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Chapter 7, Gender, in Intimacy and Community in a Changing World: Sikaiana Life 1980-1993

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VII

GENDER ROLES: Ritual Opposition and Daily Support

There are several notable changes since my stays in the 1980s. Relations between young unmarried males and females, at least among those living away from the island, are much more open and free. There appears to be more movement between partners, and more divorces. It seems that there are fewer restrictions on women and more women are becoming educated and working.

In former times, Sikaiana men and women periodically divided into separate groups and composed humorous songs to criticize the opposite sex. Reuben Tenai, my neighbor, was interested in these songs and, as the catechist, often organized the singing and dancing that accompany religious festivities. I had been on Sikaiana for about three or four months when, partly for my benefit but also for his own enjoyment, Reuben got together some older Sikaiana people to sing these old songs. In the evenings at the seashore, a group of seven or eight men and women gathered. After several practice sessions, I recorded these songs on my tape recorder. Later, with help, I transcribed and translated them. Most of these songs had been composed in the 1930s and 1940s. Such songs are rarely composed at present, although the content of the songs is based upon the theme of mutual teasing and joking between men and women which was very much evident during my stays.

A few of these songs were composed for the three fliers who were shot down over Sikaiana in 1942. According to legend, many of the atoll's young women admired and desired the fliers. After the fliers were rescued and left Sikaiana, the young women gathered together to sleep on the bedding upon which the fliers had rested. In jealousy, Sikaiana's young men burned the bedding. The women then composed a series of songs, praising the beauty of the fliers, admonishing Sikaiana's young men not to burn the bedding where the fliers had slept, and comparing the Sikaiana young men unfavorably in appearance and manners with the Americans. But these songs were not composed to praise the fliers; rather, the songs were composed to make Sikaiana's young men feel jealous. Sikaiana gender relations, however, are not only an amusing battle of the sexes. The lives of men and women are not in opposition, although they are often separated. In many of their work activities, men and women are mutually supportive or "complementary." Gender on Sikaiana defines two types of people who are, depending upon the context, complementary, separated, or, as in the case of the above songs, opposed.

The physical separation of men and women permeates the public life of Sikaiana. The inside of the church building is divided into a male side (left side facing the altar) and a female side (right side facing the altar). Before Confirmation, children sit in a center aisle. Men take Communion first; women follow. At community meetings (both in Honiara and on Sikaiana), men and women usually sit in separate areas. At meetings after Sikaiana church services, women stand close together on a little knoll to

the landward side of the main path in front of the church, and men face them in a long semi-circle along the seaward side of the path. When visiting friends and relatives, men and women often divide into separate groups to talk and gossip. Men and women often drink alcohol in separate groups. At meal times, men eat first and women later. Many consider the heads of fish to be women's food; men usually leave them on their plate for the women to eat. When a married couple goes to their gardens in the interior of the islet, the husband usually walks in front carrying his husking stick and his wife follows a few paces behind carrying a basket strapped to her back.

In sport competitions on Sikaiana, men and women often divide into separate single-sex teams that play against each other in netball and volleyball (women do not play soccer). The Men and women also form separate teams to play against one another in games such as the card game, *kaihulihuli*, and a game similar to kick the can, *haiumu*.

In some cases, the separation of males and females reflects the Sikaiana assumption that sexual attraction is a constant factor affecting all relationships between males and females and must be controlled, especially through the control of females. Males travel alone during the day or night and young men are expected to search for potential sexual partners. Women, on the other hand, whether married or single, often travel in groups when going to the interior of the islet during the day, or on trips to the beach to bathe and toilet at night. Suspicion is aroused if a woman is alone and away from the paths and gardens she normally frequents. Some people might suspect that the woman is going to meet a lover. Wives are expected to live with their in-laws when their husbands leave them for extended periods. Some people consider it to be unseemly for a woman to smoke or drink alcohol excessively. One elderly woman told me that in former times, women were discouraged from smoking, because when the supply of tobacco was limited between visits from trade ships, they would be tempted to perform sexual favors in return for tobacco.

Men clear gardens; women plant, mulch, and harvest the taro. Women plait coconut leaf mats which men use for constructing walls and roofs. Women plait the fine pandanus mats used for sleeping. Men construct canoes. By legend, men originally did the weaving on the backstrap loom. But, as one person explained to me, a person must sit with legs stretched out for long periods of time and on the men found that their legs were too cramped to fight in emergencies. As a result, women do all weaving on the loom. Men, however, make the frame of the loom and assist in gathering the materials which are used for weaving. Women do most of the cooking, washing, and housework, and women are usually responsible for the care of the children. Men do all the work that involves climbing trees. They catch birds from tree tops and harvest coconuts and other fruits from trees. They also cut and collect the coconut sap from coconut trees. The women cook some of the sap into a molasses, although much more of it is used by the men to make fermented toddy. Both sexes work at producing copra: collecting, husking, and drying nuts. But men are expected to do a greater share of the heavier copra work such as husking and cutting firewood. At sea, men and women engage in different activities. Men fish with both a line and net. Women collect shells and snails at sea, although men sometimes do this also. In former times, there were some traditional techniques of fishing practiced by women, but these are rarely practiced at present.

This division of labor is not invariable. During my stay in 1987, a husbandless woman frequently went to fish with her daughter. I heard a story, perhaps untrue, that one young man worked in the taro beds because his wife was too lazy.

In Honiara, some women are housewives, that is to say their main activities center around keeping house, caring for children and preparing meals while their husbands work for wages in their occupations. This is a new role for Sikaiana women which is directly associated with the development of a wage economy.

There are different attitudes toward schooling men and women. Males are encouraged to continue their schooling for as long as possible. Many women are discouraged from continuing their education. But many people are coming to value education, and, however reluctantly, more and more families are allowing and encouraging their daughters to continue in their education for as long as they pass their examinations. Some women living in Honiara work as typists, nurses and school teachers. Others work as clerks in small shops in order to earn a little extra money.

Many parents prefer to keep their daughters on the atoll after they have completed a primary education. These parents claim that doing so prevents their daughters from marrying non-Sikaiana Solomon Islanders. Sons are encouraged to continue their secondary education or seek wage employment abroad and then return to Sikaiana to look for a wife during their vacation. This difference in migration patterns reflects an economic strategy. Unmarried men living on Sikaiana are not given many responsibilities and generally do not work very hard until after they are married. Unmarried women work in the gardens and produce copra, which makes them much greater economic assets. As a result, young females often outnumber males on Sikaiana. Young unmarried girls do leave the island for a variety of reasons. Some girls are allowed to attend secondary schools, many reside more or less permanently with their parents in towns, and others are sent from Sikaiana to help other families.

Men participate more than women in the political affairs of Sikaiana. They hold most of the offices that link the atoll with provincial and national administrative services. All the members of the local government council are male, as are the court justices, the area constable, the provincial representative, the priests and catechists. In 1987, two of the teachers at the school on Sikaiana were men; one was a woman. Most of the atoll's public meetings are conducted by men, although women attend these meetings and their opinions are voiced. Within certain land-holding lineages, elderly women are influential, but as explained in the previous chapter, their influence is dependent upon the consensus of males. Women may be called as witnesses, although they rarely represent their lineage in the court. (I am aware of only two cases in which women acted as representatives).

Although they are not fully involved in the political life of the atoll, Sikaiana women, nevertheless, have a history of active involvement in organized groups and committees. In the 1930s, some Sikaiana women suggested to the Bishop of the Melanesian Mission that he form a "sisterhood" modelled on Christian religious orders,

in particular the Melanesian Brotherhood that was responsible for Sikaiana's conversion to Christianity. The Brotherhood was recruiting many young men from Sikaiana at that time (and still does). These Sikaiana women became the first members of a Solomon Islands religious order.

There are several clubs and committees that are run by women, including the Mother's Union. At my first arrival, the woman ran a dance club which, for a fee, could be opened for dances. During the first two years of my stay, women were responsible for the management of the local cooperative store, because the men claimed that the women would not steal the store's money. In 1983, however, at the end of my stay, the men took over the administration of the store after several years of losses. The men complained that, although the women were honest, they did not have enough business experience to adjust selling prices of the store's merchandise for inflation, nor did they lower the store's buying price for the atoll's copra when its prices fell in Honiara.

In the domestic sphere, women participate in making day-to-day decisions affecting the welfare of the household and family. Often there is reserve in the relationship between closely related males such as true brothers, or fathers and their mature sons. Women act as mediators between these closely related males by intervening in disputes and conveying requests or needs between brothers or fathers and sons. Mothers, daughters, and sisters are on easier terms with one another.

In kinship, marriage, and work, male and female activities are mutually supportive and complementary. With marriage, a Sikaiana person achieves a respectability that the unmarried never attain. Several times I heard the same joke: the work of a young man is to find a wife. Finding a spouse, however, is not always an easy matter because courtship must be conducted in private and secrecy.

Across the Reef: Coming Together in Romance and Courtship

Perhaps no intimacy is quite as charged as sexual intimacy. On Sikaiana, this intimacy is further charged because pre-marital liaisons, although common in leading to marriage, must be conducted in secrecy, without the knowledge of public, although a few close associates may be confided in or asked to cooperate. Before the conversion to Christianity when marriages were arranged, it was very common to maintain adulterous relations, sometimes with one partner for extended periods. These adulterous liaisons, also, had to be conducted in secret. Sikaiana is a small society with little privacy, and such secrecy is difficult to maintain. These illicit relations separate couples from everyone else in relations that are both highly intimate and hopefully secret.

Hakasao is the Sikaiana word for bringing the canoes from the calm of the reef across the reef and through the rougher waves of the ocean. It literally means 'to make safe.' A derivative of *hakasao*, *hakasaosao*, describes the activities of Sikaiana go-betweens, who bring together young men and women for a few moments of privacy and romance in a society which does not allow them to be together in public.

The risks and challenges of courtship have similarities to taking a canoe across the reef. Moving a canoe across the reef is a difficult and dangerous task. The waves break at the shore of the reef. Sending a canoe into the breakers at the wrong time can result in catastrophe as the waves break on the canoes. At best, the canoe will swamp; at worst, the canoe will be thrown back onto the reef and shattered, injuring its occupants. Only experienced Sikaiana men try to go across the reef into the ocean. At the edge of the reef, they count the waves in series of threes until a brief calm period occurs. Taking a running start, they leap into the canoe. Then, paddling at full force, their canoe climbs the incoming waves until it has crossed into the sea where the canoe will roll with waves rather than be swamped by them. The challenges of crossing the reef and the gulf between lagoon and ocean are apt images for the problems of bringing together men and women in Sikaiana courtship.

There is a strong romantic streak among the Sikaiana which is expressed in their patterns of courtship and marriage. Before the arrival of the missionaries, traditional Sikaiana society institutionalized romance, but not in marriages which were arranged by parents. Instead, romance took place in adulterous sexual affairs conducted outside of marriage. Following the conversion to Christianity, the concepts of romance in these extra-marital affairs was transferred to courtship for marriage.

In traditional Sikaiana society, marriages were arranged by parents, foster parents or relatives when the children were quite young. In some cases, these marriages were arranged to transfer rights to land between lineages. More often it seems, the marriages were arranged simply out of friendship between the adults. People who were friendly or allied would arrange the marriage of young relatives in order, as the Sikaiana say, to show their joy and happiness in their friendships.

The children were quite small when betrothed. Because in-laws were expected to be ashamed and reserved in one another's presence, small children grew up finding that some people avoided them and they learned to respond with this reserve to their future in-laws. This reserve and inhibition extended to the relationships between the spouses. Even after marriage, some spouses marked this reserve by not using one another's personal names.

Before the conversion to Christianity, it was also very common to have secret sweethearts or lovers, *hina*. The oldest Sikaiana people recall that almost everyone had at least one such lover, and sometimes more than one. These liaisons had to be kept secret, at least as secret as is possible on a small atoll. In the story of Peia's insanity recounted earlier, Tomaniva's extra-marital affairs were not unusual. But, for the Sikaiana, it was wrong of Peia's husband to report them. Romantic love and desire was felt for the secret sweetheart, not for one's spouse. One woman described herself as disgusted when she was brought to her husband on her wedding night. She described her repulsion by using the same Sikaiana word, *ita*, that the Sikaiana use to describe the way some children cringe at being handled by strangers. In 1980, there were three elderly women, all of whom had matured in the traditional Sikaiana society. Among older Sikaiana, everyone agreed upon the name of each woman's secret lover.

In these secret liaisons, a man approached a woman in a secluded place or used a go-between to help arrange meetings. If the woman agreed, the couple began their affair, which might last for a lifetime. In continuing their affair, the couple sometimes used a go-between to transfer gifts and help arrange secret meetings. The go-between, often the man's sister, should be someone who could be seen in public both with him and with his love without arousing suspicion.

There is a widespread story that the last chief of Sikaiana, who lived to be very old, continued meeting his lover into their old age. The meetings included a meal and conversation. Fane Telena, the chief's foster child and one of my main informants, told me that she once joked to him, "you are too old to have a lover, why do you attempt such hopeless things in vain?" To which her foster father replied, "My lover still crawls with a lot of force."

Despite the expectation that everyone had a secret lover, older people remember that there was jealousy and hostility towards a spouse if the identity of the lover was discovered. If a husband learned that his wife had been unfaithful, he probably would beat her and, in some cases, challenge her sweetheart to a fight. An adulterer who was discovered could lose rights to use the land of his lover's husband's lineage.

After the conversion to Christianity, the church discouraged arranged marriages and couples were encouraged to marry through love matches, although some people in the period immediately following the conversion chose to marry their arranged partners. Today, it is considered improper to force a marriage between a couple if they are not in love, although sometimes parents are accused of doing so.

Today's young people are expected to eventually fall in love with one particular individual. The Sikaiana refer to this true love as their *kalemata*, which also the word for 'eye.' Normally it is assumed that a person has one such true love, although sometimes people are described as having "two eyes," "changing their eye," or not yet having a "straight eye." These idioms imply that the young people, most often young men, have not yet decided which of several romantic interests is their true one. Parents and relatives may try to encourage young people to consider factors such as a partner's intelligence, occupation, and family background in choosing a spouse. But often, passion, not reason, seems to win out.

Men are expected to initiate courtship. They approach their desired one, initiate advances and, if truly attracted to the woman, they are expected to try hard to win her love even if initially rejected. Women are often described as doubting a young man's sincerity when making initial advances because men sometimes falsely promise marriage in order to engage in sex, or change their minds about marriage after a sexual encounter. Young men jokingly describe these brief encounters by using the English idiom, "hit and run." By allowing herself to be seduced into these brief encounters, a young woman risks harming her reputation and her desirability as a marriage partner. Young men who have reputations for loving and then abandoning women risk a skeptical reception when they approach another woman.

There is a frequently stated assertion that some people remain committed to former lovers even after marriage to a different person and that a person will be jealous of her or his spouse's former lovers. Young women are warned that if they have many lovers, their husbands will continually suspect them of still harboring desire for these former lovers. Such a woman, Sikaiana parents warn their daughters, will suffer beatings as a wife. Indeed, some do. Nevertheless, most people have had pre-marital affairs before settling with a different spouse. It would be very rude to ask a Sikaiana person about feelings for a former lover, but my impression is that many spouses assume that their partner's former passions for earlier loves have passed.

Sometimes, young men approach parents about marriage before contacting their daughter, but parents are reluctant to give their approval for a marriage without their daughter's prior consent.

More often young men and women begin affairs without their parents' explicit approval or knowledge. All courtship should be conducted in secret, usually at night. In a society as small as Sikaiana, however, it is very difficult to keep a secret and the Sikaiana people seem to be very sensitive to the nuances in behavior of a couple who are romantically attracted. If knowledge of a sexual affair becomes public, the couple will be forbidden from taking Holy Communion until after they have gone through the embarrassment of a public confession before the entire congregation.

There is another important reason for secrecy. Other people with different marital plans for the couple may try to thwart the wedding through gossip or by helping a rival suitor if they learn that the couple intends marry.

Middle-aged people recall that in their youths it was common to write a letter describing one's feelings and proposing a meeting. Some people still write letters, but my impression is that at present most love letters are written during periods of separation after the couple have already made their contacts. In previous times, it was possible to contact a girl during the game called *haiumu*. This game is played at night and its rules involve touching and holding between the players. The teams were boys against girls. During my stay, however, this game was played mostly by younger children.

The recent introduction of Western styles of dancing between young men and women has provided a new opportunity for touching and initiating courtship. In traditional Sikaiana society, young men and women didn't dance face-to-face with one another. At present (1980-87), Western style dances for young people are held after a feast or party and continue throughout the night. These dances are loosely supervised by parents, often the mothers of the young women who are dancing. Usually, a guitar song starts and a group of young women begin dancing with each other. Then groups of young men join in and begin to pair off with women. In the first dances, most couples dance without any physical contact. As the evening progresses, some couples move closer and hold hands. A couple can show their interest without letting anyone else know by clasping their hands more tightly than usual. A young man may try to dance with more body contact, pulling his partner closer to him. Lack of resistance is

sometimes a sign of interest on the part of the young woman. Some older people discourage close dancing, referring to it as *hakappili* 'sticking together' or in Pijin as "plastering." When dancing close, a couple has the opportunity to speak quietly and arrange a meeting.

Sometimes, a young man asks another person, usually a closely related female, to act as a go-between. The go-between will approach the desired woman, try to convince the woman of the man's sincerity, and, if successful, arrange a secret meeting. The go-between can also act as a decoy in setting up the meeting. She accompanies the young woman as if they are going to the seashore to bathe or do some chore together and then leaves her company when they meet the young man at a pre-arranged location. By accompanying the young woman, the go-between makes it appear that there is nothing unusual.

In situations where a suitor meets with opposition from his lover, or her family, he may try to enlist the support of his relatives, especially older female relatives in pleading his cause.

Many initial advances are made by men who have been drinking fermented toddy. Young men rarely dance with women unless they have been drinking. However, young women are more likely to doubt the sincerity of the advances of someone who has been drinking.

At the initial meeting, the couple discusses their feelings for one another and their future plans. It is not infrequent to hear that women resist a man's initial advances and test his sincerity by waiting to see if he continues his efforts. If the couple finds they are mutually attracted, they 'promise', *polopolo*, to remain faithful and eventually marry. The couple might be separated for a long period of time. The suitor may be in school or still working. The young woman may have to accompany her family to other parts of the Solomon Islands. Many couples delay their marriage until they consider themselves financially established. Sometimes, the couple secretly exchange presents to symbolize their love and, whenever possible, they continue to meet secretly. It is assumed that a couple who is alone for any length of time will have sexual relations. Once they have made their promises to each other, the couple is expected not to engage in sexual relations with any other person. If it is learned that the woman has had sexual relations with another man, this usually ends the affair. Women are more likely to be willing to marry a young man even after learning that he had a fling with someone else.

In their initial courting, the couple is often described as being 'embarrassed', 'shy', or 'ashamed,' (*hakanapanapa*). These feelings of embarrassment may continue through the early periods of their marriage. Some Sikaiana told me that couples who are shy in another's presence are likely to be attracted to each other. In contrast, a young man who jokes in public or speaks with a young woman is probably not interested in her as a wife.

The verb *hakataataa* describes the initial advances made in courtship. One

elderly man described the etymology of *hakataataa* in the following terms. The word for chasing fish into a net is *hakataa*. In this method, stones are thrown at a distance behind the fish in a manner such that it is not startled and moves slowly towards the net. Stones should not be thrown too close to the fish or in rapid succession because this will startle the fish and it might dart off away from the net. Courtship, according to this man, must be conducted by young men in the same manner: advances should be made slowly so that the young woman is not startled. In a similar idiom, courtship is described as the process of making a girl 'tame', *hakatala*. *Hakatala* also refers to making a bird come to a person by offering it food. This idiom is developed from the notion that, like animals who are timid at the approach of humans, young women will be easily frightened by the approach of men.

Metaphors of hunting or fishing are also used to describe courtship. A young man looking for romance sometimes jokes that he is going to 'shoot pigeon' (*hiti lupe*). The common term for successfully finding a spouse is *sahe*, the same verb used for 'catch' as when catching fish. Terminology describing 'luck' or success at hunting and fishing, *maalama* and *laoina*, are also used to describe success in romance, usually a man's success with women. *Laoina* is a derivative of *laoi* 'good'. *Maalama* is derived from the word meaning 'to be lit up', as for example the inside of a house is lit up by a lantern at night. The successful person is attractive to women like an area that is lit up by light. Finally, when advances are successful, one person, most often the woman, is described as 'dead', *mate*.

Some men may try to 'creep' or 'crawl' (*ttolo*) into the house of a woman and have sex with her while she is sleeping. Often this activity is described by the Pijin English term, *krip*, derived from the English term, "creep". A few people see this as a demonstration of boldness and virility. But it is more often viewed as destructive and improper conduct, especially by the relatives of the woman involved and Sikaiana's women in general. Men who creep frequently are ridiculed, and, if caught, they are taken to court for trespassing. Repeated convictions can result in stiff jail sentences. (Margaret Mead (1928/1973:93-95) describes this behavior, *moe totolo* or 'sleep crawling' on Samoa; it is not uncommon in Micronesia and Polynesia.)

When ready to marry, a young man should approach the woman's parents and his own relatives in order to obtain their approval. If parents try to prevent a marriage and the couple is determined to marry, they might elope. On Sikaiana, this may be done by secretly leaving Hale and living on one of the other islets at Muli Akau for about a week. When the couple returns, the marriage is usually accepted. Although relatives may be unhappy, they no longer try to prevent it. When a young unmarried woman becomes pregnant, there is an effort to determine the child's father and to pressure the couple to marry. Occasionally, a young man refuses to marry a woman he has made pregnant. I never heard of a pregnant woman who refused an offer of marriage from her child's father.

Many Sikaiana parents complain that in recent years there has been an increase in pre-marital affairs and consider this to be a breakdown in sexual morality. They think this is the result of contact with other cultures and, more specifically, because of

the introduction of foreign traditions such as Western style dancing onto Sikaiana. It is difficult to determine the accuracy of these statements about changes in sexual conduct. Many mature males have different standards for their own behavior as opposed to that of their sisters and daughters. My impression is that for a period following their arrival, the missionaries were successful in their efforts to limit premarital and extra-marital sexual relationships. More recently, there seems to have been some increase in the frequency of premarital affairs, and public knowledge about them.

Ceremonial Opposition between Male and Female: The *Puina*

In their work roles, men and women engage in separate, but complementary activities. In courtship, there is a gulf between men and women that must be bridged. In much of Sikaiana daily joking and teasing, there is opposition between the sexes. This opposition was expressed in a traditional ceremony, the *puina*. During the *puina*, men and women divided into separate groups for several days in order to compose songs. One group went to Muli Akau and composed songs in secret. When they returned to Hale, they sang their songs to the opposite sex. All songs were composed in secret and then sung in public. The opposite sex would try to anticipate the themes of the songs and have a reply ready. Many of the songs used figurative speech to both camouflage and enliven their meanings (see Donner 1987).

After the conversion to Christianity, the missionaries discouraged the performance of these song festivals because they viewed the content of these songs as lewd and hostile. A modified version of the *puina* continued after World War II during the school holidays, *uiki hakamalooloo* (literally 'week of rest'). As in the *puina*, one sex would go to Muli Akau to compose while the other stayed on the main islet. Other competitive activities accompanied these festivities. Young men staying at Muli Akau would plan raids onto the main islet in order to steal garden produce and even pigs. Young women were expected to guard against these incursions and "capture" any young man who landed.

Some of the pre-Christian traditional songs praised a secret lover while taunting and criticizing a spouse by describing the joys of adultery. In one song, a woman boasts that she has made a special rope for her lover, while giving her husband a rope that is not as strong. In another song, a woman boasts that her lover is very clever at arranging their secret meetings, never being found out by anyone else. A song composed by a man boasts about the beauty of his sweetheart's thigh tattoos, which in former times were considered very erotic and were kept covered except in intimacy. Although these songs were sung in public, it was difficult to determine the specific individuals involved; only the composers knew for sure the intent of the songs. The songs were meant to taunt the opposite sex as a group.

The songs composed in the 1940s and 50s continued the themes of taunting between the sexes but dropped the themes of adultery.

The following songs were composed after the mission's arrival, probably in the

1940s. The first song was described in the beginning of this chapter. It was composed to tease Sikaiana's young men for burning the bedding used by the American fliers.

Young men of Sikaiana do not burn the bedding of the beautiful men with
such fair skin who just appeared.

Young men of Sikaiana do not burn the bedding of those lovely rainbows
who just appeared.

I want to sleep close to fair skin of Bini (Harold Bingaman)
I want to sleep with the sweet fragrance of Polo (Paul Knight)

Young men of Sikaiana, you disgust me.
You disgust Kalati (Calvin Crouch).
You are repulsive.

This song praises the beauty of the fliers, making special reference to their fair and fragrant skin, (on Sikaiana, fair complexions are considered attractive.) But these songs were composed not so much out of romantic desire for the fliers as to taunt the Sikaiana young men. I have been able to contact two of these fliers, Paul Knight and Calvin Crouch. Both of them claim that during their few days on Sikaiana, they had no sexual contact with women. They said that they avoided women for fear of antagonizing their hosts.

The following song was composed sometime in the 1940s. The women are taunting the young men's shyness in making advances. The song reminds them that the young women are working alone all day waiting to be approached by a bold young man.

To the false lust of the young men of my age

I walk alone in the interior; I collect food alone in the interior; I work alone in the interior. I don't see you. You wander around without purpose along the shore: you are always drinking fermented toddy; you sleep without purpose inside your house. You don't strive to meet me; you don't show any interest in me; you are mistakenly afraid of me.

My beauty, My beauty.

The men composed the following reply asserting that they no longer have any place to meet in secret with the young girls.

In reply to the speech of the women, I was not being hesitant in making
advances.

That is the truth, I always go to you, I am not hesitant, for you have grown
into a beautiful woman.

My heart yearns for you, you have grown into a beautiful woman.

I search for you, I always move towards you, I make a play towards you,
 because we are good (together), I make advances to you; but, there is no
 deserted place for us to meet together so that we can talk; there is no place
 for us to make plans in (our) happiness and desire;
 So, I am saying goodbye, this is the end for us----

You can just keep waiting!

These performances became increasingly rare in the 1950s and 60s. In 1969, a song festival with a skit was performed to celebrate the American landing on the moon. Each sex composed songs that had standard Sikaiana themes. The men taunted the Sikaiana women by describing the great beauty of a woman living on the moon who was far prettier than any Sikaiana woman. The men's song was accompanied by a skit in which they re-enacted the American moon landing. One man took the short-wave radio headphones and played the part of ground control. Another tied a rag doused in kerosene to a bird's tail and lit it to represent the rocket. The women composed a reply which included the taunt that this beautiful woman on the moon had no desire for the men of the earth (i.e., Sikaiana) who stole things.ⁱ

In late 1981, the Sikaiana performed a simplified version of the *puina* as part of the Christmas celebrations. In the evenings and on Sundays the atoll's men and women gathered in separate places to compose and practice songs. The songs were composed in secrecy so that each sex could surprise the opposite sex with the content of its songs which were always critical of the opposite sex. I attended the men's composition sessions, which often lasted late into the night.

The themes of the songs composed in 1981 centered on the incidents of the Christmas holiday of the previous year when many of the atoll's young men and women were expelled from church for having sexual affairs. The women's song complained that someone, presumably a boasting young man, had told everyone about his affair when it should have been kept secret. In another song, the women lamented that the young men did not properly care for their bodies, never shaving or washing. The men, who learned of this song's content, were prepared with a reply which boasted that today's young men only had to learn how to play the guitar to make all the Sikaiana women fall in love.

Although the songs were supposed to represent the perspective of the island's young men and women, they were composed by older men and women, and reflected their perspective.

The men's songs contained a backhanded slap at the young men by describing their sole ability at playing the guitar, an ability that most Sikaiana adults consider frivolous. Moreover, the men composed songs which teased specific women by name for their premarital affairs. Although the young men found the songs amusing, they were ambivalent about the songs. Some feared that after their lovers heard the songs, they would be angry and it might be harder to arrange meetings.

Many, although not all, of the atoll's mature men gathered to compose the songs. One of the oldest men present, about 70 years old, went over the verses to make certain they were organized according to proper Sikaiana form. Men younger than him did not seem to be certain about the proper form for the verses. Usually, someone suggested an idea for a song. Then all the men made suggestions to enliven it and offered words for different verses. Eventually, a kind of consensus would be reached about the best wording and phrases. Young single men attended the sessions but did not contribute very much in the composition, even though some of the songs were supposed to reflect their perspective on courtship and young women. Several songs which criticized the young women for their sexual affairs were composed by the fathers and older brothers of these girls.

Traditionally, songs do not mention names, but some of these songs mentioned certain young woman by name. When someone objected to these direct references to several young women, he was told that this was justified because the songs served to instruct the young women in proper behavior.

A man objected that one song criticizing a woman for stealing crops was untrue. But several men replied that they did not care about the veracity of the songs: they were being composed simply to make the women angry.

While the songs were still being composed and memorized by each sex in private meetings, there were constant boasts between males and females about the effectiveness of their songs in criticizing the opposite sex. These boasts took place whenever groups of men and women passed each other: along the way to church in the morning; on the way to work; in the evenings after eating. These boasts were often couched in metaphors of fighting, using both traditional idioms such as 'tucking in a loin cloth' (in former times a way of preparing for a spear fight), and more contemporary idioms such as shooting with a 'gun' and throwing a 'bomb'. After hearing part of the women's song, one well-informed Sikaiana man, who had been reading my news magazines, wryly commented that the women were still using Second World War weapons. He boasted that the men's songs were like the "neutron bomb," (at the time being considered by NATO for deployment in Europe) which would annihilate the women but leave the atoll's buildings unharmed.

This type of traditional song composition is becoming rare. Only older people know the proper conventions for composing traditional stanzas and tunes. These songs, however, are the ceremonial expression of the humorous, opposition between men and women which is a theme in present-day Sikaiana social life. Direct criticism between mature adults is comparatively rare. But at public meetings, there is a frequent banter of criticism between the men and women. This form of teasing and criticism also occurs in domestic settings when men and women often take sides against one another in their informal conversations and joking.

It often struck me that this ceremonial opposition between the sexes could be understood as way to channel hostility in a very small society in which people tried hard

to maintain harmony. Sober adults rarely directly criticize one another. Hostility or anger can be channeled through the division between men and women, either in the ceremonial composition of songs, or in the daily banter between men and women.

Gender Roles in a Changing World

In their daily work activities men and women are mutually supportive and interdependent. On ceremonial occasions they are opposed. In romance and love they are co-conspirators in creating special projects of heightened intimacy in a small and constantly observant society. The traditional *hina* relationship included both secret intimacy with a lover, and the general taunting of spouses in song.

The mutual dependency of men and women is continued in their present-day experiences with the modernity. Men on Sikaiana are oriented to the composition sea, travel, and interaction with outsiders. Women are oriented to the household, family and the gardens in the interior. This distinction is also expressed in the integration of new institutions into their social life. Men are more likely to be engaged in the institutions and offices, such as the government council and local court, that directly interact with the outside world. They are expected to be more involved in employment for wages and education. Women are more concerned with domestic activities. Earlier in this century men participated much more than women in wage labor which took them away from the atoll. At present, there are women living in Honiara who mainly keep house and look after children. Theirs is a new role for the Sikaiana: they are housewives.

Women behave in ways that support cultural continuity and maintenance. Although not necessarily "traditional," women participate more actively than the men in many activities which preserve an indigenous stability. Women attend church much more frequently and regularly than men. A few of the atoll's younger men never attend church, but all women attend it regularly. Women never question church authority, but a few men do. Generally, women are more reliable participants in community projects including the preparations for an important visitor, a feast, or a public workday. At the 1981 *puina*, the women's performance was far more polished and better rehearsed than that of the men. Women are more likely to work at preparing and transporting copra to the ship when it makes its monthly visit. They are much less likely to be taken to court for failing to work on the bi-weekly workdays. Women and children attend public feasts during the holidays; often men do not.

More than women, men are encouraged to participate in new institutions and activities which take them away from the atoll and involve them with non-Sikaiana. In comparison with men, women are still discouraged from continuing their formal education and they are less familiar with Western culture, although this is changing and, more and more, women are continuing their education, living in town, and working for wages.

The traditional division in work tasks between men and women is maintained in a new form in present-day Sikaiana society. Women support community continuity while men participate in the roles and institutions that articulate with the larger social

system beyond the community. The separation between men and women provides balance for maintaining a separate community that at the same time is involved with larger social and cultural systems.

ⁱ Sikaiana fairy tales have a standard character, Sina, who the Sikaiana say can be seen on the full moon as she weaves. I actually think I could see the image from Sikaiana that the Sikaiana people were talking about. Since I don't see her in my home in the US, I assume Sikaiana's geographic location provides a different angle for looking at the moon.