circle of leading priestesses. Bernardino likes to offer expensive gifts to these friends, but he also explodes into shocking abuse.

Men like João cultivate women prostitutes. He is famous for visiting them in their houses and playing innocently. This habit of his recalls Wilhelm Stekel's interesting cases of homosexuals who derived their highest excitement from the company of easy women who had entertained the men they themselves desired.

Still others, like Vavá, are bisexual. He seems the most contained, and also one of the least interesting, of the group. Like João, he allows his cult grounds to be used for assignations, thus attaining for himself access to the men who visit there originally from heterosexual motives. At the same time he is happily married to an attractive white girl, having been married several times in his twenty-five years.

Others, like Cyriaco and Manuelzinho, are quite staid in their homosexual attachments. The first lives with three "sons," and the quartet is inseparable. The second, sunk in an apathetic adoration of the doll-like Vavá, never flirts in João's heartless fashion.

Some are shy and self-conscious, like Octavio; others are hostile and rude, like Bernardino and Procopio; others still are lewd like Vidal. Some are impudent, like Paim, and some are quite serene, like Cyriaco. Obviously homosexuality has different personal meanings to each of them.

"Fathers" are not equally devoted to their religious responsibilities. Procopio and Bernardino, like many "mothers," devote all their time to them. Vavá and João have white-collar jobs in the schools. Cyriaco operates a successful grocery. Others, like Paim, are wasters who have no other occupation, and who eventually lose prestige and their cult following.

It is clear, therefore, that when the bars were let down which had excluded men from cult leadership, the fact that the only group which qualified was made up of outcasts and vagrants did not militate against certain of these men playing the highest roles in candomble. It is clear also that candomble has been radically changed by their assumption of such roles. Many of the outcaste group of passive homosexuals who have become priests have broken with the outcaste group; all have persevered in the face of powerful hostility, taken over the roles of the priestly "mothers," and exploited the priestly offices to their own ends.
THE COMMUNITY FUNCTION OF TAHITIAN MALE TRANVESTITISM: A HYPOTHESIS

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The role of the mahu, a feminine role-playing male, has persisted in rural Tahitian villages since traditional times although there have been many other role and institutional changes in the 200 years since Western contact. It is suggested here that the role persists not primarily as an expressive outlet for men wishing to avoid masculine role playing, but primarily because it serves important covert needs for other members of the community. There tends to be one mahu in each village, the belief of villagers being that "it is natural" or "God so arranged it" that there should be at least one and no more than one. Tahitian sexual identity is undifferentiated in its contrast of maleness and femaleness in relation to Western expectations. It is proposed that the presence of the mahu helps stabilize this identity for men by providing a highly visible and exclusively limited contrast, implying for other men in the village, "I am a man because I am not a mahu."

At the time of discovery by the West in 1767, Tahiti, like many other non-Western cultures, had an institutionalized form of male homosexuality. As James Morrison, left ashore in 1789 on Tahiti after the mutiny on the Bounty, noted,

they have a set of men called mahu. These men are in some respects like the Eunuchs in India but are not castrated. They never cohabit with women, but live as they do. They pick their beards out and dress as women, dance and sing with them and are as effeminate in their voice. They are generally excellent hands at making and painting of cloth, making mats, and every other woman's employment. They are esteemed valuable friends in that way and it is said, though I never saw an instance of it, that they converse with men as familiar as

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women do. This, however, I do not aver as a fact as I never found any who did not detest the thought (Morrison 1935: 238).

That the mahu did “converse with men as familiar as women do,” was attested to by other observers. William Bligh, Morrison’s captain, after noting in his journal that the mahus were “particularly selected when boys and kept with the women solely for the caresses of the men,” goes on to note that “those connected with him have their beastly pleasures gratified between his thighs, but are no farther sodomites as they all positively deny the crime” (Bligh n.d.: 16).

Other early reports from explorers and missionaries added fellatio to the coital forms, the literature giving the impression that it was generally the mahu who performed fellatio on the partner (although there is at least one early report of the reverse).²

I spent twenty-six months (during 1961-1964) doing studies of various psychological and anthropological patterns in two Tahitian speaking communities in French Polynesia.³ The mahu, as a social type, still exists. There was one in each of the two communities that I studied. In this paper I will briefly describe the mahu and his relation to others, and propose one of the dynamic factors in the maintenance of the role.

I will base this discussion mostly on the more rural and traditional of the two communities, “Piri,” a village of about 300 people, with a mixed subsistence (horticulture and fishing) and market (vanilla and copra) economy, on the island of Huahine about 100 miles north-west of Tahiti.

In 1961 there was a sixteen year old boy in Piri, who was referred to sometimes by his personal name, sometimes as “the mahu.” Although there were photographs of him proudly displayed in his foster mother’s house showing him in girls’ dancing

² There is a note from one of the early (1804) visitors to Tahiti, John Turnbull (quoted by M. Bouge in Journal de la Société des Océanistes, 1955 volume 11 page 147) that the mahu “eagerly swallows [the semen] down as if it were the vigor and force of the other; thinking no doubt thus to restore to himself greater strength.” Contemporary Tahitians, describing similar acts, exactly echo Turnbull’s incorporation-of-strength thesis to explain why some mahu are so “healthy looking.”

³ Some other reports on this work are noted in the references cited section.
costume, complete with brassiere, he wore male clothes ordinarily, favoring however the neutral sarong-like pareu, worn by both sexes, rather than the Western style trousers now worn frequently by men in the village. His speech and manner were somewhat feminine—resembling feminine style without exaggerating or mocking it. His feminine role-taking was made apparent to the villagers primarily because he performed women’s household activities, and because his associations were of feminine type. He cleaned the house, took care of babies, plaited coconut palm leaves into thatching sections, and made decorative patch work quilts. He associated with the adolescent girls in the village as a peer, walking arm-in-arm with them, gossiping and visiting with them.4

There were two other men in Piri who had feminine mannerisms. It was sometimes said about them that they were mahu-like, but they were not said to be mahus. They had wives and children, and performed men’s tasks in the village. There was also a man in his twenties who had been a mahu in Piri, when the present one was a child. According to the village reports he had given up being a mahu, had gone to Papeete to work, and was now living as an “ordinary man.” Mahus were not defined by effeminate behavior alone; they also had to fulfill some aspects of a woman’s village role, a role they could give up to become ex-mahus.

It also appeared that many people assumed that Tahitian villages usually had a mahu. Someone would say, “I don’t know who the mahu is in X village.” When asked, “Then how do you know there is one?” the answer would be something like, “There always is one,” or “That’s the way things are.” When asked if there were ever two mahus in a village, the common answer was, “No, only one.” One informant pressed on this said, “When one dies, another replaces him. God arranges it like that. It isn’t the nature of things, two mahus in one place. Only one... and when that one dies, he is replaced.” From what inquiries I was able to make about other villages, although there were periods without a mahu, as there had been in Piri itself, and occasionally two for brief periods, the supposition of “at least one, and

4 The mahu in the other community that I studied, an urban enclave, in the major administrative center, Papeete, was in his fifties. He worked as a maid for a Chinese family. He was accepted as a semi-peer of a group of middle aged Tahitian women.
no more than one to a community,” seemed to stand for an actual tendency. All but one of the villages on Huahine reportedly had one mahu at the time of my study.

Overt homosexual behavior was distinctly not an essential shared part of the community’s idea of the mahu’s role. The description on which everyone agreed was someone “who did woman’s work.”

All informants in Piri expressed generally positive feelings about the mahu in this aspect. First, they said he was “natural”; God (Tahitians have been Christian since the early 19th century) created him as a mahu—although this does not rule out a later, equally natural relinquishing of the role. Secondly, he was interesting. It was “wonderful” to see a man who had the skills to do women’s things. Both men and women spoke with some pride of Piri’s mahu’s skill. Some men, however, expressed some discomfort about them—in spite of their adherence to a doctrine of approval.

As to his overt homosexual behavior there were a variety of suppositions and of evaluations. Some informants in the village said that most mahus did not engage in sexual activities. Others, mostly the younger men in Piri, stated that all mahus engaged in sexual activity with other males, although they tended to be discreet and secret about it. This latter was the opinion of the mahu in Papeete.⁵

For those who said the mahu did engage in sexual activities, there were differences in opinions as to how many of the village young men were involved with him at one time or another. From the most reliable reports it appears that only a small percentage were involved.⁶ The type of sexual activity seems to be limited now (both in Piri and elsewhere) to fellatio, with the mahu being the active partner. Intercourse between the mahu’s thighs, with its more clearly feminine sexual role-playing was not reported, and

⁵ The mahu in Piri for various reasons, probably relating to village ambivalences about his sexual life and, thus, to the importance of discreetness, was one of the only two people approached in the village who refused requests for life histories.

⁶ There were no reports of homosexual relationships between men if neither one was a mahu. Informants said that this “never” happened. In Papeete on the other hand these relationships did exist, and a new term raeus has been recently introduced to describe people who engage in preferential homosexual activities, but who are not necessarily mahus.
denied when asked about. Anal sodomy was known, but considered to be an unclean perversion introduced by the Europeans, and limited to Papeete.

Those men in Piri who had had contacts with a mahu (either in the village or on visits to Papeete) spoke about it quite openly in interviews. They portrayed the mahu as simply a substitute woman, and described the acts with much the same affect and evaluations that they used for describing casual heterosexual acts. Thus (from a tape recorded interview) an eighteen year old man, asked if he felt any shame or embarrassment over it, said, “No, one isn’t ashamed. You don’t put any particular importance on it. It is like feeding the mahu with your penis. You get more pleasure out of it than they do... For you it is just the same as if you were having intercourse with a woman. You don’t take it seriously.”

Evaluations by those villagers who denied sexual contact with mahus as to the mahu’s sexual behavior and evaluations of the mahu’s partner were more complex than the acceptance of non-sexual parts of his behavior. While some villagers were tolerant, repeating that it was just like other kinds of sexual acts, some of the villagers, both men and women, thought that the acts were “disgusting,” and that both the mahu and his partner should be ashamed—reflecting Morrison’s pre-Christian “I never found any who did not detest the thought.” No one, however, ever labeled the partner as a mahu, nor indicated that they thought he was any less manful for his “indecent” behavior.

It is evident that the existence of the mahu role serves various psychological functions. For the mahu himself it provides a legitimate identity congruent with some of his needs. (The one mahu whom I studied at any length had reported having a feminine self image from his earliest remembered childhood.) And similarly for the Tahitian men who had occasional physical relations with mahus a variety of motives, some quite culturally specific, were served.†

If we accept the proposition that mahu behavior represents a social role in Tahitian villages, one may ask about its functions, about the social or community purposes that it serves.

†I did not find any examples of exclusive or most-frequent contact of a male with a mahu rather than with women, although semi-legendary stories of men occasionally living with a mahu as a spouse were sometimes told.
TAHITIAN MALE TRANVESTITISM

The ideal of one and only one mahu to a village would imply not only that somebody was recruited for the role (recall Bligh's remark that mahus were "particularly selected when boys") but that other possible candidates were somehow kept out of the role. This limits the possible function of the role as an acceptable escape from the male role by men whose temperament or aberrant socialization ill-fit them for it. Not only are some candidates kept out, but I have seen in other Tahitian communities very young boys apparently being coaxed into the role where I had the impression that the clues, if any, to which the coaxers were responding were at most related to the possibility of the child playing a transvestite role and not to any strong inclination, and it is possible that the coaxers were acting with no clues at all.

A larger part of the population participated as partners, and this was also part of the use of the role. But for most people the essence of the mahu was his highly visible "doing woman's work" in its public aspects; the private and generally secret sexual acts were considered by some as a perverse aspect of this otherwise acceptable behavior.

I would suggest that the presence and the maintenance of the mahu role have as major aspects a cognitive and message function to the community as audience, particularly to the male members.

Sexual role differentiation has special features and problems for individuals in the communities which I studied. At the cultural level there is relatively little differentiation when compared to Western expectations. The Tahitian language has no grammatical index of gender, the majority of Tahitian first names are not differentiated sexually, there is a relative equality and similarity of much male and female role behavior. To the degree that they are differentiated there is a frequent crossing over in a number of the work roles when necessary, for example, because of the illness of one of the adults in a small household. There is an emphasis in doctrine on playing down sex differences, and this is striking in men's playing down of any special difficulties in women's experience (such as childbirth), or in giving women either any special distinctions or disabilities. The emphasis is on equality, and minimizing of differences.⁸

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⁸ There are clear anxieties underlying this equalizing, but they are not immediately relevant here.
On a more covert level, identity formation of children growing up in Tahitian households tends to be diffused. Generally the powerful caretakers include a network of older siblings and cousins in a system which is guided in a relatively exterior fashion by the mother, and to which the father is very peripheral except in unusual circumstances. The caretakers are mostly girls and young women, and this, and the fact that her eventual adult roles are those which she witnesses closely every day in the household, seem to make it considerably easier for girls to establish a sexual identity by modeling and role learning than for boys. Some indication of the limited differentiation is given by a remark of Gauguin's that Tahitian men seemed to him "androgynous," and that, "there is something virile in the women and something feminine in the men" (Gauguin 1957:47). Similarly, Henry Adams remarked in a letter from Tahiti in the 1890's that, "the Polynesian woman seems to me too much like the Polynesian man; the difference is not great enough to admit of sentiment, only of physical divergence" (Adams 1930:484).

There is much homo-erotic play among boys, particularly related to the adolescent boys' life stage in which membership in the village peer group is of central importance. There is much body contact, occasional dancing together, occasional group masturbation, much darting out timidly into heterosexual forays and then a return for bragging and discussion to the peer group.

I propose that in the absence of strong internal shaping towards the self definition of manhood in its sense of contrast and complementarity to womanhood that there have been developed various external marks or signs which function to clarify that definition.

One is the circumcision of the penis which all boys undergo in early puberty. An analysis of the symbolic aspects of this indicates that it marks (as has been often suggested for such rites) both separation from household-parent-child binding and special male status.

I believe that the mahu role, with its clear cut rules, its high visibility, its strictly limited incumbency, and its pre-empting of

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9 There is no institutionalized female homosexuality. There are some male role playing women in Papeete, but this is considered bizarre by the people in Piti.
homosexual behavior, also has a message function. It says "there, clearly, out in the open, is the mahu, the one man who has taken a female role. I am a non-mahu. Whatever feelings I have about men are no threat to me and to my eventual role as family head. I can see exactly what he is, and I am clear about myself in that I am not he."  

I suggest that the mahu is a carefully maintained role, building on pre-existing possibilities for a supply of candidates, which carefully presents a behavior complex that serves the important function, among other subsidiary ones, of defining and stabilizing a precarious aspect of identity by a clear negative image—that which I am not, and cannot be.

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The orientation that some cultural forms, some (or aspects of some) roles, rites, myths and institutions (e.g. Polynesian adoption practices), have essential functions as messages for the community as audience, in addition to expressive and adaptational functions for the actors most immediately concerned, assumes that such forms act as maintenance systems for the stabilization of adult personality forms. Some theoretical background for this position is suggested in Levy (1969b).

The establishment of an identity through contrast and negation is only one of the possible types. The maintenance form may be congruent with an important major orientation. It is assumed here that the major orientation is conflictive or otherwise unstable, and that the maintenance form acts as a kind of ongoing rehearsal and reaffirmation of the orientation. (See Levy 1969b).

As to negative forms, it has been pointed out that not cannot be expressed directly in analogical language. (For example, see Bateson 1968). It may be indicated by expressing the feature to be negated in a positive form and indicating by the context that the positive form does not obtain. Thus a dog pretends to bite in a play situation, the context providing the statement, "This is the hostile relationship which I am not taking to-

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10 George Devereux (1937) in an article on institutionalized homosexuality of the Mohave Indians suggested that one of the functions of the practice was to create "an 'abscess of fixation' and [to localize] the disorder in a small area of the body social." This seems to be related to the thesis presented here.
wards you.” Analogically, the visible presence of a mahu is necessary for the statement, “this is what you are not.”

The assumptions made about the functional implications of “maintenance forms” based on the study of particular cultural cases have obvious consequences. In the case of a role (as opposed to other patternings which do not require training and recruits) the problems of filling it, or in the proposed mahu case of filling it and limiting its occupancy, should provide predictable tensions. Extra aspirants to the role should be forced out, new ones somehow recruited to empty slots. A sufficiently long period without the role being filled should produce adjustments and pathologies predictable from the functional assumptions concerning the role.

The mahu role is one of a limited number of dramatic cultural forms (others are adoption practices, supercission operations on male adolescents) which have persisted in Tahitian communities during a long period of acculturation in which much of the old culture, e.g., political superstructure, religion, amusements, has disappeared. These forms seem to be related to persisting aspects of organization involving values, structuring of everyday reality, philosophy, and aspects of personality, and to a clearly neo-Polynesian organization of introduced cultural materials. They seem to begin to breakdown when, under conditions of modernized economy and communication, the “acculturated” Tahitian community becomes a “modernized” sample of Western culture. The mahu becomes the raerae. This suggests that such forms when identified may be good indices to the absence of either breakdown or structural modernization. (c.f. Levy 1969d).

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Fuzzy sets and abominations

As Mary Douglas (1966: 63) envisioned the division of labour, it is God’s work to create order and, presumably, anthropologists’ to reveal it. Witkowski, Brown and Chase (Man (N.S.) 16, 1–14) again demonstrate that anthropologists perform this mission better with categories of life forms than for categories of social roles. In contrast to the positing of universals for the former, however (Douglas 1966: 15, 541–2) suggests that one of the most refractory of the latter, ‘homosexual’, be removed from the list of eitic concepts (although, somewhat inconsistently, he projects an American view of ‘transsexual’ onto the rest of the world).

Douglas’s famed interpretation of the abominations of Leviticus (1966: 54–72) is premised on the structural linguistics position that text reveals structure: ‘The only sound approach is to forget hygiene, aesthetics, morals and instinctive revulsion, even to forget the Canaanites and the Zoroastrian Magi, and start with the texts’ (1966: 63). This rejection of any relevance for comparative data is arresting in the course of a book presenting a cross-cultural theory of pollution and taboo (note the singular forms), and invites an ethnocentric bias even more than does reliance on dictionaries constructed by Western observers (see Murray & Arboleda in press). Douglas treats her own religious tradition as a privileged case—a subject that can therefore be a source of comparison but never an object to be explained by comparison. This ethnocentrism leads Douglas to explain variation in dependent variables with (unrecognisedly) invariant independent variables, namely, whereas there are always phenomena residual to any categorisation schema, what does not fit is not everywhere regarded with horror. Still less are attempts to exterminate what is anomalous to a classification schema universally made.

Mayr (1981) has interpreted the history of Western biological theory as a recurring clash between essentialisms (doctrines that maintain there are a limited, readily conceivable number of species characterised by essential, distinct features) and nominalism (doctrines positing an inter-breeding population of individual organisms grouped more or less arbitrarily by species names). Comparative ethnobiological work (in addition to Witkowski et al., see Berlin 1972; Berlin et al. 1966; 1968; Raven et al. 1971; Brown 1977, 1979; Bulmer 1967) has contrasted essentialisms, and found gross morphology universally employed to distinguish kinds of plants and animals.

Not only the ancient Hebrews noticed, ‘In the firmament two-legged fowls fly with wings. In the water scaly fish swim with fins. On the earth four-legged animals hop, jump, or walk’ (Douglas 1966: 70), and classified accordingly. Apparently there was a stage 4 classification in which ‘wug’ and ‘animal’ were not distinguished, but clearly contrasted to ‘snake’. The Semitic (Amharic and Arabian), Cushitic (Galla) and Indo-Iranian (Pahlavi and Pashto) languages in Brown’s (1979) survey of zoological classification systems are all stage 4 (as are more than a third of all those in the sample).

Aquatic crustaceans are usually classed ‘fish’. ‘True fish’ are the prototype of this class (Hunn 1977: 250), and shrimp problematic, whether located in semantic space outside the ‘wug’ boundary or on the other side (that is, in the ‘wug’ class). There is no report of any ancient Semitic people attempting to exterminate shrimp, any more than peoples in Papua New Guinea faced with the difficulty of classifying cassowaries as ‘birds’ or ‘mammals’ (Bulmer 1967; cf. Herdt 1981: 131–57) have been reported to resolve the conceptual problem by eliminating cassowaries.

If there is any psychological reality to the ‘horror’ purportedly inspired by such classification difficulties, it is confined to anthropologists intent on eliciting complete and exhaustive contrast sets. As Goody (1977) suggested, fixing folk classification schemata into writing (as in tables of components or hierarchical tree diagrams) can create anomalous phenomena otherwise orally glossed over and not reflected upon. Kuhn (1962: 9) noted that even in ‘science’ there are always counterinstances: not everything that is unknown or does not easily fit received ‘knowledge’ is problematic. Anomalies are recognised with great reluctance, and attempts to construct a new paradigm (in the original linguistic sense from which Kuhn borrowed it) occur only after persistent failure to solve a problem produces a ‘crisis’ (Kuhn 1962: 144). With no felt problems and no widely-recognised failure(s), there is no rethinking of fundamentals. The psychological reality of the