HAIRDOS AND DON’TS:
HAIR SYMBOLISM AND SEXUAL HISTORY IN SAMOA

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This article uses changing hairdos in Samoa to construct a history of female sex roles and gender politics from contact to the present. The diachronic view that body symbols provide light on the nature of Samoan sexual relations - a subject that has long perplexed anthropologists. In turn, this sexual history reflects upon the controversy about hair symbolism in the anthropological literature, a controversy that concerns both the particularity or comparability of body symbols between cultures, and their communicative or personal nature within cultures.

Hair is one of the classical foci of scholarly musings about the body, having attained this focal status through Leach's (1958) seminal essay 'Magical Hair'. This article attempts to draw the strands of the debate that Leach initiated into a coherent conversation, and to contribute to the colloquy by exploring transformations of female sex roles in Samoa from contact to the present; it does so by viewing changes in hair styles as indices of changes in these roles. I argue that the rules for hairdos that pertained to young women in pre-contact Samoa paralleled rules for their sexual behaviour, and that changes in the former and the latter coincided. I use historical and ethnographic sources to document these changes, as well as data collected during my own eight-year residence in Samoa from 1981 to 1989.

As long as there have been chroniclers of Samoan culture, hair has been a symbol of import. When the British consul, William Churchward, resided in Samoa between 1881 and 1884, he observed a tropical profusion of hair styles and a ubiquitous preoccupation with the arrangement of hair.

One can rarely pass through a village without seeing some branch of hair-dressing, either cutting, oiling, combing, liming, or shaving....A flower is never more than a second or two in the hands...before it is transferred to the hair. When feasting or visiting, coronets and garlands, most elaborately woven with the greatest possible taste from all sorts of bright-hued flowers, berries and variegated leaves, invariably mixed with the high-scented leaf of the Muso-oe, are worn by both men and women, who never lose an opportunity of so adorning themselves.

Man (N.S.) 29, 407-432
Another ... habit is, by the continued application of lime, to artificially produce a light-coloured hair ... or ... to stain it a deep red ... The light colour is ... produced by plastering the hair once or twice a week with a thick coating, well rubbed and combed in, of lime burnt from the coral-rock. This is allowed to remain during the day, but is washed out in the evening ... The men present the appearance of ... sunburnt barristers ... When these white heads are set off with bright-coloured flowers and leaves, the effect, contrasting with the dark skin, is most striking ...

It would be impossible to describe the innumerable different methods of wearing the hair adopted in Samoa. One man will grow his hair for a year or two, keeping the sides and back closely clipped, whilst the hair on the crown is permitted to grow up ... in the form of a great mushroom, about eighteen inches above the scalp, and which from being liberally treated with lime becomes quite blonde in colour [above] ... a parterre of quite dark and ordinary hair. In old times it was only certain chosen individuals who were allowed to wear their hair like that, and when it became long enough it was cut and made into the ... fighting headdress worn by the chief warriors. Another man will be close-cropped, but leave one lock hanging à la Chinoise, bleached or not, just as it may please him. Then again, will be seen a gay young spark with a crest running lengthwise over his head, whilst a third will rejoice in a similar adornment breadthwise (1887: 399-401).

By the phrase 'old times', Churchward refers to pre-contact times, when he presumes there were more rules for hairdos and less riotous variety of coiffure. In Samoa, significant contact with the outside world and missionization began together around 1830. Depictions of hair styles from this earlier period, especially those of young women's styles, do evince a greater regularity. Thus the Reverend John B. Stair, who resided in Samoa from 1838 to 1845, notes that while 'Females had seven different styles of dressing their hair', the tutuiva was a style restricted to young females during their virginity' (1897: 121). The missionary Williams (who was in Samoa during the early 1830s) describes the tutuiva style as consisting of a shaved pate ornamented by a tuft hanging down over the left temple, from which a long tail was left to dangle down the cheek (1884 [1830-32]). These curious tufts and tails were commonly bleached with lime to a light reddish-brown (Turner [1884] 1984: 122; Stair 1897: 132; Freeman 1983: 229).

As Samoa became Christian, long hair for girls came to be thought extraordinarily pretty. Laulii Willis, a Samoan girl born in 1865, married an Englishman and moved to England where she wrote her memoirs (1889). Laulii tells us that prior to her marriage, when another Englishman violently and persistently pursued her, a Samoan gossip attributed this to her long hair. Today in Samoa, when a girl cuts her heavy long hair, others will remark that she is wasting her beauty. Yet girls' hair in Christian Samoa was, until recently, normally hidden in a bun.

In what follows I have two projects that are interwoven and interdependent: to investigate the significance of this rearrangement – from shaved pates and hanging locks to long hair neatly bound – and to further anthropological discourse on the convoluted topic of hair. Initially, the ideas that have arisen in the context of anthropological controversy will be used to decipher the
historical reconfiguration of Samoan girls’ hair. Finally, the Samoan data on hair, allied with other ethnographic data on hair and body symbols generally, will be used to reflect on the anthropological debate.

The ‘hair’ controversy in anthropology

Leach’s argument in ‘Magical hair’ has two strands (1958). First, Leach suggests that cross-culturally the head represents the penis, and head hair, semen. Extending the logic of these associations, Leach argues that long hair expresses unrestrained sexuality and removing the hair expresses sexual restraint, as in celibacy or castration. A decade later Hallpike (1969) rejects Leach’s equations (between loose hair and sexuality, and between hair removed and castration) because women as well as men sometimes shave their heads during funeral rites and because celibate ascetics may adorn themselves with long hair. Contra Leach, Hallpike proposes that long hair symbolizes freedom from social regulation and short or bound hair, subordination to social authority. Later still, Hershman (1974) agrees with Leach as to the general cultural significance of hair but argues that in its ritual uses hair may convey more local meanings. Recently Synnott (1993: 123-24) has criticized Leach and Hallpike for offering interpretations of hair that involve ‘one-on-one equations of symbols and meanings’. In a structuralist vein, Synnott suggests that hair makes oppositional meanings, for example, meanings differentiating men and women.

Returning to Leach’s argument, the second strand is that, when symbols like hair are public and shared, they constitute a form of social communication and exist apart from private complexes and from the unconscious motivations associated with these complexes (Leach 1958). Studying the hairdos of Sinhalese female ascetics, Obeyesekere (1984; 1990) rejoins that, while Leach is right that the primary function of public symbols is communicative rather than psychological, individuals may borrow public symbols to conceptualize and express private complexes. Doing so provides them with an avenue whereby their complexes can be integrated in public cultural understandings and whereby the alienated individual can be reintegrated into society. Cultural meaning systems are continually reinvented by this integrative process, since the articulation of private complexes with public symbols results in the creative adaptation of the pertinent public symbols.

In contrast to Spiro (1970), Obeyesekere (1984) makes a sharp distinction between symbols that are involuntarily employed by the individual and those that are voluntarily employed or that are institutionalized. Spiro had anticipated the idea that public symbols can be used to express private complexes in his work on hair in Burmese Buddhism (1970: 338-43). Spiro studied monks who shave their heads, a public symbol of their celibacy and asexuality; however, Spiro also believed that their shaved head, eyebrows, and eyelashes (which make them resemble newborn infants) express unresolved dependency needs. Obeyesekere counters that Spiro’s argument – which applies to all Burmese Buddhist monks – is too broad, since it cannot be
established that monks generally shave their hair as an expression of unresolved dependency. Shaving one’s hair is merely a requirement, voluntarily undertaken, of joining a monastery, which an individual may do for a host of reasons (1984: 40–4).

How do these ideas illuminate changes in the Samoan girl’s hairdo? Setting to one side, for the moment, the arguments of Synnott, Obeyesekere and Spiro, it may be possible to establish a symbolic base line for gauging changes in the girl’s coiffure by interpreting hair symbolism in old Samoa in the light of Leach’s and Hallpike’s explanations. A problem arises when one attempts this interpretation, however. The girl’s hair presents two elements—a shaved pate and tufts of long hair hanging loosely down—which, if either Leach or Hallpike is correct, would seem to confound one another’s significance. To begin with, therefore, let us take Hershman’s advice and look to local meanings of hair in Polynesia and Samoa for a possible resolution to this dilemma.

**Head hair as penises, or semen, or what?**

In pre-Christian Polynesia, the head was *mana* (Vason 1840; Handy [1927] 1978; Goldman 1970; Valeri 1985). In Samoa hair, as a signifier, was conflated with the head. The Samoan word for head (*ulu*) can mean ‘head’ or ‘hair’. Not surprisingly, hair was treated as if it too were *mana*. The hair of Samoan chiefs, for example, was cut by special attendants (Stair 1897: 123; Tuiteleleapaga 1980: 48).

*Mana* was associated with the vital energies of the natural world and was synonymous with fecundity (Handy [1927]1978; Koskinen 1967; Goldman 1970; Shore 1989). According to one of Firth’s informants, when *mana* was given by an old chief to a young chief, he said, ‘There is your manu [mana] ... not a man looks upon it; he observes only...the taro, the yam, the coconut, all food has fruited’ (1949: 492). Perhaps because hair in Samoa was an embodiment of *mana*, it was also a symbol of fecundity. In pre-contact Samoa, women grew their hair long only during pregnancy ‘as evidence of their condition’ (Stair 1897: 175). The implication is that long hair alluded to the pregnant or fecund state.

*Mana* was also associated with sexuality. Throughout Polynesia, spirits were personifications of *mana* (Koskinen 1967). Their actions might, therefore, be viewed as expressive of *mana*. In Samoa, male and female spirits are still said to seduce attractive young people of the opposite sex (Kraemer ([1923] 1949: 16-17; Mead 1929: 269; Stuebel 1976: 94-5; Schoeffel 1979: 26-411; Mageo 1991a: 361; 1992b). In line with this symbolism, the other body parts that were *mana* in Polynesia were the genitals themselves.

Sahlins tells us that early Hawaiian *mele* (songs) praising members of the aristocracy often glorified their genitals (1985: 15-17). Shore collected statements throughout Polynesia that the chief’s genitals were taken as a symbol of his *mana*, and their size glorified (1989: 142). In contrast, Samoan
twentieth-century tales about female spirits feature another body part—their long, unbound, streaming hair (Mageo 1991a: 360-81).

The spirits Le'Telesa and Sauma'iafe are the two best-known female spirits in Samoa today. Both wear their long hair hanging down. Often they are seen combing out their hair and may hold their head out at arm's length for that purpose (Mageo 1991a: 360-1). Like humans, Samoan spirits have a village with which they are associated, and these villages have a malae. The malae is an open area in the centre of the village, normally round or elliptical, which is an icon for an identity of place and of what one might call an authority of place. In villages that are the residence of a female spirit, the spirit is said periodically to drag her hair at night around the malae; villagers may see only her hair (Goodman 1971: 470; Mageo 1991a: 361).

In its narrative salience, the long hair of female spirits is analogous to the penises of chiefs. As chiefs have remarkable genitals, female spirits have remarkable hair. It seems probable that the primary visual characteristic of female spirits represents their primary spiritual characteristic: their long hair, like chiefly penises, is a symbol of their mana.

Summing up, in Samoa mana can connote an ensemble of ideas that might be termed 'sexuality-fecundity'; mana is connoted by long hair. There is, then, a chain of association connecting long hair and sexuality. These associations are confirmed by Samoan ideas of feminine beauty. Beauty queens everywhere are sex symbols. In the early 1970s beauty pageants began in Samoa. At one of the first pageants in American Samoa, the queen was determined exclusively by measuring each girl's hair with a yardstick. Like the silhouettes exhibited at American beauty contests, hair symbolically exhibited the Samoan girls' sexuality. Leach's argument seems confirmed in Samoa, and provides a basis for decoding the cultural messages inscribed in the tutagita; as a lock of long hair, the tutagita displayed a girl's sexuality.

The exhibitionistic significance of hair in old Samoa was reiterated by bleaching the tutagita to a light reddish-brown. If mana can be said to have a colour, that colour is red. The archetypal Polynesian chief's skin and hair were reputed to be ruddy (Luomala [1955] 1986: 139-40). The same can be said of female spirits in Samoa. The skin of female spirits glows red 'like that of the fisherman returning from the sea' (Kraemer [1923] 1949: 16A). Should a female spirit seduce a boy, the next morning his skin is 'suffused with a strange rosy flush' (Mead 1929: 269), 'as if', says Saeu Scanlan (former President of American Samoa Community College), 'he has been working in the sun'. Recounting a tale of a boy seduced by Sauma'iafe, Kraemer says 'He looked all aflame the next morning' ([1923] 1949: 16A-17; see also Schoeffel 1979: 407; Mageo 1991a: 361). One might surmise that the boy's skin had taken on the spirit's rubicund glow.

Often the boy who has been seduced by a spirit becomes sick, even unto death (Mageo 1991a: 361; Stuebel 1976: 94-5). Perhaps this is because, throughout Polynesia, mana is transferred by contact (Handy [1927] 1978: 28-9; Valeri 1985: 84-105). When a person without mana comes into contact
with one who has mana — even indirectly — some of the mana is transferred to the lesser individual who is likely to become ill. In old Samoa, the missionary Stair noted that chiefs

... always partook of their meals separately, since whatever they touched was supposed to partake of their sacredness, so that all food left by them...was taken to the bush and thrown away, as it was believed that if a person not belonging to this sacred class ate of it, his stomach would immediately swell from disease, and death speedily ensue! (1897: 121-22; see also Gray 1960: 120-1).

The boy who takes on a spirit girl's ruddy glow, like the food left behind by a chief, is contaminated with 'sacredness', that is with the spirit’s mana; however, the boy is also like the partaker who enjoys the food but does not belong to the chief’s 'sacred class', and who in consequence suffers disease and speedy death.

In Samoa, all fair hair is considered 'ena'ena, a word that is usually translated as brown, although when English-speaking Samoans use this term in reference to hair, they typically gloss it as 'blond'. This makes sense since, when one is bleaching Polynesian hair, it goes through a series of reddish-brown shades prior to arriving at blond, and even then retains a reddish hue. When describing hair, Samoans specify the actual shade of 'blond' by using certain modifiers with 'ena'ena, such as 'ena'ena mānaia, which literally means 'really nice brown hair', but which refers to a very fair reddish colour.

The hair of female spirits is most commonly said to be 'ena'ena mānaia, and they are wont to decorate it with a red hibiscus (Stuebel 1976: 94-5; Schoeffel 1979: 406-8; Mageo 1991a: 94-5). 8 Samoans look upon the fair reddish hair ascribed to female spirits as a mark of aristocratic blood and it occurs naturally in a few Samoans. So signal a mark of status was this reddish hair in old Samoa that the principal ornament of the highest status persons on ceremonial occasions was a headdress composed of it. The headdress was called a tuiga and was a ritualized version of the tutagita. Its central element was tufts of human hair that the nineteenth-century German doctor, Kraemer, says were those of a girl, cut off and bleached with sunlight, lime and wild oranges over a period from six months to a year ([1902] 1978, vol. 2: 349; see also Angas 1866: 275; Freeman 1983: 124; Shore 1989: 157).

Red coloration was a hallmark of mana not only when it appeared on skin and hair but on objects as well, for example fine mats. Supernatural powers were ascribed to certain fine mats and they were thought to be the resting place of spirits (Hutton 1874: 150-1; Kraemer [1902] 1942, vol. 1: 51-7; [1923] 1949: 63; Meleisea 1987: 37; Holmes 1974: 59). Fine mats are decorated with feathers, which in old Samoa were often red feathers taken from a scarlet-headed parakeet called sega (Wilkes 1845: 141; Stair 1897: 117; Kraemer [1902] 1978, vol. 2: 350; Stuebel 1976: 126). The female spirit, Le'Telesā, said to have red hair, may take the form of a sega. Thus Samoan iconography equates red hair and red feathers and both appear as exudations of mana. The sega itself is said to have been born as a 'clot of blood', the Samoan euphemism for miscarriages (Stuebel 1976: 54). In general, aitu
(spirits) may originate as miscarriages. By implication the *sega* is a kind of *aitu* and the ‘clot of blood’ origins of *sega* and *aitu* emphasize their innate redness.

If the *tutagia* – both in its substance and its colour – represented *mana* and sexuality-fecundity, then the girl’s bleached locks would have been a kind of self-flaunting, advertising her potential sexuality and subsequent fecundity.9 Indeed, the *tutagia* epitomizes a general attitude towards girls’ bodies in old Samoa, namely that these bodies should be displayed. This attitude is rife throughout early missionary portraits.

Reverend Williams recounts how Samoan girls, when counselled by missionary wives to conceal their persons, responded by counselling missionary wives. The girls told the wives to put aside their missionary garments and to tie a shaggy mat around their waist such that the left thigh was bare, to rub their skins with oils, to powder their breasts with turmeric, to adorn themselves with beads, ‘and then...walk about to shew themselves’ (*fā’alialia*), so that they might inspire longing in the *mānaia*, the sons of chiefs (J. Williams [1830-32] 1984: 117). Williams cites another instance in which a company of Samoan women and girls tease a bashful young Englishman by dancing before him naked, all the while telling him not to mind because ‘it was FaaSamo...or the Samoan fashion’ ([1830-32] 1984: 232).

One might suppose that this positive attitude towards self-display indicated a permissive attitude towards sexuality. This conjecture is given credence by many early missionary descriptions of Samoan night dances (*pōula*), which were described by one of my informants as like ‘a sexual party’. Although nineteenth-century sources suggest that, in their original form, *pōula* involved a great range of entertainments, these occasions had a definite trajectory ending in a melee for which ‘sexual party’ is an apt description (J. Williams [1830-32] 1984: 247-8; Wilkes 1845: 130, 134, 140; Stair 1897: 132-4; Turner [1884] 1984: 125; Pritchard 1866: 78; Kraemer [1902] 1978, vol. 2: 389-94; Moyle 1988: 209-14). In the earliest recorded *pōula* girls danced naked, often in front of a torch, and displayed their bodies in antics that were both lewd and humorous, as did the boys (J. Williams [1830-32] 1984: 247-8). *Pōula* songs were often sexually explicit and the same informant cited above (who observed *pōula* as a boy) said that ‘the words of the song’ were ‘telling them what to do’, as the following illustrates:10

Loosen your kilt and throw it in the house
Then do the slap dance in the nude.
When the papaya is yellow on one side
That is when it is sweet!
It is splendid, the white ass;
It is splendid, the white ass.
The girl’s kilt is in tatters.11

Remember, however, that the girl’s head was partially shaved. If girls were sexually unrestrained in old Samoa, then perhaps Halfpike is right and shaving female heads does not necessarily signify sexual restraint. If, on the other hand, Leach is right about the significance of shaving and binding hair, then
the Samoan girl’s mostly shaved head is something of an enigma as it should indicate sexual restraint, just as surely as her reddened locks suggest an absence of restraint.

*Female ‘castration’ and shaven heads*

Clues to the purport of the shaved head in Samoa can be found in reports from Christian times when girls began growing their hair long. I return to the memoirs of Laulii Willis, who grew up in Samoa during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The *tutagita* style was still in evidence in Laulii’s time, but rather than being the style affected by the pubescent girl, it was worn by girls prior to coming of age; in adolescence girls grew their hair long like Laulii (1889: 17). When Laulii was believed to have committed a sexual indiscretion, however, an older sister shaved Laulii’s head, leaving a lock or two (1889: 78). In other words, Laulii was forced to return to the *tutagita* style, not because she was thought a virgin, but rather because it signified a greater measure of control over her sexuality. Reasoning from this incident, it seems likely that the pre-contact girl’s shaved pate also signified control of her sexuality. This symbol of control, however, became a means to assert control.

In 1928 Mead mentions ‘severe beatings and a stigmatizing shaving of the head’ as a recently abandoned punishment for promiscuity ([1928] 1961: 273). So it appears that relatives who were distressed by a girl’s indiscretions eventually ceased to leave a lock or two – as in the *tutagita* style – and shaved the head altogether. Heads are still being shaved when Samoan parents catch a daughter in a compromising situation. Should a girl behave too freely, a parent may literally drag her home by her hair, a punishment common enough to have a name, *futi le sulu*, meaning either ‘pull by’ or ‘pluck out the hair’. I married a Samoan and as recently as the early 1980s my husband witnessed a mother who, catching her daughter at a discotheque in Pago Pago (in American Samoa), pulled the girl home by her hair. When Samoan parents warn a girl to behave, they will often say ‘You better be careful or I’ll pull out your hair’.

Attractiveness is culturally defined and constituted. Shaving a Samoan girl’s hair is, therefore, likely to decrease others’ sexual interest in her. One might say that shaving deprives her of the symbolic wherewithal to enter into a sexual relationship. Shaved heads in Samoa would then confirm Leach’s argument that either short or bound hair signifies sexual restraint (1958). If Leach is right that head hair is a visual synonym for the penis, however, shaving the girl’s hair when she is sexually indiscreet amounts to a form of castration. This conclusion once again raises the Hallpike objection: that shaving heads cannot signify castration because women do it too. But whoever is right about the cross-cultural significance of hair, old Samoa leaves us with another puzzle. If the pre-Christian girl’s hair was a metaphor for her sex role, it would seem a richly ambiguous metaphor, emblazoning a role that was free and circumscribed at the same time.
Shaved pates and long tails

The ambiguity of the pre-Christian girl’s coiffure and corresponding sex role can best be explicated through an understanding of the sexual economy of pre-Christian Samoa. In old Samoa the status of a village depended upon the rank of the titles held by chiefly members of the village (Gilson 1970; Davidson 1967). In order to raise their status, villages sponsored a succession of taupou. The taupou was a high-ranking girl who was made a village dignitary for the purpose of marrying her to a high-ranking title. She was petted and decorated and her sexual attractiveness augmented, even her pubic hair being oiled and combed (Freeman 1983: 229). The village’s hope was that she would attract a fine selection of high titles as potential marriage partners.

Often these marriages of state were extremely brief, lasting only until the girl had become pregnant (Stuebel 1976: 134; Mata’afa Tui 1987: 40). She would then return to her village, going again to her husband only to have the child acknowledged. The chief would wed another taupou, while the taupou herself was never to marry again (Pritchard 1866: 55; Meleisea 1987: 25). When the chief died, all his descendants were candidates for his title and for other titles that could be traced through his genealogy; therefore, the former taupou’s descendants had a claim to these titles and, with this claim, a means by which to raise the village’s status.

Similarly, the extended families of Samoa (‘āiga) deployed their girls to attract scions of other families rich in titles, land, or other commodities whereby the deploying family might raise its status. Should a girl become pregnant, her descendants were eligible, not only for all titles that descend through her own genealogy, but also for those that descended through that of the child’s father. She also qualified for a piece of land from the family of the boy who fathered the child, land that could be shared by the members of her ‘āiga.

Examples of the idea that daughters are a means for acquiring status and land can still be found in Samoa. In her work on Samoan comic theatre, Sinavaiana describes a skit in which a father tries to marry off his daughter to an elderly hearse driver so as to accrue status when he dies by being driven around in a hearse (1992: 204-6). My husband’s Samoan family is rife with tales of girls from other families who, at the behest of their elders, procured or sought to procure a desirable piece of Mageo land, either through marrying or bearing children.

Simply put, the Samoan girl was a lure (Mageo 1992a). As Ortner notes, the activity of luring requires both the advertisement of sexuality and its restraint – giving an appearance of freedom without necessarily the fact of licence (1981). J. Williams provides an early example. A Samoan man came to his ship...

... very urgent that we should go & sleep on shore & as an inducement offered a fine young woman he had in his canoe. Her clothing consisted of nothing but a round about of leaves which on coming on the vessel she dropped off & put a piece of white cloth on. On leaving the vessel she put off her white cloth in presence of all
& girded her leaves round her waist leaving the left thigh completely bare which it appears they pride themselves in shewing. Her head was shaven bare with the exception of a long lock & tuft over the left temple ([1830-32] 1984: 102).

As Williams's censoring gaze ascends up the girl's body, the hanging lock seems a visual echo of the bare thigh that 'they pride themselves in shewing'.

'Tails' of marriage

Indigenous concepts of marriage suited the idea of the girl's role as a lure. While the marriages of high-status girls were carefully arranged by orators, those of lower-status girls often occurred through pōula (Kraemer [1902] 1978, vol. 1: 36; Stair 1897: 124; Stuebel 1976: 114). Pōula were occasions for luring. Of pōula girls Kraemer says:

... they do enjoy to flaunt their charms. Not only do they always have their upper torso bare at a dance, wearing only a chain on their chests, they also wear their leaf girdle or shag girdle so scant and high that a part of their tattooed upper thigh is visible during the dance (Kraemer [1902] 1978, vol. 2: 395; see also Moyle 1975: 239).

Marriage was often the result of flaunting. Thus a Western Samoan informant of mine, Loia Fiaui, says of pōula:

That's how ... the travelling party from the other village will intermarry, that's the time they find spouses ... if [this guy] happens to be high in the social ranks of the village or the district ... Or if this guy has plenty of material things to give ... who cares about what happened during the night? This will consummate social relationships. This will only elevate social status. This will bring prestige. This will bring wealth.

The union of a girl and a chief was permanent for the girl, but that made between commoners at pōula was not necessarily so (Kraemer [1902] 1978, vol. 2: 398; Schultz [1911] n.d.: 29-30). Yet if the girl was free to 'marry' at pōula, and to 'marry' again as she chose, what was the significance of her shaved head?

In old Samoa the girl's shaved head represented what one might call 'conventional virginity'. Females in their virginity are called 'girls' (teine) and in Samoan the term teine has connotations of virginity (Schoeffel 1979: 178; Shore 1981: 204). When females marry, they are called 'women' (fāfīne). Females who are not virgins but who are still residing with their family, however, will be called teine because it is polite, as long as they have not borne a child – although privately people may remark, 'Well, if she is a real [virginal] girl'.

Yet this conventional virginity is not meaningless, since it signifies a girl's regard for her family's and for her village's interest in the matter of sexuality and marriage. In old Samoa, sexual actions were not judged on the basis of inflexible rules. The issue was: did the action advance the status of the family? Just as my informant says, 'if' the union elevated the social status or increased the wealth of the family, 'who cares what happened during the night?' If, on the other hand, the girl eloped merely 'upon personal inclination'
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(i le loto o le teine), she was likely to be caught and punished by her parents (Schultz [1911] n.d.: 23).

Confirming Leach’s position on the communicative role of body symbols, the girl’s hairdo in pre-Christian times signified a set of cultural assumptions about her sex role. These assumptions were that through her sexuality she would serve the interests of her family, but that she would practise this form of self-restraint in the context of a patterned form of self-advertisement (*fā'ālialia*). If the luring character of the girl’s role in old Samoa – self-flaunting on the one hand, self-restraining on the other – resolves one ethnographic puzzle, it presents us with yet another. In modern ethnographic portrayals of Samoan mores, girls are expected to be *mamalu* (Shore 1977; 1981; 1982; Schoeffel 1979; Freeman 1983). *Mamalu* is usually glossed as ‘dignified’ and is at odds with exhibitionistic behaviour of any sort. We must look to history to explain the incongruity of the present with the past.

**Changing hairdos and don’ts**

It is a truism, but not one without foundation, that changes in cultural understandings of girls’ sex roles were a by-product of Christianity. This is not to say that Samoa was the victim of a marauding conceptual system not its own that irrevocably weakened the indigenous conceptual system. Anyone who has visited Samoa even briefly is aware that the indigenous way of seeing the world is alive and well, although like all healthy conceptual systems it constantly borrows and integrates foreign elements. Nonetheless, a dramatic Christianization of girls’ roles is apparent when one compares the portraits of girls painted by early visitors to Samoa – visitors who often stayed for nearly a decade – with recent portraits.

The reasons why Christian notions about girls were incorporated, the manner in which they were, and the timetable for this development have been considered at length elsewhere (Mageo 1991b; 1992a; 1992b; n.d.). For present purposes let me reiterate that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a two-faceted change developed, which was paralleled by alterations in girls’ hairdos. In the pre-contact hairdo the head was mostly shaved and the remaining hair left to hang; in the new hairdo all of the hair was allowed to grow long but was entirely bound. The social correlates of the new coiffure were an increased emphasis on inner sentiment on the one hand, and on virginal daughters on the other. In essence, these correlates contradicted one another.

The nineteenth-century English missionaries who Christianized Samoa were members of Protestant sects that emphasized inner sentiment in the practice of religion (Gilson 1970: 65-94; Perry 1974: 11; Eliade 1987). They therefore encouraged a general shift in values that highlighted the inner self: particularly personal will, personal conscience and personal identity (Mageo n.d.). Missionaries paid special attention to the training of adolescent girls, preferring them to reside in the missionary’s house where pastors could be vigilant of their charges’ virtue (Mead [1928] 1961: 68, 156-7, 264-5).
In its application to matters of 'marriage', the shift in values precipitated by missionaries made it more likely that girls would mate on the basis of personal feeling, rather than on considerations of family status. Thus, despite her family's chiefly rank, Laulii Willis married at her own insistence at 14, threatening to elope if she was not given her way. After a brief marriage, she did elope (unsuccessfully) with a European. Shortly thereafter she married another European, to whom she remained married (Willis 1889). Mead recounts how, by the 1920s, more Europeanized Samoans refused to allow their daughters to become taupeu 'because the missionaries say a girl should make her own choice, and once she is a taupe, they regard the matter as inevitably taken out of their hands' ([1928] 1961: 101).

In pre-contact Samoa virginal daughters were the concomitant of high status. Thus Pritchard says, 'The chastity of the daughters of the chiefs was the pride and the boast of the tribes' (1866: 138). Their virginity represented their family's eligibility to contract marriages of state, for which virginity was required. For all Samoan families, however, daughters were and are important representatives of family image. Today, girls are still enjoined to 'act nicely!' (faifā deleta!), because their deportment reflects so emphatically upon their family. This is particularly true of girls with long hair, because they are thought beautiful. Girls occasionally cut their hair simply to escape this representative status. Given the public importance of daughters, as well as the circumstantial connexion between a family's status and its daughters' virginity, the Christian notion that even common girls should be virginal must have been flattering to the dignity of lower-status āiga.

Christianity, however, was not alone in fostering novel standards for feminine behaviour. Certain other historical developments also exerted influence, particularly the second world war. I quote a song from this period evincing a derisiveness towards female flaunting that was surely absent when Samoan girls told bashful Englishmen that flaunting their bodies was 'the Samoan way':

Vanished are all the sailors of the military  
Abandoning you on mainstreet,  
Sitting everywhere along mainstreet,  
With your hair dishevelled.  
Finished are the days of showing off  
Next to a guy from the military.  
I already told you not to flaunt yourself.  
You will always end up of no status whatsoever.\(^{15}\)

The verse attributes very different consequences to flaunting from those pertaining in old Samoa when it was thought to attract the notice of the mōnaia, 'the sons of chiefs'. Rather than acquiring status by luring a boy who has status -- as American servicemen did in Samoan eyes during the second world war -- the girl in the song ends up with dishevelled hair, a metaphor for her social discomposure, and is deprived of status altogether. Flaunting and luring behaviours were simply not as socially productive for girls or their
families in the twentieth century as they had once been, and this development paved the way for a new moralism about the body.

While in the early days after contact girls frankly encouraged missionary wives to 'walk about to shew themselves', today 'walking about' itself is a morally suspect activity. In American Samoa *eva* is the common term for walking about. Going *eva* has connotations of flaunting for girls – particularly at night. Trysts are called *evaga*, the suffix 'ga' turning the verb *eva* into a noun. Should a girl be away from home too much, people will say 'Se vilaia ia Eva', meaning 'Look at Eve'. This sentence implicitly compares luring behaviours to the illicit actions of the Biblical temptress, and associates these with the word *eva*. The saying 'Eva eva a tei 'ua fula 'ae mulimuli ane 'ua puta' – which means 'Walking about, suddenly swollen, and lastly fat' – refers to a girl getting pregnant. Here again the girl is implicitly compared to the Biblical Eve, and her flaunting is condemned.

With this change in mores about flaunting came a parallel change in attitudes towards hair. At first the old dualism of shaved pates and hanging locks was succeeded by a new dualism. Instead of wearing part of one's hair shaved and part of one's hair down, girls often wore their hair up in the village and down elsewhere. A middle-aged American Samoan woman I knew during my entire eight years' residence in Samoa told me that, when she and her sister were adolescents, their parents made them wear their hair up. Whenever her sister was going to their family's plantation in the bush, however, she let her beautiful straight black hair down her back as soon as she was out of sight of her house. In the village one took no such liberties. Although today Samoa is liberalizing its view of hairdos and of what they connote, it may still be remarked of a girl who wears her hair down in the village, 'Look at the hanging of her hair, she is probably a wanton'.

This 'ethics of place' is pervasive in Samoan culture (Shore 1977; 1982). Yet with the new attitudes towards girls' bodies inspired by culture contact, ethics of place came to be exploited in novel ways. The night dances of old Samoa moved to outbuildings in the bush (Mageo n.d.). A middle-aged male informant from Western Samoa, speaking of his youth, recounted excursions to the bush on which girls from his village would sometimes elope with, and sometimes be molested by, young men (Mageo n.d.; see also Goodman 1983). Often girls did not tell their parents what had transpired. Rather, they invoked an explanation which was common in pre-Christian Samoa, when people concealed delinquencies by attributing them to spirits; Stair tells us that 'Many a faithless wife', secured herself from punishment 'in this manner' (1897: 216). Similarly, in Christian Samoa a girl who went off with a boy might escape censure by persuading her parents that she had been kidnapped by a spirit (Mageo n.d.). Spirits, however, soon became something more than an excuse.
Spirited hair

Samoan-Christian girls were caught between the old mores that counselled flaunting and the new ones that censored it. Elsewhere I have argued that the result was a rise in the incidence of spirit possession (1991b; 1992b; n.d.). The data suggest that this rise occurred around the middle of this century as Samoan night dances, and the indigenous attitudes towards girls that they embodied, finally began to disappear (Mageo 1991b; 1992b; n.d.). Not only did possession itself increase, its form changed.

Pre-Christian Samoa was characterized by possession (in the sense of mediumship), spirit-induced illnesses, and spirit seductions (Turner [1861] 1986: 130; Stair 1897: 220-5; Kraemer [1923] 1949:16-17; Mead 1929: 269; Stuebel 1976: 94-5; Meleisea 1987: 36-7; Macpherson & Macpherson 1990). These were distinct events, although they might occasionally overlap. Christian Samoa is characterized by simple possession in which a low-status person, usually female, is a victim of a spirit takeover; she is regarded as ill; she may be molested by the spirit (Cain 1971: 178; Goodman 1971: 471; Shore 1977: 342-50; Schoeffel 1979: 394-5, 412; Mageo 1991a: 371-3; 1991b; 1992b). In short, the old forms of spirit commerce have been amalgamated, the status of possession as a cultural event has declined, and the gender distribution of those who are possessed has shifted. In these contemporary versions of possession, hair has a central place.

In the twentieth century girls may be 'hit' by a spirit if they wear their hair down, or comb it out at night, or if they wear their hair down in villages associated with possessing spirits, or in any village at night outside the house, especially at twilight (Schoeffel 1979: 399; Mageo 1991a: 363). Being hit by a spirit can result in facial deformity but usually results in a dissociated state, which is taken as evidence that the spirit has possessed the girl. Until recently, mothers feared that their daughters might be possessed – even during childhood – merely for going from house to house at night with their hair down. Stories of spirit possession often revolve around the female spirits Saumaiafe and LeTelesa. The girl described earlier who let her long black hair down when she went into the bush was subsequently possessed by Saumaiafe. Goodman says of LeTelesa:

Telesa gets angry at people who say bad words, or at any girl who goes into the forest and puts down her hair. ... If you go to swim at the river at the village of L[Lepea], and if after swimming you come up and try to comb your hair near the river, this will cause her to become angry (1971: 470).

When angry, LeTelesa is likely to hit a girl.

We saw that female spirits have reddish hair and decorate it with a red hibiscus. Human girls are vulnerable to possession if their hair is a light reddish brown (Goodman 1971: 470-1; Schoeffel 1979: 399, 402). LeTelesa comes from the village of Lepea; Saumaiafe comes from Saleimoa (Shore 1977: 308). In Lepea or Saleimoa a girl who wears a red hibiscus in her hair, as these spirits do, when walking across the malae runs the risk of possession.
In the early 1970s my husband's cousin, an adolescent girl, was in the habit of walking to choir practice in Pago Pago through a local park with her hair down. Parks are reminiscent of malae, Pago Pago is a residence of the male spirit, Tuiatua. The cousin became possessed by Tuiatua. She was treated by a local healer and Tuiatua spoke through her, declaring, 'You comb your hair out at night... You came over and picked a hibiscus [for your hair] and you came to the park with your hair down'.

Cain attributes the attacks of Le Telesa to vanity (1971: 178). Vanity may be glossed in Samoan as fa'atiaia. Fa'atiaia also means 'flaunting'. In general, then, one might say that girls are possessed by spirits in twentieth-century Samoa for flaunting behaviours, especially those associated with hair. This could hardly have been the case in old Samoa when pōula girls danced naked, throwing 'themselves in all imaginable positions in order to make the most full exposure of their persons to the whole company' (J. Williams [1830-32] 1984: 247).

In Samoa possession is conceived of as like a punishment and may be described as the spirit punishing the person (Goodman 1971: 469; Mageo 1991a: 365-6). To get the spirit to leave the sufferer's body, the healer negotiates a settlement. Often the settlement involves cutting off a girl's long hair. The black-haired girl possessed by Sauma'iafe mentioned earlier was cured by cutting her hair at ears' length. Inasmuch as flaunting in Samoa is done partially through a display of hair, this operation is a way to make sure that the girl conforms to Samoan-Christian values. It also imitates the punishments for sexual peccadillos whereby, in Laulii's day, the girl's hair was returned to a tutaga style and thereafter was shaved altogether.

**Cross-cultural hair**

It is time to bring the cultural history written through the symbolism of hair in Samoa to bear on the queries about the nature of body symbolism raised earlier: the first issue is whether hair symbolizes sexual freedom and constraint (Leach), or social freedom and constraint (Hallpike), or indeed whether such apparently dated 'one-on-one' correlations are relevant to the interpretation of body symbols at all (Synnott). As the last position is the most general, it must be taken first.

Synnott's belief that public body symbols work by way of oppositions and signify that certain types of people are different from others – as Samoan girls who wear their hair down differ from those who wear their hair up – seems correct. As to 'one-on-one' equations, however, surely neither Leach nor Hallpike would have demurred at Hershman's position: cross-cultural meanings (concerning sexual regulation or social regulation) are but one level of hair symbolism. Synnott rightly insists that all body symbols are 'multi-vocal', and have an unlimited number of potential meanings. As a part of local symbol systems, hair has significances that are only local. But the data on local symbolism do not dispose of the data on shared symbolism; they simply pertain to another level of analysis. In Samoa the association of
hair with mana is local, but this local meaning leads us back to the cross-cultural significance that Leach attributes to hair.\textsuperscript{19}

Turning to Hallpike's objection to Leach, Hallpike's argument seems implicitly to be that symbols work by way of a logical hierarchy: sexual control is an instance of social control, just as sexual behaviour is an instance of social behaviour; therefore, sex must be the less primary and universal metaphor. \textit{Contra} Hallpike, the Samoan data suggest that for females the control of sexuality is both key to, and symbol of, social control. The Samoan girl's shaved head represented her virginity, but that virginity was a sign for her willingness to restrain her personal desires in the interests of her family.

This relation between sexual control and social control, as it pertains to women, is evident in other cultures. Among the Awlad 'Alis Bedouins studied by Abu-Lughod (1988), for example, the cloaking of the hair by females is symbolic of a willingness to restrain their sexuality, and the restraint of their sexuality is symbolic of a willingness to submit to patriarchal rule.

As noted, Hallpike bases his view that long hair cannot symbolize the male genitals or unbridled sexuality on the fact that women may cut their hair in funeral rites, and that some celibate ascetics wear their hair long. It is true that in old Samoa women, like men, tore their hair at funerals (Turner 1884: 144). There is, however, no institution of celibate asceticism in Samoa. It is necessary, therefore, to expand the scope of my argument to include non-Samoan cases. Further, I believe that the source of Hallpike's objection is a lack of understanding of the body-in-culture; therefore, it can only be fully challenged through a discussion of this body.

As Erikson's (1963) studies of children show, we fantasize about social events as played out on our bodies and upon the bodies of others. These fantasies are not typically conscious but are evident in the imagistic language of dreams, in the talk of children, in the unsaid of everyday speech, and are codified in art, literature and popular culture. Certain of these fantasies are culturally shared; these shared fantasies about the body I call the 'symbolic body'. The symbolic body results from being a body-in-culture, subject to the social organization of one's physicality, and has several features that differ from those of the physical body.

1. Like bodies in cartoons, the symbolic body has replaceable parts. Castration can take place by shaving the hair, but the hair grows back again. Girls' heads may be shaved in Samoa but this operation has no long-term effects on their eligibility.

2. The symbolic body has multiple representation for parts, or what one might call 'repeated parts'. Head hairs are hairs, but they can also be penises. Sri Lankans characterize the matted locks of Sinhalese female ascetics as penis-like 'buds of flesh' and 'tender fleshy growths' (Obeyesekere 1984: 35). Penises are penises, but they can also be vulvas. Wogeo men hack at their penile glans in order to menstruate (Hogbin 1970: 88-9). Vulvas are vulvas but so are incisions. Western Arnhem Land Aborigines practise subincision, thereby making a vulva (Bettelheim 1971). Uteruses are what they are, but
intestines can also be uteruses. A Highland New Guinea Hua male tells us that he does not eat possum 'because I might become pregnant' (Meigs 1984: 34, 46, 52-5, 59), and a Trans-Fly New Guinea Kerikai male undergoes a lime-eating ceremony to avoid becoming pregnant from homosexual intercourse (F.E. Williams 1969: 201-2, quoted in Meigs 1984: 47). Brains too can be uteruses. Malay fathers fantasize that they gestate babies in their brain for forty days prior to their wives' conception (Laderman 1991). Mother's milk is mother's milk, but so is semen. Arapesh and Black Carib fathers believe that they help to grow the fetus with their semen (Mead 1963; Chernela 1991). The possible examples are confined to no particular cultural area.

3. The repeated parts of the symbolic body imply an attribution of male and female genitals to all bodies; culture members, both male and female, possess this hermaphroditic body in fantasy. Leach's (1958) work on hair symbolism, penises and semen demonstrates that in many cultures both men and women have fantasies that attribute male parts to all bodies, male and female. Likewise, the widespread nature of couvade practices (Chernela 1991) suggests that in many cultures men and women have fantasies that attribute female parts to all bodies, male and female. Thus Hallpike's caveat that removing hair in funeral rites cannot signify castration because women do it too is empty: if females can have male genitals in cultural fantasy, they can suffer symbolic castration.

The fantasized nature of the symbolic body also sheds light on the significance of the long hair worn by some celibate ascetics. Obeyesekere's (1984) celibate ascetics, for example, had a rich sexual life in fantasy that was part of their marriage to the god. As Leach suggests, their long hair represented their active sexuality, but it was a culturally fantasized sexuality, deriving from the symbolic body, rather than a sexuality entailing literal intercourse.

This culturally fantasized sexuality is, as Leach further argues, an integral part of social communication systems and in its communicative aspect may be used to contest more concrete social realities. Obeyesekere's Sinhalese female celibate ascetics began as social victims. Their fantasized sexuality, however, amounted to a contestation of this real disempowerment and an effective contestation at that. These women used their 'calling'—represented by their long matted hair—to forgo marital duties in bed, exerting a sexual 'freedom' they would not otherwise have had. In turn, this control over their sexuality signified a control over their lives. In Obeyesekere's view, it was through their manipulation of social symbols—their hair foremost among them—that these ascetics won themselves prestige, an income and a degree of liberty. Here again the management of hair is a symbol for the control of sexuality and the control of sexuality is a symbol for other forms of social control; again it is women who are at issue.

It is in light of the symbolic body that Leach's argument, rather than Hallpike's, seems the more encompassing. Loose hair signs social freedom; bound or lost hair signs a lack of social freedom; however, these conditions
are represented by the body and by its sexuality. Probably this is because it is our sensory experience – our bodily experience – that provides our earliest conceptualizations of self and others (Freud [1931] 1962: 13-14; Piaget 1952; Douglas 1973). It is, therefore, constitutive of our earliest memories and these remembered images provide a basis for the part of the mind that fantasizes, the part that Lacan calls the Imaginary (Lacan 1968; 1977). This basal position in fantasy life gives the body symbolic primacy so that it becomes the root metaphor for all others.

*Personal hair?*

So much for the symbolic roots of hair, but what of the personal versus public character of its significance? Once again Leach (1958) holds that while body symbols, like hair, may be psychogenetic, when they become a part of public culture they lose unconscious motivational significance for those who employ them in public social life. While in basic agreement with Leach, Obeyesekere (1984: 13-21) adds that public body symbols may become articulated with deep personal significance for certain individuals, as they are among female Sinhalese ascetics who wear long matted hair. This articulation occurs because, when personal history alienates the individual from the social order, linking public symbols with personal complexes provides an avenue of reintegration.

The rule by which one can judge if this articulation has occurred is, according to Obeyesekere, that public symbols are involuntarily employed (1984: 21). Sinhalese ascetics do not purposefully grow matted locks, but believe their locks to be generated by the deity they serve. In contrast, when body symbols are institutionalized, and when their use is voluntary (as in the case of shaved Burmese Buddhist monks), they cannot necessarily be said to have personal significance. For the possessed Sinhalese priestess, body symbols are ‘intercommunicative’ (social) and ‘intracommunicative’ (psychological). For the Burmese Buddhist monk, body symbols are intercommunicative, but as to their intracommunicative significance, who knows?

The Samoan data confirm the idea that, when public symbols are involuntarily employed, they evince ‘the expression of intrapsychic conflict in a cultural idiom’ (Obeyesekere 1984: 44-50). In the Sinhalese case, under the auspices of a god, the ascetic grows long matted hair. In the Samoan case, under the auspices of a spirit, the girl has her long hair severed. Although someone else does the cutting, cutting is usually a response to the demand of a possessing spirit, that is, of a dissociated aspect of the girl’s personality. The Sinhalese ‘god’s actions’ are a gift; the Samoan ‘spirit’s actions’ are a punishment. In both cases, however, the women experience the events that transpire *vis-à-vis* their hair as involuntary. Neither Sinhalese ascetics nor possessed Samoan girls recognize themselves in their actions, because the public body symbol of hair has become articulated with unconscious motivational significance for them.
The Samoan data, however, also leave me with two questions about the articulation of public and private meanings. My first question is, how does unconventional behavior bear on the rule of involuntary use? The girl’s bound hair in Christian Samoa was socially required but not voluntary. Since all girls had to bind their hair, the binding of hair would seem clearly not reflective of personal complexes, like the monk’s shaved head in institutionalized monasticism. But what about the case in which the girl who is supposed to wear her hair up, wears it down?

When one acts unconventionally, public symbols are likely to be both intercommunicative and intracommunicative. We do it for what it says to others and for what it means to us. The Samoan girl who breaks the rules and lets her hair down is employing public body symbols that are highly communicative, like her conforming counterpart. Thus the villagers read her hair style and call her a wanton. More than the monk, she is employing these symbols voluntarily. She does not have to wear her hair down. Nonetheless, there is evidence that, like the ascetic, her behavior is intracommunicative.

We know, for example, that until recently Samoan girls who put their hair down when they should not experienced internal conflict about their loosened hair: they were often possessed by spirits who complained about their hair, or who demanded that they cut it. One could argue that unconventional behavior necessarily has intracommunicative significance only when followed by involuntary behavior such as possession. It is implausible, however, that people generally would risk social censure or, in the Samoan case, being ‘hit’ by a spirit (which may lead to facial deformity, possession or death) for an action that lacked personal motivational significance. Unconventional behavior indicates that public symbols have become articulated with personal resistance to normal social morality, and suggests that the rule of involuntary use is a subcase of a more general rule yet to be defined.

Unconventional behavior may also play a role in the process of cultural innovation that Obeyesekere associates with the articulation of public and private meanings. To other members of her society, the black-haired girl’s loosened hair signified that she was a wanton. Although she could hardly have denied that others read wantonness into her hairdo, she would probably have disagreed that her loosened hair had this significance. In Christian Samoa it would be hard for a girl to entertain such a self-concept and still think well of herself. Cognitive dissonance theorists demonstrate that when social messages are at odds with maintaining a positive self-image, these data are likely to be ignored or denied (Aronson 1976: 110-11). By disclaiming wantonness, the black-haired girl would have implicitly controverted the significance Samoan society ascribed to hair. One must controvert the accepted meaning of a sign in order to change the meaning of that sign. Loosened hair is no longer the scarlet letter it once was in Samoa, and girls who struggled internally against prevailing sexual politics as these politics were codified in the public symbol of hair had a role in authoring this change.
My second question is, do public body symbols acquire intracommunicative significance only through the kind of traumatic personal histories that Obeyesekere describes? It seems more likely that public symbols acquire private significance for all of us simply because public social life affects us personally: what has personal significance is at least in part a product of how we are regarded and treated by others. When a Samoan girl acts under constant threat of having her hair cut off or of being pulled home by her hair, when her beauty is judged, at contests and elsewhere, by the length of her hair, the public symbol of hair cannot fail to touch her feelings.

The body is simply too close to home. In Samoa, a girl's hair not only signifies personal attractiveness — it is personal attractiveness, which is after all as much a property of the symbolic body (given that attractiveness is culturally defined and constituted) as it is a property of the physical body. For most Samoan girls, their attractiveness is not merely a matter of social communication but also one of personal identity.

Even if one were to grant the premiss that there is normally a clear distinction between salient public symbols and private symbols, the Samoan data indicate that in times of intense culture change this boundary blurs, at least when symbols are of the body. Then public symbols acquire private meanings not only through personal histories — like those of the Sinhala priestesses — but also through culture history and, therefore, do so for whole groups that utilize the same body symbolism.

Bodily symbols may not be reflective of private complexes in general, but Leach’s, Hallpike’s, Hershman’s, Obeyesekere’s, Spiro’s and my own data demonstrate that they constitute a shorthand for moral messages and moral codes. In Christian Samoa, for example, when a girl wore her hair down it was read as a message about her sexual availability, while the rule that girls should wear their hair bound was a glyph for a moral code pertaining to a prescribed celibacy.

These moral codes written on the body entail balances between licence and constraint. The girl’s hairdo in old Samoa signified such a balance: her reddened locks represented the degree of licence she enjoyed in flaunting; her shaved head represented the degree of restraint she was expected to exercise in marrying. As long as cultures are relatively stable, such moral balances are part of normal adult adjustments — they are merely the shape of the self. Expressing these adjustments in ritual may be, as Leach suggests (1958: 161), a way to avoid repression, in the sense of ‘a lack of consciousness about a feeling or desire’. However, inasmuch as body symbols allude to shared adjustments — shared at least with the members of one’s own status, gender and age group who use the same body symbols — and when these adjustments become broadly destabilized in culture change, the result is likely to be increased personal disquiet that is also shared. Then cultural history intersects with personal history and body symbols become the markers of moral conflicts that are powerfully felt despite their commonality.
During those decades when possession was most common in twentieth-century Samoa, two of the four girls in my Samoan family were repeatedly possessed. This was not unusual. The hair of one of these girls was cut to cure headaches that began after a dramatic possession episode; the hair of the other was cut by her mother as a punishment. When a high percentage of the members of a cultural subgroup shows visible symptoms of articulating public and private symbols, it is likely that the group's style of adjustment has become problematic, and that the public-personal nature of body symbols has been fused for that group. This fusion suggests a spiral in the evolution of cultural symbols.

Symbols begin psychogenetically; they are assimilated by the group for communicative purposes; cultural symbols may then be used to express private complexes or personal resistance to social morality. However, 'private' complexes and 'personal' resistance may be common and shared within a particular cultural subgroup due to the historically shifting societal demands upon that group. Hair, as a symbol, is part of a social communication about gender roles and moral rules, but these messages bear upon the inner individual, particularly when they become tangled and confused.

NOTES

I thank Aletta Biersack for sponsoring the session that stimulated me to write this article. I thank Roy D'Andrade, Melford Spiro, Sanele Mageo, Alfred Gell, Alan Howard, James Laidlaw, Susan Love Brown, Hastings Donnan, and Ken Cook for their extremely helpful comments.

1 The first missionaries arrived in Samoa in 1928 but significant missionary inroads began with Williams's 1830 venture (Holmes 1974: 12).

2 For further depictions of the tatagaia style see Stair (1897: 121), Turner ([1884] 1984: 122), Willis (1889: 17), and Schoeffel (1979: 433).

3 The Samoan expression is 'Ma'iu'iu iau aulelei!'

4 Leach was building upon the work of the psychoanalyst, Charles Berg (1951). Berg, however, believes that cultural hair symbolism conveys information as to the psychological state of the actor, whereas Leach does not.

5 For a further description of this debate see Shweder (1991: 332-52).

6 R. Keeving (1984) points out that mana is often used as a stative verb or an adjective, rather than a noun. As Valeri notes, however, the word is also used in a substantive sense (1985). On the usages of the term in Polynesia see also Shore (1989). For a discussion of the linguistic and discursive features of the term mana see Boyer (1986).

7 In Tonga a female spirit, Fehuluni, is said to have ankle-length hair. Like Samoan female spirits, she has strong sexual desires and sexual contact with her can cause illness and death (Gifford 1929: 293; Schoeffel 1979: 407-8; Teilhet-Fisk 1993).

8 On the fair hair of female spirits, see Stuebel (1976: 94-5), Schoeffel (1979: 406-8) and Mageo (1991a: 94-5). While accounts predominantly portray spirit girls' hair as light and reddish, in some stories Saumai'afe's hair is black.

9 Schoeffel also examines Leach's and Hallpike's arguments in relation to female hair styles in ancient Samoa (1979: 409-10). She concludes that the girl's short hair in pre-Christian Samoa was indicative of social and sexual restraint, but does not comment
on the *tutaga*ta. Freeman, however, argues that the *tutaga*ta symbolically displayed a girl's virginity, suggesting that Samoan girls were predominantly virginal even during the nineteenth century (1983: 229). As indicated in the text, there is much evidence that female hair is associated with sexuality in Samoa, and the idea that Samoan girls of common rank were virginal is not consistent with the historical data.

10 For examples of other sexually explicit songs Samoans used at entertainments, see Moyle (1975; 1988).

11 This translation is a synthesis of that by Kraemer ([1902] 1978, vol. 2: 394), Moyle (1988: 217-22), and Sanele Mageo. Samoans think white skin beautiful, thus 'splendid, the white ass'. This translation is interpretative, however, as Kraemer renders the Samoan word in the song as *mulipaepae*. 'White ass' would properly be spelled *mulipaepa*e. *Mulipaepae* actually means 'dispersed ass' or other more nonsensical possibilities. It should be noted, however, that especially in nineteenth-century texts, the use of the inverted comma tends to be inconsistent. Indeed, even in the latter part of the twentieth century, when consistency in spelling has become a value, Milner comments:

The inverted comma, which represents the glottal stop, is used only sporadically and often inconsistently even by the same writer in the same letter or printed page ([1966] 1979: xvii-xviii).

Further, the significance attributed here to the term *mulipaepae* is congruent with the sense of the song as a whole.

12 Pigeon-catching is a metaphor for marriage-making in Samoa, a long-abandoned sport that was conducted through luring. The bird was allowed to circle on a string giving the appearance of a wild bird circling above food or water, thereby attracting wild birds for capture. See further Herdrich (1991) and Mageo (n.d.). Sahlin argues that ancient Hawaiians had a similar attitude towards female sexuality (1985: 1-31).

13 In Samoan the phrase is *la pei ia se te ne le mo'i* An unmarried female with one child is called *fanauteasi*, 'one child', and with more than one, *fanaupalasi*, 'dropping children'. This latter term is particularly pejorative.

14 See further Valeri (1985) and Shore (1989) on the significance of binding and loosening in the Polynesian worldview.

15 The verse in Samoan is as follows:

Sosola uma o seili i Meleke
Tia'i 'oe ile aleatele.
Nofonofo solo i le aualatele
Ma si ou foga 'ua tau malepe.
'Ua uma fo'o aso o le fa'afetefete
I tālane o le tama mai Meleke.
'Ua uma ona 'ou faiatu 'aaua eite mateletele
Ete i'u lava i le tūsamaene.

16 The Samoan sentence is *Se vau'ai e fa'atautau lava lenei ulu, ai a se pa'u sasea*.

17 Spirit possession in old Samoa occasionally involved 'berserking'. The spirit would possess a warrior to assist him in battle. See, for example, Stuebel (1976: 44, 76) and Meleisea (1987: 37).

18 It is worth noting that these girls are being possessed for behaving in the manner of a spirit girl. On the significance of this cause, see Mageo (1991a: 362-75).

19 Synnott (1993: 124) argues that hair symbolism is 'more complex and subtle now than it was before Skins, Punks, feminism, androgyny and gender-bending'. The conscious use of hair to express political positions, gender politics, or androgyny and
gender-bending, is not peculiar to our time and place. Thus Leach (1958: 153) discusses the early seventeenth-century Cavaliers and Roundheads, who represented their opposed political credos through their hairdos. Similarly, Derrett (1973: 101) notes that early Christian women in Corinth tried to bare their hair in church 'as an overt sign of their sexual liberation and equality'. Hair styles among the Yoruba often comment on gender relations (Houberg 1979). Powhaten male haircuts conveyed that ordinary men (as opposed to shamans) were part masculine and part feminine (Williamson 1979). Synnott (1993: 124) adds that in the study of hair symbolism, 'it may be...useful to analyze deviations from the norm'. As we shall see later, I too find deviance worth considering.

20 Meigs cites beliefs from throughout New Guinea that men may become pregnant or menstruate (1984: 46-8).

21 Howard (personal communication) has suggested to me that the personal significance of adolescent Samoan girls wearing their hair down, when they are supposed to wear it up, involves the development of a sense of control. 'Youths everywhere test their limits against dangerous outcomes (by speeding, breaking laws, etc.). To test and win is to build a sense of self-possession and of controlling one's own destiny rather than having it controlled by external forces', which may be symbolized in the form of laws or spirits. 'In the Samoan instance the struggle is between self-possession and social (spirit) possession'.

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Des coiffures qui font l'affaire, ou qui ne la font pas : symbolisme de la chevelure et histoire sexuelle au Samoa

Résumé
Cet article se base sur le style changeant des coiffures adoptées par les habitants de Samoa pour reconstruire l'histoire des rôles sexuels féminins, ainsi que celle des relations politiques entre hommes et femmes, ceci depuis les premiers contacts avec les blancs jusqu'à nos jours. Le symbolisme corporel offre une vision diachronique de la culture à Samoa qui permet d'éclairer la nature des relations sexuelles dans l'archipel, un sujet qui, pendant longtemps, avait rendu les anthropologues perplexes. De plus, cette histoire sexuelle permet de repenser ce sujet très controversé de l'anthropologie, le symbolisme de la chevelure. L'auteur remarque que cette polémique soutenue concerne aussi bien le caractère soit unique, soit transculturel, du symbolisme corporel pris dans des cultures différentes, que sa nature soit communicative, soit individuelle, au sein d'une même culture.

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