule, I know of cases where the fa'afafine used their Christian name, and turned it into the female equivalent. For instance, Robert would become

⁵⁶ *Pe'a* is a more informal word for *tatau*.

⁵⁷ The informants' names, although anonymous, reflect whether the individual has selected a Samoan, foreign, male, or female, name.

⁵⁸ Samoans commonly have a middle name in addition to a first name. Often one name is traditionally Samoan, while the other is Christian.

Roberta, or Paul would be Pauline or Paula. Mageo also points out that fa'afafine may select a name that begins with a letter that does not exist in Samoan (op. cit.). This is also my experience, as some of my informants' names begin with Bs and Cs, two letters that do not exist in the Samoan alphabet.

The fa'afafine's names Frieda, Fran, Sarah, Ina⁵⁹, Nancy, Keri, and Maggie, are fictive in the sense that they are invented, but in practice the names are generally treated and used as if they were birth names. Many know a fa'afafine only by his girl name, and are not necessarily familiar with his birth name. In official settings, like workplaces, fa'afafine's sex takes precedence of their social identity as fa'afafine. For instance, I witnessed several fa'afafine at work having to wear nametags with their birth names. The fa'afafine's colleagues, however, would likely address them by their chosen girl's name.

In Apia, where fa'afafine may dress like women or like men, I found that a fa'afafine's way of dressing often corresponded with the name they went by⁶⁰. In other words, a fa'afafine-*teine* would be called by a girl's name, while a fa'afafine-*tama* would most likely use his given boy's name. Several fa'afafine who dress masculine or only slightly effeminately, like Damion, Pio, Mani, Andy, Tom, Ioka, and Sam, have kept their birth names. For a fa'afafine who does not regard himself as a woman, keeping his boy's name might feel more in accordance with his self-perception. Frieda, Fran, Sarah, Ina, Nancy, Keri, and Maggie, are all fa'afafine who dress effeminately. When a fa'afafine presents himself with a girl's name, he signals a feminine identity that diverges from other men. Names like Nancy or Sarah have no meaning in and of themselves, and do not entail any properties. However, a girl's name compliments, and therefore enhances, the femininity of a fa'afafine in women's clothes with evident feminine body language⁶¹.

⁵⁹ Ina, a fa'afafine about thirty years old, worked as a waiter in a bar.

⁶⁰ Although I usually found girl's names to correspond to feminine attire, and boy's names to masculine attires, there were exceptions to the rule. Tiresa and April were examples of fa'afafine who did not cross-dress but still went by girl's names. Likewise, I know of a few cases where the fa'afafine was a cross-dresser but went by his birth name, like Tony. Tony had used a girl's name in the past, but now discouraged the use of it. For what reason, I do not know.

⁶¹ In the Norwegian documentary *All About My Father (Alt Om Min Far)* (Benestad 2001), the main character, Esben Benestad, switches periodically between his manly identity and his feminine alter ego. While assuming the identity of a woman, he changes his name to Esther Pirelli. Esther is a girl's name in Norwegian.

Fa'afafine and Employed Work

Most work places in Apia do not appear to be specifically designated according to gender. However, there is probably a majority of women employed as nurses and as sales assistants in stores selling clothes, shoes, and fabrics. It is primarily men who work as carpenters, plumbers, electricians, doctors, and as sales assistants in hardware stores. Regarding fa'afafine, there appear to be a conspicuous number employed in fashion stores, and in the bar, restaurant, and hotel business. During fieldwork, at least six fa'afafine I knew worked in clothes stores, while I was aware of nine fa'afafine employed in bars, restaurants, and hotels. A minimum of six fa'afafine worked in travel agencies or airlines, and I met three fa'afafine teachers. Several fa'afafine worked within the Government, finance, or banking, while three others served the diverse occupations of a massage therapist, a librarian, and an anchorperson of the evening news on television.

The notion that some fa'afafine exceed women in their work is rather common. A clerk in the Methodist Church office declared, "The fa'afafine are very meticulous, good cooks, and they do the women's jobs often better than the women."⁶² Fa'afafine are known to excel in clothes design as well, and enjoy a good reputation for being first-rate designers and tailors. A few had a booth at the Flea Market where they sewed for clients. In Croall's documentary, there is an interview with a fa'afafine named Yuki (1999). He is a clothes designer who started off working in Samoa. I met relatives of his who told me he had moved overseas where he now worked as a successful designer.

Other fa'afafine working in show business reflect a newer trend more along the lines of the drag scene. In Apia, one of the main attractions every weekend was the Cindy show, a cabaret/drag show starring the country's perhaps best known fa'afafine; "Cindy of Samoa". In addition to Cindy, the cast usually consisted of three other fa'afafine, one girl, and five young men (see chap. 8).

How fa'afafine do gender at work has not been discussed here. This segment on workplaces is included in order to provide a background for the following segment that

⁶² Comparatively, the male *berdaches* (gender liminals) among North American Indians were known to be exceptionally proficient in women's work, and to often exceed women in skills (Callender and Kochems 1983: 447).

discusses contextual behavior. The workplaces represent settings where fluctuating contexts affect how fa'afafine behave and express themselves.

Doing Gender in Various Settings and Contexts

Interacting with fa'afafine informants, I discerned that there often were differences in how much a fa'afafine chose to display his effeminacy. This observation inspired to a closer look at contextual behavior, and the possible influence variations in contexts and settings had on behavior. By setting I mean the physical arena, like whether one is in school, at work, at home, in church, or perhaps at a bar. I view context as the social atmosphere of a specific setting. One setting may have different contexts depending on factors like time of day and the people present, and similar contexts can be found in dissimilar settings. How a fa'afafine “does gender” will at least partly be a function of the context and setting in which he finds himself, and how he interprets the situation.

Roughly generalized and based on my observations, fa'afafine acted most feminine in bars and nightclubs, sometimes to the level of exaggeration. Exaggerated in the sense that fa'afafine's reactions, body language, and facial expressions at times exceed their own behavior during other circumstances, and also exceed in degree that of the average Samoan woman⁶³. This observation is supported by the opinion of two men from the Methodist Church. One of them claimed that fa'afafine were like women, but often more extreme. The other young man added, “They take it to a new level.” Fa'afafine might shriek louder than women, wave their hands around more, dress more revealing (if they cross-dress), and make more jokes with cruder sexual connotations. I found the focus on handsome boys/men and sex to be especially noticeable. A couple of informants never got tired of saying to others or myself, “I want you to come! Well, I mean, I don't want you to *come*⁶⁴, but I want you to *join me!*”, which was usually followed by a giggle or a smug look.

⁶³ However, it is appropriate to point out that this exaggeration not only concerns fa'afafine. When going clubbing, men and women generally try to look their best, and emphasize whatever behavior or features, masculine or feminine respectively, they perceive as attractive assets.

⁶⁴ The fa'afafine allude to having an orgasm.

Contrary to the leisurely situations at bars and nightclubs⁶⁵, I find the workplace to be a setting where many informants moderate their feminine actions. Evidently, many behave according to mainstream professional job descriptions, especially in their dealing with customers. Otherwise observable and expressive effeminate behavior appears toned down and difficult to detect. Flamboyant behavior may be perceived as comical or lacking in seriousness by employers and customers. Consequently, toning down gaudy behavior can ensure that fa'afafine employees are taken seriously at work, and that their job performance will satisfy their employer.

The influence of context and setting is easily observable when comparing some informants' behavior at nightclubs with their behavior at work. For instance, my informant Mani displayed explicit differences in appearance and manner when I met him at a club compared to when I stopped by the restaurant where he worked. Mani did not cross-dress, but when going out to nightclubs, he would style his hair with gel, shave or shape his facial hair, and wear fashion shirts that sometimes were tight-fitting. He was the George Michael of Samoa.

At clubs, Mani's gestures were dramatic, and he would roll his eyes, make exaggerated facial expressions, and move his arms and hands in a ballet-like fashion. His outgoing manner combined with a very joyous attitude made him quite radiant. Typically he would buzz around, socialize, or try to convince people to come with him on the dance floor. Time and again, he flirted persistently and shamelessly with men, heedless of their responses. His remarks were practically always charged with sexual connotations. For instance, if a guy he was talking to or standing next to took leave to go to the men's room, Mani might ask if he could come and help, saying it while smiling and batting his eyes. The salacious humor struck me as amusing rather than tasteless due to his bubbling laugh, vivid facial expressions, and jester-like manner with which he usually presented his remarks. In fact, Mani's comical behavior appeared to be in the spirit of the Samoan joke *ula*⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ Although many fa'afafine have bars and restaurants as their workplace, I do not treat bars as workplaces when doing a comparison of behavior at work with behavior at bars. The bars are then settings for leisure.

⁶⁶ *Ula* is a joke made at the expense of another person's dignity, while appearing to be made at the expense of one's own status (chap. 7).

One night after the bar had closed, a group of us gathered on the stairs of the sea wall. Mani had spent the past hour passing flirtatious and salacious remarks to an Australian man. In spite of the Australian's blank turn-downs, Mani persisted his flirtation. The man's rejection of Mani could likely have made a fool of Mani, but Mani's indifference to the rejection, and the exchange of glances that passed between the individuals on the sea wall, suggested otherwise. The Australian gave a short monologue about how he respected people like Mani, and thought that "they" (fa'afafine) had the right to do what "they" wanted like everyone else. My interpretation of the situation was that the Australian practically patted himself on the back for being so generously accepting of fa'afafine, while Mani and some friends of his found the Australian's comments provocative and rather narrow-minded. Mani's incessant attention teased the comments out of the Australian, and the Australian's "generosity" backfired and caused him to lose dignity instead of Mani⁶⁷. I found the *ula* to be a rather typical style of joking for assertive fa'afafine.

Mani's behavior at work contrasted with his gaudy, energetic style at nightclubs. As a waiter, he had to wear the *ie faitaga* (a male wrap-around) and a short-sleeved shirt, and he always kept a well-groomed appearance. Mani spoke in a soft, low voice, and moved quietly around. His body language was not exaggeratedly feminine, but in my view rather effeminately graceful. Like Mani noted, "I think you can still tell⁶⁸...." Mani reflected further on his own behavior at work, and said, "Well, I respect people. I am polite, helpful, and ask what I can do for the customer."

Another informant, Tiresa, is generally less flamboyant than Mani, but like Mani, his body language became more effeminate at clubs compared to at work. At the clubs, Tiresa would giggle more and use dramatic facial expressions and hand movements. He stated, "I show more of my fa'afafine-side at clubs. Why should I hide it?" Tiresa dressed rather neutrally in shorts and a loose fitting shirt at nightclubs as well as at work. He appeared to take his work seriously, and he had an efficient and confident way of dealing with customers.

⁶⁷ The evening ended with a heated argument between the Australian and one of the fa'afafine that had been sitting on the sea wall observing the interaction between the Australian and Mani.

⁶⁸ Mani implied that it was still obvious that he was a fa'afafine despite his moderate behavior.

Sam described his own behavior at work as “straight”. He was service-minded and efficient, and had a manner that was usually calm, friendly, and at times timid. Like Mani, Sam wore an *ie faitaga* and short sleeved shirt at work. Although his style of clothing was usually neutral, his hand gestures and appearance were clearly effeminate. He used barrettes and hair bands to keep his short hair pulled back, often with a flower behind one ear. He usually wore eyeliner and mascara, and carried accessories like handbags, fans, and jewelry. Sam was the most timid of all my informants, and could appear uncomfortable and unconfident in settings where he sensed that someone did not approve of him. Different from the assertive style of many informants, he appeared to avoid confrontations with individuals whom he thought did not like him. At nightclubs, however, he appeared somewhat less shy. He mingled and was outgoing, and appeared to dance uninhibitedly in an unmistakably feminine manner.

Fa’afafine are notorious for how they can attack people verbally. Sometimes this takes place at nightclubs where disagreements among intoxicated individuals erupt into quarrels. Describing himself, Tony said, “I’m the type that shouts and yells. I’m worse than Aaron (a fa’afafine friend). At nightclubs, I’ll just yell at them if someone messes with me or talks behind my back.” Frieda would not tolerate negative attitudes either, and said, “At work, I meet lots of people, and I have to show (them all) respect. But, I can be a bitch if they don’t respect me.” Informant Isak made a generalization about fa’afafine and stated, “Either they (fa’afafine) have it in their wits or in their fists. They can rip people apart with their comments.” A middle-aged schoolteacher working at the Seventh-Day Adventist School warned, “Don’t get in an argument with them (fa’afafine). Boy, can they talk!” The teacher lifted her shoulders and hands, closed her eyes and frowned, as if shrinking at the mere thought of their foul language. She added that they may walk like a girl, and dress like a girl, but when they fight, they are not so feminine any more.

Sarah worked in a fashion store, and I often came by to visit. Sarah is an outgoing and spontaneous, funny person, and he had the knack of being the center of attention at all times. Fortunately, he could moderate his otherwise crude sense of humor in dealing with the customers. However, he would rarely let an opportunity for a flirt or a laugh go by if the

situation permitted it. He was likely to adjust his comments to the customers in question, which the following two incidents should illustrate.

One time, Sarah's *palagi* friend Jeff came to the store to buy a pair of shorts. Sarah got a kiss on one cheek, but demanded a kiss on the other one too, and Jeff humored her. Sarah wanted to know if he was wearing boxers underneath his *lavalava*, whereby Jeff teasingly lied and said no. Consequently, Sarah grabbed hold of his *lavalava* and tried to pull it off, but failed. To Sarah's amusement, Jeff did take off his *lavalava* and swing it over his head, whereupon Sarah chased him to the dressing room. I am positive Sarah would have dressed him personally if permitted to.

During another incident, Sarah went to great lengths to embarrass me. Two good-looking guys we both knew had entered the store, and Sarah's mischievous expression forebode humiliation on my behalf. Sarah became obnoxious, made crude sexual remarks and jokingly came on to them. He made me a reluctant part of it all by putting words in my mouth and quoting me falsely to the boys, completely ignoring my protests. The boys responded by smiling shyly and talking in a low voice to each other.

During both these colorful incidents, the store was empty except for other employees. One should take into account that the customers were familiar with Sarah, and that the time spent with these customers were like a time-out from regular work. As mentioned earlier, identical settings may have different contexts depending on the people present. His rather calm and collected behavior towards unknown customers suggests that Sarah would have behaved differently towards Jeff and the two boys had there been other customers present. My general impression is that when in a work context, fa'afafine will, like most employed people who take pride in their work, concentrate on executing the job the best they know how. The good work that fa'afafine do contributes to positive attitudes towards fa'afafine. For instance, fa'afafine are known to be hardworking individuals. It is reasonable to believe that many employed fa'afafine will strive to uphold a good reputation. A few informants expressed annoyance and concerns about the negative influence certain criminal and dishonest fa'afafine could have on the reputation of fa'afafine in general.

Bars and nightclubs are usually characterized by loud music and the constant hum of people talking and laughing. The atmosphere is usually positive, whether it is excited or relaxed. The large number of people and the noise level in the room make these settings and contexts rich on impressions. It takes more for an individual to stand out from a nightclub crowd than to blend in, compared to out on the street. Possibly, the nightclub context subdues the effect of the individual's behavior, thereby constituting a setting where fa'afafine can clearly express their gender identity in public without drawing an inappropriate amount of attention to themselves⁶⁹.

In addition to learning about workplaces and bars/restaurants as settings for contextual behavior, I explored the school as a setting that could encourage certain behavior. Although most of my informants were no longer in school, we had conversations about life at school as a young fa'afafine, and possible challenges like teasing. Several of the informants' statements illustrate ways in which they produced their gender identity through actions that distinguished them from other boys, and indicated that they were fa'afafine.

Mani told me about his time in high school, where he asserted he behaved like a girl. "I've broken all the rules," he remarked with apparent pride. He would attend meetings for boys as well as for girls. The boys would accept Mani as a sister, and let him have a word at the meetings. "Let our sister here say something," the boys would say, as he often represented a different point of view. He would use the girls' lavatory if he only needed to use the sink or the mirror. Apparently, the vice president did not like fa'afafine. Mani relayed how former fa'afafine students had experienced a hard time, and that they had come into the schoolyard looking downcast. In contrast, Mani said he had created "a little community". He fought if necessary, and stated, "I can be a girl and a boy." As in a pantomime, he pretended to set his ladylike identity to the side, and then locked his hands into fists. In his opinion, life at school was generally easy for fa'afafine, and teasing was not really a problem.

When I asked Frieda how his school years had been, he exclaimed, "*Manaia!*" (Good!). He stated, "No teasing. I was acting very quietly. I was a very good fa'afafine then.

⁶⁹ Stigma is known to be attached to individuals who draw attention to themselves (O'Meara 1990: 73).

I was always well behaved.” At that point in the conversation, a friend of Frieda who is also a fa’afafine, shot in, “In the classroom yes, but in the toilet, no ...,” and shrieked with laughter. Frieda rolled his eyes, and continued, “When I went to college, I sang in a choir, and they let me sing the theme song at the school’s 100th anniversary. It was a big choir, and I sang soprano. They also let me organize the girls’ pageant at our school. My friends were a mix of girls, boys, and fa’afafine. There were a lot of fa’afafine, and I was the best,” he giggled. “I was the best because the others were from the country side, and I’m from town. There were nine fa’afafine, and the school had about 1500 students.”

Tiresa, who had gone to an all-boys school, blurted out, “I was the only girl!” and laughed. About his time in school, he said, “ It was alright. I was in men’s college, and everyone called me a girl, and I didn’t mind. When we did the *siva* (traditional Samoan dance) in school, I was the only one who got to do the *taupou* (village princess)⁷⁰. When we put on plays, I always got a woman’s part. There were five or six fa’afafine in our school altogether, and there were three of us in my class.” Like Tiresa, Nancy had also been appointed the part of the *taupou* at school performances.

Sarah had evidently been a feisty and assertive young fa’afafine. He stated, “Teasing was never a problem for me—they were scared of me. I’d beat the shit out of them. And, I had too good grades in school. Baseball was my favorite game those days. I always played with the girls. My teacher allowed it, until I started going to a government school. They tried to force me to play rugby, but they didn’t succeed.”

Along similar lines, Tony declared, “ I was never teased. I was always at the top of the class, and got respect for that. But I know some other fa’afafine who were teased. I was like the boss,” and he laughed. “I was hanging out with the older kids, so it was not a problem for me. I was successful in school. Nobody would dare tease me. Other fa’afafine were teased. Still happens. College and university were fun. High jump was my game. I like soccer and netball. If I felt like playing with the girls, I’d play with them. The boys played rugby. I never played rugby—too rough. Hate that game.”

⁷⁰ A *taupou* is a village princess, usually the daughter of one of the high chiefs. In earlier times, it was important she remained a virgin until marriage, and she was therefore strictly guarded.

The statements above depict fa'afafine as successful and self-confident students who displayed courage, willpower, and talent at school. Naturally, such a description cannot hold true for all fa'afafine, and as Mani and Tony pointed out, some fa'afafine were teased (see also chap. 10). Informants have given examples of how they ignored prohibitions, broke rules, or forced their will through, when challenged by school authorities or unfriendly students. As illustrated previously, fa'afafine are known to "have it in their wits or in their fists". The stories from schooldays suggest that character traits such as assertiveness and willpower often are associated with fa'afafine and constitute part of the schemas that many hold for fa'afafine. Plausibly, these are traits that fa'afafine to a great extent strive for and try to demonstrate. Additionally, these comments about personal success can be intended to draw a favorable picture of themselves as individuals. The comments can also create an impression of a society that tolerates them as fa'afafine, or a society that is not capable of controlling fa'afafine under any circumstance.

Another setting that most fa'afafine are familiar with is the church. Samoa is a Christian country, and numerous different congregations are represented. Among the churches, there are variations in views⁷¹ on fa'afafine and in expectations to fa'afafine's actions in church and in life in general. One man told me that fa'afafine can never come to church in a dress. However, after one visit to the Catholic Church, I could disregard that statement as representative for all churches.

That Sunday morning in the Catholic Church, I found myself in the choir section where I had joined my fa'afafine friend Tala⁷². As I looked around, two other fa'afafine caught my eye. One was in the company of a woman, and they were both beautifully dressed in long, white *pule'asi*. White is a common color to wear in church, and in some churches it is compulsory, although not in the Catholic. Apart from having narrower hips and being slightly taller than the average woman, I had to look twice before I was convinced this person was not a woman. The other fa'afafine I noticed sat in the pew behind me. He was dressed in a blouse and a long skirt, and a hat was placed askew on his head. His polished

⁷¹ A more detailed presentation of the various churches and their attitudes towards fa'afafine will follow later.

⁷² Tala was presentably dressed in an ironed shirt, an *ie faitaga* and a tie. However, Tala always dressed as a man, and apart from adding a tie, he had not changed his attire for the occasion.

nails and bright red lipstick gave him a neat and well-groomed appearance. The psalms were often divided into women's and men's part, and the fa'afafine behind me always sang with the women. Fa'afafine informants Nancy, Tony, and Keri also sang soprano in their church choir, and attended the sermon dressed as women.

I talked to informant Mani about attending church, because I knew he was quite involved with his church. I remember he once told me that his pastor did not really like fa'afafine, and that the church prefers that fa'afafine do not dress like women. "They say that God did not create fa'afafine," Mani explained. He told me it was all right, and that he still was active within the church and sang in the choir. The church was the reason he offered for cutting off the long hair that he used to have. Even though everyone in his church knew he was a fa'afafine, he said he tried to moderate his actions. "What actions"? I asked, and he answered, "Oh, you know, like this....", and he waved his hand in a feminine gesture, and added, "I try to behave." I understood his last comment to mean that he tried to limit his flamboyant behavior to a minimum in order not to attract attention to his fa'afafine identity, considering that the pastor did not approve of fa'afafine.

One informant belongs to Seventh-Day Adventist Church and commented jokingly in a deadly serious tone of voice, "The toughest church in the world," but noted, "I'm treated good, with respect." He also told me that he had gone to a lot of different churches, and that it did not really matter all that much which one he went to. He commented that sometimes people would look at him, "but I'll just smile and wave to them, you know. I don't care." He continued, "I went to the Catholic for a while. I didn't feel there was any discrimination at the Catholic Church. Then they started to call me Lady Diana, and they started to make sarcastic remarks about my appearance in church. A few people in the congregation said these things. They reckoned I was coming there for a fashion show because of my expensive suits and hats with a veil. I really dress up to go to church."

Conclusively, in the informants' accounts of their actions at school and at church depicted above, there are especially five common denominators that appear worth noting. The first three denominators deal with entertainment, while the last two deal with sports. First of all, four fa'afafine mentioned on their own initiative that they sang in a choir, in

church, or at school. Secondly, and more significantly, four informants reported with some pride that they sang soprano. Boys and men sing in choirs, but only women sing soprano. The third shared denominator has to do with how fa'afafine commonly are given the part of a female in stage performances. Three informants accounted being assigned the role of the *taupou* at school performances. Dancing like women does not only take place during schooldays, however. Especially one informant would on numerous occasions proudly and eagerly leap off his chair and perform a female Samoan dance when the right music flowed from the speakers at a bar. Also, fa'afafine always perform the female's part in traditional dances at the Cindy show.

The last two common denominators are concerned with sports. Netball is generally a women's sport, and while women and fa'afafine play netball, rugby is the ultimate sport for men. Many fa'afafine used to play netball in their school days, and some still played or watched the game. One informant was a netball coach for children. The final point is an apparent dislike among some fa'afafine for rugby. One informant asserted he hated the game and that it was too rough. Instead, he enjoyed soccer and netball and would sometimes join the girls. Another informant who refused to play rugby, had baseball as his favorite game. The statements suggest that rugby is in part disliked because of what the sport denotes. Rugby is the most popular male sport in Samoa, and women do not play it; that is, there are no women's rugby teams. Plausibly, netball and other sports that women play are more popular among fa'afafine than rugby because the sports do not by definition classify the players as males. Also, as other sports like soccer and baseball can get rough and physically challenging, it is not necessarily the roughness of sports itself that some fa'afafine find objectionable. Rather, it could be the masculinity of the macho game of rugby, signaled through violent body contact and exclusive male access, that some fa'afafine find objectionable. Especially netball that is not played by men denotes femininity and thereby compliments a feminine self-perception. Similarly, a couple of informants described certain male chores as too rough (see above), and preferred the finer female tasks. As with rugby and netball, male chores and female chores denote masculinity and femininity respectively.

Gender as Performance

In order to better understand the full meaning of “doing gender”, one must appreciate the cognitive system of dual organization in Samoa (Shore 1981: 206) and the importance of performance (Shore, pers. comm.). According to Shore, Samoans “elaborate an extensive set of oppositions that may be shown to involve “Male” and “Female”⁷³ gender discriminations” (op. cit.). For instance, speech styles, dance styles, eating styles, political power, and *matai* (chiefs) are divided into the opposition Male and Female (ibid.: 206-207). The intricate connections between speech styles, political power, and kinds of *matai* will be explained below. The gender discrimination in dress styles and work has already been described in this chapter.

Samoans believe that all individuals psychologically and socially contain both Male and Female aspects of their identities. A person’s biological sex is thus merely one aspect of his or her gender identity. This is especially evident in the dual division of speech styles, commonly referred to as the t-language and the k-language. For example, in the former speech style, the word *teine* (girl) is pronounced as it is written, with a t-sound. In the k-language, the same word is pronounced “*keige*”. The ‘t’ is replaced with a k-sound, and the ‘n’ is replaced with a ng-sound, which is how a Samoan ‘g’ is pronounced. Shore writes that the t-language is a formal pronunciation and is known as “good speaking”. The t-language has Female associations in that it is connected to dignified occasions where socially proper behavior takes precedence of personal impulses, regardless of whether the speaker is a man or a woman. In contrast, the k-language is a colloquial speech style. It is “bad talking”, as it is intimate in character, and associated with uninhibited expression of personal feelings. Most Samoans, including fa’afafine, speak in the k-language, but it is linked to boys and men (ibid.: 206-207). The division of speech styles into Male and Female and its incoherence with gender identities illustrate the Samoan belief that they contain both Male and Female aspects.

Political power is also dually divided, and the two aspects are *pule*, Male power, and *mana*, Female power (see chap. 2). *Pule* is associated with the political class that has secular

⁷³ Shore capitalizes Male and Female when referring to gender associations rather than biological males and females (1981: 206).

authority, like husbands, and *matai*. *Pule* is the power to effect change, and it is connected to utilitarian activities. *Mana* is associated with God, and the roles of sister and father's sister. *Mana* is a sacred force that prevents improper action through supernatural sanctions. *Pule* and *mana* complement and oppose each other in their properties of being Male/Female, active/passive, and secular/sacred, respectively. Both powers are connected to *matai*, who are divided into *ali'i* (high chief) and *tulafale* (the high chief's orator) (ibid. 200, 207).

On an abstract level, *ali'i* are known to hold the Female power *mana*, while *tulafale* have the Male power *pule* (ibid.: 207-208). *Ali'i* are generally characterized by formal, dignified, and controlled behavior, and their dignity is commonly displayed negatively, by what they do not do. While *ali'i* most often speak in the formal Female speech style, *tulafale* generally use colloquial Male speech. As orators with *pule*, they speak and act on behalf of the *ali'i*. The *tulafale* is associated not with denial and control, but rather impulsive and assertive behavior (Shore 1982: 224, 242-243, 274).

In addition to the system of dual organization, the strong element of performance in the Samoan culture is also relevant for grasping the context in which gender is done. Performance enters into a wide range of traditional entertainment, rituals, and ceremonies, like village dances, *poula* (Joking Night), kava ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and *matai* title bestowals. The central role of performance is also evident in the popularity of occasions like festivals, sports arrangements, celebrations, school performances, and beauty pageants. At the two major hotels in Apia, there is a *Fia Fia* Night⁷⁴ every week, and smaller motels and beach accommodations often offer music and dance entertainment for the guests.

A regular participant at stage performances is the *fa'aaluma* (conductor-clown), who most often is a man (Mageo 1998: 196). He usually functions as an MC, and he leads choruses, speaks to the audience, and generally conducts the roll of events on stage. During pre-colonial Joking Nights, the *fa'aaluma* would lead the comic and wild dances that counterpointed the graceful and dignified dance of the *taupou* (village princess) (ibid.). I visited a *Fia Fia* Night in Apia, where the man running the show appeared to have the role of *fa'aaluma*. His demeanor was characteristic for a *fa'aaluma*, in the sense that his

⁷⁴ *Fia Fia* Night is an evening of entertainment, where traditional music, song, and dance are the main focus. *Fiafia* means happy/happiness, joy.

mannerism was often exaggerated. His facial expressions were overstated and comical, and he moved quickly and with grace. He frequently moved his hands in distinct and elegant ways that were effeminate. Concerning the effeminate moves of *fa'aaluma*, Samoan boys often entertain friends by acting like girls. If boys take on the formal role of *fa'aaluma* in entertainment, they tend to act feminine⁷⁵ (Shore in Mageo 1998: 208).

In contrast to witty punch lines of stand-up comedians, the humor of the *Fia Fia* Night that I attended lay primarily in the *fa'aaluma*'s antics and interaction with others on stage. Judging by the laughter and the applause, the audience found his antics and pranks extremely amusing. The MC was recognizable as a *fa'aaluma* due to his characteristic behavior, not his attire, which consisted of a *lavalava* and leaf decorations similar to the other male performers. Behavior appears fundamental for determining the social role of a person in Samoa, whether the performance of that role is on a stage or in everyday life.

Mageo describes gender as social fiction, and writes that gender identity in Samoa is located in the persona, which refers to the social role one plays in society (1996a: 590-591). Illustrations above show that Male and Female gender associations do not necessarily link directly to males and females (Shore 1981: 208). Considering the Samoan belief that individuals have Male and Female sides, *fa'afafine* can be described as males who capitalize on and develop their Female side, and do not employ or maintain Male gender markers (Shore 1981: 208-209). *Fa'afafine* means "in the manner of a woman", and males who assume the role of *fa'afafine* generally imitate women through mannerism, physical looks, and activities. It is the display and manipulation of Female gender markers that can be perceived as a performance.

Summary

I have proposed that gender is best understood as a dynamic identity produced and communicated through actions and interaction. In Samoa, this gender construction has its special cultural flavor. In support of this proposition, I have presented common labor tasks

⁷⁵ This way of joking is also an illustration of the Samoan joke style *ula* (Mageo 1998: 208).

and the way they normally are assigned by gender. While some informants stated that they did men's work as well as women's, other informants declared that they preferred female tasks, as they found male tasks too rough or tiring. While doing female chores in the home, I assert that fa'afafine not only produce goods and services, but also a particular fa'afafine gender as well (Berk 1985: 201).

A clearly visible way of conveying a fa'afafine identity is through displaying effeminate body language and dressing in women's clothes. In light of Samoan dress styles, I have depicted how some effeminately fa'afafine dress and use women's accessories. In addition to actively pursuing effeminate gender markers, there are certain male gender markers that can be avoided as part of an attempt to convey femininity, or a fa'afafine identity. For instance, a fa'afafine can refrain from tattooing himself with the masculine *tatau*. He may also avoid many male chores as well as rough and macho sports like rugby, which is a game exclusively for men. Fa'afafine who wish to dress like women will also likely remove facial hair, and avoid wearing masculine clothes like the *ie faitaga*.

In order to exemplify the influence of context on fa'afafine's actions, I have depicted and compared contextual behavior in settings like nightclubs and workplaces. While nightclubs appear to be settings where many fa'afafine intensify the level of effeminacy in their actions, the toned-down manner of several informants at work suggest that workplaces may have the opposite effect on their behavior. Informants' statements about experiences in school and church constitute data from which I have deducted several shared choices of actions. Several sang in choirs, and quite a few were assigned female parts, like singing soprano, and taking the role of the *taupou* in stage performances. A number of informants drew a picture of themselves as self-confident, strong-willed individuals, who handled social challenges well. These self-presentations combined with fa'afafine's notoriety for verbal aggressiveness suggests that assertive qualities are part of many people's schemas for fa'afafine and fa'afafine's self-schemas.

With the intention of placing fa'afafine's performance of gender in a cultural context, I have presented the dual, gendered cognitive system that permeates Samoan organization. Depictions of how Male/Female gender associations connect to speech styles, political

power, and the types of *matai*, are illustrative examples of the system of dual organization. The examples show that gender associations do not necessarily link to biological gender, or to the gender with which one identifies with, as becomes evident in the use of the k-language and t-language.

The prominent place of performance in Samoa is also helpful in grasping how the fa'afafine gender identity can be perceived as a role being played. Traditional entertainment and various occasions where performance is central have been mentioned. I have depicted the role of the *fa'aaluma*, a conductor-clown at entertainments, to illustrate how characteristic behavior is indicative of which social role is being played, and consequently the status of the individual. The example of the MC at *Fia Fia* Night also illustrates how males who imitate typical female conformist behavior are perceived as comical. Entertainment shows featuring fa'afafine hinge on this sense of humor.

In this chapter I have aimed to illustrate how, when Samoan males do typical female activities and manipulate feminine objects to enhance an effeminate appearance, the activities and objects function as gender markers that signal and communicate a fa'afafine identity. The actions are guided by scripts underlying the role of fa'afafine, which when acted out convey which gender identity is assumed. The significance of these gender-marking actions will become all the more comprehensible in the next chapter, where the temporary properties of the fa'afafine gender role is discussed.

7 FA'AFAFINE IDENTITY; PERMANENT OR TEMPORARY

While there appears to be little doubt as to who are defined and define themselves as fa'afafine, it seems to be culturally undetermined whether the fa'afafine identity is permanent or temporary. Fa'afafine generally stress the permanency of their role, but many non-fa'afafine appear to regard the role as one that can be assumed or shed. Thus, the

fa'afafine role is not an imperative status like the Western notion of girl/boy and woman/man, but must be upheld through action, interaction, and display of other characteristic gender markers. As discussed in the previous chapter, gender in Samoa can to a large extent be perceived as “done” rather than “had”⁷⁶, and a person’s behavior is strongly defining of his or her gender identity⁷⁷.

Cross-gendered behavior as a criterion for defining gender liminality is not universal, however, and neither is the common Western perception of gender as permanent (Nanda 1999: 138). Initially, comparative data on gender nonconformists⁷⁸ from primarily Indonesia, North America, India, Brazil, and Oman will be presented. This data describes the defining criteria of gender liminality in the cultures, and how the individuals in question communicate their identity and transition into gender liminal roles. The issue of how culturally specific criteria of gender nonconformity affect the temporality or permanency of a certain gender liminal identity is also approached.

Following the comparative data, I shall use Samoan field data to illustrate how the fa'afafine identity is perceived by some as permanent and ascribed, while others appear to view the fa'afafine role as temporary and assumed. Finally, I will also discuss how the contrasting criteria can be perceived as signs of change in the role of the fa'afafine.

Gender Liminality in a Comparative Light

The Western cultural conception of gender signifies gender as ascribed, invariable, and dichotomous (Nanda 1999: 138). In the United States, transsexuals change anatomy through sex operations, but allegedly do not change gender. In order to be allowed genital surgery, a transsexual must convince psychologists and other medical professionals that he (or she) has always believed to be the opposite gender of what his (or her) anatomy indicates (ibid.: 138-

⁷⁶ A similar difference between having and doing gender is noted by several writers who have focused on how girls and women are ascribed their feminine identity, while boys and men have to achieve their masculine identity (Chodorow 1989: 33). I assert, however, that in Samoa both sexes “do” gender. Like the males who assume a fa'afafine identity, girls and women may assume the liminal gender identity of *fa'atama* by displaying gender nonconforming behavior.

⁷⁷ As characteristic fa'afafine behavior was extensively discussed in chapter 6, behavior as a gender-defining criterion for the fa'afafine role will not be elaborated in this chapter.

⁷⁸ I will focus primarily on male gender nonconformists, although the respective terms denoting the liminal gender identities often include female gender nonconformists.

139). The transformation of becoming a woman involves alteration of personal identity, social identity, and physiology, which according to Bolin implies that transsexuals gradually develop a feminine identity and do not start out with a fixed feminine identity (1994: 449). After surgery, the transsexual is no longer in a transitional stage, but has crossed over and become a woman. Through surgery and the arrangement of legal matters, society allows the individual to assume the identity of a woman in legal, social, and personal ways, thus preserving the Western dichotomy of gender and the notion of gender as permanent and dichotomous (Nanda 1999: 138-139).

In the United States, genitals, gender identity, and choice of sexual partner can be perceived as fundamental criteria for defining gender and gender liminality⁷⁹ (ibid.: 132, 139). However, as illustrated above with the transsexuals, if genitals and gender identity do not denote the same gender, genitals can be modified to match the person's cognitive gender identity. Cross-culturally, however, the defining criteria vary (ibid.). In Indonesia, *banci*⁸⁰ denotes persons with nonconforming gender behavior and/or gender identity (Oetomo 1996: 261). Individuals who appear androgynous in physical features, dress style, and/or behavior, are recognized as *banci*. Commonly, Indonesians also find a person's occupation indicative of a *banci* identity. The term does not imply a certain sexual orientation, and stereotypically, *banci* are known to be impotent and/or have extremely small genitals. The stereotype is false, and *banci* often engage in homosexual sex. An adolescent boy signals transition to *banci* status by starting to cross-dress from time to time. Eventually, he cross-dresses continuously (ibid.: 261, 265).

In India, the traditional social organization of the gender nonconformists *hijras* is part cult and part caste. The members worship the goddess Bahuchara Mata, a version of the Indian Mother Goddess (Nanda 1999: 24). The *hijras* are female impersonators who are hermaphrodites or surgically emasculated. It is through emasculation that the person renounces sexuality and receives the ritual power that sanction *hijras* as ritual performers. The role as ritual performers is essential for the *hijras'* collective positive self-image. At

⁷⁹ Anne Bolin writes that the American gender paradigm emphasizes "reproduction and the biological sexual body as the sine qua non of gender identity and role" (1994: 447).

⁸⁰ Plural forms of the foreign terms for gender nonconformists vary according to the authors from whom I have selected data. I employ the plural forms used by the respective authors.

births and weddings, *hijras* bestow blessings upon the child or newly wedded couple in the name of the Mother Goddess. A large number of *hijras* also earn a living working as homosexual prostitutes, which stands in contrast to their ideal as ascetics to renounce sexual desire and activity (ibid.: 1-15).

Hijra translates to eunuch or hermaphrodite, which both denote impotence in India. Impotence is central in defining *hijras* as not men. Impotence, however, is a necessary but insufficient criterion for becoming *hijra*. A man who dresses and behaves like a woman is a “fake *hijra*” and remains a man until he has his genitals removed. Young boys that are found to be hermaphroditic are reassigned from the male sex to the status of *hijra* (ibid.:14-15). Nanda terms the born hermaphrodite “the paradigm for the alternative sex”, but commonly the *hijra* is a ““useless” creature” (i.e. impotent man) turned powerful through the process of emasculation (1994: 383). The *hijra* role gets its institutionalized character from the culturally shared conception that *hijras* are ascetics and neither man nor woman (Nanda 1999:10).

In most North American Indian cultures⁸¹, there are reports of a distinct but intermediate gender role collectively termed *berdache* that combines social attributes of women and men (Callender and Kochems 1983: 443, Broch 1977: 95). Common denominators among the *berdaches* are that for an indeterminate period of time, they dress, behave, and/or occupy the professions of members of the opposite sex. Importantly, they are permitted to assume the social and marital status of the opposite sex. Typically, in order for a boy to signal his transition to a *berdache* identity, he needs to display behavior characteristic of women (Whitehead 1981: 84-85). Whitehead deems the performance of women’s work to be the most significant gender-defining character, but writes that the coexistence of a feminine occupation and a feminine external appearance was to expected and would likely be mutually reinforcing (ibid.: 88). *Berdaches* display variable sexual behavior, but partners of the *berdaches* are usually non-*berdache* and of the same sex. Not all *berdaches* are homosexual, however, and there are documentations of *berdaches* displaying bisexual and heterosexual behavior (Roscoe 1994: 335).

⁸¹ According to Will Roscoe, male *berdaches* have been documented in 150 North American societies. Approximately half of the societies recognized female *berdaches* as well (1994: 330).

In Brazil, the *travestis* represent an alternative gender identity. They are homosexual, dress in feminine clothes, display effeminate body language, and often modify their bodies with hormones and implants. *Travestis* are not perceived to be, and do not generally regard themselves as, women or men. Instead, *travestis* are categorized as *bicha* (“pest”, “bug”, “female animal”), along with *transformistas* (gay drag artistes), and *transsexuais* (pre-operative transsexuals) (Cornwall 1994: 113, Nanda 2000: 44-46).

Nanda writes that the Brazilian gender ideology is based on the distinction between inserters and insertees during sexual acts. To penetrate is perceived as an active and masculine act, symbolizing male superiority, while to be penetrated is deemed a passive and feminine act, submissive and inferior in comparison (ibid.: 44). One can perceive the gender system to be based on the dichotomy of men versus not-men, where any man who gets penetrated is not-man (ibid. 49). *Travestis* are “made, not born”, through an initiation rite, led by older *travestis*. The making of a *travesti* involves getting a new name, a new identity, and eventually, a new body (Cornwall 1994: 117).

Travestis’ participation in the Afro-Brazilian religions Candomblé is significant. These religions focus on possession trance and entail that Yoruba deities are received by devotees. The deities have a sex, gender, and personality, which replace the devotees’ sex, gender, and personality, when possessed. Family relations among the deities are transferred to fictive family relations among the devotees, thus proscribing sexual relations among the devotees, and among the devotees and other followers (Cornwall 1994: 126, Nanda 2000: 50-52). To receive a deity is comparable to the passive and receptive role during sex. In many Candomblé, possession and ritual performance are restricted to women and *bichas*. However, as vessels of the gods, they enjoy the spiritual power the possession brings, whereby acquiring typical masculine superiority and respect (ibid.: 127). Candomblé offers other ways of thinking about gender through alternative versions of gender and agency. In this sense, the gendered identities of the *travestis* become situational (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 6).

In Oman, one finds the *xaniths*, whom Wikan categorizes as a third gender (1982: 168). The *xaniths* are homosexual males who claim to be women. Although Oman is a

strictly sex-segregated society with numerous arenas inaccessible to members of the opposite sex, *xaniths* are admitted into women's domains. Socially, *xaniths* are generally treated as women, but legally, they are regarded as men. *Xaniths* work primarily as domestic servants and prostitutes. As *xaniths* are banned from wearing women's clothes, they wear clothes that unite characteristics from male and female garments. They wear the male *dishdasha* (ankle-length shirt), but have it sewn in a feminine close-fitted fashion using unpatterned, pastel colored material. In contrast, men dress in white, while women use patterned and brightly colored cloth. *Xaniths* adorn their hair in similar intermediate ways. Other characteristics are the rich applications of perfume and makeup, a swinging gait, a soft voice, and effeminate body language. *Xaniths* are free to move about, but generally stay at home at nights like the women. They eat with women, and do the chores delegated to women (ibid.: 168-174).

A male publicly signals his transition into the role of *xanith* by joining the women singers at weddings. One can become a *xanith* at any age, and one can change identity to *xanith* despite being married (ibid.: 173-174). Commonly, *xaniths* start working as prostitutes in their early teens. Homosexual prostitutes are by definition *xaniths* because they take a passive, receiving role in sexual acts. The significance of the active role during sex is evident in the process whereby a *xanith* can reassume the identity of a man. The change occurs during weddings, where the *xanith* proves his manhood by deflowering the bride. A bloody handkerchief bears witness to penetration and a virginal bride. After this ceremony, the former *xanith* behaves and is treated like a man (ibid.: 174).

Wikan hypothesizes that *xaniths* are not allowed to wear the female *burqa* because *xaniths* are prostitutes. Differences in dress wear uphold an important social distinction between the two genders. Female prostitutes do not exist in theory, and the *xaniths*, as prostitutes, represent a negation of womanhood. By associating *xaniths* with prostitution, women's purity and virtue are emphasized and protected (ibid.: 178).

Some Defining Criteria of Gender Liminality

The data presented above on gender nonconformity in a range of cultures indicate that the criteria used to determine gender and gender liminality vary. It appears that the nature of the

criteria has a bearing on whether the gender liminal role is perceived as temporary or permanent. Transsexuals in the USA modify genitals in order to create a body that matches a gendered self-image. The gendered identity is perceived as ascribed and permanent. In Indonesia, *banci* are publicly recognized primarily on gender nonconforming behavior and androgynous appearance. However, the stereotype that *banci* are impotent and have abnormally small penises suggests that the *banci* identity is perceived by society at large as inborn. Widespread ignorance of *banci*'s homosexual activities and the prevailing stereotype concerning *banci*'s impotence indicate that sexual orientation and sexual activity are not essential criteria. If it is a cultural belief that the decisive trait for *banci* status is inborn, it is likely a shared notion that the *banci* identity is permanent. Nonetheless, a boy signals his transition to *banci* status by starting to cross-dress, which also implies that gender nonconforming appearance is indicative of *banci* identity.

Like the *banci*, *hijras* are easily recognized by gender nonconforming appearance, behavior, and occupation. Unlike the *banci*, however, *hijras* are by definition impotent and emasculated. A male born hermaphroditic is classified as a *hijra*, but impotent men can also be made a *hijra* through emasculation. The removal of the genitals is the crucial criterion, and emasculation distinguishes "real" *hijras* from "fake" *hijras*. The role of *hijra* entails both an ascribed status and an achieved status. The ascribed status of being not-man derives from being impotent and/or genitally imperfect. Through emasculation where *hijras* renounce sexuality, *hijras* achieve the ascetic status that "real" *hijras* hold (Nanda 1999: 15). The *hijra* status appears permanent once achieved.

The *berdaches* among the North American Indians are identified based on occupational pursuit. Cross-dressing and to a lesser degree homosexual orientation are complimentary but insufficient characteristics for categorization of persons into the status of *berdache*. This order of precedence in criteria stands in contrast to the Western gender system, where sexual orientation and sexual activity are generally perceived as determinant traits for gender identity. Cross-dressing and unconventional occupations may indicate gender nonconformity, but are not defining criteria (Whitehead 1981: 97). The role of the

berdache is transitory and can be assumed or shed, signaled by displaying respectively gender nonconforming or conforming behavior.

Males in Brazil cannot be born *travestis*, but are said to be made *travestis* through initiation rites. With a new name, a new identity, and a modified body, former males assume the role of *travestis*. It would appear that physical modifications of the body are permanent aspects of the *travestis*' identity. More importantly, however, is the unalterable state of being a non-man as a consequence of having been sexually penetrated. A *travestis* cannot achieve the status of man, thereby making the *travestis* identity irreversible and apparently permanent.

Like the *berdaches*, the *xaniths* of Oman represent a potentially temporary liminal gender role that can be assumed or shed, depending on the characteristics of the behavior displayed. Males signal transition to *xanith* status by joining the women's choir at weddings. As mentioned, a *xanith* may reassume the role of man by proving his ability to take the man's role in sexual intercourse on his wedding night.

To conclude, the gender defining criteria discussed above suggest that the nature of the criteria influences the character of the liminal gender role. Criteria based on physical and/or psychological traits like genitals, sexual orientation, and impotence, tend to lie at the base of gender nonconforming roles that are perceived as permanent and ascribed. These identities are not necessarily assumed or assigned by others at birth, but once the gender roles are assumed, they appear to be irreversible. Western transsexuals, *hijras*, *banci*, and *travestis*, represent gender nonconformists whose roles can be perceived as permanent. In contrast, criteria that are action-based have a tendency to generate roles of a temporary character. The *berdaches* and *xaniths* are gender liminals who may assume or shed their gender identities by displaying culturally gender conforming or nonconforming behavior. Sexual activity is central in Brazilian gender system, which could lead one to characterize the role of the *travestis* as temporary. However, more significant than the homosexual aspect of the sex that *travestis* participate in, is the use of their genitals and the position taken during sex. *Travestis* are the receivers and are thus permanently not-men.

In the following segment, I will discuss the contrastive ways the role of fa'afafine appears to be perceived. I am under the impression that non-fa'afafine may view the fa'afafine identity as temporary, while fa'afafine informants generally perceive their identity as permanent and innate.

Nature or Nurture

Referring to Polynesia in general, Nanda argues that gender variance has aspects of a role being played, and that these statuses therefore are not necessarily permanent (2000: 64). In accordance with the analyses of Nanda, empirical data from Samoa illustrates how being a fa'afafine can be interpreted as a temporary gender status. The following examples demonstrate the significance of behavior in communicating gender identity and gender transition.

In the documentary by Croall (1999), a scene depicts the “coming out” of a fa'afafine. The father of a fa'afafine recounts the first time the family noticed that their son was behaving differently. The father describes how the son started to wear his *lavalava* like a woman, tied around the chest, and states, “(...) that's when we realized he had changed. He was starting to behave like a fa'afafine” (ibid.). Also males at a young age are recognized as fa'afafine because of perceived gender nonconforming behavior. A teenage boy named Paolo asserted that his seven-year old nephew probably was a fa'afafine. “He's not *ulavale* (cheeky/naughty), and small boys are supposed to be naughty, you know.” Paolo stated that if little boys played with girls and were not naughty there was a possibility that they were fa'afafine. Similarly, an informant stated that the clearest sign of a boy being fa'afafine was if the boy primarily preferred to play with girls.

As with the *berdaches* and *xaniths*, the gender nonconforming role of a fa'afafine is reversible. A male with a fa'afafine identity can reassume⁸² the role of man. One way for a fa'afafine to achieve the status of man is by marrying a woman. In the transition to recognition as man, the fa'afafine must cease to employ feminine gender markers with which he has previously communicated his fa'afafine identity. For instance, a minister told

⁸² I employ words like ‘reversible’ and ‘reassume’, because although boys can be recognized as fa'afafine from an early age, males generally hold the status of boy/man prior to publicly becoming known as a fa'afafine.

about a man who “used to be a fa’afafine”, but who now had a wife, had grown a beard, and did not act or look like a fa’afafine at all. The same minister also said that a fa’afafine could be ordained as a minister if he married (a woman). As marriage is not generally a requirement for ministers in this church, it implies that marriage signals transition from the role of fa’afafine to the role of man. According to Paolo, a man in his congregation had been a fa’afafine before, but was now completely man, despite a slightly feminine body language. Paolo stated that the man had made a testimony in church confirming his transition from fa’afafine to man.

When I asked people why they thought a person became or was a fa’afafine, I was offered various explanations. While some shared their ideas and admitted they were not sure about the cause, others would present their opinions confidently as facts. It would appear that non-fa’afafine were more likely than fa’afafine to offer explanations that emphasized social and psychological factors, rather than biological factors. Some of the explanations given for what could trigger a liminal gender identity in a child were child molestation, gender confusion, and the theory that some parents’ need for a daughter led them to select a son to be raised as a girl.

The latter theory will be discussed further, as it can be used to illustrate contrasts in opinions concerning the origin of fa’afafine identity. The theory implies that a boy’s transition to take on the fa’afafine role may be motivated externally, which also could indicate that who becomes fa’afafine is coincidental. However, if a young boy behaves in nonconforming ways at an early age, it could lead parents to specifically choose that son to be raised as a girl. The selection thus becomes less coincidental. Also, although some parents may raise a son as a girl, the goal is not necessarily to turn the son into a fa’afafine. Some parents could be motivated by the need for help in the house. Like one fa’afafine asserted, “No parents want a fa’afafine. If they could choose, they would prefer not to (raise a fa’afafine).” The following accounts depict two young people who were in part raised as girls.

Fa’afafine informant Sophie was three years old and the youngest of the nine siblings, eight boys and one girl, when he claimed his mother started to dress him in girl’s

clothes. Sophie said, “My mom said she was desperate for another girl. She didn’t say that that is why she dressed me up, but I figured it out. But I think I’d still be a fa’afafine,” meaning he would still be a fa’afafine today even if his mother had not dressed him up. Curiously, the same mother reacted negatively when Sophie gave indications of being a fa’afafine several years later. “When I was eight or nine, my mom realized I walked and talked differently constantly. She started to beat me up and cut my hair. (...) When I was twelve, I knew I was a *mala*,” Sophie stated.

Paolo was of the opinion that it is experiences in a boy’s adolescence that turn him into a fa’afafine. He claimed that boys who lack a father figure and who socialize primarily with girls and women could potentially become fa’afafine. Interestingly, he used himself as an example. Paolo recounted that when he was a small boy, his mother very much wanted a daughter, and she started to dress Paolo in dresses and put lipstick on him. “Luckily,” Paolo said, “I had uncles who knocked me about and made me hard.” He did not have a father present in his life and he stated he felt he lacked a father figure. He claimed that he probably would have become a fa’afafine if it were not for the influence from his uncles, cousins, and friends in his upbringing.

These two accounts oppose each other, although Sophie and Paolo shared the experience of having a mother who dressed them in girl’s clothes. Sophie states that he has been a fa’afafine his whole life, and that he would be a fa’afafine regardless of his mother’s actions. Sophie portrays the fa’afafine role as inborn and unaffected by external influence. Paolo is a teenage boy, but asserts that he could have become a fa’afafine if his relatives had not interfered. Paolo stresses the importance of upbringing, and renders the fa’afafine role a product of agency and influence.

The individuals who brought the theory in question to my attention were non-fa’afafine adults, among others a representative from Jehovah’s Witnesses (see chap. 10). Fa’afafine informants, on the other hand, had the following reactions to the theory. A fa’afafine who had eight sisters said, “Some families don’t have girls, and the boys do the chores the girls would do, but that doesn’t make them fa’afafine. Stupid theory.” Other reactions were, “It’s a fucking stupid theory”, and “It’s wrong, that theory”. Damion found

the theory hysterically funny, and replied in between giggles, “That’s bullshit! That’s a whole lot of shit. Whoever said that must have been really stupid. Just imagine it literally—it’s really funny. It’s just parents using humor to explain. *Mala* (fa’afafine) may be playing along with it, but they are really *mala*. It’s a much easier way for them (fa’afafine) of explaining it (the fa’afafine identity). The power of clothing... (laughter). Need another house girl?” (More laughter.)

When I asked informants why they were fa’afafine, I found that most of them tended to insist they were born that way. Other common answers were along the lines of, “I’ve always been a fa’afafine”, “It’s biological”, and “Ask God”. A few thought their gender identity had to do with their hormones. Not only fa’afafine explained their gender identity as a result of biology. One mother of a fa’afafine stated that the cause why some males were fa’afafine was “biological, genetic, and hormonal”, and continued to say that, “we (Samoans) do not discriminate against the fact that they are born this way.”

In answer to the question of why some fa’afafine married women, at least four informants answered that probably family pressure forced the fa’afafine into marriage. One added, “Or they do it for their careers. It looks better... But it doesn’t last.” He explained, “It won’t last with women, because it’s men they really want.” Two fa’afafine answered that they did not know why some fa’afafine married, and one commented with a frown, “I think it’s weird.” Another proposed that maybe they were lonely, or afraid of having to live their whole life alone. Damion gave an extensive reply: “It’s mostly the ones that are ‘closets’ (who marry), to prove to themselves that they can be a man—whatever being a man means. I think that’s the reason. I remember a friend of my parents; he came back with a wife from overseas. They had two kids, now they are divorced. I was small then, but even I noticed it seemed wrong. He was so feminine.” Damion pondered a bit before he said, “Maybe they are bisexual? Some seem happy. There are a lot of them (bisexual men) around.” None of the informants proposed that fa’afafine got married because they no longer perceived themselves as fa’afafine.

The Element of Emotion

In asserting that the fa'afafine gender is inborn, informants communicate an understanding of their gender role as biologically determined. The conception of the fa'afafine gender as biological appears to further convey a notion of fa'afafine's identities as "real", or genuine, and in theory unchangeable. By stating that they are born fa'afafine, they indisputably legitimize their gender role, as an inborn role is ascribed without consent, choice, or external motivation. In contrast, the view of the fa'afafine identity as a role that one can assume or shed dismisses the possibility of a strong biological foundation, and includes elements of agency and the possibility of external influence. Also, less significance is given to the emotional aspect of the gender role. The role is perceived to be communicated through behavior, and a change of behavior is sufficient to signal a change of gender role.

In addition to the assertion of being born fa'afafine, many informants state they feel like a woman (see chap. 4) and emphasize the emotional and biological aspects of the fa'afafine role. In contrast to viewing the fa'afafine role as temporary, informants explain characteristic fa'afafine behavior as a natural consequence of the gender deviant emotions that fa'afafine apparently share. Although not all fa'afafine say they feel like women, fa'afafine generally appear to share the notion that their feelings differ from the feelings they perceive to be typical of men.

The emphasis placed on the naturalness of being fa'afafine, that they are born fa'afafine, and that many state they feel like women, may be perceived as a consequence of Western influence. The Western notion of gender identity as permanent and ascribed is fundamentally different from the Samoan view of gender identity as role-based (Mageo 1996a: 591). It appears plausible that increased familiarity with Western gay identities and Western views on gender have influenced many fa'afafine's self-schemas and their schemas for fa'afafine behavior. Acquaintance with the foreign view of gender identity as ascribed and permanent could explain why many informants state they are born fa'afafine and feel like women, or feel differently from men. Without knowledge of the Western perception of gender, these assertions would bear little meaning in a society where gender is recognized primarily by gender marked behavior and appearance.

From an analytical point of view, I propose that the scripts on which the role of fa'afafine is based are in a process of change. The hegemonic cultural model for gender in Samoa appears to have taken up an unprecedented element of emotion, which is increasingly replacing gendered behavior as the defining criterion of gender identity. At the present time, the criteria of emotionally not identifying with men and being sexually attracted to males, appear especially prevalent among fa'afafine. However, it is likely that this altered perception on gender and the fa'afafine role will become increasingly prevalent in society in general as a consequence of continuing influence from fa'afafine and the West. The growing notion of gender as emotionally based, rather than behaviorally based, allows the variety of appearances and behaviors among fa'afafine that is presently observable, without affecting the use of the term "fa'afafine". Nonetheless, this variety has inspired new terms for subgroups of fa'afafine, like "fa'afafine-*teine*" and "fa'afafine-*tama*" (see chap. 5).

With references to changes in Samoa, Besnier writes, "In the early 1990s, Samoa is witnessing the emergence of individuals who understand themselves as having a gay identity in the Western sense of the term and position themselves in society differently from *fa'afafine*" (1994: 304, orig. italics). Besnier does not describe what he means by a Western sense of a gay identity, or how these individuals position themselves differently from fa'afafine. I interpret "gay identity" to mean a gender identity that is ascribed, permanent, and homosexual in orientation. A possible interpretation is that Besnier uses "fa'afafine" to refer to a traditional gender liminal role, thereby comparing what can be perceived as a modern, urban fa'afafine role with a traditional, rural fa'afafine role. Field data supports the argument that there are individuals who understand themselves as having a gay identity, although I find critical comments necessary. Data supports or undermines Besnier's idea that these individuals position themselves differently from fa'afafine, depending on how one interprets Besnier's use of "fa'afafine".

First of all, a few informants identified with the term "gay", while others denied, sometimes vehemently, that they were "gay" (see chap. 5). The identification and familiarity with "gay" and a gay identity by some fa'afafine can be perceived as a new trend in Samoa. However, it should also be taken into account that conversations with informants took place

in English. It appears plausible that informants use the term “gay”, which is a functional substitute for the exclusively Samoan term “fa’afafine”, more loosely around Western foreigners for whom they know the term bears meaning. This use of the concept “gay” could give the impression of a stronger and more widespread identification with the term than what is actually the case. The fact that informants employ the term “gay” nonetheless testifies to awareness of the term and its referential meaning.

Although some informants acknowledge a gay identity, it is my conviction that the gay identity does not replace their fa’afafine identity⁸³. Nothing appears to indicate that there is yet a culturally shared conception of an alternative to the role of fa’afafine. A male who is not a fa’afafine is a man, and a male who identifies with the term “gay” is still a fa’afafine. In this sense, individuals who perceive themselves as gay do not position themselves differently from fa’afafine, as they *are* fa’afafine.

If the term “fa’afafine” refers to fa’afafine who lead a traditional and rural life as opposed to urban fa’afafine, this makes sense because observable behavior shows how rural and urban fa’afafine are positioned differently in society. Urban fa’afafine generally lead more independent lives than fa’afafine in rural villages, as they typically have employed work, money to spend on themselves, more opportunities to meet new people and other fa’afafine, and generally more personal freedom than fa’afafine in rural villages, where *matai* are in position to control village life (see chap. 2). Rural fa’afafine are typically more family oriented in praxis than urban fa’afafine, as they primarily do domestic work and rarely hold jobs outside of the home. Access to bars and nightclubs are scarce or non-existent, and chances of meeting new people and being exposed to new impulses are limited and fewer than in town. In this sense, one can say that there have emerged individuals in Samoa who position themselves in society differently from (traditional) fa’afafine. However, if this latter interpretation of “fa’afafine” is the intended meaning, it is unfortunate that Besnier does not make clear that the individuals who identify with “gay” also perceive themselves as fa’afafine.

⁸³ One informant asserted he was gay and denied being fa’afafine. However, this informant was only part Samoan and had lived most of his life overseas. Neither he nor I perceive his self-image to be typical for gender nonconforming Samoans.

Besnier also argues that Polynesian gender liminality should not be perceived as a third gender, because liminality operates within the boundaries of a dualistic view of gender and its respective symbols, leaving no room for an “in-between” category (ibid.: 319, 326). He writes that the terms “gender liminality” and “gender-liminal persons” most correctly describe Polynesian gender nonconformists’ “intermediate-gender status” (ibid.: 287). Importantly, Besnier writes, “While liminality is best viewed as a borrowing process rather than as a role or identity, it does give rise secondarily to a rather loosely defined identity” (ibid.: 327). What is borrowed, are social and cultural attributes that gender liminals employ or shed in varying degrees dependent on context. As the employment of attributes varies among the gender liminals, individual differences arise. Last but not least, Besnier asserts that the perspective of gender liminality is the preferred model for accounting for the variability within the category (ibid.).

I support the view that concepts like “gender liminals” and “gender liminality” are useful terms for gender nonconformists. However, I do not conceive the terms as necessarily being in opposition to the perception of gender liminals as constituting a separate gender category, or a third gender. Additionally, perceiving gender liminality as a borrowing process rather than a role or identity is not compatible with my field data or with the analyses I have done based on Mageo’s view on gender in Samoa as a social role. It is my opinion that Besnier pays insufficient heed to the emotional aspect of the fa’afafine identity, which I have illustrated is fundamental in informants’ self-presentations. As discussed above, Besnier notes changes in Samoan gender liminality, but appears to oppose fa’afafine with individuals claiming a gay identity. The changes take place, so to speak, outside the role of fa’afafine. In contrast, I argue that changes are taking place *within* the role of the fa’afafine. Also, I present the gender role as (increasingly becoming) emotionally based, which renders the gender identity as permanent, rather than loosely defined and fleetingly based on borrowed attributes. I perceive schema theory as a better model than Besnier’s perspective of gender liminality for explaining variability within the category of Samoan gender nonconformists (see chap. 4).

Summary

Two issues have been the focus of this chapter. First, opposing perceptions of the fa'afafine identity have been discussed. It appears that while fa'afafine informants present their gender identity as permanent and inborn, several statements from non-fa'afafine suggest that some Samoans view the fa'afafine role as temporary and subject to external influence. The second issue is how diverging gender-defining criteria of the fa'afafine role perceptively result in contrasting ways of conceiving the fa'afafine identity.

Data on gender liminals in North-America, Indonesia, India, Brazil, and Oman, have been presented in order to show a cross-cultural variety of gender defining criteria, as well as to illustrate how the criteria influence whether the gender role is perceived as ascribed or permanent. Criteria like sexual orientation, genitals, and impotence, appear to generate permanent and ascribed gender identities. In contrast, criteria that are action based like ways of dressing, body language, and occupation, appear often to lie at the base of gender roles of a temporary character.

Following the comparative data, I have presented the two contrasting ways the fa'afafine identity appears to be perceived. On the one hand, the possibility of assuming the role of fa'afafine or reassuming the role of man by change of behavior suggests that the fa'afafine identity is potentially a temporary role. On the other hand, fa'afafine informants' assertions of being born fa'afafine indicate that many fa'afafine perceive their gender identity as permanent in character. Several informants claim they feel like a woman, and that their characteristic fa'afafine behavior is a consequence of these gender nonconforming emotions. The precedence placed on the element of emotion appears novel and can be interpreted as an indication of undergoing change in the role of fa'afafine and the cultural model of gender in Samoa. With respect to this change, Besnier's perception of Polynesian gender liminality as a borrowing process, or at best as comprising individuals with loosely defined gender identities, appears somewhat outdated. I have proposed that these shifts in perceptions of the fa'afafine role and in many fa'afafine's presentations of self are possibly a result of influence from the West, where gender typically is perceived as ascribed and permanent. I maintain, however, that although the defining criteria may be in the process of

change, the concept “fa’afafine” remains. There does not appear to be an alternative to the role of fa’afafine other than the role of man. Nonetheless, new categorizing terms like fa’afafine-*teine* and fa’afafine-*tama* that differentiate between fa’afafine based on behavior and appearance, give evidence to changing perceptions of which criteria are considered fundamental to the role of fa’afafine. In time, the criterion of emotionally identifying with women, or not identifying with men, may replace characteristic effeminate behavior as the ultimate defining criterion of a fa’afafine gender identity.

8 THE APPEARANCE OF THE DRAG QUEEN

Presently in Samoa, fa’afafine are often associated with entertainment and stage performance. In order to explore why fa’afafine are connected to show business, I depict in this chapter contemporary as well as traditional entertainment, relying heavily on the works of Mageo (1996a, 1999). The aim is to reveal possible connections between pre-colonial entertainment and the entertainment featuring fa’afafine that prevailed in Apia in 2001.

Initially, traditional entertainment and the influence missionization has had on it will be depicted. The next segment presents contemporary entertainment, including the Cindy show and fa'afafine beauty pageants. Lastly, the characteristic style of performance that fa'afafine are known for presently, is depicted and interpreted. Especially contrastive aspects feminine/non-feminine and virginal/sexual that are perceptible in the role of the fa'afafine are elaborated on.

Traditional Entertainment and the Impact of Missionization

Before the missionaries came to Samoa in the 19th century, *poula* was a night of entertainment staged in the honor of a visiting group from another village. While the visiting party usually was male, the group hosting them was usually female (Mageo 1998: 88-89). *Poula* has been translated to Joking Night, *po* meaning evening or night. *Ula* is a joke made at the expense of another person's dignity, while appearing to be made at the expense of one's own status. Mageo points out that dignity is the bodily idiom of status. As *ula* entails undignified antics where things sexual or scatological are verbally or bodily exposed, the dignity of another is offended through the standard Samoan insult of self-exposure. The consequence is playful assaults on hierarchical respect (ibid.: 196). The performances during Joking Nights supposedly became increasingly uninhibited throughout the night, as each party would challenge each other with songs and dances that had to be equaled by the opponent party. In the spirit of the *ula*, these mock competitions constituted mock attacks upon the dignity of the other village (ibid.: 89).

Missionaries did not approve of all the various elements in Joking Nights, especially not the exhibitionistic dances. With Christian ideals like chastity and modesty, missionaries would not tolerate the girls' provoking dances. Joking Nights became joking theater, eliminating the dances and calling the entertainment *Faleaitu*, meaning a house of spirits, which were the houses used for Joking Nights. Gradually, sometime between the 1930s and the 1960s, men replaced female comedians. Men's presence and behavior on stage appeared to be more acceptable and less in conflict with Christian ideals (Mageo 1996a: 594).

Despite the missionaries' wish of banning all dancing, Samoans, even the ministers, resisted. Instead, the character of the dance became important (Mageo 1998: 197). The first performance of the Joking Night was by the *taupou*, the ceremonial village virgin, followed by other dignified dances like synchronized sitting dances, standing dances, and the *taualuga*. The *taualuga* was a dance led by the highest ranked person present, usually a high *matai*. The dances mentioned here were known to be of good character and went under the term *siva*, originally a word referring to singing rather than dancing. Mageo points out that during a *taualuga*, other dancers engage in wild choreographic jesting, called *ai'aiuli*, a contracted and displaced version of exhibitionistic dancing smuggled in under the cover of a new name (ibid.: 194-198).

Interestingly, the *siva* underwent changes in colonial times. The *taualuga*, formerly danced by the highest *matai* present, was taken over by the *taupou*. The change emphasized the ideal of female premarital chastity stressed by missionaries and demonstrated the status ascent of the virginal girl. The role of the *taupou* was in other words elevated from Joking Nights to her central part in the *siva*. This will also explain why the jesters may be boys, or older women and men, but never young girls (ibid.: 200). Such obscene behavior was not fitting for a dignified virginal young girl. Margaret Mead describes the original motive of the jester's dance to function as a comic relief for the *taupou*'s beautiful dance. The jesters honor the *taupou* by mocking her. The higher the rank of the *taupou*, the higher the rank of the people deigning to the role of the jester, a dance characterized by horseplay and exaggeration of stereotyped figures (1961: 115).

Following Mageo's line of thinking that asserts that missionization has contributed to a destabilization of the sex-gender system in Samoa (op. cit.: 208), the *faleaitu* (joking theater) is central in shedding light upon the fa'afafine's part in entertainment today. Relying on work by Caroline Sinavaiana (1992a, 1992b) and Bradd Shore (1977, 1981), Mageo describes how these comedian nights, allowing only men as performers, focused on masculine sex and gender. They featured men as wives and made mockery of the man's authority. "By undercutting the secular authority of her husband and his position within the family, the Christian-colonial wife deprives him of his precontact gender role and implicitly

feminizes him” (1996a: 599). A male/female dichotomy collapses, as the “wife” is not a female, which feminizes the husband and leaves them both somewhere in between the binary oppositions of male/female (ibid., see also Broch 1985: 275-276). The performance could perhaps also indicate the chaos that would prevail, were the gender boundaries between men and women to collapse, as is often the message in rites of inversion (Broch 1985: 278).

The “wives” in the *faleaitu* were not necessarily fa’afafine; they merely dressed as women for the sake of the performance (Mageo 1996a: 600). The effeminately dressed men of present entertainment however, are usually fa’afafine. Mageo writes that the *faleaitu* transvestism was a device, and that there has been a shift from fictive to real transvestites (ibid.:)⁸⁴. This change may have entailed a shift in the connotations of the performance. Compared to men who dress up as women largely for the sake of supplying the performance with a “female” character, many fa’afafine strive to be like a woman regardless of whether they are on stage or off. In a way, the boundaries between men and women have been crossed, or under any circumstance, challenged. Chaos, however, has not resulted. On the contrary, a gender role different from that of women’s and men’s has been institutionalized, as is the case in many other cultures (see chap. 7). One could perhaps argue that gender liminals, as “matter out of place”, have been categorized and put in place as a result of what Mary Douglas terms “pollution behavior” (1975: 50-51)⁸⁵. Thus, I suggest that in contrast to the men who dressed as women, fa’afafine on stage do not represent a threat of chaos. Rather, through exaggerated female-like behavior and salacious humor, fa’afafine represent the negation of women. I will return to this matter below.

There has also been an interesting shift from fa’afafine portraying wives in *faleaitu*, to portraying Christian-colonial sisters, or virginal *taupou*, in contemporary entertainment (ibid.). In a sense, the fa’afafine replaces both the male clown in *faleaitu*, and the *taupou*. It allows for fa’afafine in entertainment business to be jesters as well as gracious female impersonators (Senelick 2000: 461).

⁸⁴ See chap. 5 for further discussion of the term “transvestite”.

⁸⁵ Douglas refers to Lord Chesterfield who defined dirt as “matter out of place”. Dirt includes “all events which blur, smudge, contradict, or otherwise confuse accepted classifications”. Pollution behavior is the reactions to these events (Douglas 1975: 50-51).

Drag Shows and Fa'afafine Beauty Pageants

Illuminated by the spotlight, Cindy enters and heads for center stage, mastering the art of walking gracefully on heels that are so high that he literally is on his toes. With the microphone firmly in one hand, he flashes a smile at the audience and leans matter-of-factly into his hip. His long black hair is put up and fastened with hairpins, and his face is professionally made up. A makeup foundation renders his skin perfectly smooth, while a reddish-brown blush accentuates the high cheekbones. His lips are painted red, and thick, black, false eyelashes give his brown eyes a dramatic and intense look. Arrayed in a black evening gown and boa, Cindy is quite a sight to behold. As the murmur dies down, Cindy starts addressing the audience in English and has them laughing within seconds. The following two hours of the Cindy show is a spectacle of humor, song and dance, performed by a cast consisting of three fa'afafine, one girl, and about five young men. Comments, lyrics, and body language play unabashedly on sex, which is the core of the humor. The femininity of the fa'afafine, who never play the part of a man, is accentuated in the contrast with the butch male dancers, radiating masculinity and sex appeal in dances with explosive energy.

The show is highly varied and contains numbers like solos sung by Cindy himself, playbacks, traditional Samoan dancing, the Hawaiian hula performed by the cast's only female, Cindy's Tina Turner and Whitney Houston imitations, and songs like "Greased Lightnin'" and "Maccarena" featuring the male dancers. The show is staged every Saturday



Photo 4. The Cindy Show.



Photo 5. The Cindy Show.



Photo 6. The six contestants in the fa'afafine beauty pageant, Miss Showgirl.

at Kitano Tusitala Hotel, one of the largest hotels in town⁸⁶. Consequently, many in the audience are tourists and other visitors. The show seems to appeal to a wide range of people, which is reflected in the composition of the audience. Samoans, foreigners, men and women, young as well as old, appear to enjoy themselves, and clap enthusiastically as one act relieves another.

At the end, a couple of the boys round up the show with an enthralling *siva afi* (fire dance). Cindy then bids everyone a good night and thanks the sponsors and the audience. Sometimes he takes the opportunity to make a few final teasing comments to embarrassed *palagi* men in the front row, or he makes his way out into the audience to chat.

Besides the Cindy show, there is another form of entertainment that also stars fa'afafine: the fa'afafine beauty pageants. During my stay, there were two pageants, Miss Tutti Frutti and Miss Showgirl. Both were held at the Kitano Tusitala Hotel. The pageants commonly have somewhere between six and twelve contestants who compete in various categories like for instance eveningwear, show costume, hats, bathing suits, underwear, and talent. There is also usually an interview where the contestants have to answer a few questions⁸⁷. The jury evaluates the participants and elects a winner within each category, and a winner for the pageant as a whole. People in general regard the pageants as funny, silly entertainment, and expect a night of goofy antics and a good laugh. Several commented that they enjoyed the fa'afafine pageants more than the ordinary Miss Samoa pageants where young girls compete, because the fa'afafine always were so hilarious. Although most of the audience regarded the fa'afafine pageants as a joke, some contestants appeared to take it quite seriously. I watched a winner dry tears of joy while another sulked as he was he forced to settle as third runner-up.

The pageants are popular entertainment and attract full houses. Despite an age limit of 18 years due to the likelihood of acts and remarks regarded unsuitable for young eyes and ears, there is a wide variety of ages and people present, from the ordinary man and woman to Members of Parliament. However, a preponderance of the audience appears to be women.

⁸⁶ To my knowledge, the Cindy show ceased in 2002.

⁸⁷ At Miss Showgirl, I was asked by the organizer to conduct the interviews, which I did.

Typically, a group of girl friends attend the show together and make it a girls' night out⁸⁸. The entrance fee of USD 7–10 is high for those with a limited cash income, and consequently, not everyone can afford to come. After covering expenses, the remaining proceeds from the pageants are given to a good cause. The profit from Miss Tutti Frutti went to a home for the elderly run by nuns, The Little Sisters of the Poor, and profit from Miss Showgirl went to Sautiamai, Samoa's AIDS awareness volunteer organization. This form of charity work is an important aspect of the pageants, as it appears to have a positive influence on people's attitudes towards fa'afafine (see chap. 10).

Drag shows and fa'afafine beauty pageants represent a new and obvious change in the role of the fa'afafine. In the disguise of makeup, glitter and stuffed bras, young men create an illusion of glamorous women. Alongside a sincere feminine attitude, the humorous aspect is latent and omnipresent. Others portray themselves in the figure of the jester, clowning around in a rather inelegant, almost grotesque, manner.

Taupou and Beauty Queens

In the egalitarian Christian Samoa of today, all girls are potentially *taupou*; the symbol of Christian-colonial virginal ideal. For a girl to be chosen as a *taupou* or a beauty queen, she has to show central virtues like dignity and grace. Participants in beauty pageants must often perform the *taualuga*, the dance of the *taupou* (Mageo 1996a: 601).

Every year, girls compete to be elected the new beauty queen in the Miss Samoa pageant⁸⁹ held during the Teuila-festival in September. It is not only the physical beauty of the contestants that is assessed. They also compete in categories like traditional wear, sarong, *puletasi*, interview, and talent. The latter is usually demonstrated through song or traditional dance, where the girl performs the *taualuga*, the dance of the *taupou*. One of the girls who was to enter a Miss Samoa Pageant is a lively, social, and outgoing girl who has boy friends, likes a good party, gets drunk at times, and often wears short skirts and tight tops. She and her friends joked about how she was to act like a good role model for young

⁸⁸ I was invited to the show with two young women, who long had planned to go together. Seated in the row behind us were four women who attended the show together without their husbands.

⁸⁹ Beauty pageants in Samoa began in the early 1970s (Mageo 1994: 411).

Samoan girls during the weeks to come before the pageant. She admitted with a giggle that a change of her wardrobe and drinking habits would be beneficial for her chances of becoming the new Miss Samoa. The characteristics aspired for within the Miss Samoa pageants propose that a dignified, well-behaved virginal girl is still alive as an ideal⁹⁰. The key word here is ideal. The majority of teenagers and young adults I met in Apia did not appear to strive for the ideal of virginity or sobriety, nor expect these virtues in their peers. Pregnancies out of wedlock, drunkenness, and infidelity were not uncommon in Apia. However, to respect one's elders and behave appropriately towards them was a virtue that I never saw questioned, or encouraged challenged.

Contemporary entertainment shows featuring fa'afafine reflect and display contrasts encompassed in the role of the fa'afafine, of which fa'afafine's portrayal of the *taupou* is one. Other contrasts are represented in fa'afafine's conflicting image of acting like a woman and a girl interchangeably in every day life, and in the nicknames used on fa'afafine. In the fa'afafine beauty pageants, the fa'afafine make a caricature of the girls' Christian-colonial role through the jest genre *ula* (ibid.: 601). The fa'afafine imitate the dignity and grace of a *taupou*, while at the same time loading words and actions with sexual meaning. It is *ula* because the fa'afafine apparently makes a fool of himself, but is actually mocking someone else. In this case it is the colonial ideal of the virginal girl that is mocked, marked by the contrast to the burlesque, sexual jester (ibid.).

A couple of the fa'afafine informants mentioned that they had been chosen for the role of the *taupou* at school performances at their all-boys school. Being generally more feminine than the other boys at school, they would be an obvious choice for such a feminine part. Most likely, the performance would evoke laughter in the audience, analogously to the general response of performing fa'afafine. However, as these fa'afafine chosen for the part of the *taupou* are young, to receive the part of the *taupou* may have greater significance than mere entertainment. It is probable that getting the part of the *taupou* is perceived as a confirmation of their identity as fa'afafine. By being assigned the part, as well as performing

⁹⁰ Schoeffel writes that the term *tausala* had in pre-Christian times only referred to girls of high rank, but had by the 1970s evolved to become "a set of ideal behaviors, qualities and attributes to which most Samoan girls learn to aspire" (Schoeffel 1979 in Mageo 1996b: 70).

it, their femininity is exposed and legitimized not only by the teachers who assign the parts, but also by their peers and all the parents who come to watch the performance.

Unfortunately, I lack data to properly support these assumptions. However, the informants who recounted their experiences as *taupou*, told the story on their own initiative and with what I interpreted as pride.

The Cindy show contains a similar contrast as the one present in fa'afafine beauty pageants. The overwhelming glamour and femininity is joined by vulgar humor and body language, which suggests juxtaposing what is feminine with what is inappropriate female behavior and therefore unfeminine. The fa'afafine are clearly effeminate, but as they cross the gender line and take their actions further than a decent woman/girl would do, their behavior becomes unconventional and consequently reveals the liminal status of their gender role. My informant Maggie gave an example from a fa'afafine beauty pageant in the 1990s. One of the participants used a banana to demonstrate how to use a condom, triggering bursts of laughter in the audience. Maggie stated that as fa'afafine, they not only could cross the line of appropriate female behavior, but also exceed it quite extensively. Although commenting on the effeminate men of Tahiti, the *pinapinaaine*, Besnier describes how the women appreciate the *pinapinaaine*'s clownish performances at dances, and how they make crude jokes about men, jokes which the younger women would be too reserved to make (op. cit.: 298).

Fa'afafine constitute other contrasts in addition to the feminine versus non-feminine. Femininity itself represents a duality in the opposition virginity versus sexuality, or girl versus woman (Mageo 1998: 210). As mentioned earlier, fa'afafine have nicknames like "talking *pipi*" and are referred to as *teine*, both of which allude to them having the status as girls, not women. Simultaneously, their salacious humor, on stage and off, and other names like *ai paneta* and even the term *fa'afafine*, stress sexuality and womanhood (ibid.: 210-213). Either way, they are neither fully a woman nor a girl, and yet they appear to have aspects of both.

Summary

As a consequence of the missionaries' restrictive views on appropriate female behavior, men ended up taking the part of women in joking theater, where they dressed up and mocked new gender roles. Today, fa'afafine model the ideal of the virginal girl in roles as *taupou* and beauty queens, while at the same time ridiculing it through sexual joking in the genre of the *ula*. By deriding the ideal, the fa'afafine remove themselves from this ideal as well as directing a critique towards it. Lastly, the fa'afafine have referential names that allude to status as girls as well as women, which again oppose the elements of virginity and sexuality.

9 INDIVIDUALISTIC TRENDS AMONG FA'AFAFINE

From Neglect to Saliency

Accounts of fa'afafine in early Samoan historical documentation are conspicuous by their absence. While the gender liminals of Tahiti, Hawaii, the Marquesas, and New Zealand, were described in detail by Europeans in the 1700s, Samoan fa'afafine and Tongan *fakaleiti* are not mentioned (Besnier 1994: 294). Besnier cautions against interpreting historical silence as a sure sign of a complete absence in the past of gender liminals. He states that gender liminality in Polynesia has possibly become gradually more salient despite colonialism. This is in contrast to what has been the case with, for instance, ritualized homosexuality in Melanesia, and the Native North American *berdache*. He nonetheless warns against generalizing about Polynesian gender liminality, and assesses a reconstruction of the history of Polynesian gender liminality as unfeasible. (ibid.: 294-296). Mageo asserts that Samoan transvestites are presently “conspicuous in their numbers”, and that few reports of fa'afafine in old writings suggest an increase in numbers rather than a pre-colonial absence of transvestites. She also declares that historical factors like colonialism have played a part in destabilizing the sex-gender system (1998: 208).

It would appear that foreign influence still affects the cultural model of gender in Samoa. In this chapter, I examine individualistic trends in the fa'afafine role and argue that the apparent increase of fa'afafine in Apia and the modern expression of the fa'afafine identity are best interpreted in the light of the developmental changes and global westernization that Samoa is undergoing (see below, and see Linnekin 1997 for data on Western influence on gender ideologies in the Pacific). I put forward the possibility that leading a life as a fa'afafine is a constructive and creative way of dealing with the changes, and with some of the socio-cultural conflicts these changes have shown to instigate between generations. In a sociocentric society like Samoa, obligations towards extended family are strong and influence people's lives. To enhance liminal gender markers that distinguish one as someone with fewer familial obligations than most other Samoans, can be beneficial for

fa'afafine who seek greater personal freedom. The following segment concerns developmental changes in Samoa.

Towards Individualism

The problem of high suicide rates and challenging generation gaps in Samoa was presented in chapter 2. Younger generations are raised under circumstances different from their elders, as they grow up in a society undergoing modernization and increased globalization. Today, most people have access to television, and the Internet has got a strong foothold in Apia. Practically every family has relatives overseas, and those who have the opportunity to travel will likely do so. Those who can afford it may choose to educate their children in New Zealand or elsewhere. Increasingly, international companies establish themselves in Samoa, which entails heightened communication with, and strengthened ties to, foreign countries. Tourism grows rapidly, introducing new impressions and acquaintances to Samoans.

Technological advancement is only one part of the development. Greater knowledge about living conditions other places in the world puts one's own situation into perspective. Globalization will to some extent entail changes in people's expectations and aspirations. Samoa's meeting with Western influence can be viewed as an encounter between a sociocentric society and a substantially more individualistically oriented world-view. Samoan culture has been described as oriented towards social groups and intergroup relations, in contrast to a Western egocentric world-view where individuals and interpersonal relations are in focus (Mageo 2001, Reid 1990). The ensuing segment illustrates the sociocentric character of the Samoan society.

Without Children as Caregivers

In Samoa, children are expected to serve (*tautua*⁹¹) their parents their whole life (Mageo 2001: 194). I met several people in their twenties, who wished to move overseas to continue their education or to start a business. They abandoned the plans of leaving Samoa due to reported obligations towards the parents. One girl told me that her main concern was to help

⁹¹ *Tautua* is a principle of Samoan organization where one serves one's parents and grandparents by offering one's resources, such as knowledge, strength, and money (Macpherson and Macpherson 2000: 30-31).

her father with his shop while he was still alive, as she could always pursue an education in New Zealand later. A young man told me that although he could imagine moving to Australia to start a business, it would be futile. His father could at any point in time summon him home, at which he would have to leave immediately. Mageo writes that children's self-worth would be too greatly undermined, if they were to neglect familial obligations. The act of service is approved and positively sanctioned in children (1998: 78). To have children ensures that there will be someone to care for oneself in old age. Homosexual liaisons do not have the significance of marriage and children that heterosexual relationships have (Mead 1961: 149). Traditionally, children and marriage are significant social and economical elements in village structures. Only love and a strong obsession for one's partner will make the homosexual relationship important and permanent, Mead asserts (*ibid.*).

I spoke to several fa'afafine about their hopes and wishes for the future, and about the prospect of having children. The following three statements are from informants Pio, Frieda, and Tony. Pio and Frieda's statements illustrate further a sociocentric view often expressed in Samoa, as well as the custom of children being raised by more relatives than their biological parents. Tony's comment exemplifies how children are required to care for their elders.

Pio declared, "If I were my brother or sister, I'd start a family of my own. We (fa'afafine) are more accessible to our families; we're more family-oriented. Maybe it's the culture. It can be a blessing or a curse. My family is very supportive. My focus will probably be with my family. In Samoan families, you're also parenting to those (other family members') kids. In this society, long term relationships (between two males) are not really possible, like settling down, so I don't think that will happen with me." Frieda said promptly, "I want to live in a home of my own, with dogs and cats. (...) In the future, I'll have no kids, and that (my family) is all I'll have. That's my target, to help out my family. And I really love my family, they always come first."

Tony replied, "I just want to succeed, be well off, support myself. I want to be independent. My worst fear is, if I'm not, 'cause I can't breed my own children. (...) If I settle down with a guy, it's all right. If not, I'll be well off on my own too." Tony also

mentioned a fa'afafine who was like a role model to him. Tony admired the way this fa'afafine was well off, and that he lived on his own, and basically had everything he needed.

Children are commonly perceived as a social support and an insurance that one will be taken care of in the future. Fa'afafine in general do not have children of their own, and fa'afafine like Frieda and Tony (and Sam and Tiresa; see below) express a desire to be successful and self-supporting. Although it is to be expected that their extended family will support the fa'afafine if needed, it is likely that many fa'afafine aim to become self-supporting largely because they will not have children of their own to care for them in old age. Some fa'afafine, however, do have plans of raising their own children, which will be discussed next.

In-Family Adoption

In Samoa, childcare is commonly transferred from parents to older siblings after weaning. Compared to cultures where childcare remains to a large degree in the hands of the parents, traditional Samoan relations between parents and children may be conceived of as detached (Mageo 2001: 195). Older relatives have a right to intervene in the young ones' lives, and may demand help from them or criticize their actions. Reciprocally, the young individuals are free to seek help and support from family members. Mead describes how children may change residence throughout their childhood, in response to pressure or difficulties at home, such as too much scolding or hard work (1961: 41-43). During fieldwork, there were several incidents of children changing homes. A family in Apia accepted their niece into their home, as the teenage girl could no longer tolerate living in conflict with her parents. A young woman left her two children primarily in her mother's care, and only saw her children on an irregular basis. Another woman took over the responsibility of her son's newborn, as the young parents were having marital problems and were not looking sufficiently after the baby. It is necessary to look at the concept of adoption and the custom of in-family adoption in light of these culturally sociocentric conditions where the extended family provides a strong social support (Reid 1990: 60).

There are a number of characteristics concerning adoption in Oceania that diverge from common adoption procedures in the United States (Carroll 1970). Adoption can be defined as “any customary and optional procedure for taking as one’s own a child of other parents” (ibid.: 3). Adoption in Oceania is usually a family matter that takes place between relatives, where the adopter typically is a classificatory parent or sibling of the biological parent. Parents do not usually put up their child for adoption, but settle the affair in private. Therefore, adoption generally does not involve formal legal procedures. Also, the adopters are often single individuals. Another point of variance from American norms is that the child is not necessarily unwanted by the biological parents, and these parents are for the most part perfectly capable of raising the child. Rather, the child is given up for adoption because another person wants to adopt the child, and the transaction is normally considered to be a generous act of the parents. Carroll also points out that many societies in Oceania distinguish between fosterage and adoption. The former entails temporary and obligatory care for a child that is a relative. The latter involves taking over the full responsibility for the child on a permanent basis (ibid.: 5-7). Mead’s description of children changing residency due to pressure or domestic trouble is probably more a case of fosterage, where the teenage child moves away on her own accord temporarily. Of the examples above from fieldwork, I assess the two cases where the grandmothers take care of their grandchildren to be potential adoptions. It is too early to say whether the grandchildren will remain in the grandmothers’ care or increasingly be in their biological parents’ care.

Before submitting two cases where fa’afafine are adopters or foster parents, four fa’afafine informants share thoughts on the prospect of raising children. The first statement comes from Damion, who said, “I have always wanted children—to think like me, to act like me. Every relationship (overseas) has been long term; two years, three years. I wouldn’t mind adopting. I think marriage is totally old fashioned, and a total waste of time. (Damion wrinkled his nose and stuck out his tongue.) People shouldn’t get married anymore.”

Sam, who works diligently at the hotel where he is employed, announced optimistically, “I’d love to raise kids in the future. I want to be a successful businessperson,

a distinguished person, and have a big hotel. I'll probably end up overseas. In the future, it'll probably be possible to live with a partner."

Nancy remarked on a slightly more romantic note, "I'd like to marry a cute *palagi* who has a job, and we would stay together, and he'd treat me like a woman. He'd take me where I want to go, like on outings, and traveling. I can imagine adopting kids. I think I will."

In a relaxed tone, Tiresa declared, "Well, you know, I want to get a good job, settle down, get a nice house, find a partner and live happily ever after. I want a partner for life, but not until I'm about fifty. I'm happy the way things are now." Tiresa added that he was talking about living overseas, and not in Samoa. He also felt confident that he would adopt one or two children in the future.

It can be difficult to determine whether these thoughts about bringing up children are likely to be put into action, or whether they merely are pleasant ideas unlikely to materialize. It may therefore be enlightening to present two examples of fa'afafine who actually raise children. One fa'afafine informant, Susie, took care of a baby boy. At the time I visited Susie at his home, the boy was only a year and a few months old. When the boy toddled into the room, one of the women who also lived there introduced him as "Susie's baby". The boy appeared to be strongly attached to Susie, as his face lit up when Susie entered the house. He started to whimper when he thought Susie was leaving him, and during the interview, he wanted to sit on Susie's lap and play with his necklace. Susie also emphasized the affection between them and stated, "He's mine". The other woman present said she also looked after the baby when she was not at work. The actual family relations between Susie and the boy, and the amount of time Susie spends taking care of him, are unknown to me. I was under the impression that the baby was the son of Susie's nephew, or similar.

The second example is taken from the documentary *Paradise Bent: Boys Will Be Girls in Samoa* (Croall 1999). One of the fa'afafine interviewed in the film proudly presents the legal papers that certify the adoption of a baby boy, who is seen sitting on the lap of another fa'afafine. The fa'afafine relates that he will have the baby call him "Mom" and that he will explain "everything" to the boy when he grows older. As was the case with Susie, the

baby was part of the fa'afafine's extended family. Contrary to the latter example, this situation is a clear case of adoption, confirmed through legal procedures.

As marriage and childcare entail additional responsibilities and obligations, fa'afafine who live as singles are freed from various commitments, some of which may demand time and money from those involved. One such commitment is the *fa'alavelave*, discussed in the following section.

Free as a Bird

In response to the question of whether there were positive sides to being a fa'afafine, Frieda declared, "It (to be a fa'afafine) is like being a free bird. Not like men and women, you know, like when they're a couple, carrying a heavy load, having duties and obligations, like *fa'alavelave*. You don't feel you have the same duties and obligations. You can spend the money you earn on yourself."

The following text is an elaboration on the statement made by Frieda concerning personal and financial freedom. Firstly, some appreciation of what a *fa'alavelave* entails is necessary in order to comprehend Frieda's point. The *fa'alavelave* is an important Samoan occurrence, and literally means "entanglement". It refers to any kind of problem or trouble, as well as all social ceremonies like funerals, kava ceremonies, and title installations (O'Meara 1990: 193). It is in both definitions of the word a category of Samoan occurrences where family members are obliged to help, financially or otherwise (Reid 1990: 57). The public ceremonies normally entail large and formal gift exchanges and are occasions where people pursue social as well as economic goals. Commonly, guests bring gifts consisting primarily of fine mats and money. The hosts give pigs, fine mats, money, and food in return. Preferably, the hosts give more than they have received so as to show generosity and material wealth, both of which are highly regarded. Prior to the ceremony, gifts are accumulated through the help of family members, friends, and neighbors (O'Meara 1990: 201-203).

The topic of *fa'alavelave* came up several times during fieldwork. The parents of a family I sometimes visited were going to the United States for the bestowal of a *matai* title

on a relative. As expected, they had to bring gifts for this *fa'alavelave*. On the eve of their departure, half the living room was filled with two massive bundles of fine mats and sleeping mats. I was told that the gifts were not only from them, but that relatives too had contributed. They had to rent an extra car in order to transport all the gifts to the airport.

Fa'alavelave can in other words be a circumstantial affair. It appears clear to many Samoans that *fa'alavelave* is solely a Samoan tradition, and one which is generally not known in *palagi* cultures. One time, a taxi driver in his late twenties inquired with a little smile why the *palagi* boy in the back seat did not have a Samoan girl friend. He also wanted to know whether his passenger would consider living in Samoa permanently. The *palagi* fidgeted in his seat before coming up with an answer that I had heard him use before when posed the same kind of question. He shrugged his shoulders and said something to the extent of there being lots of pretty Samoan *teine*, but that he doubted that he could handle the *fa'alavelave*. The answer obviously amused the cabdriver, who grinned into the rear view mirror and chuckled "Ah, *fa'alavelave*, yes, yes."

Another incident took place in the home of one of my *fa'afafine* informants. He had atypically little contact with his family and had been supporting himself for many years. He was teasing me about how my life would be, if I stayed in Samoa. At the prospect of his *palagi* friend (me) settling down with a Samoan husband, he cracked up laughing and reminded me that I would have to deal with *fa'alavelave* and "all that shit", and he rolled his eyes. His body language suggested that he wished to take no part in it, which to my knowledge he rarely or never did.

Another acquaintance is the son of a *matai*. On discussing the *matai* system and the bestowing of new *matai* titles, he stated somewhat aggressively that he had no desire of becoming a *matai*, who everyone relies on for help. He had watched how people approached his father for money and help whenever they needed their problems solved.

The three episodes give an impression of what some people think about *fa'alavelave*. The cabdriver did not necessarily dislike *fa'alavelave*, but he appeared to understand why a foreigner would not want to become involved in them. The *fa'afafine* showed a clear disapproval of the *fa'alavelave*, or the obligations entailed. The *matai* son gave an

impression of not wanting to deal with the large network of villagers who would have a right to draw on him for help and thereby influence his life, if he were to become *matai* in the future. Samoans are regularly faced with obligations and expectations. Mageo asserts that neglecting familial obligations likely will lead to the diminishing of an individual's self-worth (1998: 78). I am also under the impression that sacrifices made in order to help parents or siblings are done with some gratification. The young woman who looked after her father's shop showed no sign of bitterness for postponing her education in order to help her father. Relating this about her life situation to me could be an opportunity for her to boast of her unselfishness and willingness to serve her father. I did not, however, feel that this was the case. She informed me of her priorities in answer to my probing and initial lack of comprehension for the *fa'aSamoa*⁹².

Also, the *matai* son generously helped his close family members and friends financially and otherwise, with apparent pleasure and satisfaction. I detected a certain reluctance among younger persons to be pressured and steered by obligations towards individuals whom they were not emotionally close to. Conceivably, the same persons might perceive fulfilling obligations towards people they felt close to as different. Lastly, I am under the impression that the girl in the shop and the *matai* son fulfill their obligation without expecting commendations. However, neglecting their familial duties would likely result in shame and what Mageo terms undermining of self-worth (ibid.).

Frieda said that *fa'afafine* are more like free birds that do not have the duties and obligations of married couples. Marriage entails obligations towards the spouse's family in addition to one's own kin. Frieda's comment suggests that as *fa'afafine* generally have fewer family commitments, they are in a position to enjoy more personal freedom. They may also spend more of the money they earn on themselves, as they do not have spouses or children who depend directly on them financially.

In praxis, however, some *fa'afafine* do assume responsibilities that their social status does not automatically entail. At least three of the informants chose to pay for the education of children in their family. It should also be stressed that although many statements from the

⁹² *Fa'aSamoa* denotes Samoan culture and literally means "the Samoan way".

informants have indicated a desire for independence and self-support, three informants declared that as they would not have families of their own, their focus would be on their extended family. Damion is one of these informants, and he comments here on how the fa'afafine's role in the family may have changed: "The traditional role still exists. In villages it's more like before. When it comes to family, it affects the way they (fa'afafine) act. They act more responsible. A lot of fa'afafine support their families financially and work at home. They are centered on their family, because they don't have wives and kids. There has been a change, from work in the home to support through work elsewhere⁹³. Several of the other fa'afafine and myself support nieces or nephews quite substantially to get them through school. Some have adopted kids from extended family and put them through school. Some of the kids are even sent overseas."

Nonetheless, funding of relatives' education is generally of an optional character, and differs substantially in that way from parents' responsibilities for their own children. In such cases, there is in other words a freedom of choice.

I define personal freedom with difficulty, as what gives a person the feeling of freedom is individual and relative. Nonetheless, in comparing life in Apia with life in rural villages, I perceived increased autonomy and anonymity, and fewer restrictions laid down by authoritative figures, as signs of having more personal freedom.

Greater Freedom in an Urban Setting

In connection with circumstantial behavior, I was interested in finding out potential differences between living as a fa'afafine in town compared to other places in Samoa. Life in Apia usually entailed more personal freedom for Samoans in general than life in the outback Upolu or in Savai'i. The villages around and in town are not as clearly defined, or controlled, by the *matai*. Therefore, traveling out to villages, or across to Savai'i, could often mean modifying behavioral habits. One woman said bluntly, "Not all villages and religions approve of fa'afafine." She went on to say that many fa'afafine from the outback villages

⁹³ This change of method of service (*tautua*) is commented elsewhere (Mageo 1998: 78, Macpherson and Macpherson 2000: 30-31). Samoans continue to offer their resources to the family, but now increasingly through financial support rather than through physical labor.

move into Apia, where there are more people, more night life, more clubs, and where they can lead a freer life. She pointed out that many villages have curfews that may require people to be at certain places at specific times.

“When I go to Savai’i, for instance, I stick to their way, because the *fa’aSamoa* is strong there. It’s more formal there. I’d probably wear a T-shirt and a *lavalava*,” Frieda told me one afternoon when Sarah and I dropped by his office. Sarah seemed to be of the same opinion. He said, “I keep a low key if I go to Savai’i. That’s where the culture is really strong, and I wouldn’t want to do anything wrong, like talk to people I’m not supposed to talk to, or things like that.” Frieda, who has relatives in Savai’i, spoke warmly of his visits to the big island. He liked the *fa’afafine* there and spent a lot of his time with them. He told me how he had been there three weeks once, and had realized that there were not that many possibilities: “It was boring! Here you have nightclubs, stores and fashion,” and added thoughtfully, “But they’re still *mala*, or *fa’afafine*. They pluck their eyebrows and do their hair.” “And they still want men!” a third *fa’afafine* present shot in. Frieda continued undisturbed, “They might play volleyball or do some sport, maybe cricket, and maybe go for a drink and then go home to the families. It’s not that they can’t go out, but often it (the night club) is too far away, you know. But they’re *still* *fa’afafine*,” he repeated. He told me how he liked to look his best when he went there, and that he would put an extra effort into his appearance. With a smile on his face he described the men over there as “really nice and good looking. And they receive us really well. You know, when they see a new *mala*, they’ll look and might think “Oh—“she” looks good!”” Then followed some gossip on another *fa’afafine* who had been going to Savai’i for a year now, visiting a man there.

Tiresa, who has spent a lot of time in Savai’i, meant that everyday life for a *fa’afafine* was very different in Savai’i compared to Apia. “The ones here in town get more freedom—they can go out at night, wear dresses everywhere they want to go, grow their hair long, go to movies and night clubs, wear makeup and get more makeup, ‘cause it’s cheaper here. And they are more accepted in general here. I don’t think *fa’afafine* are allowed in women’s toilets at the club in Savai’i. *Fa’afafine* in Apia are tougher. The ones here are used to shit (i.e. the *fa’afafine* in Apia are more used to offending behavior); they get comments,

and are used to going to nightclubs. A fa'afafine from Asau⁹⁴ who wants to go to the nightclub, must take the 10 o'clock bus and muck around all day and must stay over night with a fa'afafine who lives near the harbor. And, "she" must make up a real good story, like saying "she" will sell coconuts, or run away. The nightlife is different too. You can't walk around in Salelologa (the wharf) after closing. No way. No parks, nowhere to party, unless you have a car—then you can drive around. There are many villages where you can't have long hair, can't have makeup, and they want all the men to join the *aumaga*⁹⁵—the poor fa'afafine in those villages just have to do what the *matai* say. The villages closer to Salelologa are probably the ones more lenient."

Tiresa continued, "In Savai'i, you find the fa'afafine doing the house jobs, sitting behind the house. The majority of fa'afafine in Samoa stay at home and looks after the young ones. They don't have other jobs." When I asked Tiresa why he thought fa'afafine moved from Savai'i to town, he mentioned more freedom, paid work, and a chance to meet new people, as the main motivational factors. He was of the opinion that it was hard for fa'afafine in Savai'i to meet each other, because they might have to travel a bit. "Besides, they don't have the money to travel. They just stay home."

Damion stated, "There are more problems for fa'afafine in the outback than in town. In the villages in Savai'i, men can't have long hair, women can't wear shorts, and fa'afafine can't wear dresses or makeup. That's why they all come here. More freedom. It's not work that attracts them to Apia. I find that the *mala* from Savai'i, coming for the weekend, act totally outrageous. Like they're making up for lost time, rebelling from all the rules."

Nancy was trying to think if there were any differences between the fa'afafine in town and the ones living elsewhere. He commented, "The village fa'afafine—they have access to the town. The only thing is their makeup, and the way they dance; they are a bit behind. Sometimes their dresses, too. It's the same with Savai'i." He also said, "I'm worse when I go to Savai'i. I show my fa'afafine side more. Guys are tired of seeing me here, but over there, there are new faces. In the coastal areas, on the beach, I wear short shorts and

⁹⁴ Asau is a village on the north side of Savai'i and lies almost opposite of Salelologa, the main harbor where the nightclub is.

⁹⁵ The *aumaga* is the villages association of untitled men, and usually comprises the village's work force.

tops. Many *mala* prefer to have boy friends from the coastal area. Guys here in town know how to get money out of you. Then they might use the money on their girl. Guys from the coastal areas aren't like that."

To summarize, the informants depict Apia as more lenient than most rural villages in matters concerning fa'afafine's physical appearance and behavior. Apia offers fashion stores, nightclubs, work opportunities, and a chance to meet new people and other fa'afafine. Importantly, due to the weaker social organization of the urban villages (see chap. 2), the same level of social control that exists in some rural villages is practically unfeasible in Apia.

The Impact of Education and Employment

Rather than only focusing on differences among fa'afafine as a consequence of where they live, Pio, who works within the school system, was concerned with the importance of education for all young Samoans. He stated, "It is not so much where you are based, it has more to do with education. (...) Education has redefined the roles. It means that someone else has to do the job at home. It also has to do with rural-urban migration. It's general for everyone. If you're fa'afafine and doing well in school, the parents will push you to go further with education, and that means leaving home. It goes for everyone. (...) If you do well beyond the school level in the villages, everything is concentrated in town. Parents send kids to town to pursue education. If you're a bright fa'afafine, you won't stay in the village, and that goes for any kid that does well. If you're not so bright, you stay at home and be part of the family and do the chores."

Speaking as a fa'afafine who had been a teenager in the late 60s, Pio meant that growing up as a fa'afafine was much easier now than when he was young. Pio stated, "Families are more tolerant, or not tolerant, but more exposed than 20-30 years ago. There is a much wider horizon, not as limited or limiting, more knowledgeable. The traditional aspect of the fa'afafine role has disappeared more because of education. You can't expect *mala* to stay in the traditional role while their peers get an education and move on. Sometimes it's a

peer thing, and the young ones (fa'afafine) today may be able to relate more to their own peer group than to us older fa'afafine, who only have being fa'afafine in common.”

Notably, Pio regarded the importance of education as equally relevant for fa'afafine as for other Samoans. Instead of viewing fa'afafine as a group to be treated in seclusion, he appeared to regard development as changes that concern generations and peer groups collectively. The migration from rural areas into town is one general trend, and the pursuit of higher education is another. Both encourage a quest and exploration of individual potentials. Town life offers a variety of job opportunities and a chance to expand one's social network. The only tertiary schools are located in Apia, and all other post-graduate schooling must take place overseas.

Apart from opening doors to the students, higher education may lead to yet two consequences. Firstly, individuals with post-graduate degrees command respect, especially in a society where the majority does not have tertiary schooling. Secondly, increased knowledge in general and of foreign cultures in particular may ease the introduction of novel elements into their own culture, such as the concept of “homosexuality” and males in women's clothes. In both cases, education appears to affect people's attitudes towards fa'afafine. The following comments by Tony and Pio illustrate some of the consequences of higher education and how they perceive general changes in prevailing attitudes towards fa'afafine.

Tony exemplifies the first point: “We (fa'afafine) really have to strive for excellence. When I entered the work force, I had to be no. 1, so that I would be respected and not criticized. I don't have any bad experiences—they respect me because I'm educated. But, if I'd been a drop out, it would have been very different. They wouldn't talk to me. In academic gatherings, it's easy to feel outcast, so it's very lucky for me to be a part of it. I noticed that when I brought a friend. They didn't bother to talk to “her”. But it's not really a problem.”

Although Tony is only in his mid twenties, he had a clear impression of the changes of attitude that had taken place the past years, and drew an optimistic picture of the development. He said, “ Those days (10–20 years ago), only a few respected us, and only a

few liked us, but now I reckon it's really changing. People used to look at us like *mala*, like a curse, but now we're respected more, also because of the jobs we're doing and our outgoing charity work. Now everyone knows fa'afafine. It's easier now. The old fa'afafine, they were paving the way for us. Now we engage freely in the community." I find Tony's report of present circumstances to be characteristic of him. To a larger degree than other fa'afafine informants, he generally portrayed himself as a self-confident, strong-headed, and well-liked "woman". It appeared to me that other self-confident and generally well-liked informants were more liable to share frustrations and unpleasant experiences (see chap. 10). This is not to imply that Tony was not being truthful, but I propose that his depiction is somewhat positively biased.

Pio looked at education from a slightly different angle from Tony and contemplated possible connections between education and sociocultural changes: "The sexual joking has always been there, especially with fa'afafine. People are more understanding, like they crack up laughing at the jokes. (...) It (society) is more knowledgeable. It's a different context, different time. Society now is more receptive. Before, fa'afafine were a novelty, there weren't many fa'afafine. There were less, and they were more hidden. Apia is really bringing it out, concentrated in one small area. There is a lot more migration than 30 years ago." An employee at the Methodist Church also asserted that there had been an attitude change in Samoa, and that the fa'afafine had become more visible in society. He told of his uncle who was a fa'afafine in the 1960s, and maintained that compared to those days, fa'afafine dress more effeminately at the present.

Pio and I also talked about the families of fa'afafine, and he pointed out that having a child that is a fa'afafine is hardly the family's wish. He explained, "There are very caring families in Samoa, but if they were given a second chance to have their child reborn, they would want a boy or a girl. They don't glorify it (having a fa'afafine child). A lot of them know it (being a fa'afafine) is biological. Families are more educated, and they know that they can help by being there and supporting them. Some fa'afafine have worked very hard to establish themselves, like my mentors. When I was young, I had older fa'afafine who were very supportive. They were in the clothing trade—tailors. There weren't so many fashion

shops like now. More was tailor-made, and they were meeting demands. It was their way of expressing “this is me”, and they built up their name. They were really against young fa’afafine dropping out of school. They wanted them in school or else helping out at work, establishing who they are.” As Pio and Tony both stated, attitudes have improved the past decades. Pio’s last comments imply that there were older fa’afafine who were concerned with the direction the fa’afafine as a collective group were heading. Receiving an education or applying oneself diligently to work appeared to be the commended lines of action. Through school or a profession, the fa’afafine would find their respectable niche in society, and thus “establish who they are”.

While Pio was focusing on how a higher educated society led to greater acceptance and understanding of the fa’afafine, Tony saw education as a means for fa’afafine to earn more respect. Pio seemed to be of the opinion that higher education implied greater acceptance due to a widened horizon. Having earned a postgraduate degree, Tony was preoccupied with how education had opened doors for him. His degree appeared to make people take him more seriously and relate to him on a more egalitarian basis. The focus was not so much on his gender status, as on his documented accomplishments and potentials. In the sense that a scholastic degree is measurable and indisputable, it is understandable that it stands regardless of people’s personal attitudes towards him. Fundamentally, the pursuit of education allows one to explore and develop one’s abilities. It is to be expected that with an education degree, a fa’afafine’s chances of competing on an equal basis on the job market increases, as does his general chances of finding work, and consequently the ability to be financially self-supportive.

Seeking Opportunities Abroad and With Foreign Men

Pio, quoted a couple of times above, speaks of Samoa as a country based on Christian principles, where tolerance must yield to respect, and where keeping up appearances stands in opposition to individuals’ right to show and experience sexuality. He contrasts Samoa to New Zealand, and his opinions on individuals’ rights appear to be inspired by the sexual climate in New Zealand, which is characterized by independence and openness. He states

that the gay movement overseas has influenced development in Samoa. Individuals' desires for independence and self-realization conflict with a deep Samoan tradition of focusing on care for the extended family, and respecting elders and putting their needs before one's own. Several of the fa'afafine informants above mention moving abroad and settling down with a partner. In Samoa, it is generally not accepted for a Samoan man to live in a relationship with a fa'afafine. Pio says for instance that a long-term relationship between two males in Samoa is "not really possible", while Sam airs the idea of it becoming possible in the future. Damion mentions having had long-term relationships overseas, and Tiresa and Sam state the prospect of moving abroad. It suggests that they perceive long-term relationships with men as more attainable outside of Samoa, where not everything of a sexual character must be "behind curtains", like Pio asserted. The statements imply that the feeling of personal freedom correlates positively with the distance between their village and the world overseas. The urban migration discussed previously reflects similar ideas, but on a smaller scale.

An alternative to moving abroad in order to have an open, long-term relationship is to settle down with a foreigner. Nancy wishes for a husband who is *palagi*, in other words a foreigner. During my fieldwork, there was a fa'afafine and a *palagi* man who had been living together for several years. To my understanding, this is viewed as more acceptable than a fa'afafine living with a Samoan man, as *palagi* are not Samoan and may live by different norms. Under any circumstance, the Samoan men fa'afafine generally seek are men who apparently lead a sexually straight life, and who may have girl friends, be married, and/or have children. These men are most likely unwilling to have a long-term relationship with fa'afafine. *Palagi* men represent a chance to live out a relationship in the open, whether in Samoa or abroad.

Encounters with foreign homosexuals and gay movements in Australia and the United States have certainly given many fa'afafine a new perspective on themselves. Informants pointed out how fa'afafine are visibly distinct from the Samoan males, unlike many Western gay men who often are indistinguishable from heterosexual men. A second difference many fa'afafine are aware of is how two foreign gay males may date each other, while two fa'afafine will not. This suggests that many fa'afafine have compared themselves

with gender liminals overseas and are aware of some variances. Doubtlessly, gay movements have inspired fa'afafine to become reflective of their role in society, and their rights, or perhaps lack of rights. The focus on the individual and the individual's desires is more apparent as well. It is perceivable that a break between a sociocentric and an individualistic orientation will come about at some point. The friction between these two orientations is already evident and is interpreted as an important contributing factor to social problems observed among the younger generations (see chap. 2).

Making a Fashion Statement

Especially in Apia, fashion has become more westernized during the past few years. Foreigners who had been in Apia 5–15 years before I arrived, pointed out how people dress more revealing presently. Short skirts, tight fitting jeans and other pants, skirts with splits, tank tops, and shorts above the knees, have become common. This trend, however, is basically seen in town and not in rural areas. Fa'afafine in outfits like these, along with high-heeled shoes, represent perhaps the new look of the fa'afafine. This does not mean that they all dress like this, but the trend is generally tolerated in town and indicates a change of style in dressing habits. As maintained by my informants, this change would not have been possible, or permitted, say ten years ago. In a way, the informants are the fashion pioneers of their time. Frieda, always effeminately dressed, remarked, “You know, there's a law. Before you got arrested for cross-dressing. And now look!”, and he shook with content laughter before he added, “The law still exists, but it is not enforced.”

In the office building where Tony worked before, employed fa'afafine are not permitted to dress like women. As far as Tony knows, there is a law there against cross-dressing. Tony would not accept this rule, though, and would wear a *puletasi*, or a skirt and a blouse at work. He told me that he assumed he was the first fa'afafine to dress like a woman at his previous place of work, and that none of the other fa'afafine employed there dared follow suit. He said they were afraid and that he really had to stand up for himself. Tony praised his former boss for being so understanding. He stated he felt most comfortable in his own clothes (meaning women's clothes), and that other clothes would hinder him from

performing his best. Tony also added that so far, no one had told him to go home and dress like a man, but that he was still waiting for it to happen. In his new job they had uniforms, and Tony had been given a *puletasi* to wear.

Drag has been cited as an example of performativity by Butler (2000). She writes that gendering occurs through the embodying of norms. Although a forceful practice, it is not fully determining (ibid.: 110). Drag can be compared to rites of inversion, where norms in society are stressed and strengthened by a demonstration of contrasting behavior. Butler describes drag as “not unproblematically subversive”, as drag undermines heterosexually ideal genders “by virtue of effecting that exposure” (ibid.). However, similarly to inversion rites, the exposition of the naturalized status, which in this case is heterosexuality, does not necessarily undermine it. On the contrary, “heterosexuality can augment its hegemony *through* its denaturalization” (ibid.). Butler also asserts that gender norms operate by demanding the embodiment of particular ideals of masculinity and femininity, and that these ideals are usually related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond (ibid.). She stresses that drag is an attempt to confer a cross-gendered identification, but adds that a cross-gendered identification does not automatically indicate homosexuality (ibid.: 112).

During the Joking Nights from the 1930s to the 1960s, fa’afafine were found in drag primarily on stage, as missionaries had males replace females as actors (Mageo 1996a: 594). In the 1960s and 1970s, my informant Maggie was a young teenager. According to him, he was one of the few fa’afafine who dared to dress in female clothes in public at the time, as it was not nearly as common then as it is now. The ideals of femininity, and the idealization of the heterosexual bond that Butler mentions, appear to be of relevance for many of the fa’afafine who dress as women. Several assert that they feel like women and that they seek men sexually like other females do. Comments above show how some informants also hold typically heterosexual values, like finding a partner for life and raising children. I do not perceive many fa’afafine’s desire to dress like women in everyday life as an attempt at subverting heterosexual norms. Rather, heterosexual norms appear to be pursued in earnest. Cross-dressing in the context of entertainment is a different matter, as much of the humor lies in the caricature portrayal of the female gender.

Butler writes that drag does not actually oppose heterosexuality, but that by “working the weaknesses” in the heterosexual norms, it allegorizes heterosexuality through exaggeration (op. cit.: 114). However, the apparent seriousness with which many fa’afafine perform, is possibly more striking than the humor found in the common exaggeration of gender roles. Several of the fa’afafine who participated in the two beauty pageants I attended looked as if they took the outcome of the contest very seriously. Facial expressions gave convincing impressions of disappointment or pure joy, depending on their placement in the pageant. During a talent category, one nervous fa’afafine, dressed in a glamorous evening gown, did his best to sing a high-pitched ballad. His voice shook slightly, and he glanced frequently at an older fa’afafine in the first row who nodded comfortingly while helpfully mouthing the words and tapping his knee to the beat. An act may not appear to be intended as funny, but the audience may interpret it differently, and most likely there will be multiple motives underlying why different members of the audience enjoy or do not enjoy a certain number. Similarly, certain numbers in the Cindy show portray the star of the show as a beautiful woman who sings “her” songs without any humor or exaggeration. However, when Cindy suddenly reverts for a moment to a deep male voice untypical for Cindy, the contrast between a feminine appearance and a masculine voice catches the audience off guard and reaps applause and laughter.

Informants’ comments, earlier in this chapter, bear witness to changes in social norms. What some fa’afafine fought for in the past has gradually become trendy. It has become common for many fa’afafine to dress as women to the extent that someone like Tony is given a woman’s uniform to wear at work. The fact that it has become more common for fa’afafine to dress like women does not merely reflect a change in trends. It may also indicate awareness among fa’afafine of what some of them feel as inhibiting and perhaps a breach of personal rights. Some fa’afafine, like Tony and Maggie, have shown a will to fight for what they believe is right. They have also shown self-confidence when challenging prevailing norms despite resistance from the general public and authorities. O’Meara writes that fa’afafine’s behavior is stereotyped and exaggerated like Western stage transvestites, and that fa’afafine may have “adapted a traditional Samoan transvestite role to

a more recent Western model” (O’Meara 1990: 71). A change in the more traditional behavior of fa’afafine can in other words also be a consequence of Western influence.

Conclusively, the altered dressing habits of many fa’afafine can be viewed as testifying to a change of attitude, where the incentive among many fa’afafine to pursue self-realization is strong and in sync with the individualistic trends among the general young population. There are signs that the public view on individualistic tendencies is increasingly accommodating. For instance, examination of the suicide epidemic has revealed a generation gap with communication problems and diverse desires and expectations between the young and their elders. The explanations and solutions offered to the problem of suicide bear witness to an increased awareness and understanding for the direction that the development in the Samoan society is taking (see chap. 2).

An Apparent Increase of Fa’afafine

Several factors come into play when discussing whether the number of fa’afafine are increasing. It is possible that the number of fa’afafine is rising. Unfortunately, no statistics on fa’afafine are available, and as previously mentioned, historical accounts of fa’afafine are scarce. However, I find it probable that fa’afafine have become physically and socially more salient over the past decades, which under any circumstance would give the impression that fa’afafine are becoming more numerous.

Apparently, in earlier years, it was unacceptable for males to dress like women. I am of the opinion that fa’afafine who dress effeminately, are more visible than fa’afafine who dress neutrally, or masculine. It follows that if more fa’afafine dress effeminately today, fa’afafine in general become more noticeable. Considering the urban migration, it is to be expected that fa’afafine do become “conspicuous in their numbers”, as Mageo writes.

Fa’afafine have likely become increasingly evident socially through modern entertainment, like the Cindy show and the fa’afafine beauty pageants. The charity donations from the pageants have necessarily also commanded respect and recognition in society, regardless of individual attitudes towards fa’afafine.

If fa'afafine by and large are less influenced by family obligations than other non-fa'afafine age mates, and thereby enjoy greater personal freedom, it is possible that some male individuals find the status of fa'afafine appealing. It appears easier to assume the role of fa'afafine at present than a couple of decades ago, considering that data suggests increasingly accepting attitudes, and that there are numerous fa'afafine to function as role models. All the fa'afafine I became acquainted with expressed a homosexual interest in men, and my informants also stated that they had been fa'afafine since early childhood. I perceive the majority of fa'afafine to be homosexuals, and do not claim that fa'afafine generally make conscious decisions about becoming a fa'afafine at an early age. However, young males who have been labeled fa'afafine through childhood by family and friends appear to have the social possibility of stepping out of the fa'afafine role and assuming a masculine identity. If social acceptance of fa'afafine has increased, progressively more young males who are inclined to take on, or continue, a fa'afafine identity may do so, rather than hide it. According to most of my informants, there are countless male "closets" who do not wish to reveal their sexual interest in men, as they have chosen to portray themselves as heterosexual. Summarily, there are three factors that may contribute to a growing number of fa'afafine in Samoa: the prospect of living out one's sexual orientation, the increased acceptance in society of fa'afafine which eases the burden of going against the mainstream, and the temptation of greater independence in a town which is constantly becoming more urbanized.

Summary

Several of the informants' comments above reflect a desire for independence and being able to be support themselves. I have argued that the need to be self-supporting has to do with fa'afafine not having children of their own who will take care of them in old age. I suggest that it also has to do with the trends observed among the younger generations. Many find themselves faced with the choice of pursuing own goals, or fulfilling family obligations, as the two options are not always compatible. Some attend schools abroad, where assertiveness and independence often is encouraged. It is also likely that these young Samoans acquire an

understanding for egocentric values, which they bring back to Samoa. These values are also communicated through media, especially television and movies where primarily Australian and American productions are shown.

However, this independence is incompatible with Samoan social principles of prioritizing group needs and unquestionable obligations towards family. As many fa'afafine are unmarried, family obligations are minimized, and the possibility of pursuing own goals is more realistic. In a situation where society allows a transition from the status of fa'afafine to the status of man, the prospect of increased personal freedom as fa'afafine will perhaps lead fewer young fa'afafine to break away from a fa'afafine identity in order to pursue traditional Samoan values, like marriage and children. An enhanced understanding in Samoa for Western trends and values that influence younger generations may add to the motivation of having, and keeping, a fa'afafine identity. I must emphasize that I do not imply that young males assume the gender role of fa'afafine for the sole reason of enhancing their chances of leading more independent lives. I argue, however, that the prospect of increased personal freedom as a fa'afafine compared to a man is a motivating factor for fa'afafine, who assess the possibility of reassuming the role of man in order to start a family and thus secure old age and avoid loneliness.

Another change has to do with the social position of fa'afafine. Intimate relationships between Samoan men and fa'afafine are generally of short duration, as it is not condoned for a Samoan man and a fa'afafine to live together. As tourism increases and more Samoans travel, the prospect of finding a foreign partner for life has also become a new factor in the lives of many fa'afafine. Fa'afafine have opportunities of settling down with a partner on a long-term basis, either with a foreigner in Samoa, or abroad. Most likely, life as single is not a necessary consequence of a fa'afafine identity to the same extent as in the past. I view these factors to play in when the number of fa'afafine is found to increase, or fa'afafine appear to have become more salient in Samoa.

(Part One)

Attitudes of the Present

In the Introduction, I described the encounter with a Samoan cabdriver and his amusement over my research plans. The cabdriver was only the first among many Samoans to ask why I was in Samoa, and I witnessed a wide range of reactions to my research. The responses included surprise, laughter, puzzlement, and indifference, among others. Some non-fa'afafine reacted with slight annoyance. They wanted to know why I had chosen to write about fa'afafine, and why I could not change the topic. A few expressed concerns about what people overseas would think of Samoa.

This chapter is roughly divided into two parts. In the first half, many of the fa'afafine informants' perceptions of the attitudes that they encounter daily, or experienced in childhood years, are presented. As will become apparent, fa'afafine's experiences, and their impressions of how people perceive them, vary considerably. In Apia where people are familiar with the Cindy show, and where fa'afafine beauty pageants are staged, fa'afafine are well known for the entertainment they provide. The presentation of contemporary entertainment in chapter 8 offers a backdrop for a better understanding of some of the assessments below made by fa'afafine informants.

It is also my intention in part one to illustrate the variety of attitudes towards fa'afafine that prevail in the Samoan society. Assessing people's attitudes based on their verbal and non-verbal actions can be difficult in a society that prides itself of being friendly and hospitable. As Mageo words it, they "vaunt care as a primary feature of their cultural identity" (2001: 210). Such an image is likely maintained partly by impression management. Many Samoans (fa'afafine and non-fa'afafine) convey a picture of a society where fa'afafine are cherished and fully accepted. My first impression of fa'afafine was that they were incorporated into society like everyone else. The fa'afafine did not appear to attract attention or evoke reactions unless they wished to do so. I never witnessed any direct physical or verbal hostility towards fa'afafine. However, by talking to people and observing behavior, and comparing saying with doing, I gradually acquired a sense of existing mind-sets.

Notably, there is likely to be a number of viewpoints, as no single viewpoint will fairly epitomize prevailing attitudes.

Part one also proposes to give an impression of the sexual or gendered climate in Samoa. Incidents from fieldwork, and the reactions the incidents evoked in people, are intended to draw a picture of sexual norms, as well as attitudes related to the sexual aspect of the fa'afafine role.

The second part of the chapter highlights attitudes of the churches. As many Christian churches worldwide disapprove of homosexual lifestyles, the fa'afafine's strong presence in a Christian country like Samoa can be perceived as somewhat of a contradiction. To shed light on the apparently unproblematic relationship between the Church and fa'afafine, I contacted representatives of various churches. I also questioned informants about their view on the Church and their experiences within it.

Facing Up To Reality

Various attitudes prevail in the Samoan society concerning fa'afafine. With some fa'afafine, disapproval from fellow citizens can fuel willpower to stand strong come hell or high water. For instance, I asked Tony how he would react if somebody did not like him because he was a fa'afafine. He answered, "I'd just smack their face, just let them come. I love those incidents. I'll stand up for what I believe." Sarah's reply to the same question was, "I don't care. I ignore them, they're not worth it."

While some fa'afafine handle confrontations with self-confidence, others may be intimidated by negative attitudes, and require more time to face up to people who display these attitudes. An incident with Sam, one of the younger informants, depicts a slightly insecure fa'afafine vulnerable to perceived hostility. It was late one evening at a bar, and Sam walked over to me, and we exchanged greetings. He then asked me if I would mind ordering a drink for him. Sam added quietly that the bartender, Fata, was not very nice to him, and that he looked angry. Sam felt certain Fata did not like fa'afafine. I tried to assure him that Fata appeared to be grumpy all the time, and that he was not as angry as he looked.

My attempt at comforting Sam had no effect however, and he squirmed and looked uncomfortable. He said he would really rather not have to approach Fata again.

It is, however, reasonable to claim that living in Apia where fa'afafine are a constant part of the setting is a support for tentative fa'afafine in need of role models and a possibility of comforting solidarity. One of my informant's comments touches on this subject. He described being a fa'afafine as "a survival thing". He said, "Especially when you're young, when being a part of your own age group is important. If you do survive (as a fa'afafine), you'll be more tolerant and self-confident. If you don't survive, you'll get very withdrawn, won't want to go out, be afraid of being taunted, can't fight back. Another alternative is going "straight". If they don't know how to deal with it, going "straight" would be the easiest way."

Fa'afafine as Entertainers

Several informants gave their impressions of how fa'afafine in general are regarded by the Samoan society. Damion stated, "Fa'afafine are generally accepted as funny people, entertainers. If I were a woman with children, I'd accept other *mala*, but prefer that my own kid wasn't. When it hits home, it's different. You will find different attitudes. (...) They (fa'afafine) are definitely more accepted now. There's more understanding. One of the reasons we do the shows, pageants, is to show that we are quite capable of doing other things than the sleazy stuff, the stereotyping." I understood Damion's last words to refer to the homosexual acts that they are stereotypically notorious for.

Tony also mentioned the effects of the fa'afafine beauty pageants, and said, "The beauty pageants are a help. They give us a positive attitude—they are all for charity. And within the families and villages, the fa'afafine are respected. And we have decorators, designers, and singers who are popular. In general, we are welcome in the public."

In contrast, Cleopatra appeared to be a bit fed up, and indicated annoyance with living in what he experienced as a two-faced town. He grumbled, "There are some people that accept us, but that's bullshit. They just say it—they don't really. They accept us in certain

stuff, but not in everything. Like when we entertain, they come and get a laugh, but they don't want to be seen sitting talking with us, or something like that.”

At the time, Cleopatra's critical statements about people who pretended to accept fa'afafine came as a surprise to me. On numerous occasions, Cleopatra and I would go for a coffee, or go shopping down town. I was often struck by how Cleopatra appeared to know “everyone”, and how friendly faces, smiles, and nods met him wherever he turned. When we stopped for a chat, Cleopatra would easily be the center of attention, making those around him laugh at his jokes and mischievous antics. It is plausible that Cleopatra's active role in the entertainment business is of relevance for interpreting Cleopatra's criticism above. Although he appeared to enjoy the interactions, perhaps he felt that people expected him to be funny and entertaining, and that the whole interaction pivoted on his talent to entertain. Possibly he was under the impression that stepping out of character would harm social relations. He may think that that is all people see and appreciate in him.

A mutual acquaintance of Cleopatra and myself told me that Cleopatra had been teased well into the 1990s, but that Cleopatra now had become somewhat of an icon in society. These comments indicate that Cleopatra has experienced both challenging and good times, where positive attitudes to a large degree may have followed his rise to success. In the view of these circumstances, Cleopatra's statements become more comprehensible.

A Fickle Society

Not all of my informants' comments about prevailing attitudes in society dealt with entertainment. Sam, for instance, described the Samoan culture as harassing, and stated, “Their first reaction to someone different is to laugh, make fun. Others say that fa'afafine are very talented and good at what they do, clean and neat. Theory and praxis... It's hypocritical.” Reflecting on change of attitudes, Sam concluded, “There is influence from off island. Some states in the US are approving gay marriages. Slowly here, people are starting to understand that people are different, not only fa'afafine but different religions, cultures, etc. Like kids on the beaches here will learn white people's cultures about bikini

wear, what they wear when they swim⁹⁶. They don't see their parents like that. It will be fine; it would be boring if everyone was alike. Boring with just white—colors are nice.”

A *fa'afafine* who was subjected to harassment is Tom, who told about an incident downtown a little while back. He had climbed into a taxi, and the driver had turned around and asked whether he was Tom, which he confirmed. The driver then commanded, “Get out of my car.” “What, is my money not good enough for you?” Tom had replied, whereby the driver simply said, “Get out of my car, you're evil.” The conversation had ended there, and Tom jumped out.

Tony meant that the attitude change was continuous. He declared, “We still can't avoid humiliation in the general public. We still experience negative attitudes towards us. That's why it's an ongoing thing. Some ruin our reputation, like Lisa, still being arrested. A few do bad stuff, and they ruin our reputation, especially the street girls, like Lisa. “She” was taken for child molesting. They walk the streets and they take money—sometimes. Like Lafi, “she” doesn't work in the Government! “She” tells everyone “she” does, and “she” wears the *sulu* and white shirt, and at nighttime “she's” in an evening gown. “She's” probably just an office boy, “she” is definitely not in the Government!”

Nancy drew a comparison with how the *fa'atama* (tomboys) are treated by society and said, “They (the general public) accept us, accept us much more than the lesbians. I don't know why, maybe because all the *mala* have been fighting from the beginning. Like there used to be a law against dressing (cross dressing). (...) I predict we'll become very strong, like the ones in Australia, with their own festivals. In the past, all the *mala* were so close to each other, but today they're all doing their own thing. They're not getting along that well. They had to stick together before, probably because they were less accepted then. Now they argue a lot, say stuff about each other. A lot of backstabbing.”

Pio also brought up *fa'atama*, but was under a different impression than Nancy. Pio asserted, “Relationships between two women are more hidden, but people are more tolerant with two women living together. Sometimes a *fa'afafine* and a man are living together even

⁹⁶ In general, Samoans swim in a T-shirt and a *lavalava* or shorts. It is not common to only wear a bathing suit or bikini, though foreigners/tourists often do.

in the least likely places, like a village. But it takes understanding and tolerance from families. We're a very fickle society."

Experiences from School Days

During conversations about informants' childhood, accounts from schooldays illustrating existing attitudes surfaced. Damion, who had moved around a bit during his schooling, had experienced how different the environments at schools could be. "Over here (Samoa) it was good. Fa'afafine in school hung out together. In Form 1 and Form 2 we were about seven fa'afafine. There was teasing, but nothing major. I don't see kids today being teased as much. Back then it was new for everybody. In one class, it was just me. The teasing was like "Hi auntie!". Here the teasing was more fun. In New Zealand, there were absolutely no fa'afafine in the whole school. There the teasing was more degrading, the attitude was totally something else, like "Fucking faggot!" At high school here, there were about ten fa'afafine in one class! Young boys tease more than girls, and fa'afafine will often be more friends with girls. Now, with guys being older, it doesn't bother them anymore."

Tiresa told me about an episode from when he went to high school. "We were playing rugby in front of my house, and my dad called me over. He told me not to run like that (in a feminine way) and shout like that, and play more like a man." Another incident was when his father had caught him standing with other fa'afafine after school. "He came driving and picked me up. He started hitting me in the car. I got a beating at home."

Nancy also told me about some rather turbulent episodes. "I was told by my mom not to hang with the other fa'afafine. I did hang with them all day, but I asked them to stay away after school finished, because my mom might come. She usually picked me up and drove me home. One time, in my graduation year, I was by the school gate, walking with two boys, swinging my hips and holding my hand like this..." and he showed me how he had held his arm, bent at the elbow with his hand hanging loosely from the wrist. "My mom came—I didn't know she was there. Suddenly I heard, "Who said you could swing your hips like that! Get in the fucking car!" And she slapped me across the face. It was so embarrassing. I was embarrassed in front of the whole school," and he placed a hand on his cheek, as if hiding

his face, reenacting the shameful moment. Later he added, “I never got into trouble when I was in school. I got teased, but I didn’t really care. They got tired of it. In the end, everyone respected me.”

Other episodes from when Nancy was a teenager and attending school, illustrates the family’s attitude towards Nancy’s lifestyle. Once, the mother caught Nancy kissing a boy. “I’m gonna hang you, and I’m gonna beat you to death,” the mother threatened. “She didn’t,” Nancy added, “but my brothers beat me.” A brother also beat Nancy when he found him sitting behind the church talking to a boy. When Nancy said that all they were doing was talking, he exclaimed, “Don’t get smart with me!”. “My mom helped my brother beat me, with a branch. I still love my mom—it’s part of our culture, although you guys (Western foreigners) call it abuse,” Nancy stated.

Young Uelese, who was still in school, admitted that the boys at school were mean. Uelese is a prefect, which means he is second after the head boy and head girl. According to one of the teachers at his school, being a prefect automatically gives Uelese more responsibility and respect. He said, “They tell me to not act like a fa’afafine. They say “You’re not a girl, you’re a boy!” I get upset. It hurts. They don’t make me who I am. They’ve never hit me. It’s mostly boys, but some girls tease too. I think about it when I get teased: Why am I a fa’afafine? Why didn’t God make me a girl, or a boy?”

Affecting People’s Attitudes

The diverse viewpoints presented above range from disappointment in a hypocritical society, to an optimistic belief in the future and in ongoing changes. Some informants experienced upsetting incidents at school, while others did not appear troubled by the teasing. Others have fond memories from school days, but can recount distressing episodes involving angry parents outside of school.

It is difficult to detect any correlations between the attitudes a fa’afafine encounters, with, for instance, his level of femininity, or prominence in society. Cleopatra and Tom, who are two of the more renowned fa’afafine in Apia, recounted negative experiences. Cleopatra, a fa’afafine-*teine*, accuses Samoans of being insincere in their acceptance. People will come

to be entertained by him, but will not sit down for a chat. Tom, a fa'afafine-*tama*, tells of an incidence where he was refused a taxi ride after having been identified. It is probable that well-known fa'afafine experience people reacting to them to a larger extent than more unobtrusive fa'afafine. In contrast to the latter, well-known fa'afafine have acted in a certain way or voiced opinions, that have left people with specific impressions of them.

Naturally, these impressions may be positive as well. Fa'afafine who hold respectable jobs, or are prominent in society in other ways, are in a position to set a good example. They can show that fa'afafine can be beneficial to society on the same level as non-fa'afafine, and are therefore to be taken seriously, and treated with respect. One fa'afafine worked as an anchor man at the national television-station. He was almost daily on the news, and was somewhat of a celebrity. I have the impression that he was generally recognized as a talented and hard working person.

An additional factor that may affect how people view fa'afafine is how they choose to dress. On one hand, it can be argued that femininely dressed fa'afafine provoke the most resistance. They constitute an extreme contrast to Samoan men, as they are visibly the most feminine fa'afafine. One man reacted with annoyance when he heard I was writing about fa'afafine, which could suggest that some heterosexual men see fa'afafine as a disgrace to the male sex, and/or possibly to Samoan culture. Fa'afafine-*tama* are more neutral in their physical appearance and do therefore not attract attention to the same degree.

On the other hand, fa'afafine-*teine* can be perceived as less provocative. Contrary to masculine attired fa'afafine, the obvious femininity of fa'afafine-*teine* sets them apart from heterosexual men. The femininity creates distance that leaves the role of masculine men undisturbed. Additionally, fa'afafine have been characterized as jesters (Mageo 1998: 209). Like jesters, fa'afafine-*teine* wear clothes that denote their position in society. Like jesters, they are frequently not taken seriously, and may consequently be regarded as harmless. On stage, fa'afafine are given the opportunity to toy with serious matters in provocative ways that would not be condoned if done by others than the fa'afafine⁹⁷. If women had performed

⁹⁷ The fa'afafine entertainers on stage make a caricature of the Christian-colonial role using the Samoan joke genre *ula* (see chap. 7).

the same act, the audience would likely have found the joking vulgar and obscene. It is the fa'afafine's marginality that "renders him comically harmless" (Senelick 2000: 463).

Impression Managements

The people, who according to Cleopatra said they accepted fa'afafine but did not in praxis, are examples of persons who put on public appearances that diverge from these individuals' private realities (Tseëlon 1995: 41). Below are incidents that depict incongruence between verbal and non-verbal actions. It is important to note that the incongruence does not necessarily reflect discrepancy in values.

One morning while I was having coffee at a restaurant down town, I had a short conversation with one of the girls working there, Lesina. She asked me what I was doing in Samoa. I answered her, whereby she immediately blurted out with the apparently unambiguous comment, "I don't like fa'afafine." I asked her why not, and she declared, "They are bad. They do bad things." When I beckoned her to tell me what those bad things were, she answered evasively, "You know!" As Lesina would not clarify it anymore, I could only interpret by her smile and her bashfulness that she was referring to the fa'afafine's sexual activities with men. One of her coworkers was a fa'afafine informant of mine. Lesina's view was not apparent in her behavior towards him. The two of them gave the impression of getting along very well at work. On the one hand, Lesina may dislike all fa'afafine, but choose to conceal her feelings at the restaurant for the sake of decent behavior and a pleasant atmosphere at work. On the other hand, Lesina's remark is perhaps best understood as a general comment about fa'afafine's notorious sex life, which does not necessarily affect her behavior towards individual fa'afafine.

Another illustration of impression management is selected from a bar/restaurant where two fa'afafine worked as waiter and bartender. Pika, who was a straight boy in his early twenties, worked closely with the fa'afafine. Now and then Pika would say, "I hate those faggots!", referring to his two coworkers, and possibly also fa'afafine in general. On a number of occasions, Pika and the two fa'afafine teased each other. They called each other names, and shrieking with laughter they would chase after one another in the kitchen. The

general amicable interaction between Pika and the two fa'afafine suggests that Pika's derogatory words are better understood indexically, where the meaning depends on the context (Briggs 1992: 196). "Hate" may reflect Pika's frustration or irritation over his coworkers in certain stressful work situations, or as a joking way of reacting towards their teasing. Pika was known to grumble and complain, and would therefore not be taken very seriously when he did. He used "hate" often, and would for instance tell me he hated girls. His actions, however, were not in accordance with his words, as he dated a girl, and had several good friends who were girls. Remarks about hating fa'afafine could also be intended to emphasize his masculinity and communicate to others that he was not one of those men who were attracted to fa'afafine.

After having spent much time with them, watching them work out front in the restaurant as well as observing "backstage language of behavior" (Goffman 1971: 129) in the kitchen, I find it justifiable to conclude that the relations among the three were amicable, and that to take Pika's remark about fa'afafine literally is misconceiving.

Tim, a young man in his late twenties, was not enthusiastic about fa'afafine. Despite having had good friends in the past who were fa'afafine, he was apt to call them names and make fun of them, though not to their face. He stated that he was of the opinion that they could do whatever they wanted, as long as they left him alone. It was clarified that leaving him alone meant not making a pass at him. A fa'afafine who sexually came on to Tim and disregarded his rejection risked verbal abuse or a black eye. Fa'afafine who interacted with him on a no-nonsense and non-sexual basis appeared to have his respect, however.

These comments and actions presented above do not only testify to the varying attitudes that prevail among people, but also show that the attitude people convey may not always square with their actions. Some will want to present the Samoan society as tolerant, and therefore over-communicate how fa'afafine are a natural and accepted part of the community. Others, contrarily, may wish to under-communicate fa'afafine's role. They may stress their disapproval of fa'afafine as well as point out other parts of their culture that they are more proud of, and that they would rather see be made focus of attention, and topic for research.

Keeping Up Appearances

Not long after I arrived in Samoa, I was standing on the main street, watching people shuffling up and down, and I got a distinct feeling something was amiss. I just could not quite put my finger on it. As it is often harder to notice things that are absent than things that are present and unusual to the eye, it took awhile before I realized what it was. I could not see any couples. I could see pairs of men and women walking along, but no obvious couples, no holding hands, no pecks on the cheek, or kisses for goodbye. Ten to one, the couple you saw kissing or holding hands were foreigners.

As I later learned, in accordance with the *fa'aSamoa*, intimacy belongs to the private sphere. People do not usually show romantic affection in public. Although the dancing some young couples engage in at nightclubs is hardly in a puritanical spirit, there is little blatant display of kissing or other confirmation of affection.

Homosexual acts are forbidden by law (Western Samoa Statutes Reprint 1992: 633-634), and the display of romantic affection between two of the same gender is rare. The following data is included to help illustrate the “sexual climate” that Pio speaks of (see below).

In Apia, there was a couple that consisted of a *fa'afafine* and a foreign man. Although seldom, they would show their affection in public by a kiss. However, they were the only same-sex couple I came across that was completely open about their relationship. Intolerance for display of same-sex affection became apparent one night at a local bar. A band was playing, and a number of people were dancing. Unpredictably, two men started to dance intimately by clinging clumsily to each other. They appeared to be drunk, judging by their movements. A security guard was quickly on the spot to separate the two men. The men broke loose and continued to dance separately. Other couples of men and women dancing intimately in a sexual manner were not interrupted. The two men did not appear to be causing trouble for the surrounding people, which suggests that it was their unconventional behavior the security guard objected to.

Another incident that comes to mind took place one night at Bar A. I was there with three other girls and Tala, a *fa'afafine*. Tala had been flirting with an American man, who

most likely was a tourist. I had never seen him before, and it did not look as if he knew anyone. He came and sat down at our table next to Tala. Before long, he and Tala were kissing, and eyes from all around the bar were on them, smirks and snickers escaping the bystanders. Not only did the American seem oblivious to the fact that he was kissing a male, but he appeared to pay no heed either to the girls at our table who were in hysterics, and squirming in an attempt to smother their laughter. The American may nevertheless have caught on, because he mysteriously disappeared a short while later. This turned out to be a problem, as Tala had ordered beer to everyone at the table, counting on the American to pay the bill.

Unconcealed kissing in public places is not common, and a show of affection like this between a man and a woman would likely have attracted some attention. However, Tala and the American attracted more attention than what could be expected of a man/woman couple. The attention, and laughter and snickering, can be interpreted several ways. First and foremost, it appears to me that people were primarily laughing at a foreigner who was being fooled by a fa'afafine. Secondly, intimate acts between fa'afafine and men are known to happen, but then in seclusion. Thirdly, sexual relations between men and fa'afafine are not generally taken seriously.

The first reason is best understood if Tala's actions are interpreted to have been in the spirit of the *ula*. People could have been laughing at the fa'afafine whose unconventional attraction to men led him to kiss another man. However, while they kissed, Tala kicked us under the table and snuck a hand behind his back to pinch the giggling girl next to him. Tala's attempts to communicate with everyone at the table during the kissing, suggests that Tala was including us all in the joke. Contrary to ridiculing himself, Tala made a playful assault on the American's dignity through self-exposure in a bodily and undignified antic. Additionally, as dignity is the bodily idiom of status (Mageo 1998: 196), Tala ridiculed an American tourist whose money Tala had counted on should pay for a round of beer.

Informant Isak noted that it was common in Samoa to laugh at other people. He pointed out that when people laughed at fa'afafine, it was usually because they found the fa'afafine's actions or comments funny, and not because the fa'afafine were males dressed in

women's clothes. Isak stated that laughing is not derogatory, and that women laugh at men and vice versa. "The fa'afafine are the comedians," Isak concluded, which substantiates the characterization of them as jesters.

The second reason proposed entails that acts of an intimate or sexual nature between men and fa'afafine are not common in the open. An unusual display like the one of Tala and the American will attract attention. As men do not usually tell women about their sexual encounters with fa'afafine, they may talk about the sexual encounter among themselves. Different from the men, fa'afafine appear to relish in pointing out men they have been intimate with. I experienced several times that an informant would give me a nudge and with a satisfied grin nod towards a young man. Typically, the nod was coupled with a judging remark about the man or the sexual encounter. A number of Samoan men and a couple of informants confirmed that men brag amongst themselves about sex with fa'afafine, but they never tell a woman. The following account should illustrate the assertions above.

Vai is a boy in his early twenties who had had sexual encounters with a fa'afafine on several occasions. Two separate sources informed me of this on their own account, the fa'afafine in question and a male friend of Vai's. Before this information came to my attention, I had asked Vai if he hypothetically would have sex with a fa'afafine. He had shaken his head and replied no. It exemplifies how a man tells his male friends about his sexual experiences with a fa'afafine, but chooses to conceal it from female friends.

In Polynesia, gender liminals are generally regarded as sexually accessible (Nanda 2000: 67). They are also viewed as "inherently promiscuous, transient, and lacking in significance" (ibid.). On the same note, Niko Besnier points out that as no brother-sister relationship protects the gender liminal from men's advances, these individuals become sexual "fair game" in a much broader sense than women are (1994: 301). As real girls, they fa'afafine would have had such a protection from brothers. The following incident demonstrates how sexual interaction between a man and a fa'afafine can be perceived as less significant than sexual interaction between a man and a woman.

Isak had had a lover for some time, but did not know his lover had a wife. He was therefore greatly surprised to find his lover attempt to introduce the woman next to him as

his wife, and not as his sister or cousin as he had expected. The woman appeared unhappy and did not wish to be introduced to Isak. The lover explained later that his wife had become suspicious when he had not come home several nights. She had accused him of being unfaithful, whereby he had brought her to meet Isak. The fact that he had had an affair with a fa'afafine, and not a woman, had been an extenuating circumstance. Although the woman was not in high spirits, the liaison was apparently not a grave threat to the marriage. Isak proposed that the impossibility of the affair resulting in children was also a mitigating circumstance. The story lends support to the assertion that sexual relations between fa'afafine and men are not taken very seriously.

Nanda refers to Levy on the gender liminals in Tahiti, who are perceived as a practical and “relatively pressure-free alternative to women for the release of sexual tension” (op. cit.: 66). One man explained to me that if a man was out on a date with a girl, he might seek a fa'afafine afterwards. It was understood that this was only if the girl declined a sexual invitation. “To release the pressure, you know...” he clarified. The man next to him added, “They (Samoan men) don't care. If they get desperate, they'll take anything.” Nanda also asserts that sex with Polynesian gender liminals is often associated with younger men and viewed as a sign that the young men cannot find a woman as sexual partner. She writes that married men are expected to have sex only with women (ibid.). Although this latter expectation is not always the actual case (Isak's lover was married), a police officer recounted a common incident that supports the association of fa'afafine with young men. The police officer, a humorous man in his fifties, depicted his younger colleagues' behavior at night when the nightclubs closed. He laughed heartily as he said that if the boys did not drink too much, they had sense enough to go straight home. However, if they were drunk, they were liable to find a fa'afafine and wander off with him.

During our last interview, Pio reflected on characteristics of the Samoan culture, especially those that touched on sexuality, respect, and individualism. He commented on what he perceived as hypocritical tendencies in Samoa, and said thoughtfully, “I think it goes back to our own culture. We're a group-kind of people, we should be looking after our own, but we're very pretentious. It reminds me of an English program called “Keeping up

Appearances”. Our society can be caring, maybe tolerant, but somewhere people draw the line, especially for sexual conduct. This is a country raised on Christian principles. Some run away from home, maybe later they come back and then the family will accept them.”

Pio has received much of his education abroad, and was able to draw a comparison to New Zealand. He shared some of his hopes and visions for the future, and stated, “In New Zealand, the *palagi* question a lot of things, they are more outspoken, independent, questioning. It makes it easier. Here, there is an umbrella of respect. People have to be polite to their parents. They (fa’afafine) don’t dare to force their fa’afafine life on them. The sexual climate in Samoa is that everything should be behind curtains. There is no showing of affection here, no kissing, no holding hands. It’s a cultural thing. We need to not only fight for fa’afafine’s rights, like to introduce boy friends/partners at home, but fight for everyone’s rights. For instance, let them show affection on TV, and let us switch channels. Maybe the next step is for fa’afafine to get together and talk about important issues. There is no MP (Member of Parliament) that is fa’afafine openly yet. Fa’afafine are everywhere, but not openly. They’d probably be the last ones to point their finger at issues, because they don’t want to throw their cover. There is a transsexual MP in New Zealand. He went from being a man to a woman. It will happen here, but... The gay movement overseas has speeded up development here. But, you’ll always have the Samoan perspective. In New Zealand there are exclusive gay clubs. Here, you wouldn’t want to go to a club where everyone is gay. Fa’afafine want mixed clubs. But again, context, if the society says, “no—we don’t want you here”, gay clubs will be better. It’s a matter of comfort zone.”

A different setting that also may welcome fa’afafine to varying degrees is the church. Whether a fa’afafine is within, or out of, his comfort zone in church will likely be determined by the attitudes of the church in question. In the following second part of this chapter I will focus on how some informants experience attending church, and how they feel about the Script on homosexuality. Extracts from meetings with representatives from several different congregations will also be presented.

CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

(Part Two)

Samoa, Founded on God⁹⁸

“If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.”
(Leviticus 20:13)⁹⁹

The Bible not only condemns homosexual relations but also denounces the wearing of the opposite sex’s clothes (see Deuteronomy 22:5). Considering that 99.7 % of the Samoan population is Christian (CIA 2001), one could expect unconcealed homosexual liaisons between fa’afafine and men to be a controversial issue. However, the homosexual activities of the Samoan males did not appear to attract much attention at all. The rest of the chapter is primarily based on conversations with various church representatives and fa’afafine informants.

God Made Adam and Eve, Not Adam and Steve

“They say that God did not create fa’afafine...”

Mani, referring to his church, Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS)

An informative afternoon was spent at the Methodist Church’s offices with two reverends and two laymen from administration, Uli and Tili. The discussion became lively, as we all sat in the same room, and the four men were not always in agreement. The reverends seemed more timid than the other two, and were not as loud. Tili was the most talkative, and stated enthusiastically that the fa’afafine were good members of the church, and that they sang in the choir. He generalized them as good individuals, and added, “They are very meticulous, good cooks, and they do the women’s jobs often better than the women.” After a while he said, “Who are we to judge? Never mind the Bible, I don’t think it says anywhere that Jesus

⁹⁸ The motto of the Samoan people is “Samoa is founded on God” (Meleisea 1987: 70).

⁹⁹ The Holy Bible, New International Version 1979. See Tim 1:9-11, Romans 1:24-27, Deuteronomy 22:5, Jude 7, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 for excerpts from the Bible condemning homosexual acts and dressing in clothes of the opposite sex.

didn't accept fa'afafine. I think that the apostle Paul was one (a fa'afafine)." He laughingly admitted to having envied fa'afafine, watching them at parties accompanied by beautiful girls, while he himself had not met any. He concluded, "I like fa'afafine," and added that he knew many nice fa'afafine, including one working nearby at a restaurant as a chef. He was so eager for me to meet the fa'afafine, that he sent someone down to the restaurant to fetch him.

Tili's clearly positive portrayal of the fa'afafine was to be considered a personal view, and not the Church's official view. Tili's comments, along with Tili and Uli's discussion on sex between fa'afafine and men, may have prompted one of the reverends to voice the Church's official attitude towards homosexuality. "The Methodist Church does *not* accept homosexuality," he shot in, looking directly at me, finally getting a word in. However, the reverends did say fa'afafine could become ministers, as long as they were single, or married to a woman.

During another conversation with Tili and two other reverends, one of the reverends stated bluntly that he did not like fa'afafine, and that he was of the opinion that fa'afafine should behave like men. He asserted that that is how God had created them; as men. In reply to the question of why some males were fa'afafine, he stated fa'afafine's desire for sex with men as the main cause. Consequently, I asked if it was necessary to be a fa'afafine—as opposed to being a man—in order to have sex with a man. In unison, the three men present answered yes.

In more recent years, new church communities have settled in Samoa. The leader of one of these congregations was of special interest to me because he was the only Christian representative to my knowledge to have publicly spoken against fa'afafine. He had debated on a Christian radio channel, and on TV on Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). As a response to one of the pastor's public performances, a fa'afafine had written a letter to the *Samoa Observer*, criticizing and rebuking the clergyman. During a conversation with the pastor, he made me understand that he had nothing personally against fa'afafine, and that he knew several nice people who were fa'afafine. However, he felt obligated, as a servant of God, to inform fa'afafine and others of what the Bible preached on these matters. He said he

could not turn and look the other way, like some chose to do for fear of how people around would react. He feared God more than his fellow being. He said that when his last day came, and he was to stand before God, he had to be able to say that he had done his duty; that he had spread God's word, and tried to help people live by the word of God. He informed me that fa'afafine were welcome in the community, but were to dress as men and refrain from homosexual activity.

Some of the fa'afafine I talked to knew this church leader, or knew of him. One fa'afafine informant told me that he once had the pastor as a customer at work. The informant had refused to serve the church leader and had fetched another fa'afafine colleague to replace him. The fa'afafine colleague had made a point of acting especially feminine in front of the pastor. When Sarah heard I had scheduled a meeting with the pastor, he wrinkled his nose. According to Sarah, the church leader hated fa'afafine and had said that God did not create fa'afafine. "Well then who did?" was Sarah's quick retort.

Hate the Sin and Love the Sinner

The pastor of another new congregation was a defender of living by absolutes, and stressed the danger of thinking in terms of relativity. For instance, an individual was either a man or a woman and was to behave accordingly. The pastor's wife was concerned with the way people, like some church leaders, had the attitude "it doesn't matter". She referred to an incident where a woman in the congregation had come to her looking for help. This woman had a fa'afafine working for her as a maid, and wondered whether that could be considered wrong. The pastor's wife had said that she should delegate a man's chores to the fa'afafine, and not women's work. Being given female chores would only encourage the fa'afafine to remain fa'afafine. The pastor's wife added that if the fa'afafine really needed the money, he could do man's work. The woman had admitted she had talked with another church leader's wife, whose response had been that it did not matter that she had a fa'afafine as a maid. The pastor's wife was surprised to hear the church leader's wife's response, and meant that condoning attitudes like that was a problem.

The pastor's wife pointed out that a fa'afafine was a fa'afafine until he was relieved of homosexual feelings. Different to what her husband had said, she was of the opinion that it was not enough just to wear men's clothes and abstain from homosexuality. The fa'afafine needed to rid themselves of the longing in their hearts, and therefore only they themselves could truly know when they no longer were fa'afafine. She was however sincerely confident that such a change could take place.

I confronted the pastor's wife with the hypothetical situation of what actions they as church leaders would go to if a homosexually active fa'afafine dressed in women's clothes came to church. She said they most likely would approach the fa'afafine, and talk to him, and tell him what it says in the Bible. "You know, God says, love the sinner, but hate the sins. And I hate the sins," she said earnestly. She added that some fa'afafine did come to church, and that everyone was welcome.

Shepherding the Lost Sheep

The pastor's wife described to me how they as church leaders looked upon themselves as "shepherds". The shepherd with a 100 sheep has to leave the 99 behind, if one sheep strayed from the flock. Like the outspoken pastor had said (see p. 171-172), one day they would have to stand before God and be held responsible for their work here on Earth. She said that because many fear their fellow human beings more than they fear God, they do not face and deal with problems. Homosexuality was merely one of many problems, and she did not consider homosexuality a bigger sin than any other. She could not recollect the church ever specifically bringing up homosexuality as a topic.

The pastor was of the conviction that homosexuality was not biological, but rather something spiritual that was given a concrete expression. He told me how several fa'afafine had come to him and his wife for help, saying they did not wish to continue to lead the life they led. A common denominator among some of the fa'afafine was that they had experienced people abusing them in their childhood. The fa'afafine wanted the couple to pray for them. The pastor's wife recounted of one schoolteacher who had abused some boys at school. He was sincerely repentant and sad, and said he could not go on living like that.

He wanted a family of his own, but dared not have children in the house, for fear he would abuse them too. The teacher wanted the pastor and his wife to pray for him, whereby she had told him he had to pray as well. The will to change had to come from him, and he had to cut the contacts he had with other fa'afafine. Apparently, an uncle of the teacher had abused him as a child.

As the pastor's wife had asserted that a majority of the fa'afafine who had come to their congregation for help had experiences of molestation as a child, I included the matter of molestation in my repertoire of questions to informants. I told them that some people were of the opinion that many fa'afafine had been molested as a child, and that that was the reason they had become fa'afafine. Without making it a direct personal question, I asked for their reaction. "Not a very good theory," was one comment. "I don't think it's true, I can't believe that," and "Never heard of such a case. I wouldn't agree. I'd say it's a natural thing," were two other reactions. Yet another one was, "Could be possible, in some cases it might be, but in most cases I don't think so. I don't know of any cases." A fourth response was, "I strongly believe that from a psychological perspective, that could happen—I see it as a fact. It's an issue that has always been raised. Not only fa'afafine, but also girls; some turn out weird, others turn out okay. Their minds have been affected by the incident. It's not the main reason, but it could be true for some."

Standing out from the prior comments, one informant said humorously, "Well I'm sure they liked it." Already taken off guard by that remark, I was quite unprepared for what he was to say next. He continued, "When I was about seven or eight years, I was molested by my cousins and uncles. When we'd go to the plantations, we'd do it there. But it doesn't make me a fa'afafine. I was that from the beginning. I didn't mind what they did—why should I?" and he laughed heartily. I then asked if he would call it molestation, and he thought it over carefully before he said, "I'd call it good molesting, not a bad one," and he laughed again. "They used you to give them pleasure?" I asked, whereby he replied, "Yes, I was too young myself."

One fa'afafine offered a response that may shed light on the previous account. He explained, "At an early age in Samoa, fa'afafine really stand out. They are more expressive,

and maybe more vulnerable. At 10, 11, or 12 years old, a fa'afafine would much easier be approached sexually than a 12-year-old girl. They are therefore more likely to have sexual experience. You might hear many say that it's all part of growing up. It's actually the way the fa'afafine-boys are, that makes them likely to be in liaisons with older guys. Girls are more protected. I don't believe that the person becomes fa'afafine because of molestation. It's behavior that encourages "abuse". It's not necessarily against the will of the fa'afafine-boy."

Unambiguous Scripture

Fa'afafine cannot become a Jehovah's Witness. This was stated clearly during an interview with one of the coordinators at the headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses. The man explained that fa'afafine may study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, but if he wants to become a member, he must no longer live as a fa'afafine. The coordinator acknowledged that the uncompromising line of Jehovah's Witnesses might entail that fewer fa'afafine joined Jehovah's Witnesses than other congregations. He said that other churches might compromise more than Jehovah's Witnesses. Other congregations might state that the world had changed since the Bible was written, but Jehovah's Witnesses did not compromise and followed strictly the words of the Bible. The coordinator commented, "The Bible is not ambiguous, like the passages we just read—they're not ambiguous, are they?" In expectation of my visit, he had selected passages¹⁰⁰ from the Bible that dealt with homosexuality and cross-dressing, which he read aloud to me.

Early during the conversation, the coordinator asked me what I knew about the causes why some males became fa'afafine. When I hesitated in answering, he started explaining. He claimed that when a Samoan family did not have daughters, or not enough daughters, the parents would raise one of their sons as a girl, and dress him in girl clothes, and so forth. With evident confidence he asserted that biology had nothing to do with some males becoming fa'afafine. He brought up the topic of mankind's original sin, and the nature/nurture debate. He claimed that the Bible says that individuals are influenced by the

¹⁰⁰ One of the passages is presented earlier in this chapter.

surroundings (nurture), as well as original sin (nature). He also read a passage from the Bible that describes how the devil, in the shape of a dragon, and some angels fell to Earth. On Earth, the devil would do his utmost to destroy the work of God. The coordinator declared that all human beings have an inborn potential to be tempted by the devil and to commit sin. My understanding of his words was that homosexuals were among those tempted by the devil to commit sin.

At a meeting with an advisor from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), a booklet reading *Understanding and Helping Those Who Have Homosexual Problems* was pulled down from a shelf and handed to me. The advisor recommended I read the booklet, and stated he had no personal views on the matter of fa'afafine and homosexuality. He said, however, that homosexuality was not an issue in their church, and that there was not really much to talk about. Homosexuality was not discussed as an independent topic, but along with other sins like drug abuse, self-gratification, adultery, etc. The booklet describes homosexual behavior as sinful and immoral, which should be eliminated and repented (LDS 1992:1).

After the meeting, I was introduced to a young American serving his missionary duty in Samoa. He could inform me that there were fa'afafine in the congregation, and that they were welcome to be there. However, fa'afafine could not undertake ecclesiastical responsibilities or become church leaders or missionaries.

What the Eye Doesn't See, the Heart Doesn't Grieve

The former pastor of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS) was an elderly man, hard of hearing. He found my topic very interesting, and had never heard of anyone doing research on fa'afafine before. It turned out he was not aware that there were fa'afafine and men living together. His secretary, who was helping us out due to his impaired hearing, whispered to me, "I don't think he knows," when he had bluntly asserted that there were no men living together. She then told him that one of the fa'afafine he had mentioned was actually living with a man. He was surprised to hear it, and replied, "oh really...", and raised his eyebrows. I asked whether a fa'afafine could be a minister, upon which he answered yes,

informing me that there were several fa'afafine attending the theological college. He said they were sometimes teased, but that they tried hard to live like everybody else, by getting married, and having kids. They were still recognized as fa'afafine however, he pointed out.

I find the latter remark noteworthy. If males who are married and have children can be perceived as fa'afafine, it would seem to indicate that communicating man gender markers is not always sufficient to be recognized as man. It is not clear whether these male theological students also displayed fa'afafine gender markers, which most likely would have made their gender status ambiguous or weakened their credibility as men. This piece of information from the pastor also suggests that Samoans vary in their perception of the fa'afafine status as temporary or permanent. If one believes that a fa'afafine status is permanent, one will likely continue to perceive a male/fa'afafine as a fa'afafine even though he marries and has children.

Talking about homosexuality as an issue within the church, the former minister told me how he and his wife had been on a business trip to Australia to attend an annual meeting. He said homosexuality was a big issue there, "but not here in Samoa. If it became a problem, then maybe it would become an issue. But, that would maybe happen in the future, not now."

Like many other Samoans before him had done, he told me how fa'afafine do the women's work. He also maintained that sometimes a family would choose a boy to be brought up as a girl if there were not enough girls in the home. If there were people leading a homosexual life, they must be doing it in secrecy, because the Church would not accept it. He continued to say that some fa'afafine were more like women, others more like men. Some live with their families, while others live with other fa'afafine. Not knowing I had already made good contact with several fa'afafine, he encouraged me to speak with them personally and meet them with an open mind. He warned that the fa'afafine might not open up to me, if I met them with a critical attitude. He also said he hoped I would write something positive about Samoa. As I was about to leave, he thanked me for enlightening him, as he had not known there were two males living together.

The Gospel of Transformation

A pleasant morning was spent in the home of a pastor from the Apia Protestant Church. He proved to be accommodating and willing to share the Church's views as well as his personal views concerning fa'afafine and homosexuality. In answer to the question of whether he thought certain churches would be stricter or more lenient towards fa'afafine than other churches, he said, "Especially the main line churches¹⁰¹ are more accepting for convenience's sake. We are accepting in our church, but with a deep yearning in our heart that they can be transformed. I think they (the churches) are all accepting, although the evangelical¹⁰² are probably less accepting. We are a church with an open door; you can freely walk in, you can freely walk out. (...) We can only give the gospel, and we believe they can be saved from condemnation." He added that homosexuality was discussed along with other sins, and that the Church did not rank the sins.

The pastor informed me that two fa'afafine used to come to church. "None of them come any longer. One of them is now married to a man, a *palagi*, well not officially married, but it's no secret they are living together. I never preached against him, but I preached the word of salvation. (...) He only came to church five or six times. Somebody told me he would go out and cry. That happened twice. He might have felt guilt. I never got a chance to talk to him, because he would always leave right after the sermon. (...) I would not treat fa'afafine differently. I'd welcome them like everyone else. (...) I believe they can go through transformation, but unfortunately, that did not materialize for him. I have a feeling that conviction was there, but there was discomfort on his part. He seemed to be running away, not from me I don't think, but from the gospel. He seems to be afraid that there might be more to be said."

When I asked the pastor whether he saw any contradiction between the strong religious attitude in Samoa and the number of fa'afafine, he responded, "I agree, there is a

¹⁰¹ The main line churches are primarily the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, the Methodist Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. While a teacher at a Catholic school said there were 10 fa'afafine attending the school, a teacher at a Seventh Day Adventist school stated there were no fa'afafine attending the school. Both schools were considerable in size.

¹⁰² By evangelical churches he likely refers to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Assembly of God, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Worship Center, and New Wine Congregation among others.

contradiction. There are times when society should be blamed for this acceptance of those who opt for that (homosexual) lifestyle. These people (fa'afafine) are very committed, for instance, as members of the church choir or as part of the work force at church. This paralyzes the ethical standards laid out in the Word because of the good that they do."

In an attempt to explain why some males become fa'afafine, the pastor said, "I believe parents are the main cause of this. They have a lot to do with it. They run the lives of their kids. They don't allow their kids to be weaned on the father figure. They need someone to do female chores. You're either *in* or *out* of the house, *in* the village or *out* of the village. There are exhausting responsibilities in the plantation. If a boy is given only house chore responsibilities, the boy will think it's more comfortable than doing the masculine chores. It must be proven by statistics, but if the first-born is a boy, the mother will try to mold him into a girl, because she needs help around the house. If she only has boys, she will take a special favor upon one of the boys and gradually mold him—make him do the female chores. There are times when the father will feel uncomfortable having the son help him, because he doesn't want him getting hurt in the plantations. I am talking about how it all begins, not how it is later in life. Mothers will accept feminine sons and see the advantages; manpower. The father may not accept it. The mother will love to have a fa'afafine son, but not the father, who may see it as a sign of weakness in himself."

One of God's Interesting Creations

Tony stated, "About the Bible... It contradicts with what I believe; God created everything, and he created me in his varieties of creation. It's not a choice of creation. It's not a choice I made; I was born like this naturally. God created me like this, it's one of his interesting creations. If God didn't like this, I'd be dead by now, but since I'm still alive...". Tony's voice trailed off, leaving it up to me to finish his train of thought.

Sarah was previously quoted recounting how people in a Catholic congregation had called him Lady Diana for dressing up for church (see chap. 6). Sarah then stopped going to church for a while. The church he usually attended, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, was "still a bit stingy" with him. He declared, "You know how you can read people, how they are

to you. They didn't really know how to handle a black sheep like me." When I asked him what he thought about what the Bible says on these matters, he said, "It doesn't affect me. I was made like this. What am I gonna do about it? If *He* made me like this, it's *His* fault."

Not everyone was aware of the teachings of the Bible. Frieda's reaction upon hearing them was, "Does it say that in the Bible? Show me. Didn't know that. Well, I'm just the way I am." Tiresa did not seem too concerned for his soul either. "You know, I don't go to church all that much. Maybe once a month, maybe twice. Too busy partying and drinking," and he cracked up laughing. He felt he was treated fine at the Methodist Church. When I commented that some did not know the Bible's standpoint on this matter, he smugly remarked that whoever did not know what the Bible said on this topic must not have been listening in church, or did not pay attention at school.

Damion had a slightly more ambivalent relationship to the Church. He said, "I'm a Catholic, but I don't go to church. I stay home and cook¹⁰³. I was really religious when I was younger. My mother forced me to go to church. (Damion lived overseas at that time.) I started rebelling when they forced me to go and hear that homosexuality is wrong. I had a *major* problem with that. It used to bug me, and I stopped going to church when I was about twelve. I stopped going to church after learning about homosexuality. Just left it. No hard feelings. I don't have a problem with religion, as long as people don't impose their views on me."

Sam is a Catholic, and professed his beliefs were not very strong on these matters. He did seem a bit perturbed by what I told him the Bible said about homosexuality, and he protested at first, but then uttered, "But God, please, you can't help other people's feelings. A man must do what his heart tells him to do. I'm sure God loves everyone. He can't put us as castaways. I can't say it's wrong what's in the Bible, but I have to say: "God, please...." You can't really control human behavior, or feelings. People say it's desire. It's a natural thing, natural behavior. I'm attracted to men—it's not me who put this in me. Heavenly Father... too bad. And I can't change. If you have a good heart and a good being...", and his voice trailed off.

¹⁰³ The Sunday lunch, *to'onai*, takes place after church. The preparation of *to'onai* is time-consuming, and usually requires that somebody stays home to cook during church service.

Pio thought the issue was interesting and said contemplatively, “Some things in the Bible I feel undecided with. People come up with different explanations and think of it as a 20th century phenomenon. They tend to forget that it happened before Christ was born. I see it now as a part of a natural design. Everything was made for a purpose. I think fa’afafine and lesbians were made as the natural birth controls of the world. I came to realize this later in life. God had a plan; He didn’t make everything on a whim. I have used my education to figure this out. I am at ease with myself and God, and besides, the Bible was written by people on Earth. I have read that societies that condemn fa’afafine, or even force them to marry, are suffering from overpopulation and malnutrition. Now societies are going to manmade contraceptives.”

Sina was telling me how he usually sang soprano in the church choir. He would wear a hat, like women often do. He told me, “The pastor said the men never cover their head, only women. I said to myself that I’d still be in the choir, but I wouldn’t wear the hat. He was sharing with me what the Bible said, and gave it to me as advice. It’s a free world, but because of Christianity, it sits on my shoulder all the time. I can’t help being a fa’afafine. I think he was trying to help me, not criticize me. I just want them to accept me. I did it out of respect, and people really respect the reverend, but there’s no way he can change me to become a full man. Only on the outside can he change me. I am always a full woman on the inside.”

In reply to how he was treated in church, Frieda declared he was treated fine. He said, “I was thinking about changing church to the Catholic, but it’s not the right solution. Instead, I stopped being in the choir and part of the church community.” Rumors had it, relayed to me by a friend of Frieda, that Frieda had had a clash with the pastor, and had stopped going to church. When I talked to Frieda, he seemed reluctant to say anything more than mentioned here, and I did not push the matter further.

Tony was as always willing to share his views and told me, “It really depends on the pastor how I’m treated. Some pastors are okay with fa’afafine because they are in the choir, and are Sunday school teachers. My pastor is okay, and he recently asked me if I wanted to be a Sunday school teacher. I said no, because I drink—wouldn’t get up. Depends on the

pastor. He may be strict and narrow minded and “holy holy” and look at the fa’afafine as dirty, while others are more open-minded.”

Summary

Fa’afafine are indisputably a part of Samoan society. However, prevailing attitudes have proved to be diverse, which statements from fa’afafine informants and other Samoans I have spoken with support. Some informants stress how society is accepting of them, while others perceive society as harassing, and describe the divergence between theory and praxis that they have witnessed, as hypocritical. As a strategy in impression management, some Samoans appear to over-communicate Samoa as a tolerant society that fully accepts fa’afafine, while others may under-communicate fa’afafine’s part in Samoan society. Examples where people’s viewpoints of fa’afafine do not coincide with their actions towards fa’afafine are also presented as examples of impression management.

Statements above indicate that there has been a change in attitudes towards fa’afafine, and that constructive actions by fa’afafine have had a positive effect on the prevailing attitudes. In general, fa’afafine have shown a capacity for hard and honest work in the various jobs fa’afafine hold. Through involvement with fa’afafine beauty pageants where money is donated to charity, fa’afafine have demonstrated diligence and social commitment. In addition, many fa’afafine are active church members and appear to be devoted Christians. One minister uttered that the good work that fa’afafine do in church, paralyzes the ethical standards of the Bible.

One informant expressed annoyance with those fa’afafine who negatively affect the reputation of fa’afafine, like those who lie, steal, molest, or offer sex for money. This comment indicates that the actions of a small number of fa’afafine may come to reflect on all fa’afafine, whether the actions are sanctioned positively or negatively by society.

By citing informants and relaying episodes from the field, I have depicted what an informant calls the sexual climate of Samoa. How fa’afafine can be perceived sexually contributes further to an understanding of how some Samoans regard fa’afafine. For instance, fa’afafine often function as sexual substitutes for women. Using Nanda’s phrase,

fa'afafine are "potential sexual "fair game"" for men (2001: 67). Sexual acts between men and fa'afafine are generally not taken seriously.

The second part of the chapter focuses primarily on informants' experiences with various churches, and on different churches' attitudes and policies regarding fa'afafine and homosexual behavior. As the teachings of the different churches are founded on the biblical Scripture, the churches have in common that they do not officially condone homosexual acts. The degree to which the various congregations take action to influence and change the homosexual aspect of fa'afafine's lives, varies. Generally, the churches welcome all people and appear to take little direct action concerning fa'afafine church members. The various churches have in common that they deny fa'afafine leading a homosexual life style to become clergymen. It could appear, that for "convenience's sake" (pastor of the Protestant Church), the churches shut their eyes to the homosexual activities in which numerous church members partake. Like the former Methodist pastor said, homosexuality is not an issue or a problem in Samoa like it is in Australia. If homosexuality were to become an issue, it would "maybe happen in the future, not now." Why homosexuality is not an issue in Samoa at the present, or what would make homosexuality an issue in the future, the former pastor did not say.

The world is not stable, but rather transient and liable to change. Fredrik Barth reminded his students of this during a lecture on newer anthropological theory at the University of Oslo (13.02.2003, pers. notes). Barth stated further that unlike the natural sciences that seek eternal systems of truth independent of context, anthropology must seek contextual, generative models of transactions that increase our understanding for change as well as reproduction. He also claimed that anthropology should neither ignore the variations that exist among individuals, nor let the variations become predominant and thus hinder us from “seeing the wood for the trees” (ibid., pers. translation).

It is along such a middle course depicted by Barth that I have aspired to steer my research and ultimately, this dissertation. The overall objectives have been to study how gender can be perceived as a cultural specific construction, and to explore the changes that the gender role of the fa’afafine appears to be undergoing. To supplement the main objectives, I have studied and discussed a range of topics that essentially highlight the fa’afafine gender role from various angles.

The gender identity of the Samoan fa’afafine comprises a gender role separate from that of men and women (and *fa’atama*). The fa’afafine are neither fully men nor fully women. Yet, although separate, the fa’afafine role appears to pivot on these gender roles. Characteristic codes of behavior that communicate a fa’afafine identity contrast conformist male behavior and to varying degrees imitate and sometimes exaggerate conformist female behavior. In this sense, the role of the fa’afafine connects closely to the gender roles of men and women. Fa’afafine informants share the praxis of not identifying themselves with men, and common denominators among fa’afafine informants such as displaying effeminate body language and speaking in a softer voice set them apart as being *not* men, and thus fa’afafine. Simultaneously, characteristic fa’afafine behavior resembles women’s behavior, and some fa’afafine put much effort into portraying themselves as women. The fa’afafine who identify strongly with women, may dress like a woman, assert they feel like a woman, and/or point to anatomy and reproductive ability as the only differences between women and themselves. However, there are variations as to what extent fa’afafine identify themselves with women, and some deny feeling like a woman and rather emphasize that they are fa’afafine. In the

cross-cultural comparisons of nonconforming gender roles, I have presented among others the *xaniths* in Oman, depicted by Wikan (1982) as a third gender. Similar to the *xaniths*, the fa'afafine role constitutes a separate gender category.

I have discussed the existence of common denominators among fa'afafine as well as the variations found among them using schema theory. Schema theory then, has been a tool to help me keep in sight “the wood” as well as “the trees”. Relying on Mageo's theory of gender in Samoa, I have argued that fa'afafine gender identity can be perceived as a social role based on scripts. The scripts underlying the fa'afafine role lead to numerous shared behavioral traits among fa'afafine. In being shared, these traits are consequently characteristic for fa'afafine and compose the basis for what I perceive as a fa'afafine stereotype; that fa'afafine are males dressed as women, who feel and behave like women. A stereotype for fa'afafine indicates that many Samoans share a similar schema for fa'afafine behavior and identity.

The dynamic connectionism of schema theory allows for changes and variations within a sociocultural group, or in this case the fa'afafine. Schema theory proposes that people's schemas are based on semantic learning in combination with the idiosyncratic knowledge derived from individual experiences. Since colonial times, Samoa has continually been affected by Western influence and increased globalization. The Samoan people have in the past decades witnessed for instance rapid urban growth, economic and technological development, increased tourism, and more traveling overseas. Novel notions of self-realization and independence appear to have gained solid foothold, especially among the youth. Plausibly, such novelties bring with them new experiences, which consequently modify people's desires, motivations, and ultimately their schemas for social life and interaction. Awareness of alternative gender identities overseas may also affect many people's schemas for a fa'afafine gender identity in general. For fa'afafine specifically, acquired knowledge about overseas gender nonconformity may cause fa'afafine to adjust their self-schemas.

These adjustments of schemas may crystallize in various ways. A scrutiny of concepts reveals variations among informants as well as change in the gender role. How

informants perceive concepts like “gay” and “homosexual” differs greatly. The term “gay” is becoming gradually more familiar, and some fa’afafine acknowledge that they are “gay” in the Western sense of the word, while others refute any identification with the term. The new concepts “fa’afafine-*tama*” and “fa’afafine-*teine*” reflect individual differences among fa’afafine in dress styles and perhaps in self-identifications. These new terms also underscore that Mageo’s alternations of the terms “fa’afafine”; “transvestite”, and “homosexual” are unfortunate and inaccurate. Fa’afafine-*tama* dress, by definition, as men. Additionally, not all fa’afafine are homosexuals (one informant is bisexual). Lastly, “homosexual” and “transvestite” can hardly be said to be equivalent terms. A transvestite is not necessarily a homosexual, and vice versa.

When foreign trends and notions pervade traditional Samoan norms and introduce unprecedented experiences, cultural models may be challenged and ultimately changed. In discussing the gender defining criteria of the fa’afafine role, I have described how behavior is fundamental in communicating gender in Samoa. Nonetheless, I have also put forward that focus on emotion is increasingly replacing gendered behavior as the crucially defining criterion of the fa’afafine identity. Based on the cross-cultural comparisons of nonconforming gender criteria, I suggest that the nature of the gender defining criteria influence the temporality of the gender identity. While many non-fa’afafine appear to view the fa’afafine role as temporary, all informants present their fa’afafine identity as permanent and inborn. The fa’afafine status and its accompanying roles can be perceived as temporary when the display of gender nonconforming behavior categorizes a male as fa’afafine. Should he cease this role-play and instead employ male conformist gender markers, he may regain the status of man. In contrast, by emphasizing emotions that are essentially innate as the defining criterion, the fa’afafine identity becomes more permanent in character. In spite of these changes in the fa’afafine role, the gender role remains, which indicates that the changes take place within the framework of the fa’afafine status. The terms fa’afafine-*tama* and fa’afafine-*teine* represent subcategories of the term “fa’afafine”, which also suggests that the fa’afafine gender identity remains, while criteria, or perhaps rather schemas, undergo modifications and/or differentiation.

On several occasions, I have directed critical comments at Besnier and his writings on gender liminality in Polynesia. Besnier appears to contrast fa'afafine with individuals who identify with the term "gay" and who perceive themselves differently from fa'afafine. I assert that although there are individuals who acknowledge a gay identity, these individuals are fa'afafine, and the gay identity does not replace a fa'afafine identity. Rather, changes are taking place within the fa'afafine status. Besnier also criticizes the perception of Polynesian gender nonconformists as constituting a third gender, and maintains that gender liminality in Polynesia is best perceived as a borrowing process rather than a role or an identity. Again, Besnier does not take sufficiently into account novel modifications of the schemas underlying the fa'afafine role. He presents Polynesian gender liminality as transient and lacking in emotions, a description that contradicts my Samoan field data. Fa'afafine informants appear to identify strongly and persistently with the fa'afafine status. Besnier also considers the perspective of gender liminality as a suited model for explaining the diversity within a gender liminal category. Considering how emotions are increasingly replacing the employment of gendered attributes as the essential criteria for defining a fa'afafine identity, I find that schema theory exceeds Besnier's perspective of gender liminality in explaining diversity among fa'afafine.

In a sociocentric society like Samoa, growing tendencies of individualism constitute an especially noticeable development. Children are expected to serve their parents and elderly relatives throughout life, and family relations and obligations within kin groups are of great importance in social organization. Familial obligations increase when a person starts his or her own family. Consequently, a male who remains fa'afafine his whole life does not have the same degree of familial obligations to fulfill as a man with a wife and children.

The notion of personal independence appears to be expressed in several ways. Many fa'afafine convey a desire to be successful in their work and to be able to take care of themselves, as they will not have children to look after them when they grow old. Additionally, with fewer familial obligations, employed fa'afafine have more money to spend on themselves, which again allows for more personal freedom of consumption. A few informants want to pursue their wish for children and speak of adopting a boy or girl. Others

share their dreams of settling down with a husband, perhaps somewhere overseas where two males living together is more accepted than in Samoa. I also interpret how many informants insist on dressing like a woman, despite the challenges that this appearance may entail, to be a sign of independence and aspiration for fulfillment of complementary personal desires. Last but not least, the increase and saliency of fa'afafine in Apia is substantial. Compared to most rural villages, town life offers greater personal freedom, a range of job opportunities and leisure activities, and a chance to meet new faces and other fa'afafine. As strength is often found in numbers, the strong presence of fa'afafine in town is likely to boost the self-confidence of most fa'afafine living there, and to be perceived as encouraging by boys liable to assume, or publicly come out with, a fa'afafine identity.

The support found in living among many equals is perhaps especially important when facing derogatory remarks and disparaging attitudes. By and large, fa'afafine are accepted members of society, and many Samoans speak warmly of the benefits of having hardworking fa'afafine around the house to do both men's and women's work. Nonetheless, several fa'afafine informants express disappointment in what they perceive as a hypocritical society, where people only pretend to acknowledge them in a positive way, but choose not to socialize with them. Some fa'afafine also recount distressing episodes where people have been directly hostile towards them. The various churches, in general, take little action concerning fa'afafine, despite most fa'afafine's homosexual life style. A few denominations do not allow fa'afafine as members, but most preach the word of forgiveness and tolerance.

I am under the impression that prevailing attitudes towards fa'afafine have improved over the past few decades. Older fa'afafine have encouraged younger fa'afafine to receive an education and to work diligently, thus challenging a bad reputation of fa'afafine as thieves who steal from and engage in sex with male tourists. Importantly, fa'afafine have acquired a respectable reputation for their involvement in charity work, where money from fa'afafine beauty pageants has been donated to a good cause. Other stage entertainment like the Cindy show starring the fa'afafine Cindy, has been popular for many years, and has led to the fact that one of the most famous people in Apia is a fa'afafine.

On a final note, I should like to state that because my fieldwork was based in Apia, the picture presented of the fa'afafine is one that should not uncritically be generalized to account for all fa'afafine in Samoa. Living in town permitted a freer and more independent life for many of my informants, compared to the often more strict rules dictated by the *matai* in rural villages. Also, within town there are likely local variations that I have not discovered or considered. As most of my informants were fa'afafine employed in or close to the center of town, they were in various degrees engaged in, and familiar with, happenings in town. Fa'afafine who stayed at home or worked outside of town were not nearly as accessible to me, and their opinions and experiences would possibly have given additional and/or different impressions to those given by my fa'afafine informants.

The controversy between Mead and Freeman stands today as one of the most well known discussions in the nature/nurture debate in the history of anthropology. The findings of Mead nourished a belief in the determinant influence of culture on human behavior. When Freeman refuted Mead's findings years later, the foundation of the Boasian culturalism was shaken and its followers enraged.

The relevance of the nature/nurture debate for this anthropological dissertation is evident. The thesis deals with what I perceive as a cultural construction of a Samoan nonconforming gender role and the changes in this role. Culture is perceived to be a strong force in molding behavior, and the culture specificity of the fa'afafine role is delineated through presentation of field data. Yet, cross-cultural comparisons may call attention to similarities among a spectrum of gender liminals across the world, thus shedding a universalistic light on gender nonconformity. It is, however, not my goal to dispute the influence of biological factors on human behavior in favor of cultural factors. Rather, focus is directed at the dialectic relationship between a person's mental cultural models and his/her continuous learning experiences in a culture specific context. It is the mutual, plastic property of this relationship that is thought to explain the reproduction and modification of social behavior, and more specifically, the perpetuation of, in combination with perceptible changes in, the role of the Samoan fa'afafine.

Glossary

- *ai'aiuli* – wild choreographic dancing during a *taualuga*
- *aiga* – extended family

- *ai lalolagi* – slang for fa’afafine, literally: to roam the world
- *ai paneta* – slang for fa’afafine, literally: to eat planet, can allude to fellatio
- *banci* – Indonesian gender liminal
- *berdache* – North American Indian gender liminal
- *bicha* – slang used in Brazil for various gender liminals
- *fa’a* – a Samoan prefix, can mean to make, or indicate something pretended/false
- *fa’afafine* – Samoan gender liminal, literally: in the way of a woman
- *fa’afafine tama* – a fa’afafine who dresses in a masculine manner
- *fa’afafine teine* – a fa’afafine who dresses in a feminine manner
- *fa’aluma* – conductor-clown
- *fa’aSamoa* – refers to Samoan culture, literally: in the Samoan way
- *fa’atama* – tomboy
- *fafine* – woman
- *fagufagu* – refers to a male waking up another male by initiating sex
- *faleaitu* – joking theater
- *hijra* – Indian gender liminal
- *ie faitaga* – piece of clothing for men, like a sarong but with pockets
- *lavalava* – sarong
- *mala* – slang for fa’afafine
- *manaia* – good, nice
- *matai* – chief
- *oka* – (as an exclamation:) wow!
- *palagi* – White westerner/foreigner
- *palusami* – a traditional Samoan dish: taro leaves and coconut cream
- *pe’a* – full male body tattoo, also called *tatau*
- *pipi* – slang for a girl’s genitals
- *pisupo* – canned corned beef
- *poula* – Joking Night
- *puleitasi* – a two-piece female clothing

- *sa* – evening prayers
- *siva afi* – fire dance
- *sulu* – another word for *ie faitaga*
- *tama* – boy
- *taualuga* – a dance led by the person of highest rank
- *tauatane* – refers to acts between men (e.g. dancing, sexual intercourse)
- *taupou* – village princess
- *tautua* – to serve, a principle of Samoan organization where one serves one's parents and grandparents
- *teine* – girl
- *teine pepelo* – slang for fa'afafine, literally: lying/false girls
- *transformista* – term used in Brazil for gay drag artists
- *transsexuais* – term used in Brazil for pre-operative transsexuals
- *travesti* – Brazilian gender liminal
- *ula* – a joke made at the expense of another person's dignity
- *umu* – earth oven

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