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Samoans and Gender: Some Reflections on Male, Female and Fa'afafine Gender Identities[1]

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Introduction

> I le mau a Samoa, e leai se Atamu ma se Eva. E leai se Etena ma se gata. E leai se 'apu ma ni afeifei i lau o le mati. I le mau a Samoa, e usu gafa le Atua ona maua lea o le tagata. E usu gafa i le la, i le masina, i le moana, i le papa, i le 'ele'ele, ona maua lea o le tagata (Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese, 1999a:1).[2]

> ... man is 'almost entirely the product of society', while woman is 'to a far greater extent the product of nature'. ... His tastes, aspirations and humour have in large part a collective origin, while his companion's are more directly influenced by her organism. His needs, therefore, are quite different from hers ... (Durkheim, 1952:385).[3]

As a Samoan woman, what interested me about engaging in an inter-cultural analysis of gender was its potential to provide some understanding of the philosophical and cultural assumptions that underpinned both mainstream New Zealand, and my own Samoan experiences and perceptions of gender and gendered identities. Samoan knowledge and practices of gender and gendered behaviour in late twentieth-century New Zealand draw on both Samoan and Papalagi models of gender, sexuality, reproduction, kinship and family. To build a model of how contemporary Samoan migrant communities might frame, experience and perceive gender, I draw on the understandings of Samoan and Papalagi scholars, and also on my own understanding.

This chapter addresses four issues. The first section briefly examines the concept of gender, traces Western configurations of the term 'gender', and

looks at Samoan perceptions and ideals of the gendered identities 'male', 'female' and 'fa'afafine' (or effeminate male).

The second section explores the idea that aiga, or familial ties, rather than gender is central to Samoan social classification and organisation. This centrality encourages the internalisation and prioritisation of the collective, aiga-based self over the individual self in which Western configurations of gender lie.

The third section explores the fact that although expatriate Samoans have retained their collective aiga-based identity, traditional configurations of gender, and the separate practices of male and female roles have, according to a recent study (Anae *et al.*, forthcoming), undergone changes in New Zealand. Conservative Samoan separations of male and female reproductive and parenting responsibilities, have shifted in the different and changing economic and religious conditions in New Zealand, so that gender roles and responsibilities are more fluid.

The concluding section explores the contexts of this shift towards more shared or fluid gender roles, and notes that, despite shift, collective aiga-based identity, rather than gender, continues to be the primary organising principle for Samoans in and beyond Samoa.

This chapter argues that an examination of the 'male', 'female' and 'fa'afafine' gender identities can establish why familial ties, rather than gender, underpin Samoan modes of social classification and organisation, and why these ties remain central to the Samoan (gendered) 'self', despite the often-conflicting pressures of life in New Zealand.

'Gender' and Samoan Understandings of the Gender Identities 'Male', 'Female' and 'Fa'afafine'

Understanding the Concept of 'Gender'

Within sociological discourse, 'gender' is often differentiated from 'sex' (Giddens, 1993:725). Sex, here, refers to the biological or physiological make-up of a person, determinable at birth through recognition of male or female genitals. The sex of a newborn child is established by locating, either before or at birth, the child's genitals. The child is then 'labelled' male or female. Gender, on the other hand, is established by non-biological factors: those psychological, social and cultural factors imposed by society on the male or female person/personality (see Chodorow, 1978).

Chodorow (1978), building on de Beauvoir (1964),[4] extended Durkheim's view, and argued that female identity is as much shaped by society as is

male identity. Both contend that gender, rather than sex, is the social construction of the male and female identity or self. Chodorow (1978) refers to the reproductive function of woman as the defining source of her female identity.[5] She argues that 'women's social position and identity are mainly shaped by their involvement in reproduction and childrearing' (Chodorow paraphrased in Giddens, 1993: 725). Her finding echoes similar findings within Samoan society, as this chapter will show.

The notions of masculinity and femininity are also often associated with gender. Like gender, masculinity and femininity refer to socially ascribed norms and expectations which are embedded within various social institutions, and their structural and ideological frameworks. The only difference between them may be that whereas gender captures the social construction of both sexes, masculinity captures those traits constructed specifically for males, and femininity those constructed specifically for females. Notions of masculinity and femininity are informed, shaped and disseminated, both consciously and unconsciously, through every social, legal and cultural institution within society – from the private spheres of family to the public spheres of employment, government and so forth. Thus gender, informed by tales of masculinity and femininity, takes shape according to social, rather than biological inscriptions.

The development of gender studies in the West, in both traditional academic disciplines such as history, and philosophy, and in newly established women's studies departments, has taken on a feminist bias. Feminists contend that the continued existence of a female bias in Western institutes of gender studies reflects, at least for many, the ongoing need to combat inequitable gender relations within their societies. Notwithstanding this, Carver (1996) argues that gender studies look at both sexes and their complex array of motivations, interactions and practices, and need to be addressed as such. He contends that without equal attention to female *and* male identities, the inequities imposed by male hierarchies could never be addressed effectively.

More significantly, Carver's (1996) work questions the idea that sex is only about biology. He redefines sex more widely, to include 'being a male or female in each of its biological, social or legal definitions' (Carver, 1996:5). Thus, where sex is for others separate from gender, Carver redefines 'it' as being inclusive of gender. Gender, he concludes, is not just about taking on a 'sex-based' identity (i.e. having male or female genitals and undertaking male or female gender roles), but also about taking on a sexual identity.[6] In this sense gender refers to notions of sex and sexuality, both inclusive of gender. What is interesting here is the silencing of the term 'gender' within the explicit emphases Carver gives to the terms 'sex' and 'sexuality'.

The concept of gender is complex. Its origins and subsequent development owes much to its roots in Western history. For the purposes of this chapter, the term is used to refer to the physiological, biological, social, legal and sexual make-up of a person. This wider definition of gender is used to frame and examine contemporary Samoan perceptions of 'female-ness', 'male-ness' and 'fa'afafine-ness'.

To be 'Male', 'Female' or 'Fa'afafine'?

Contemporary Samoan perceptions, practices and ideals of gender are based on values grounded in pre-Christian Samoan cosmology and in modern Christianity. To gain an appreciation of the cultural context in which Samoan gender identities are formed, the principles of Samoan cosmology and the influences of Christianity are summarised here.

While, for the sake of clarity, I discuss the male, female and fa'afafine identities separately, I am mindful that many fa'afafine see themselves as part of the female group rather than as a distinct gender. Nevertheless, I propose to discuss this group separately, to highlight the centrality of a collective aiga-based rather than gender-based principle in the organisation of the Samoan individual and/or collective self.

(i) Samoan Male Gender: Sexual Prowess, Physical Strength and Protector/Provider for the Aiga

> ...[in modern Samoa, t]here is also an association of sexual expressiveness with high-ranking males.... (Shore, 1981:198).

An examination of the privileges afforded to young Samoan men of high rank allows some insight into Samoan understandings of 'being male', and into the type of idealised social scripts given to males in ancient Samoan society. Many of these scripts continue to permeate perceptions of Samoan male-ness. Manaia, the sons of high-ranking chiefs, were, according to Tanuvasa Tavale, the 'princes' of their villages. They were openly encouraged to explore their sexuality with low-ranking women and to form political liaisons with high-ranking women (personal communication). As Schoeffel (1987: 187) notes, before entering a settled monogamous relationship, many manaia would engage in sexual liaisons with adolescent girls, who 'along with their families, regarded the brief liaisons with [these] young aristocratic men [manaia] visiting their settlements ... to be an honour'. Manaia enjoyed

many special privileges, but in particular the privilege of sexual access to almost any woman or girl, particularly of low rank, of his choice. When a manaia was ready to take a wife, he would approach his village tulafale, or orator chief(s), who would in turn find him a suitable partner – usually a taupou or village virgin – and negotiate the terms of their union.

Behind this privilege lay the assumption that, according to Samoan cosmology, the reproductive male function of sowing one's genealogical seeds widely supported the ideology of procreation. It enabled marriage and procreation contests between families wishing to form genealogical links with those of high rank so as to gain both a closer relationship with the Gods/nature and to receive status and wealth. This contest for genealogical propinquity, alluded to by Tamasese (1999a:1) in the quote at the opening of this chapter, gave meaning to much of what surrounded ancient Samoan gender scripts and social organisation. To be a male in Samoan society required not only the ability to perform sexually, but also the ability to procreate and form political liaisons with high-ranking families either through marriage or the birth of children.

The sexual virility afforded to Samoan males is well reflected in the Samoan term 'avi' or sexual prowess (see Park *et al.*, forthcoming). This term suggests that the ability of men to impregnate and form life is one that was special and natural to their function and purpose within society. Sexuality for men was thus associated with virility and power, and measured by the number of sexual liaisons, particularly high-ranking liaisons, one was able to form and the number of children one produced. This ancient emphasis on procreation describes a power that is collectively rather than individually manifest, thus privileging both heterosexuality and family wellbeing.

The physical prowess of a taule'ale'a, or untitled male, was equally important as his sexual prowess. His physical prowess was required to work the plantation and to provide food, shelter and protection for the aiga and village. Thus, although males of all ages were able to assist in such gender-allocated tasks as the cultivation of land, taule'ale'a, because of their youth and physical strength, tended to fill the roles of tillers, fishermen, providers and protectors for their families and villages.

Despite an overwhelming emphasis in Samoan masculinity scripts on virility and procreation, sexual activity itself did not transform a boy (tama) into a man (tamaloa). Forming a politically successful union, having and raising successful children, and gaining status through tautua, or service, to one's aiga and village, were more important criteria. During ancient times, transforming a Samoan boy, whether manaia or not, into a man also involved taking a chiefly title. Taking a chiefly title signalled a movement away from

being someone who merely took instructions from elders to being someone involved in family and village decision-making responsibilities; from being one who was instructed, to one who gave instructions. These were perhaps considered the more important signs of transition from boy to man, from child to adult.

The brother or male relative's role, as protector of the chastity of his sisters or female relatives, was embodied in a covenant, or feagaiga, between brother and sister. The covenant protected sisters from unwanted sexual attention, and was central to the construction of distinctly separate male and female roles and responsibilities. Theoretically at least, the provider/protector duties expected of Samoan males by Samoan society, especially the duties of feagaiga, were imposed or undertaken from the time a brother or male relative was able to walk and communicate until he died. However, the feagaiga was most visible in situations of physical reprimand, when enforced by the men against the perpetrator, the female victim or both. The feagaiga was more effectively enforced by those male folk during their youth or early adult years, when they were at the peak of their physical power. For Samoan males, in their capacities as brothers, fathers or male relatives, much of the feagaiga principle between brother and sister was rationalised and enforced on the continuing belief that their collective family status was inextricably linked to female chastity (see Shore, 1981:193).

What the manaia status and feagaiga principle did for Samoan male gender scripts was to produce potentially conflicting roles. As manaia Samoan males were encouraged to develop their sexual prowess, while as brothers they were encouraged to show caution and provide protection against the very sexual attention they themselves were trying to develop and sustain as manaia. However, Shore (1981) rightly argues that both roles existed in their own sphere – at least for the purposes of analysis. Whilst on the one hand Samoan cosmology seemed to encourage heterosexuality and sexual prowess – i.e. the ideal of the manaia – it also prescribed a male identity that demanded men be providers and protectors of family status.

As unmarried Samoan men, especially during ancient times, sexual freedom was openly encouraged for males as long as they were able to escape the wrath of their female partner's male relatives. As brothers, males were relied on to provide protection and physical labour. Both roles – the sexual manaia and the protector/provider brother – required high levels of physical aggression. Hence, it was not surprising that participants of Park *et al.*'s study (forthcoming) often spoke of sexual and physical prowess and aggression when describing Samoan male-ness. The ideal Samoan male was one who was able, on the one hand, to gain many sexual liaisons and form successful political unions with high-ranking families, and on the other, to

protect his sisters from sexual harm and provide his family with food, status and physical labour.

(ii) Samoan Female Gender: Virginal Maiden, the Carrier of Life and Familial Status.

> ... in modern Samoa ... female chastity is stressed, a reflection of the enduring power of the taupou ideal (Shore, 1981: 198).

In Samoa, being born female led to a gender path cultivated around reproductive capacities. Unmarried females were referred to as teine, or girls, whilst married females were referred to as fafine, or women. The sisterly status, recorded by both Shore (1981) and Schoeffel (1979), was considered higher than the wifely one. This was largely because of the genealogical rank afforded to sisters rather than wives within Samoa's social system. This ranking system suggests that, as a sister and particularly an unmarried one, the full protection of the feagaiga applied.

In illustration of the importance of this feagaiga in ancient and modern Samoan society, Fana'afi (1986: 103–110) locates females, particularly tama'ita'i (daughters of high-ranking chiefs), as one of the four central 'spokes' of her socio-metric model of Samoan society. Fana'afi (1986:104–105) argues that the 'sister gender' identity was the most privileged identity for a female. She contends that the sister's special status was exemplified by her equal and life-time rights, as both a daughter and sister, to access to and use of family customary lands. However, as a wife living with her husband's family, a female was only allowed access to his family customary lands while she remained married to him. The wives of high-ranking chiefs were returned to their families when the husband wished to form another marriage. In this case, the wife's right of access to the former husband's family customary lands ended with her return to her family.[7] The principle implicit here is that the welfare of Samoan females lay primarily with their biological kin, rather than with the families into which they married. Marriage, therefore, at least in ancient political Samoan theory, was more for the convenience of procreation, for the extension of genealogical ties and enhancement of family statuses, than anything else (see Schoeffel, 1987: 175).

The female gender scripts passed down from ancient Samoan narratives framed the controlled sexuality of the titled taupou, or village maiden, as representative not so much of her own mamalu or sacred essence, but of her family and the village to which her taupou title belonged. The successful marriage of a taupou was one where her mamalu or sacred essence – her

virginity – was preserved for her wedding night. The blood flow from the breaking of the hymen during first sexual intercourse was often produced as evidence of her mamalu, of her family's ability to protect her, and of her family's belief in its importance to both her future and theirs.

The wife status implied, at least at the outset, that the sexual self of the Samoan female no longer needed protecting by her brothers. Because she did not herself have direct genealogical claims to the mamalu of her husband's family (particularly if she was not from a descent line of high rank), she did not, through marriage (at least theoretically) gain any higher status than she already held. Marriage resulting from elopement – even when the family accepted the union – was, at least in political terms, frowned upon. Those females who took their wifely identity in this way were generally attributed lower status. Nevertheless, marriage between the taupou and her manaia was generally solidified once they entered sexual relations and produced children.

Like the male identities of brother and 'manaia', the two female identities of sister and wife existed in their own sphere. However, a sister, particularly an unmarried sister, was afforded much respect and familial protection, whilst for a taupou/wife, receiving respect and protection (physically and emotionally) was inherently more complicated. Nevertheless, reproductive sexuality was highly privileged amongst Samoan understandings of gender, and that privilege informed and defined both male and female roles and responsibilities (see Shore, 1981).

For many females in modern Christian Samoa, particularly those without social rank, educational status and/or economic wealth, their role is like the taule'ale'a, to contribute to the daily requirements of Samoan family and village life. This typically involves child-minding, household maintenance, washing clothes, the production of finely woven mats, and attendance at various church and women's committee meetings. Where necessary, they might also need to cook (see Schoeffel, 1979; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991).

Contemporary Samoan male perceptions of the female gender add further insight into an understanding of Samoan perceptions of female-ness. In Peteru's (1997) study, some male participants raised disconcerting attitudes towards their female counterparts. Many echoed Western patriarchal assumptions of females as the second sex. Peteru (1997:180) writes:

> It was found that the social scripts attributed to gender also found their way into the sexual sphere of the informants and their female sex partners, where subservience and obedience was expected of the female. ... Also noted, however, are some of the contradictions within the opinions of the informants concerning deeper feelings towards their female sex partners, and the hope of stability in their lives, and raising a family.

However, as Peteru (1997) noted, these male attitudes seemed to be fluid. They could change if the young men were able to form secure marriage relationships that would later bear children. Procreation emerges yet again in this complex narrative of Samoan gender relations, albeit within a contemporary setting. The ability to form secure marriage relationships seems a complicated process for these young men, a situation that owes much to the conflict between being avi on the one hand and protector of female chastity on the other. Nevertheless, the virginal ideals of the Samoan female taupou from ancient Samoa permeate the perceptions of Samoans living in modern Christian Samoa.

This perception of the ideal Samoan female as virginal, as motherly, as mamalu, as the carrier of life and family status, is nicely illustrated in the poem 'Beauteous' written by a Samoan male, a religious minister no less, living in Samoa:

Beauteous
A young lady
Smiling face
Lovely appearance
Smooth skin
Brown eyes
Hairless body
Curly hair
Slim figure
No scars
Baby eyes
Sweet voice
Middle height
A neat companion.

Excellent reputation
Open minded
No make-up
Not a drinker
Not slothful

Not cheeky
Loves all
Respects others
Good conduct

Speaks less
Listens well
Simple style
An intellectual honey.

Likes children
Hates money
Is upright
In fine health
Humble heart
Against movies
Pacific nature
Religious Eve
Creative mentality
Shares love
Extremely careful
Natural beauty
A real virgin.

(Kolia, 1988:12)

(iii) Fa'afafine Gender: A Third Gender Category or Part of the Family?

Fa'afafine have been variously defined as hermaphrodites, effeminate males and, more specifically, effeminate males who are blatantly homosexual (see Pratt, 1893:113; Milner, 1993:52). It is recognised here that little is known and recorded of ancient Samoan attitudes towards and practices of 'homosexuality', or of the gender identity fa'afafine. However, more recently, fa'afafine have become increasingly recognised as a distinctive gender identity (see Mageo, 1991; Besnier, 1994; Worth and McNab, 1998; Wallace, 1998; Worth, 2000).

McIntosh's (1999: 11) explication of 'Oceanic homosexualities' suggests that fa'afafine could also be described as 'transgenderal homosexuals' in that they:

> ... do not just practice sexual activities as if they were members of the opposite sex but they often take on all the sociocultural gender roles as well, including the appropriate gendered division of labour and other gendered responsibilities and obligations.

This is consistent with Park *et al.*'s (forthcoming) findings that fa'afafine were indeed usually associated more with women than with men in Samoan

society. Parents would not actively discourage their female children from forming platonic relationships with fa'afafine, as they posed no public sexual threat. It was precisely their (perceived) homosexuality that allowed fa'afafine closer liaisons with Samoan females. This assumption is implicit in the reply of one Samoan female participant in Park *et al.*'s study, to the question of whether within the Samoan context, one could form platonic relationships with members of the opposite sex:

> [In Samoa] ... your friend[s] are always, you know, female, and the same with a male ... all the friends would be male. Except for us [herself and her female siblings] ... we [found] that ... when we grew up, one of our cousins was a fa'afafine, and he was actually hanging around us all the time, you know, and we accepted that. ... but, in [the] case of a real macho male, no! ... he [the fa'afafine] was allowed to be hanging around us by our parents [because he posed no sexual threat to us] (older[8] Samoan female participant, Park *et al.*, forthcoming).[9]

Considerable debate, some academic and some not, over the nature and formation of this 'gender' category has occurred in contemporary times. According to Besnier (1994: 285–328), fa'afafine are not 'representatives of femaleness as a coherent and unitary category, but rather they align themselves with specific instantiations of womanhood in various contexts' (Besnier, 1994: 308). Peteru (1997: 46) argues that the term fa'afafine 'needs clarification as it seems to have become confused with transvestites, drag queens, and transsexuals who have varied sexual values and sexual behaviors'. Worth and McNab (1998) suggest that for many Samoan 'drag queens', redefining themselves as 'queens of the Pacific' exemplified an identification process that privileged their ethnic rather than gendered peculiarities. The exploration of these ideas falls outside the scope of this chapter; it is sufficient to say that the arguments highlight, yet again, the complexity of the concept of gender and its Western origins.

In terms of the construction of gender in the Samoan context, and its emphasis on procreative abilities, fa'afafine are, without medical intervention, unable to have children. Hence fa'afafine are a distinct third gender category not because they have a different sexual status, but rather because they cannot, as biological males, have children. Moreover, as Besnier (1994: 319) notes, because fa'afafine are unable to reproduce, they cannot expect their 'brothers' to provide protection over their chastity. Simply put, there is no feagaiga between brother and fa'afafine.

The transgenderal identities of many fa'afafine were accepted not only for their practical usefulness in the protection of unmarried females and

completion of female tasks, but also because of their genealogical links to the family unit. Thus their familial ties were considered first and foremost, both by themselves, their respective families, and their society, before gender or sexuality. This point is well made by Karl Pulotu-Endemann, a notable advocate of Samoan ethnicity, who also happens to be a fa'afafine:

> I am proud of who I am, and I don't need to put on dresses to be that person. The most important thing to me is the thinking and your relationship to your family and your culture (Pulotu-Endemann in Wallace, 1998:29).

Aiga First, Gender Second: On Being Samoan, then Male, Female, Fa'afafine

As noted above, within Samoan gender scripts, collective aiga-based identity would inform understandings of self, before classifications of gender. As Schoeffel (1987: 174) notes below, within Samoan society – particularly in ancient times – the first principle for social classification and organisation was genealogy:

> In many societies gender is the first principle of kinship, descent being traced, at least at an ideological level, exclusively through males or, less frequently, through females. In such societies elaborate classificatory systems based on gender – on the masculinity or femininity of all things – are common. But in many societies gender is a secondary principle in ascribing social rank, as was the case in ancient Polynesia, and in particular Samoa and Tonga.

The centrality of genealogy – aiga/family or nu'u/village – to Samoans was derived from the way in which they interpreted their existence as descendants of the gods, whose life purpose was to procreate, and to form marriages with nature and with mortals. To sustain this focus, males and females, heterosexual or otherwise, were taught from birth to revere their place within the aiga and nu'u. The long-term value of maintaining familial ties was implicitly and explicitly learnt through observation. It was articulated by elders, and illustrated in ongoing deference to elders and reciprocal gifting between individuals, families and villages. Teaching social values, including those relating to appropriate gender behaviour, was not always easy and in cases required physical and verbal reprimands. From childhood through to adulthood, Samoans were taught to respect elders, to show humility and to

give unselfishly. In this context, the collective self was fashioned through such principles as humility, service, respect and deference, embedded in an oft-quoted Samoan saying, 'le olaga fa'asamoa o le olaga fa'aaloalo' (the life of a Samoan is one of respect). Children had little reason or opportunity to question the instructions, knowledge and wisdom of their elders.

Like the tying of familial or village status with the untainted reproductive sexuality of unmarried sisters or female relatives, familial status was also tied to the general public behaviour and good conduct of children. As the movements of the taupou or unmarried sister were heavily protected, so too were the movements and conduct of young children. The significance of this protection and behavioural learning system, according to Tanuvasa Tavale (personal communication) referred to the Samoan saying, 'o amio o tamaiti, e ta'u ai le lelei o le aiga' (the conduct of one's children reflects the status of one's family unit). He explained that throughout time, Samoan society prioritised respect and deference – e maualuga le ola fa'aaloalo – so that elders were afforded respect and deference by virtue of their age and chiefly capacities – ia malu le matua.[10] Thus for many Samoan parents, ad hoc corrective childrearing techniques – o puipuiga po'o taofiofiga o matua – were, in the context of their society, the most effective mechanism for teaching respect and deference to those considered too young to understand otherwise. From an early age Samoans learnt the value of family, the importance of female mamalu, and the wisdom of age. Therefore, within every command issued by an elder demanding conformity, and within every rationale offered by a matai (chief) demanding the act of giving, lay the unspoken desire for the maintenance of communal and family wellbeing. The embodied message was overwhelmingly that family is all-important and all-encompassing.

Much more can be said of the centrality of aiga to Samoan life, to the Samoan self and to Samoan social classification and organisation. For the purposes of this chapter, an understanding of the complexities of aiga and/or nu'u, rather than gender, will provide a foundation upon which to build an understanding of Samoan motivations and identity formation. In this context, the seemingly accepted place of fa'afafine in modern Samoan society should be no surprise; nor, for that matter, should the primacy of aiga, rather than gender, in Samoan social classification patterns and personal identity development.

Persistence of Collective Aiga-based Identity as Primary Organising Principle for Samoans in New Zealand

New Zealand society, like other Western societies, has for some time been influenced by the eco-political ethos of Western liberalism. Samoan migration

to New Zealand, which began in the 1940s, has declined recently. Population growth now comes mainly from natural increase.[11] Samoans have continued to practise their fa'asamoa in New Zealand. For many first and second-generation migrants, the Samoan church community has played a significant role in maintaining their culture, despite their new physical, economic, political and legal environment.[12] For many New Zealand-raised Samoans, growing up in New Zealand challenged their perception of and allegiance to the fa'asamoa, and shaped the development of their Samoan ethnic identity.[13]

Nevertheless, for many Samoans raised in New Zealand, the values of respect and deference, reciprocal gifting and collective support, practised by their parents and observed in many family fa'alavelave or ceremonial activities, continued to be valued. The traditional Samoan principles of fa'aaloalo (respect) and tautua (service) continue to find support amongst the New Zealand-raised Samoan community. The value which this group of Samoans place on fa'asamoa is evident in the comments of another female participant in Park *et al.*'s study:

> ... when you're young there were values. When you're young you think it's all crap and it's not until you grow older and you see that ... you start to realise ... then you get to understand fa'asamoa a bit more ... even going further to understand where it's all com[ing] from. You d actually appreciate it, especially when you have children of your own, ... then you realise, you want to instill the same in your children ... but I can understand how some of them were rebellious, I mean I was at that age, you know. [I would ask my mother] 'Why do you have to do that? Why do you have to give money again? Why do we always have to give, give, give? ... And my mum would always say, 'Because when we're in trouble or we have a fa'alavelave then they will return it (young female participant in Park *et al.*, forthcoming).

This participant reiterated an oft-quoted Samoan sentiment that 'young people cannot fully appreciate the fa'asamoa, or at least its ideals, until they 'grow older''. The wisdom of age is once again privileged in such a way as to support the Samoan expectation of respect and deference to one's elders. What is implicit in the quotes above and below is the centrality of aiga to Samoan life. However, where in ancient Samoa the nu'u played an important role in understanding genealogical ties and organising social behaviour, in New Zealand the nu'u seems to take second place to the aiga or family:[14]

> Fa'asamoa to me at the moment is the ... most basic definition is the family orientation ... the way that the family is ... the kinship and

> genealogy ... that's the way I understand it to be ... and that's how I learn my fa'asamoa. It's through my family ... my extended as well ... when they have special events, and showing my face there ... just linking up with cousins (participant in Anae, 1998: 177).

The nuclear family environment in New Zealand, coupled with the pressures of Western liberalism learnt in schools, has meant for many Samoan parents the need to re-evaluate their traditional childrearing practices (see Meleisea and Schoeffel, 1998:157–177). For many Samoan sons and daughters, whether living in or out of Samoa, learning about appropriate gendered behaviour was often by chance or through peer group discussions. For example, Samoan children often learnt that they had done something wrong after the fact, when they would receive either physical or verbal admonition or both. The rationale behind this type of child discipline was consistent with 'traditional' Samoan childrearing techniques and its generally ad hoc socialisation and learning processes (see Park *et al.*, forthcoming). The 'reactive' nature of Samoan child-discipline techniques reflects the ancient Samoan social classification of children and young people, particularly unmarried young people, as non-decision makers in society whose role was to learn and obey without question[15] and to provide physical and economic assistance to their families where possible.

In Samoa, where the fa'asamoa was allowed to develop without much direct challenge by young people, children's rights activists and so forth, these aiga-based, elder-driven social classifications of gender were internalised without much critique or public dissent.[16] However, in New Zealand, where Western liberal ideologies of children's and women's rights permeate, this rationale has received much critique. Suffice to say that growing up in New Zealand's liberal environment, with its individual self-focus, has left many young Samoans questioning not only the child–parent relationship as demanded by the fa'asamoa of their parents (see Anae, 1988), but also the brother–sister male–female relationship implicit in their gendered upbringing.

Discussing issues of gender, sex and sexuality with children was, for many Samoan parents, unheard of. Today, however, in countries like New Zealand, it is encouraged and, for many, unavoidable. A number of Samoan parents have begun to engage in discussions with their children, some more successfully than others, on issues of gender, sex and/or sexuality. To illustrate the difficulties that many Samoan parents experience when attempting to explain gender and sexuality to their children, I use yet another quote from Park *et al.*'s study (forthcoming). The quote below captures part of a

conversation between a mother and her daughters, where the mother tries to explain, although with expected difficulty, the difference between the male and female gender:

> *Mother:* A boy will always be a boy no matter what!
> *Daughters:* Oh, OK.
> *Mother:* But a girl, once they become a woman, that's it, you know. You can't hide it. Do you understand?
> *Daughters:* Yeah, Yeah!
>
> (Samoan female participant in Park *et al.*).

The mother makes reference to the underlying presumption of ancient Samoan cosmology, that the differences between male and female are biological. She implies that for a Samoan female, reproductive sexuality, both her virginity and her ability to carry life, is the defining agent of her female gender or at least her gender status. The presumption of sexual freedom attached to manaia, as discussed earlier, underscores her suggestion that 'a boy will always be a boy no matter what'. Similarly, the persistence of the taupou ideal is found in her exclamation, '[B]ut a girl, once [you] become a woman ... you can't hide it'. Thus, for many Samoan daughters living in New Zealand, Shore's psychology of reproductive sexuality (Shore 1981:198) is most apt and continues to permeate the various familial expectations on them as females.

Anae's study (1998: 247) raised similar sentiments. A quote from one of her participants shows that the mothering responsibilities attributed to females in ancient Samoa are still very much expected of Samoans, both those in Samoa and those living outside Samoa:

> ... But I think it was just our role as women to take over and be major caregiver, and I suppose you go through little phases where you think ... my brothers should be here. But they had families so us girls were left to maintain a lot of the caring for the folks.

Here, the ancient separation of male and female gender roles continued after migration. The evidence of the separation of male and female identities, and of the persistence of the ancient brother–sister covenant, was found in contemporary incidences. These included (a) not being able to form platonic relationships with members of the opposite sex, at least until after marriage; (b) not being able to sleep in the same room as brothers; (c) not being able to wear brothers' clothes or vice versa; (d) not being able to make any sexual inferences during a conversation or watch sexual scenes on television when

a brother is present, and vice versa. Many of these incidences were not uncommon to my own experience growing up in New Zealand. It was within the practice of these gender codes that the significance of the brother–sister feagaiga, pivotal to ancient Samoan gender relations, could be found in contemporary New Zealand situations.

This feagaiga underscored, for Samoans, the biological differences between male and female reproductive sexualities and provided a protection mechanism for the perceived vulnerabilities of the female sex. Christianity, Western modernisation and individualism each impacted on the persistence, dilution, and in some cases the non-practice of or suspicious attitudes towards this covenant. The value of the brother–sister feagaiga, on migration, seems to have lost much of its original strength.[17] Nevertheless the point is made, for the particular concerns of this chapter, that despite migration Samoans have continued to hold onto most, if not all, of their fa'asamoa. What has changed with migration and over time is the practice of Samoan gender roles, rather than the framing or defining of gender itself.

Over time, and as a consequence of economic recession in New Zealand, more women were expected to leave the home and find paid employment. For many first-generation Samoan mothers, this meant that job responsibilities were added to their household and childrearing duties. The persistent relegation of childrearing tasks to females in Samoan migrant families continued, and was perhaps exacerbated by mainstream New Zealand's own patriarchal emphases on the reproduction of mothering.

However, in the late 1990s, sentiments expressed by a young Samoan male participant in Park *et al.*'s study suggest that the climate has shifted. The expectation that Samoan women bear most, if not all, the childrearing responsibilities, may have begun to change:

> All decisions have to be done together, not like the Samoans have often done having the male decide everything. [Or] On the other side, he just lets the mother do everything. ... It's got to be ... all those things are done as a family unit together (younger Samoan male participant in Park *et al.*, forthcoming).

The sentiments in this quote imply that both push and pull factors determine the viability of continuing certain gender roles and responsibilities, and that there is much value in the maintenance of the collective aiga identity. Today some recognition seems to exist that for various reasons – mostly economic, some cultural – Samoan families must continue to pool their resources to survive.

The idea that because Samoan gender roles are now more fluid, the primary basis of Samoan understandings of gender – i.e. as based on reproductive sexualities – has also shifted, does not necessarily follow. The more logical conclusion is that for many Samoans in New Zealand, the economic and cultural conditions of mainstream New Zealand life have made the sharing of gender roles a practical reality. The shift is thus more pragmatic than ideological. Hence the principle of aiga as the defining agent of the fa'asamoa and Samoan (self and group) identity has, despite migration, persisted and continues to take precedence over gender as the organising principle of Samoan life.

Some Conclusions and Personal Reflections

> ... The *Fa'a-Samoa* creates its own complex system of conflicting social pressures. All Samoans know what this means. Everyone complains about it to their relatives, friends and even to strangers who are ignorant of the system. But despite this, very few Samoans have totally departed from its practices; and it matters not whether they live in Samoa, New Zealand, USA., Australia or any other part of the world, they always take it with them. It is an integral part of their lives. Samoans love their *Fa'a-Samoa*, despite all its alleged faults and ambiguities (Ioane, 1983:527).

Gender is indeed a complex term in and of itself, let alone when examined cross-culturally. This chapter has surveyed some of the underlying presumptions that surround Samoan constructions of gender and sexuality. It has addressed the origins of the concept of gender, raising a differentiation between the concepts of sex and gender, as well as of sex and sexuality. The more detailed tracings of the gender identities 'male', 'female' and 'fa'afafine', as they were framed within ancient Samoa, produced a clearly biological demarcation between male and female gender identities. Fa'afafine were embraced by Samoan society according to their abilities to give service, as well as their genealogical links, to their family. Thus, during ancient Samoa, in Samoa and in metropolitan Samoan communities today, aiga and nu'u relations, rather than, sexuality or gender determines a person's acceptance into Samoan affairs.

Samoan emigrants may place greater emphasis on aiga than nu'u relations, and with various economic changes, Samoans in New Zealand have also experienced some changes to the conservative separation of male and female roles, moving towards a pragmatically driven practice of shared

gender responsibilities, especially in the home. This shift in gender responsibilities does not imply a move away from the understanding that Samoan gender identities are formed primarily on the basis of reproductive sexuality; nor towards a belief that Samoan gender identities are now more or less equal or collectively based in any way. The implications to be drawn need to be underscored by the overwhelming focus of the Samoan (individual and group) self on familial ties, and the significance of these ties to the formation and maintenance of cultural-ethnic and gendered identities.

On reflection, writing this chapter has provided valuable insights for me, a Samoan-born but New Zealand-raised mother, daughter, granddaughter, sister and aunt, into the complex world in which my parents were raised and in turn raised me. My relationships with my husband, my brother, my father, my uncles and my in-laws have each been reflected on during the course of writing. Because of time and space restrictions, I am not able to do justice to the complex concerns of this chapter. Nevertheless, if it has triggered some further thoughts and debates on the complexity of Samoan gender identities, aiga relations, or life in general, then it has been a good cause. Soifua.

Notes

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2 An English version of this paper was delivered at the National University of Samoa on 2 September 1999. This quote translates as: 'In the Samoan version of Creation, there is no Adam and Eve. There is no Eden and no tempting snake. There is no forbidden apple and no camouflage of fig leaves. In the Samoan version, God is progenitor of man. Man is therefore descended. There were marital links with the Sun, the Moon, the Seas, the Rocks and the Earth from which eventually issued Man'(Tamasese, 1999b: 1).

3 This quote from Durkheim was found in Giddens (1993: 725). I prefaced my introduction with quotes from Durkheim and Tamasese because they illustrate the two frames which shape contemporary Samoan society's various articulations of Samoan gender identities. Durkheim's observations of gender differences between male and female are similar to many Samoan constructions of gender, at least in modern Christian Samoa. Tamasese's framing of Samoan cosmology highlights the importance of genealogy and the genealogical links between man, God and nature.

4 de Beauvoir (1964:249) is famous for her quote 'one is not born but becomes a woman'. Central to this is the idea that the female gender identity is one that is learnt, rather than genetically or biologically determined.

5 Chodorow's (1978) thesis explicates the recognition that Western social scripts of mothering use biological differences to legitimise keeping women in the private realm of domesticity and out of the decision-making roles of public life. Western women's lack of political voice is in contrast to Samoan women, who as sisters or tama'itai are not only able to gain access to family or customary lands, but also to make effective contributions to family and local village affairs. This latter point is raised briefly later in this chapter; however, for further insights see Fana'afi's article (1986:103–110). Chodorow's work is central to Western gender analyses.

6 Carver (1996:5) seems to assume here that sexuality was not part of the former definition of gender.

7 Tanuvasa argues that, during ancient times, a high chief was entitled to take more than one wife. However, in recognition of the potential conflict this might cause for these wives and their families, he was required to formally return his current wife to her family before taking his new wife. Tanuvasa found that in many cases this practice was particularly unfair to the jilted wives and their families, and suggests that this may have persuaded Samoan society to accept the monogamous marriage advocated by the Papalagi missionaries (personal communication).

8 The term 'older' here refers to those participants aged over 40 years (see Park *et al.*, forthcoming).

9 I was fortunate to have been the interviewer here and recall the almost automatic response of the participant, when she noted that it was impossible for males and females, unless the males or females were homosexual, to form platonic heterosexual relationships. This suggests the centrality of sexuality, albeit reproductive sexuality as argued by Shore (1981), to the nature and formation of Samoan gender identities.

10 Although the Samoan phrases have been paraphrased to fit the flow of ideas within this section, they are nevertheless terms used by Tanuvasa Tavale in

our discussion of these issues. The English translations are mine.

11 See Krishnan *et al.* (1994) and Ongley (1991) for an in-depth analysis of Samoan migration to New Zealand.

12 See Anae's (1998) discussion of the role of the Church in the life of Samoans living in Auckland. She focuses on New Zealand-born Samoans in the English Speaking Group at Auckland's Newton PIC church.

13 See Lealaiauloto's (1995) article, 'I am Samoan, but can Samoans accept me?', which addresses the identity challenges she faced as a Samoan raised in New Zealand.

14 Some might argue that the Church could be seen as a New Zealand-based substitute for the village polity. I would argue that although there are some similarities, there are too many differences that outweigh its usefulness. For example, in New Zealand there are many different Samoan religions. Some, like the Seventh-day Adventist and Latter-day Saints, have actively discouraged member participation in the fa'asamoa. Also, in principle, the beliefs of ancient Samoan cosmology conflict with some contemporary Christian theologies in which many Samoans are deeply engaged. Moreover, in New Zealand, there are simultaneous attempts by various village groups from the islands to establish similar village entities in New Zealand. If successful, these village entities would effectively make the Church substitution redundant.

15 To learn without question was advocated by Samoan parenting ideologies on the presumption that the answers to young people's questions would become clear to them later in life. Part of learning respect, humility and deference was to learn without question.

16 Critique *per se* is a relatively new phenomenon in Samoan circles. For those wishing to engage effectively in such an exercise, much careful debate and strategic planning is required.

17 See Tupuola's examination of this feagaiga relationship and how the rape experiences of some of the New Zealand-raised Samoan female participants of her study have led them to seriously question its significance to Samoan society today (1996:59–75).