

ACQUIRING GENDER IN MELANESIA: HOMOSEXUALITY AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO MALENESS

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ABSTRACT

It is readily apparent that many Melanesian societies maintain a distance between men and women. Some ethnographers working in Melanesia have posited reasons for this dichotomy, for example, fear of contamination from menstrual blood, or the importance of male solidarity in social organization. These theories do not adequately explain gender concepts and the range of social interaction between the sexes. By focussing on the belief surrounding male homosexual behaviour in initiation ritual, this paper attempts to demonstrate that gender concepts in Melanesia, like attitudes towards homosexuality, cannot be explained in terms of Western categorizations of male and female, or in terms of Western concepts of sexuality. A comparison of the correlation between homosexuality and gender beliefs among North Americans and among Melanesians indicates that the apparent separation of the sexes in Melanesia is not due to the inherent distinctness of male versus female, as reflected in the Western dichotomies that colour such ethnographic descriptions of gender. It is suggested that in Melanesian societies men must be differentiated from women, and that mutable gender categories must be maintained by social sanctions that delineate the sexes during the reproductive years.

RESUME

Il est évident que plusieurs des sociétés mélanésiennes ont pour but de maintenir une distance entre les hommes et les femmes. Quelques ethnologues qui travaillent dans cette région ont énoncé quelques raisons pour cette division, comme la peur de la contamination des hommes par le sang menstruel des femmes. Cependant ces théories ne peuvent pas expliquer avec précision les concepts de genre et le comportement social entre les sexes en Mélanésie. Dans l'article qui suit, l'auteur explique qu'en se basant sur les croyances de comportement des homosexuels male, que les concepts de genre comme les attitudes envers l'homosexualité en Mélanésie, ne peuvent pas être expliqués en appliquant des catégories males et femelles occidentales, ou les concepts sexuels occidentaux. Une comparaison de corrélations nord-américaines et les mélanésiennes indique que la séparation des sexes en Mélanésie n'est pas due à la distinction inhérente du male contre la femelle, telle que reflète dans les dichotomies occidentales qui sont contenues dans les descriptions ethnographiques de genre. L'auteur de cet article suggère que l'ont doit différencier les hommes des femmes, et que les catégories mutables de genre doivent être

sanctions sociales qui délimitent les sexes durant les années de reproduction.

ACQUIRING GENDER IN MELANESIA

In several Melanesian societies, sexual activity among males is considered to be an essential part of growing up. An examination of the context and the meaning of the homosexual act in these societies provides insight into the ways that these peoples perceive gender and sexuality and the interaction of these concepts. These beliefs and attitudes are subtly, yet profoundly, different from Western perceptions of sexuality and gender. Unfortunately, much ethnographic literature fails to discern this difference in conceptualization. There is a tendency to interpret intersexual behaviour in Melanesian cultures in terms of Western attitudes towards 'male' and 'female', stressing a perceived distance between the sexes. It is important that gender concepts be understood in terms of a given culture's own symbolic system, especially since the relationship between men and women affects a wide range of behaviour.

Western literature on the topic of homosexuality focusses on the erotic and sexual component as a defining characteristic. In the present discussion of Melanesian same sex behaviour, such an application of the terms 'homosexuality' and 'homosexual' is useful in that it limits the Western notions of masculinity and femininity that are commonly associated with sexual activity between two members of the same biological sex. Melanesians perceive the correlation between homosexuality and gender quite differently. This indicates that one cannot assume a Western perception of the interplay between gender and sexuality in a discussion of gender in these cultures, and that the conceptualization of gender also differs. It would be appropriate at this point to ascertain how Judeo-Christian notions of homosexuality and gender relate to each other and how this relationship reflects Western gender concepts.

The stereotype image of the male homosexual in Western society is that of a man with effeminate characteristics.

Effeminacy is any style of male behaviour that resembles the gestures, movements, or mannerisms usually associated with women. Although it is more frequent among homosexual than heterosexual males, effeminacy is relatively rare even in homosexuality and would not require as much attention as it does if it were not that, in the minds of many people, it characterizes the whole group (Tripp 1975:171).

The reason for the popularity of this image, as well as for the equally fallacious image of the lesbian as a masculine woman, can be explained in part by the fact that stereotypic homosexuals are more visible to the public than homosexuals who do not possess those traits commonly associated with the opposite sex and therefore are not recognizable as 'different' except in their private sexual behaviour, especially since overt expression of affection between males is suppressed in public. For the majority of homosexuals, this private life remains undetected, or at least rarely viewed by outsiders.

Consequently the visibly effeminate man or masculine woman¹ not only provides a stereotype but also confirms the popular conviction that homosexuality is not widespread and that it represents abnormal gender identity.

An important factor in this model of gender and sexuality is the correlation between biological sex and gender. Sex, that is, whether a person is male or female, is based on genital attribution. If a newborn child has a clearly defined penis and scrotum, it is labelled a boy, a label which defines how people behave towards the child. A male baby is given a male name, male clothes (generally blue, with no frills), male toys (plastic tools, toy cars, etc.), and male attributes (he's strong, he's assertive, he's independent, etc.). He is addressed in a manner different from female infants and is handled differently.

If the baby's external gonads pose problems of definitive categorization, such as in the case of hermaphrodites, surgical 'correction' may follow. It is believed, perhaps justifiably, given the Western predilection for dichotomizing male and female, that a hermaphrodite cannot lead a normal, or at least happy, life. Assigning a male or female gender and surgically removing or restructuring the ambiguous genitals is meant to eliminate the problems of gender identification before they arise, although manipulation of the phenotype does not correct those situations that have genetic bases. One of the immediate gender problems that arise in the case of hermaphrodite babies is how the parents are meant to respond to a child who is ambiguous in sex when its biological sex defines its gender, which in turn defines the interaction of parent and child.

A biologically normal individual displaying gender behaviour that is considered inappropriate to the biological sex of that person may be labelled homosexual. A transvestite or an effeminate man is not necessarily homosexual, but variations in expected gender behaviour are often attributed to homosexuality because of the impression of homosexuality as an aberration of gender identity, for example whether a person considers him/herself to be male or female.

Transexuals generally believe their psychological and emotional constitution to be sympathetic with the opposite sex and thus that their biological sex is inappropriate. The ensuing conflict between mind and body can be resolved through surgery in which the genitals are appropriately restructured, and hormones are ingested in order to produce the corresponding secondary sexual characteristics. As with hermaphrodites, it is apparently imperative in Western culture that biological sex be consistent with gender identity since biological sex is taken as the basis for gender attribution.

These attitudes toward sex and gender demonstrate that Western thought dichotomizes and polarizes male and female, and the attendant manifestations of those sexual facts, for example masculinity and femininity, into mutually exclusive categories. Babies who are perceived as both male and female are surgically assigned gender. Transexuals whose gender identity fails to correspond to biological sex are also surgically assigned compatible sex. This tendency to

dichotomize into exclusive categories is evident in Western attitudes toward sexuality. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are contrasted and bisexuality is seldom perceived as a viable expression of a person's sexual orientation.² Consider the confusion experienced by J. Keith in his attempt to label himself:

A drawback to saying I am homosexual is that I have supposedly said I would not relate sexually with women. But I am aware that intense, loving friendships can lead to sexual involvements, and I am certainly not prepared to stop being very close friends with women. Thus it seems that the label "homosexual" is a very inadequate one to describe me (but it is certainly better than the label "heterosexual") (1974:84).

It is important to note that Keith does not even consider that there might be a label other than 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual', and that by choosing to be labelled homosexual, he must become sexually involved exclusively with men, as though sexual orientation is inalterable. Clearly 'bisexual' is the most appropriate choice. As Beach suggests, "It is conceivable that potential bisexuality is much more common... and, in fact, is the rule rather than the exception" (1977:165).

The adoption of the label 'homosexual' is often a long and difficult process for many Western gay men and women. 'Coming out', as it is called, requires a great deal of self-evaluation in relation to society's expectations regarding sexual behaviour, as well as a re-evaluation of the popular attitudes and beliefs about the nature of homosexuality. It is necessary for those who don't fit into the stereotypic categories to question the underlying assumptions regarding masculinity and femininity that give rise to the popular images. A person who is male does not de facto have a female identity if he is homosexual. When a new assessment of homosexuality is achieved, a gay person sees that it does not imply problems of gender identity. 'Gay' men know that they are male and further that they are sexually attracted to other males. The sexual attraction does not arise from the notion that one is like a woman in sexual orientation.

When the issue of gender and sexual preference has been resolved, a homosexual identity is assumed, based on a difference not only in sexual orientation, but also in attitudes and beliefs related to sex and gender.³

Persons who experience sexual attraction to both men and women have other issues to grapple with. The labels do not fit and a decision is necessary: the individual must pick one sexual orientation and exclude the other, or deal with the realization that bisexuality is possible and preferable.

Recently, the growth of gay liberation and women's liberation movements has facilitated the resolution of these issues and has made public some of the questions on the subject of male and female relationships, sexuality, and gender. Although the dichotomy between

men and women and the correlation of sex with gender have now become the subjects of public debate, the dichotomy between homosexuality and heterosexuality remains relatively unchallenged.

This polarization of concepts into absolute categories presents problems when trying to understand Melanesian gender and sexual behaviour. There are other reasons why the subject of homosexuality in particular is a problem in anthropological research.

HOMOSEXUALITY AS A SUBJECT OF INQUIRY

Because of the long-standing Western view that homosexuality represents a form of pathological behaviour, psychology and psychiatry are often considered the discipline within which the topic may be discussed. As a pathology, homosexuality is examined in terms of etiology, treatment, and cure. A number of hypotheses have been put forth in an attempt to understand the sources of homosexuality, using biochemical approaches or exploring factors in psycho-sexual development, but so far no satisfactory conclusion has been reached. The life history of the individual provides the data, and attempts are made to pinpoint the crises or other factors that may have affected gender identity. This approach generally has a negative emphasis. Homosexuality is seen as arising from trauma, crisis, or neglect. It has been assumed to be related to a flaw in the development of gender identity arising from inadequate role models. (For a good example of this kind of analysis, see Hampson 1965:123-124.)

More recent work leaves the etiology issue to one side and takes a more positive approach. Current sociological discussion on the topic tends to examine homosexual subcultures and the dynamics of the interactions among members of these communities and their relationship to society (see Hooker 1962).

Anthropologists have seldom focussed on homosexuality per se, but simply mention its existence or apparent non-existence fleetingly without examining the details to any great degree (Sonenschein 1966:75, and Fitzgerald 1977:392). Fitzgerald offers some criticisms and critiques of anthropological research on homosexuality, suggesting that, although the contributions are scant, they nonetheless make "some significant contributions to the research literature on homosexuality largely by recording the range and diversity of such sexual practices and personality types..." (1977:387). One area of interest purporting to deal with homosexuality has been concerned with the so-called berdache. As discussed above, the assumption that homosexuality reflects confused gender identity is problematic, and the correlation of homosexuality and transvestism with berdache practices fails to adequately describe the nature of gender concepts in those societies (Fitzgerald 1977:387).

There are many reasons that might account for the reticence of ethnographer and informant alike on the subject of homosexuality. Foremost is the Western bias on the topic, resulting in part from the

religious and moral attributes of some anthropologists and/or those informants who have acquired such Judeo-Christian opinions through contact with missionaries and other Westerners. Ethnographers who believe homosexuality to be a perversion in their own cultures may be tempted to relegate any evidence for it in another culture to an insignificant status or to ignore it altogether, especially if they consider it to be an uncommon and abnormal practice and take such attitudes into the field. The indigenous groups who have sufficient contact with such Western beliefs, particularly if they are exposed to any anti-homosexual proselytizing, may suppress such expression to some degree or they may remove its occurrence from all possible outside scrutiny, including that of the anthropologist. If the ethnographer feels uncomfortable or embarrassed by the topic, his informants may sense his discomfort and avoid further discussion about homosexuality.

A major reason for the lack of literature on the subject of homosexuality is that same-sex activities often occur in a secret ritual context, such as initiation. Such secret knowledge is often limited to those involved in the ritual, which usually excludes the anthropologist, unless he is able to convince his informants to let him observe or participate. Even then, sexual behaviour is considered to be an intimate and private act in most Melanesian societies. Consequently, sexual activity may occur out of the public eye and may never be revealed to visiting outsiders. It is problematic to assume that if no overt word for homosexual exists in the language of that culture, as well as no other perceived evidence, then the concept and the act itself are absent.

Kessler and McKenna point out some of the semantic problems involved in the discussion of homosexuality in non-Western cultures.

Davenport, an anthropologist who lived among the Melanesians, asked them if there were men in the tribe who enjoyed men but did not enjoy women. They could not understand his question since, as Davenport explained, they have no concept, and consequently no word for exclusive homosexuality. To make our own analysis of their perplexity: If there were an individual in that society with a penis who desired men and not women, that individual might not be considered to be a man. The confusion with Davenport's question may have been because there were no exclusively homosexual males and yet there may have been individuals with penises who enjoyed individuals with penises (1978:36).

Part of the problem here is in the Western conception of homosexuality as involving two males. Homosexual acts may occur in this Melanesian culture in special contexts between two individuals who are not both men, and therefore the act is not between members of the same sex. For instance, in the society that Davenport is describing, a man is by definition a married adult male. His only homosexual contact is with unmarried pre-pubescent males, who are not considered to be men yet. They are all males, but not all are men, since men are necessarily married. The homosexual contact for men, as defined in

this culture, is prescribed: it must be a boy, not another married man. Although two unmarried adolescents are free to have sexual contact with each other, they are not yet men, and so the Melanesians that Davenport questioned probably did not consider them when they were asked about the sexual proclivities of men. Since men are married, they necessarily have heterosexual contacts also and so exclusive homosexuality is denied by the very definition of 'man'. For these people, heterosexuality and homosexuality are not mutually exclusive. Normal sexual behaviour in this culture is dictated not just by preference but by social structure, some degree of bisexuality being the norm.

Davenport's (1965) report is unique because it purports to describe a Melanesian culture in which homosexuality is not restricted to an initiation context, as is the case in most other available discussions of homosexuality in Melanesia. Homosexual contacts are considered an important outlet for sexual gratification. Unfortunately, Davenport attempts to provide an etiology for this situation, explaining the existence of homosexuality as resulting from a need to find a substitute for heterosexual coitus because there are a number of strict constraints on premarital sex and adultery (1965:199). Since a great number of Melanesian societies have comparable constraints, yet are reported to show no indication that homosexuality is prevalent, this suggests that the situation is a little more complex than simple sexual gratification, especially since heterosexual contacts were traditionally available with concubines in these societies. Several features of East Bay culture suggest that ritual was involved at some point, as we shall see in later discussion of homosexuality in ritual. One salient feature is the prescribed nature of the roles assumed by adult men in their relationship to young boys, and the social commitments this entails.

Further examination of homosexuality in this culture may show that, although the status is indeed different from heterosexual coitus in marriage, the people of East Bay do not relegate homosexual activity to the status of a substitute, which implies that it holds an inferior status and that heterosexual exclusivity is preferred. That homosexuality has its own attendant complex of values, meanings, and beliefs suggests that it is a viable sexual expression in its own right.

Kessler and McKenna discuss another problem of interpretation.

...Opler, an anthropologist, asked a member of the Ute Indians of Colorado whether or not any members of that society indulged in homosexuality. Opler says that the question yielded amusement, disbelief, and counterquestioning on American urban culture, and he concludes that the Ute found that a ridiculous question and that homosexuality is not practiced among adult Ute. What we must ask ourselves is not only whether the conclusion follows (i.e. that homosexuality is not practiced by the Ute) but whether in fact, the description "yielded amusement, disbelief,..." is an

objective report or an interpretation/coding of behaviours... The data then, are sounds from the mouth of an individual. The interpretation that follows is that the sound meant laughter, the laughter meant amusement, and amusement meant 'no'. There are two problems here: whether the anthropologist's report is an accurate objective description of what was really happening according to positivistic criteria, and whether the report is a reasonable reconstruction of what the Ute were doing according to ethnomethodological criteria (1978:32).

It is apparent that the topic of homosexuality is fraught with moral, semantic, and methodological difficulties which may account in part for the reticence of anthropologists to address the subject specifically or to acquire a complete and unbiased knowledge of its nature in other cultures.⁴

RITUALIZED HOMOSEXUALITY IN MELANESIA

In the past fifty years or so, the subject of homosexuality has been addressed to some significant degree by fewer than a dozen anthropologists working in Melanesia, from the New Hebrides to Papua New Guinea. They include Deacon (1934) and Layard (1942, 1959) on the Malekulans, Landtman (1927) on the Kiwai Papuans, Williams (1936) on the Keraki Papuans, Van Baal (1966) on the Amarind-Anim of Irian Jaya, Kelly (1976) on the Etoro, Schieffelin (1976) on the Kaluli, and Herdt (1981) on the Sambia. All of these describe homosexuality as it occurs within a ritual context, namely male initiation, and it is for this reason that the subsequent discussion is limited to ritualized male homosexuality. Only two of the above authors mention the existence of female homosexual practices (Deacon 1934:170, and Kelly 1976:47). The fact that the research on these groups was carried out by male anthropologists suggests that there may be a gap in our knowledge about female sexuality in Melanesia. Strict constraints on interaction between the sexes would prevent women from approaching or even conversing with male anthropologists in some cultures, particularly concerning sexual or genital matters. It is fairly common in parts of New Guinea that women have little or no ability to speak Neo-Melanesian (the lingua franca between many anthropologists and their informants) thereby requiring a male translator in order to discuss private female behaviour; if such a conversation could be imagined. If, as in the case of male initiation, female homosexuality plays a role in secret ritual limited to initiated women, then it is very unlikely that a male anthropologist will learn of it on his own or through a male informant.

Landtman explains that his knowledge of male homosexual practices was not easily obtained:

I had considerable difficulty in obtaining definite knowledge of the moguru [life-giving ceremony]. Some of

my informants only dared to come and tell me about it late at night, first ascertaining by the aid of my lantern that no listener was hidden about my house (1927:350).

The reason for this is that "everything connected with the moguru is kept extremely secret. The 'new' men are warned not to speak of it to anybody, particularly not to the women and children, nor to the white men" (1927:358).

Williams faced the same reticence: "For a long time the existence of sodomy was successfully concealed from me, but latterly, once I had won the confidence of a few informants in the matter, it was admitted on every hand" (1936:158). Herdt admits to fortuitously discovering the existence of male homosexuality among the Sambia:

During that same period I unexpectedly learned, through the confidence of my friends, of secret, institutionalized homosexual practices between youths and initiates. Up to that point I had spent some five months in the village (and had visited others). This experience included living for a few weeks in its men's club-house (before the construction of my own house in the village). But in spite of that closeness, and those contacts, I had not seen or heard anything to indicate the existence of homosexual activities--which informants had earlier denied in the course of standard checklist interviewing (1981:xv).

Such secrecy is fairly common in Melanesian initiation ritual, but coupled with the idea that all white men might perceive homosexuality with the same Judeo-Christian morality that many missionaries have demonstrated, one can easily understand why Melanesians are especially reserved about revealing ritualized homosexuality. Herdt suggests "that this special psychosocial pattern is more common than once thought and that we must not ignore it in explaining the meaning of male initiation and relations between the sexes" (1981:318).

There are striking similarities in the beliefs and concepts surrounding same-sex behaviour in the various reports on initiations wherein homosexuality plays a role. Although William's (1936) description of the Keraki deals with Papuans who are relatively close geographically to the Kiwai of Landtman's (1927) ethnography and to the Amarindanim described by Van Baal (1966), the distribution of the other cultures in New Guinea and in the New Hebrides indicates that the phenomenon is widespread. A similar study of the literature on Fiji, Micronesia, and Polynesia might prove interesting.

The individual characteristics that these initiation rites share are not always unique just to those cultures in which homosexuality is present, nor does each culture under discussion necessarily possess all these characteristics. This, however, may simply appear to be the case due to lack of sufficient data. These traits are not diagnostic of institutionalized homosexuality, nor do they attempt to explain its

occurrence. However, taken as an integrated complex of beliefs and behaviours, they facilitate the discussion of homosexual ritual and, thus generalized, provide an admittedly simplified basis for a discussion of gender and sexuality. Further research may confirm or repudiate the predictive value of this complex.

In these Melanesian societies, it is commonly held that homosexual acts are necessary for growth. "The act is seen as a necessary condition for the completion of a boy's physical development" (Van Baal 1966:494). In particular, it is the ingestion of semen, either through fellatio or sodomy, that produces this maturation process. Schieffelin, describing the Kaluli, explains that

the male embodies the qualities of productivity, vigor, stimulation, and energy. This male influence is concentrated in semen. Semen has a kind of magical quality that promotes physical growth and mental understanding... Semen is also necessary for young boys to attain full growth to manhood (1976:124).

Kelly describes Etoro beliefs about semen in greater detail, suggesting that "every adult male possesses a limited quantity of life-force which resides in his body as a whole, but is especially concentrated in his semen" and that this life-force is passed onto the novitiates through homosexual insemination (1976:40).

Since the semen that is ingested through fellatio (Etoro, Sambia) or absorbed through sodomy (Keraki, Kaluli, Kiwai, Amarind-anim, Malekula) is meant to promote growth of a boy into a sexually mature man, it is readily apparent that this defines the nature of the roles assumed by the persons involved. One must already possess the ability to produce semen and to ejaculate, and thus be able to transmit this life-force to a partner who does not yet possess this ability. As Kelly says, "Boys differ most importantly from men in that they completely lack the most critical and essential attribute of manhood, i.e. semen" (1976:45). The act must involve a youth or adult man as donor and a prepubescent boy as yet unable to produce semen as recipient.

The relationship between the donor and the recipient differs from group to group, but is always prescribed. For the Amarind-anim, "boy's main paederast is...a relative belonging to the opposite moiety...a maternal uncle (Van Baal 1966:493). The Etoro believes that "the ideal inseminator...is a boy's true sister's husband or her betrothed; brother and sister will then receive semen from the same man (ideally a FMBS)..." (Kelly 1976:52). In other groups a healthy older man is chosen for the boy by his father (Deacon 1934:260, and Schieffelin 1976:124) or by the elders (Herdt 1981:234), perhaps because he possesses some desirable characteristics such as strength, vitality, or courage that may be transmitted in the semen from the donor to the recipient (Kelly 1976:46).⁵

The ingestion of semen is expected to be frequent and the period of homosexual activity is recipient, then as donor, is extensive. The

idea of making a boy into a man in this manner is comparable to the view of conception held in these societies, in which a foetus is believed to be formed from menstrual blood and regular inseminations over a period of months. To guarantee that an initiate has been adequately inseminated, the boys are not always limited to their chosen donor, although the prescribed inseminator is the principal partner. "Men say that initiates should take their semen from many bachelors" (Herdt 1981:236. Compare Van Baal 1966:494; Schieffelin 1976:126; and Kelly 1976:47).

As with conception, receiving semen should end when a boy becomes visibly mature, just as insemination of a woman is curtailed with the first signs of pregnancy. When a boy has demonstrated sufficient growth in stature and genitalia, and development of secondary sexual characteristics (pubic hair, facial hair, change in voice, and the ability to produce semen), he then acts as donor to new initiates. Homosexuality does not end, but roles change concomitant with acquisition of male status. The cultures under discussion have several stages of initiation and several levels of age-grades and status-grades, each level having different sets of rituals and expectations of behaviour, frequently culminating in marriage, fatherhood, warriorhood, and membership in adult manhood, with its attendant responsibilities.

The notion that boys need to ingest semen in order to grow and mature arises from the observation that girls' growth is rapid and spontaneous at the onset of menarche. The acquisition of the ability to produce menstrual blood, the female life-force, is the index of female maturation. Girls become women naturally and rapidly.⁶

Men hold that females naturally achieve reproductive competence through a means endogenous to female physiology. Femininity is thought to be an inherent development in a girl's continuous association with her mother..." (Herdt 1981:160).

Boys, however, do not acquire manhood naturally. Semen from donors is required to build up and produce the desired results. Semen is passed on from generation to generation, transmitting maleness acquired from the original ancestors.

In addition to insemination to promote male growth, initiation involves segregation of the initiates from the women of the village for varying lengths of time. This is expected of a process whose aim is to separate child from mother and to inculcate notions of masculinity and male solidarity (Strathern 1970:374). It also reflects beliefs about the powerful influences that women have over men. If, as Herdt says above, femininity arises as a result of continuous association with the mother, then masculinity requires a severing of that influence and a closer association with the father and other males in order to acquire maleness.

It is frequently suggested that female pollution needs to be purged from a boy in order to shed the debilitating effects that prevent growth. If one views this not as a polluting contagion but as

a powerful female influence (see Paine 1982) that a boy in initiation must learn to control and manipulate in order to ensure his maleness, then seclusion is well justified. The purging rites can be seen, not just as purification, but also as teachings in the control and manipulation of vital essences. Trials and ordeals teach control of pain, just as hoaxes, first introduced to instil terror in the neophytes, are then revealed in order to teach control of fear and to introduce the novices to the spirit ancestors whose semen they are receiving.⁷ The ability to control semen and blood, which women, according to the men, at least, cannot control, and the ability to control fear and pain are seen as essential qualities of men and warriors, marking them as distinct from women, children, and strangers.

Characteristic of this isolation and separation from women is the secret disposition of ritual and of homosexual behaviour in male initiation. Knowledge of these activities by non-initiated persons such as women, children, and outsiders (traditionally the enemy), would threaten the pure male essence of the rites, an essence that is absorbed through association with men, just as the female essence is absorbed, perhaps to the detriment of the boy, and to the benefit of the girl, through association with women. Young initiates are bathed in this essence, and men renew it in their intra-sexual associations. Besides, if those persons who were not 'men' were to learn how boys became men through the acquisition of the ability to control fear, pain, and vital essences, then the characteristics which separate men from non-men would be threatened. Such traits could then be acquired, and the integrity of this fragile category would be lost. Without men, society would collapse and return to the androgynous state of mythology.

Schieffelin relates the secrecy of ritual knowledge to embarrassment about homosexuality:

Despite its benefits, however, men's homosexual relations are a vulnerable point in the male image of strength, and consequently a subject of considerable embarrassment in relation to the women. Men try unsuccessfully to maintain it as a secret that women do not know (1976:124).

As discussed above, the interpretation of such emotions is difficult. For instance, is embarrassment involved, or is it shame? Men might feel shame when ritual secrecy is broken since this constitutes weakness on the part of the transgressor, denying the efficacy of the rituals which are meant to impart strength and solidarity. Men might experience shame when it is discovered that male strength is in fact a fragile accomplishment. Men might feel shame about their role as nurturers, giving birth to men from boys, just as women in these cultures generally profess shame in their association with parturition. Schieffelin's informant makes this same analogy: "This is our thing... What happens when women go to the forest and bring back a child is their secret" (1976:124). Herdt has a similar statement from his informant: "Women hide childbirth, we hide homosexuality" (1981:273).

Marriage and fatherhood are universally considered the ultimate expression of maleness in Melanesia. Marriage requires a shift to heterosexuality, although there is not an immediate change to exclusive heterosexuality. Donating semen to aid the growth of a boy may continue intermittently in some groups for years after marriage. By the time a man is married, he is expected to be fully male, be able to protect his manhood from femaleness, and be fully incorporated into the masculine value and belief system.

SEXUALITY AND GENDER

The nature of sexuality in the Melanesian societies described above is transitory, involving changes in sexual role over time, from boy as recipient of semen, to youth and adult man as donor of semen, first to boys and then to wives. Semen is the focal point of male homosexual acts. The transmission of that vital essence from generation to generation ensures that men are differentiated from women, a process that is thought not to occur naturally in boys. In order to keep the act purely male, unaffected by female influence, it is shrouded in secrecy, and initiates are isolated until they are sufficiently strong, i.e. masculine, to maintain their maleness.

The Western model discussed at the beginning of this paper suggests that homosexuality arises as a result of abnormal psychosexual development. Men are necessarily masculine and an essential characteristic of masculinity is sexual attraction to women exclusively. Any flaw in this equation, such as sexual attraction to other men, affects the other components in the model, for example masculinity and maleness. In this manner, homosexuality is believed to be related to effeminacy (in men) and transvestism. The constellation of categories is rigid and discrete, and if one category fails to meet standards of normality, then the individual involved is classed in the opposite set of categories: women=feminine=sexually attracted to men. Since such exclusivity of categories is contrary to human variation, Westerners have yet to resolve how gender and sexuality interact. A child learns somehow to adopt one sexual orientation and stick to it.

In Melanesia, homosexual behaviour in initiation gives rise to manhood. Manhood is not inherent in the biology of a child, it is a potential, transmitted through insemination and ritual initiation. With the transference of male life-force, semen, through ritual sexual acts, it is believed that a boy will not grow to sexual maturity. He will not become a man, although a girl will become a woman on her own once she has experienced menarche.

This is not to say that boys are considered to be the same as girls, or that femaleness is perceived as the natural state--physiology defines who will become a man or a woman. It demonstrates rather that maleness does not imply manhood. Further, being a man does not imply masculinity. Initiation implants the potential for masculinity as visualized by the Melanesian--courage, vigour, prowess in hunting and economics, strength--and teaches it through trial, ordeal, hoaxes, and

myths. Maleness is acquired at birth, manhood is acquired at initiation, and masculinity is proven during adult life. This suggests that the categories are fragile, and that they are not exclusive. Women also have the potential for masculine virtues (Strathern 1978) and strength (Herdt 1981:181). There are explicit notions of male and female qualities, but these are not the rigid, mutually exclusive concepts that Westerners use. "...the values which they sustain also demand that they be to some extent free-floating, and it can be most inapposite to think of all men as important and all women as insignificant" (Strathern 1978:171. See also Scaletta 1981).

Such is the case with homosexuality as described above. In Melanesia, the adoption of exclusive homosexual behaviour as a life-style is seen as being as irregular as exclusive heterosexual behaviour. No male becomes a man without to some extent experiencing both. Bisexual behaviour is required for males and sexual orientation at a given point in an individual's life is prescribed. This demonstrates that human beings are born with a potential for sexual diversity, and that society moulds a person's sexual responses and preferences.

It seems obvious to the anthropologist in the field that there are clear cut values and regulations of behaviour for males and for females. Nonetheless, certain irregularities demand explanation. Transvestism (Levy 1971), male menstruation (Hogbin 1970), male pregnancy (Meigs 1976), and homosexuality (Herdt, 1981) affecting every male in certain societies, all defy interpretation in terms of Western categories of exclusive gender and exclusive sexuality. The concept of pollution is sometimes proposed as an answer to this dilemma, strengthening the polarity between the sexes for the convenience of the Western analyst, but as Meigs says, "Gender is not an immutable state but a dynamic flow. Such a view permits most persons to experience both genders before they die" (1976:406).

NOTES

1. It is interesting to note that the English language lacks a term comparable to effeminate, such as "emmasculate". One might suspect this suggests that Westerners value masculine qualities, even in women, but not feminine qualities, especially in men.
2. This reminds me of a conversation regarding a nominally gay friend who also maintains a somewhat precarious relationship with a woman friend. His sexuality was described as "indiscriminate".
3. This statement is of course idealistic. There are homosexuals who are secure in their sexual orientation but who have not resolved the issue related to sexuality and gender, just as there are heterosexuals who have rejected the popular beliefs about masculinity and femininity. But for the most part, any homosexual who had adopted a gay identity and is active in gay subculture has some insight into gender issues by virtue of having rejected the culturally prescribed norm.
4. A good example of the problems that haunt the topic even today is afforded by Herdt's discussion of the Sambia (1981). This is not the tribe's real name, but due to the secret nature of homosexual ritual and "the real worrisome pressures of local politics" (xvi), Herdt felt it necessary to adopt a pseudonym. These ethical demands prevent other material from even being made public. Since the initial writing of this paper, two other cultures have been brought to my attention by anthropologists who have felt constrained about writing about the homosexuality present in the societies in which they worked.
5. It is interesting to compare the ancient Dorian belief that an individual's arete, or mana, resided in his sperm and that honored men should ritually copulate per anum with young sons of nobility in order to transmit their arete. See Thorkil Vanggaard's (1974) Phallos; A symbol and its history in the male world. New York: International Universities Press.
6. Whether women perceive their growth as natural is never discussed. Do they believe that men's growth is natural or achieved? Since women are theoretically ignorant of men's initiation practices, then they should not be aware of the methods whereby a boy is made into a man.
7. See Deacon (1936:250ff) for a fascinating description of some of these hoaxes.