



We are not brown-palagi: Navigating cultural boundaries in Samoan research

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Abstract

Pasifika-led research in adopted homelands like Aotearoa (New Zealand) remains an area that needs attention. In particular, research frameworks that account for Pasifika knowledge must, at their core, embrace the values, languages, philosophies and cultural practices of those communities being researched. It is encouraging to see that Pasifika researchers and health professionals are continuing to take an active role in championing Pasifika heritage not only in Pasifika spaces, but extending this into mainstream arenas. It is for the purpose of adding to and supporting Pasifika indigenous knowledge that this article seeks to make a contribution. This article explores Pasifika health research within a Samoan context, with a specific focus on the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (UTA) as a research framework. Insights are drawn from the author's research engagement with a number of research projects (Ola Fa'autauta Lifewise Project, 1997; Meaalofa as a Counselling Approach, 2004; and, Ua tafea le tau'ofe, 2011-2015), and from research literature on Samoan cultural practices.

Keywords: Fa'asamoa, Uputāua Therapeutic Approach, Pasifika health research.

Acknowledgments. Pasifika-focused research underlies much effort to contribute to Pasifika people's wellbeing wherever they are located in the world. Significantly, cultural knowledge that is shared and explored is a gift that finds meaning and context within Pasifika communities where the *tufuga* (expertise) of these treasures reside. I am greatly humbled by the opportunity provided by the *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing* to make a small contribution to Samoan and Pasifika research understandings with this paper. As the Samoan proverb exclaims: *e vave taunu'u le malaga pe a tātou alo va'a fa'atasi* – our destiny is within sight when we paddle our canoe together.

Why bound me with a question when you don't care for an answer, why play for a pair when there is only one dancer (Vaiioleti, 2006)

Introduction

Pasifika¹ migration to Aotearoa New Zealand has increased steadily since the first wave of diaspora in the mid-1900s; their combined numbers equate to being the fourth largest major ethnic group after NZ-Europeans, Māori and Asian (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). The most recent national census in 2013 reported Samoans as the largest Pasifika ethnic group with a total population of 144,138 (or around 50%). The next group is Cook Islands Māori with 61,839 (or 20.9%), followed by Tongans (60,333 or 20.4%) and Niueans (23,883 or 8.1%; Statistics New Zealand, 2007 & 2013). The remainder of the Pacific Island groups have much lower numbers compared to the four groups mentioned above. The past 15-20 years of population data also reveals a greater increase in young Pasifika people than ever before, while their elders have also shown signs of increased longevity compared to their ancestors (see Figure 1). For instance, New Zealand-born Samoans (NZ-born) make up around 62.7% of the total Samoan population, while other Pasifika groups feature much higher numbers, such as NZ-born Niueans (78.9%) and Cook Island Māori (77.4%; Statistics New Zealand, 2013). As a group, the Samoan population consists of relatively young members (see Figure 1), with 38.1% (2006) and 36.5% (2013) identified as 15 years of age or younger, 60% of whom were born in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2007 & 2013).

Samoan health research has played an important role in influencing the way Samoan people have received support and care over the years (Tamasese, Waldegrave, Peteru, & Bush, 2005). Importantly, there is a growing recognition of the value of cultural-specific practices and approaches in the delivery of care specific to the needs of Samoan communities (Anae, 1997; Seiuli, 2013). While this is a step in the right direction, there is always room to add to the canon of Samoan health knowledge and practices. In this regard, this article advocates for

the recognition of specific cultural knowledge, values and practices that remain central to Samoan peoples' journey to wellbeing in places like New Zealand. The Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (UTA) is presented and examined as a Samoan derived framework that underpins Samoan cultural knowledge in health-related research. Here, the core of Samoan values, beliefs and traditional practices is highlighted and discussed in depth as being fundamental to researching how some Samoan men responded to death and bereavement experiences (Seiuli, 2015).

Samoans in New Zealand: Adaptive Cultural Identity

Identity as a function of cultural adaptability and social acceptance continues to present a myriad of challenges for some Samoan migrants, even after generations of citizenship in adopted homes like New Zealand. Another reason for the tension being experienced by migrants is the challenging “attempt to deal simultaneously with two (sometimes inconsistent, sometimes conflicting) cultural contexts” (Berry, 2012, p.96). In the context of Samoans living in New Zealand while seeking to maintain links with their families, church, and village in Samoa, there is often a visible tension of seeing themselves in one way in one location, and then having to consider themselves as something else in another setting. The practice of cultural maintenance for many New Zealand Samoans revolves around the code of *fa'aaloalo* (honour and respect) and family or church contributions, particularly to care for their parents or elderly family members (Bush, Chapman, Drummond, & Fagaloa, 2009; Culbertson, Agee, & Makasiale, 2009; Tiatia, 2007; Tupuola, 1998). For many, such obligations form a strong basis of their world as Samoans. Moreover, their identity plays a key role in understanding how they are to relate to other family members and to the wider Samoan

¹ The term Pasifika (Pacific) refers to Pacific Islanders or Pacific Islands people living in New Zealand. This categorisation is used in New Zealand contexts as a term of convenience to encompass the diverse range of people from the South Pacific (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'aoi, Taleni, & O'Regan, 2009). In this paper, the term Pasifika and Pacific will be used interchangeably.

community (Tamasese, Peteru, & Waldegrave, 1997).

Age group and median age						
Samoa and Pacific Peoples ethnic groups, and New Zealand population						
2006 and 2013 Censuses						
	Samoa		Pacific Peoples		NZ population	
	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013
Age group (years)	Percent					
Under 15	38.1	36.5	37.7	35.7	21.5	20.4
15–29	25.2	25.8	25.3	25.9	20.2	19.9
30–64	33.2	33.1	33.2	33.8	46.0	45.4
65 and over	3.5	4.6	3.8	4.7	12.3	14.3
Median age (years)						
Male	19.9	20.6	20.1	21.2	35.1	36.9
Female	21.9	22.4	22.1	22.9	36.7	38.9
Total	20.9	21.5	21.1	22.1	35.9	38.0

Source: Statistics New Zealand

Figure 1: Samoan Population: Comparison with other Pasifika ethnic groups and New Zealand data (Statistics New Zealand, 2013)

When multiple cultural contexts are involved in diasporic locations, particularly those that are different to a migrant's indigenous reference, it can cause them confusion as they try to survive, let alone to thrive in their new homes. For example, those elders who hold *matai* or chiefly positions within a family or village setting may experience a decline in their perceived status as New Zealanders or in their work environments, while their chiefly status may only be recognised within specifically defined cultural settings. Along this line of thought, Aponte, Rivers and Wohl (1995) explain that identity conflict is a major socio-psychological issue that many migrants face. Dr Foliaki, a Tongan psychiatrist, asserted that negative social and health outcomes become visibly evident when Pasifika migrants are unable to gain a reasonable economic foothold in their adopted countries (Medical Council of New Zealand, 2010). For many Samoans, a strong economic position enables them to provide for and maintain family and church obligations in New Zealand and Samoa.

Samoans are generally represented in the literature as belonging to a homogeneous entity (Macpherson, 2001). On the basis of this observation, it might also be assumed that most Samoans share commonalities within the realms

of “cultural universals” (Berry, 2012, p.96). That is, their cultural patterns or practices share common elements which can in turn shape their practices, behaviours and adaptive conditions. As a result, enculturation or the gradual acquisition of the characteristics of an adopted home like New Zealand, has a way of influencing Samoan migrant's experiences in response to ecological, socio-political, and cultural contexts, even with their shared identities. Additionally, the diaspora has led many to contend with readjusting their lifestyles, evolving language, and patterns of address in order to maintain their cultural identity and reformed practices in the new land. On the whole, many Samoans have adapted well, such as NZ-born Samoans, while others may still find it a challenging adjustment, particularly elderly Samoans.

As with any group, there will be a small percentage that will move elsewhere for employment or accommodation rather than remain in New Zealand (Va'a, 2001). Greater affiliation for many NZ-born Samoans to being New Zealand citizens plays an influential role in choosing to raise their families in their country of birth rather than migrating like their parents. In many instances, the identity of NZ-born Samoans consists of the relational and the

independent aspects of Samoa and the dominant western patterns, and of the collective and the individual (Anae, 1997; Tiatia, 2007). For this particular group, the tension between integration and separation becomes an important issue for consideration, where traditional connections and modern adaptation demand cooperation (Berry, 2012; Tiatia, 2012). Additionally, the structure of the *'āiga* (family network) in diasporic locations serves a vital function in the observation and maintenance of Samoan cultural rituals and customs, many of which are being attended to on a regular basis, whether in the home or the church. The essence of this way of living and relating finds connection to the familiar Samoan proverb: *o le ala i le pule o le tautua* – the pathway that leads to leadership begins with service. Family or cultural obligations such as those mentioned earlier are rendered to one's family, church or village community, particularly those that equate with the elevation of family honour, or provide support during *fa'alavelave* (family crisis), which can occur on a regular basis (Seiuli, 2015, Va'a, 2001). Just as vital is the relational space required of Samoan social organisations and cultural rituals. In this context, the proposed space that connects is the *va fealoaloa'i*, that is, the space of 'social relatedness' between people (Anae, 1997). Another similar space is referred to as *va tapuia*, which refers to the 'sacred divide' between people and all living things, inclusive of genealogical connections (Suali'i-Sauni, 2010). This space needs to be nurtured or *teu* in order to avoid any confusion or disharmony within family, church or village relationships (Pereira, 2011). The discussion of the UTA model in later parts of this paper will reference specific reasons why the relational space remains a vital aspect of engagement when researching Samoan people.

Fa'asamoa Imperatives

Attending to cultural protocols when engaging Samoan participants is a vital part of researching Samoan people. It is prudent to learn how to respond appropriately to participants of recognised status in Samoan society such as *matai* (chief), *faijeau* (minister) and *tuaā* (elder). Being Samoan, and, engaging in *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way of life) reinforces the concepts of *fa'aaloalo* (respect), *va fealoaloa'i* (relational connections), *alofa* (love/compassion) and *agaga fesoasoani*

(willingness to help; Mulitalo-Lautā, 2000; Seiuli, 2004; Tamasese, et al., 1997). Such characteristics continually inform and guide Samoan-led research from beginning to end. It is this type of covenant relationship that helps in the maintenance of many Samoan cultural practices in places like Samoa, New Zealand, and other parts of the world. It is also for this reason that many Samoan researchers seek to remain transparent and accountable to their communities wherever they are located.

Guided by the imperatives of being Samoan, as presented later by the UTA model, one must engage in health research methods that are grounded in Samoan cultural practices and protocols. For example, in a recent study on Samoan men's recovery from death impacts (see Seiuli, 2015), part of the methodological approach took into account the *va tapuia* (sacred space) as being central to the engagement with participants. That is, the *va tapuia* enabled a safe sacred space for validating and acknowledging participants' experiences, however difficult and challenging the retellings of these events were. The retelling also allowed participants to give meaning to their moments of grief, while enabling a greater understanding of how they responded to, and coped with, their time of grief as Samoan men. The *talanoa* (narrative dialogue) also helped some participants to connect their individual experiences with those of other Samoan men experiencing death impacts in similar ways. As participants of this study, these men were encouraged to interpret their grief experiences less as isolated and exclusive incidents, but as ones that might find similarity to other Samoan men. Many found this collective identification supportive because it helped them to see that they were not alone in their attempt to cope with, and make sense of their grief. The *talanoa* enabled some of the participants to share their experiences of struggles, challenges, and emergence from the impacts of death as Samoan men in Samoa and New Zealand.

What appears to be absent in Pacific-focused health models such as those mentioned earlier is the element of therapeutic consideration for participants and their communities in and through the process of engagement. It seems that for most part, the benefits of Pasifika-focused research are generally realised at the conclusion

of a project when findings or outcomes of research projects are finally presented (Seiuli, 2010 & 2013). This resulted in the author's attempt to develop an approach that considered therapeutic intentions as being central to the engagement processes while still allowing later benefits such as generation of better understandings of death and bereavement experiences among Samoan male participants. Hence, the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach aims not only to offer a culturally therapeutic perspective on researching Samoan communities impacted by death and bereavement experiences, but also to provide a strong element of Samoan culture and its adhering values to the engagement process (Seiuli, 2013). For this particular study, the research remained anchored in Samoan paradigms while also considering other patterns of influence in participants' contemporary locations. Engaging research participants in this manner not only ensured that they felt safe and supported to narrate their personal life experiences during death and grief, but also provided a *tulagavae* (cultural foundation) that was familiar; in fact, one would argue this as being crucial to Samoan indigenous reference.

Research Connections that Affirm Genealogy

Traditional research approaches encouraged obtaining information from communities being researched without existing prior connection, thereby removing any links that might influence or collude with the information being canvassed (Vaiotei, 2006). This way of accessing information for Samoan or Pasifika people is a foreign concept because relationships are the “foundation on which most Pacific activities are built” (Morrison, Vaiotei, & Vermeulen, 2002, as cited in Vaiotei, 2006, p.25). What Morrison and colleagues are emphasising is the importance of ongoing relationships between the researcher and the Pasifika community being researched, where prior connections are not only necessary, but in fact vital to any successful research engagement. In many ways, prior connection serves as a crucial part of a trusting relationship when it comes to Pasifika research processes. Consequently, a research approach that insists on engaging Samoan communities without taking time to build relationships and cultural connections may

lead to participants experiencing being treated as *brown-palagi* (European/western) in the process, rather than being intimately aligned with their indigenous values (see Seiuli, 1997 & 2015). This sentiment, of being perceived as *brown-palagi*, was expressed to the author by a church group who were involved in a quasi-experimental research in the early 1990s around healthy lifestyles among members of a number of Samoan churches involved. The conclusions reached from reviewing the processes undertaken for that particular study were that the “planning and implementation lacked any input of Samoan perspectives to healthy lifestyles” and the “delivery of the messages were from a palagi perspective rather than from a Samoan cultural view” (Seiuli, 1997, p.8-9). These conclusions may have in some way fuelled the feelings of *brown-palagi* as expressed by the participants of the study.

The vast Pasifika Ocean with the many inhabitants of its extensive archipelagos is a reminder of the variations that must inform Pasifika research perspectives (Health Research Council, 2004; Seiuli, 2015). For instance, central to Samoan-led research are unique protocols that must be considered central to the methodological approach when researching Samoan people. Vaiotei (2003) stresses further the value in “Pasifika research approaches as legitimate research methodologies for Pasifika issues” (p.13). There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ when it comes to addressing Pasifika perspectives (Kalavite, 2010; Lee-Hang, 2011; Tamasese, et al., 2005). Each Pacific nation requires the expression of its own unique perspective amidst shared commonalities and understandings with other Pasifika groups. The result is the development of Pasifika-focused approaches to research through the work of existing and emerging scholars and researchers. For instance, one of the earliest health and wellbeing approaches is the Fonofale model, created by Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann (see Mental Health Commission, 2001), which is used to examine the health and wellbeing of Samoan and Pasifika people through the conceptual framework of a Samoan *fale* (house). Some Pacific clinicians in health practice and research in New Zealand may consider the Fonofale model a pioneer approach grounded in Samoan concepts

in their work with Samoan communities. More recent additions of Pacific health models including the Lalaga model (Mulitalo-Lautā, 2000; social work focused model), Talanoa (Vaiotei, 2003; a pan-Pacific concept familiar to Samoan, Tonga and Fiji where oral tradition becomes the vehicle for ceremony and protocols in the process of relating), Tui Kakala (Thaman, 2002; Te Pou o Te Whakaaro Nui, 2010, p.17; health research model based on Tongan values of respect, reciprocity, sharing and collectivism), Seitapu (Te Pou, 2010; Pasifika mental health framework that considers the cultural, spiritual and relational environment and beliefs of Pasifika clients and their families) and other Pasifika models, are helpful for informing and guiding practice and research processes.

Pasifika ways of researching people and their traditions might be seen as opposed to those of dominant western research practices (Vaiotei, 2006). As mentioned earlier in this section, the importance of prior connections is a vital part of Pasifika research strategy. In fact, Vaiotei (2006) argues that having an existing interpersonal connection “removes the distance between the researcher and participant, and provides ... a human face they can relate to” (p.25). Aside from personal interaction, established relationships assist with credibility and reliability, not just in the professional or academic context but especially in the church and community space. In this realm of connection, researchers, participants and wider community are involved in a process of reciprocal knowledge sharing, which manifests shared hopes, dreams and aspirations in and throughout the process of engagement. In the Samoan context, such a connection is intrinsically linked to Samoan-held values of *fa'aaloalo* (deferring honour), where one is called upon to *teu ma tausī le vā*; that is, to nurture the relational space (Seiuli, 2015; Tamasese, et al., 1997). To neglect the reciprocation process or to assume *Palagi* (western) research patterns of non-association can lead to the relational space being disrespected, thereby dishonouring the reputation or dignity of those being asked to engage in this space (Seiuli, 2013). These existing, yet vital links speak to the heart of being Samoan and of engaging in Samoan-focused research that aligns with Samoan cultural foundations.

A Samoan proverb that accentuates further the notion of best research practice declares: *tau mai na o ni pua ula*, which calls for ‘drawing together of those elements that are valuable and useful, the best in all approaches’ that provide the best outcome for Samoan communities being researched (Tui Atua, 2009a). Some research on Pasifika communities in the past resulted in harmful and distrusting relationships between researchers and those researched (HRC, 2004). These unfortunate situations continue to influence the path for researching Pasifika communities. The challenge, therefore, is not to repeat the same mistakes, and to ensure not only that useful knowledge is gained and treasured, but, importantly, that beneficial outcomes are possible for those communities being researched. For this to happen, not only must Pasifika research be informed by good ethical practices, but it must also consider therapeutic objectives that align with Pasifika people’s wellbeing in diasporic locations like New Zealand (HRC, 2004).

By contrast, historical qualitative research into Samoan life was fundamentally research done through the method of observation. For example, Kirk and Miller (1986) point out that earlier qualitative observations depended heavily on “watching people in their own territory, interacting with them in their own language, and on their own terms” (1986, p.9). Such observations often resulted in misrepresentations and misinterpretations. It is on the basis of these past experiences that Tamasese and her colleagues (1997) emphasise that western models and methodologies “are repeatedly, by design and habit, significant interpreters of the realities of people’s lives” (p.8). This awareness of a dominant emphasis and reliance on western views traditionally employed in research may become a helpful guide, so we can avoid repeating the same mistakes. It is in this vein that more recent Samoan-focused research approaches, particularly those by Samoan researchers, have sought to weave into qualitative research principles the values and processes embedded in the culture of Samoan people, together with the recognition of their indigenous voices (see Anae, 1997; Seiuli 1997, 2004, & 2010; Suaalii-Sauni, 2010; Tamasese et.al, 1997). Such researchers have engaged with the subject matter

both as *outsiders* by assuming the role of the researcher, and as *insiders* where they are actively involved as members of the researched community. On this point, Sanga (2004) endorses that a crucial component of Pasifika research must involve the “active participation of insiders as being integral to indigenous Pasifika research” (cited in Watson, 2007, p.49). In other words, there exists great potential for Pacific researchers to explore the many experiences and multiple voices along the continuum of being insider/outsider researchers (Seiuli, 2015).

It has been reported that some quantitative researchers emphasise objectivity and detachment as an ideal and raise questions about whether insiders researching their own communities can be objective. On this point, it is vital to emphasise that many Samoan researchers are aware of the challenges and difficulties in being ‘insider/outsider’ researchers (see Anae, 1997; Seiuli, 2015). This does not necessarily indicate that having the status of a cultural insider leads to misinterpretation. Rather, one would argue as a Samoan researcher with experience of researching Samoan communities in New Zealand and Samoa that this way of engagement leads to a more relevant and grounded interpretation of the Samoan condition (see Seiuli, 1997, 2004, & 2015). As is common practice in qualitative research, many indigenous researchers work to be transparent in terms of their influence on the research process by critically examining their own viewpoint as an insider, as an outsider, and other positions in between (see Anae, 1998; Tamasese, et al; 2005). This transparency enables a richer and fuller representation of health culture and experiences amongst Samoan communities being researched, researchers included. Additionally, Samoan-led research projects also draw upon, and adapt, other qualitative research traditions to help inform the broader research orientations of their work (Seiuli, 2015). There is much that has been written about insider/outsider positions in research; however, this is not a key focus of this paper.

Methodology

The concepts presented in this article form part of a larger doctoral study conducted at the

University of Waikato on Samoan grieving practices in New Zealand, Samoa and California. The research documented the processes by which Samoan people, especially men, coped with death impacts. Narrative inquiry was considered the most appropriate qualitative approach to engage Samoan participants as they storied their lives through death and bereavement experiences. Engaging participants using this research method enabled them to explore the meanings of such challenging life events (Ballard, 2009; Buckle, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This approach is deemed to be particularly useful where there is a scarcity of information that considers the experiences and difficulties faced by a particular population (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006), which is the case for Samoan death and bereavement paradigms.

The uniqueness and centrality of Samoan cultural protocols being vital to the methodological approach was also an important consideration. Themes, practices and approaches common to Samoan people’s ways of life was acknowledged and validated (Seiuli, 2010 & 2013; Vaioleti, 2006). For example, important protocols of attending to and maintaining appropriate *tausi le va* (relational boundaries) with participants were adhered to at all times. It was also culturally imperative to maintain alertness when discussing subjects with sanctioned parameters such as the death of a family member. The outcome of this culturally compatible approach is that the data gathered became grounded in first-hand experiences, resulting in deeper insights into the meaning-making processes involved with death impacts. This process is a reflection that “lives are not static, fixed in place, but ceaselessly in the process of many journeys from one place to another” (Knowles, 2000, p.217). This way of examining the lives of Samoan people is another chapter of their *malaga* (journey), both in their diaspora from Samoa, and their developing identity as New Zealanders.

Empirical Engagements and Analysis

For the study, a total of 22 participants (19 men and three women) were interviewed, who identified themselves as Samoans and were aged 18 years and above. Of the 22 participants, five

lived in Samoa, four in California (USA) and 13 in New Zealand. The *fono fa'atalatalanoa* (narrative dialogue) involved an examination and documentation of important areas in each of the participant's lives such as: their family history and connections to Samoa; their *aiga* (family) relational networks; their specific involvement in traditional or contemporary family rituals; their spiritual practices; and their pathways of coping when a death impacted upon their family.

All of the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, thus providing written accounts of what the respondents said. The interview transcripts were then re-organised under key questions explored in the *talanoa* interview schedule, which allowed for participants' responses to be categorised and organised. Field notes were analysed in conjunction with the interview transcripts, and coded according to the relevant categories or themes. The outcome of this process resulted in the writing and analysis becoming closely connected, with many of the themes and findings emerging through the writing process. Thematic analysis is a common technique used to support a narrative analysis, thereby extending the focus of the analysis beyond the mere content of the narratives, and considers the wider aspects of significant action and events within the narrative (Riessman, 2008). The *fono fa'atalatalanoa* followed both a descriptive and exploratory pathway that enabled a deeper understanding of the *how* and *why* questions within the context of death rituals and mourning customs from these Samoan individuals and their families (Yin, 2012).

A Unique Samoan Approach to Research

The Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (UTA) as a Samoan-specific research framework is grounded in ancestral beginnings along the lines that Anae (1997) suggests in saying that “we are carrying out the genealogies of our ancestors ... over time and space” (p. 1). The UTA ultimately represents a *meaalofa* handed down by the *tuaā* (ancestors), and, for me, from my grandmother Uputāua Leiataualesā Seiuli after whose name this approach takes its title. Her *meaalofa*, which is reflective of her love and life, left a profound impact on those she cared for. Safety and security

were the hallmarks of her compassionate nature, providing a refuge in troublesome and challenging times (Seiuli, 2013). The UTA approach is an enduring legacy that engages in a culturally embracive manner. Furthermore, the UTA opens *le vā tapuia* (a consecrated space) to facilitate sensitive conversations in culturally specific ways with research participants.

The UTA uses the *Faletalimalō* as its conceptual framework (Figure 2), which is a modern Samoan meeting house specifically built for hosting and welcoming esteemed guests. Uputāua contains two Samoan words: *upu*, meaning a word or a saying, and *tāua*, which is a term used to indicate worth, wisdom, or sacredness. The combination of the two words (*upu, tāua*) can easily convey the concept of: “words of wisdom or sacred conversations” (Seiuli, 2013, p.43). Likewise, ‘approach’ in this context, suggests an advance towards a proposed space (Seiuli, 2013). UTA helps to remind Samoan researchers like me of the ongoing responsibility of researchers to pay attention to the various components of the *faletalimalō* framework throughout the engagement process with participants. Although the UTA approach finds correlation with the work of talking therapies (Te Pou, 2010), it recognises that the healing journey for Samoan people, such as those impacted by death and grief, may also encompass other pathways that lie beyond the therapeutic encounter.

The key components of the UTA are outlined next, highlighting their significance to *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way) and their role in Samoan-focused research. Many of the Samoan cultural values used to conceptualise the UTA framework are drawn together from familiar practices and beliefs. These values and beliefs are used in the UTA model to support the important work involved in researching Samoan people, whether in death and grief recovery, or in other health-related areas. It is for this purpose that the various concepts of the UTA are intimately connected to the life and daily practices of the Samoan people. Some of these concepts may find relevance for other Pasifika or indigenous settings and may well be used as a comparative tool.



Figure 2: Uputāna Therapeutic Approach (Seiuli, 2013)

Table 1: Components of UTA Approach (Seiuli, 2013)

UTA Component	Conceptual	Meaning	Usage and Representation
Roof	<i>Ola fa'aleagaga</i>	Spirituality	Provides a spiritual covering that encompasses both Christian beliefs and traditional Samoan spirituality.
Physical environment	<i>Tu ma aganu'u</i>	Culture and customs	Locates both traditional customs and more recent adaptations as a place of ancestral connection.
Foundation of the house	<i>Aiga potopoto</i>	Family and relationship networks	Serves as the foundation of collective identity and belonging for members.
Internal boundaries	<i>Le va fealoaloa'i</i>	Relational space	Safeguards individuals and families in their respective roles and responsibilities.
First pillar of wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'aleitino</i>	Physical wellbeing	Extends to include language, loyalty, service and representation.
Second pillar of wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'aleloto</i>	Social wellbeing	Extends to include collective responsibilities, reciprocity and cultural pride.
Third pillar of wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'alemafau</i>	Psychological wellbeing	Important to the domain of thinking, decision-making and leadership.
Fourth pillar of wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'alelagona</i>	Emotional wellbeing	Significant to addressing loss and grief, coping and recovery.
External boundaries	<i>Tausi tua'oi</i>	Community boundaries	Safeguards individuals and family relationships with the outside community, including healthcare and professionals.
First step of engagement	<i>Meaalofa</i>	Gifting	Emphasises the spirit of generosity and support that affirms relational bonds.
Second step of engagement	<i>Loto fa'atasia</i>	Co-collaboration	Intentional-sharing approach that enables working <i>with</i> people not <i>on</i> people.
Third step of engagement	<i>Mana ma mamalu</i>	Honour and dignity	Acknowledges indigenous expertise in healing and restorative journeys.

UTA Components and Conceptual Meaning

Ola fa'aleagaga or spiritual life represents the 'roof' which acts as the covering that endorses safety and protection. Since the arrival of Christianity, Samoa adopted its teachings and values (Taule'ale'ausumai, 1997; Va'a, 2001), and this continues to a greater extent today, even in diasporic locations. Nevertheless, Samoan people also continue to maintain an understanding and practice of spirituality connected to their ancestral past (Suaalii-Sauni, Tuagalu, Kirifi, & Fuamatu, 2008). For instance, spiritual connections are particularly called upon with the re-enactment of death chants called *lagi*, which are often visibly demonstrated by village *tūlafale* (orator chiefs) when a *tamāli'i* (high chief) passes away. Such divine connections remain a significant aspect of Samoan life, even in the present day. More recent researches on Samoan life tended to focus predominantly on the role of Christianity as the primary form of spirituality among Samoan people. However, this component of the UTA model advocates that one must also explore the role of traditional spirituality and its current role in Samoan a participant's life.

Tu ma aganu'u fa'asamoa, as represented by the land, stands for the practice and maintenance of *fa'asamoa* (Samoan way) and its values. The firm foundation that upholds the 'āiga, even more so in adopted homes like New Zealand is *fa'asamoa*, serving as a reminder of the place of belonging to one's ancestral connections and birthplace. The fluidity of *fa'asamoa* culture gives space for accessing both traditional and contemporary knowledge that supports Samoans in their development, and on their healing journeys. This therefore continues as a living entity, meaningfully shaping Samoan identity wherever Samoans are situated. Because culture plays a vital role in the lives of many Samoan people, researchers needs to be informed about specific protocols that assists them in the engagement process. In this regard, having a 'cultural advisory' group is key to working sensitively with Samoan participants.

'*Aiga potopoto* represents family and relational networks. In many adopted localities, consideration must be taken of the complexities

of cultural variants that may exist within each and every family group. In places like New Zealand, the formation of many Samoan families may contain traces of the traditional as well as a diversity of other ethnic mixes. Significantly, belonging to a family structure that is strong, nurturing or communal may not be the reality for all Samoans (Samu & Suaalii-Sauni, 2009). To a large extent, the '*āiga potopoto*, together with the church, have become places where Samoan identity is being nurtured, and where roles and responsibilities, as well as learning and observing may find their purpose. For research purposes, the role that family plays in the life of individuals cannot be underestimated. Hence, being mindful of familial relationships and kin networks can serve as another layer of support for participants.

Le vā fealoaloa'i represents the first boundary in the relational space as discussed in earlier sections of this paper. These internal boundaries help the family maintain safe limits both internally and externally. A common Samoan expression declares *ia teu le vā* (nurture the relational space) which speaks to the role of safeguarding family relationships. In regards to kin connections, one must always 'nurture and take care' of the relational space within the family first and foremost, followed by that of the wider Samoan community such as the church or village (Seiuli, 2013). Family and community relationships are the essence of Samoan social etiquette, hence the constant need to guard it. Failure to take care of the *va* in research has invariably led to the trampling of the *mana* (sacredness) of people, leading to refusal to participate further until the space is healed (Seiuli, 2015). If the research space is deemed unsafe, the prospect of achieving beneficial outcomes can be severely hampered for all involved in a research project.

Ola fa'aletino (physical wellbeing) represents the first *pillar of wellbeing*. Samoan people are easily recognizable for their sense of loyalty, their supportive community and unique cultural surroundings. The physical pillar of wellbeing recognises and values reciprocity, where many Samoans find their connections to the larger tapestry of life: all are sacred and related (Morice, 2006). The physical wellbeing of any Samoan participant often serves as the starting point for examining their holistic health. Other areas of interest that connects to the physical health may

include their living status, employment, church connections and so on. Examining these areas in research allows for a greater understanding of the nature and extent of Samoan participants' wellbeing under this component of the UTA framework.

Ola fa'aleloto (social wellbeing) is represented by the second pillar. The Samoan social self is often visible in people's friendly, obliging, warm, and cheerful personas. Significantly, collectivity and shared responsibilities call members to family loyalty in their acts of *tautua* (service), not independently, but as a close unit that supports individuals whenever and wherever the need exists. For many, their extended social structure, with its adhering patterns of support, provides the stabilising force when impacted by *fa'alavelave* (crisis) occasions – a regular occurrence in many Samoan people's lives. A Samoan proverb that describes this relationship well declares: *o le tagata ma ona fa'asinomaga* – each person is appointed their duties and responsibilities. Examining the various roles that social connection has in the lives of participants can generate greater understanding of the influence that their wider networks and communities play in their lives.

Ola fa'alemafau (psychological wellbeing) represents the third pillar, which aligns with the thinking and decision-making processes. Psychological wellness is a crucial component in the process of adapting and coping with life situations with which one is confronted from time to time. As a senior counsellor in the Pacific community, this area of psychological wellbeing is often ignored or neglected altogether. It needs to be an area that is the focus of attention by health researchers in particular if Samoan people, particularly young people, are to attain restorative health (Seiuli, 2013 & 2015). In health research, particularly those that focuses on mental health, this component is vital as a way to help researchers gather information relating to the way Samoans cope with life stressors such as those discussed in earlier parts of this paper. Although psychological wellbeing is an area that is generally absent in much of the literature on Samoan health, this area needs to be brought to the fore if Samoan communities in the future are to achieve optimum health.

Ola fa'alelagona (emotional wellbeing) is the fourth pillar of wellbeing. Emotional wellbeing is central to Samoan personhood, but one that is rarely acknowledged or given much attention. It is well documented (Tamasese, et al., 1997; Tui Atua, 2006 & 2009b) that a significant factor contributing to stress in Samoan communities is the struggle for economic survival whilst balancing traditional responsibilities such as *fa'alavelave* obligations. As a result, *fa'alavelave* is an enormous “burden” (Maiava, 2001, p. 132), and many find such obligatory duties difficult to maintain, especially given their own economic and family struggles to make ends meet. Moreover, when communication within a family unit is hampered, the likelihood of healthy emotional development and security can be disrupted or weakened. The result of unchecked emotional turmoil, particularly among younger Samoans, can be devastating (see Anae, 1997; Tiatia, 2012). Similar to the psychological aspect of the UTA framework, researchers need to explore the emotional wellbeing component with Samoan participants especially given the weighty responsibilities many of them and their families may face from time-to-time.

Tausi tua'oi (external boundary) provides a secondary boundary for the 'āiga. The *tua'oi* is an extension of the internal boundaries that needs on-going care, similar to those being observed within relational connections. Taking care of *tua'oi* relationships ensures that harmony is achieved between the wider community and the researcher, and this process also serves as the forum where negotiating desired outcomes, specific timeframes, *meaalofa* (gifts, reimbursements, resources, food, etc.), accountabilities, and responsibilities can take place (Seiuli, 2013). As researchers, taking care of this external boundary helps to avoid mistakes that were made in the past when researching Samoan communities, such as unintentionally trampling on participant dignity and that of their community (Seiuli, 1997).

Meaalofa (the gifting process) is the first of the three *steps of engagement*. Prior to entering into the *falelimalō*, which is symbolic of the sanctity of the 'āiga, *meaalofa* is a reminder that the gift of healing and restorative practices is inherent within the relational bonds that are formed between Samoan families, their communities and

health researchers. In this space of engagement, *meaalofa* manifests itself in acts of generosity with knowledge, time, resources, and reciprocal support (Seiuli, 2004; Turner-Tupou, 2007). To many Samoan people, the act of *alofa* (love/compassion) remains the cornerstone of fa'asamoa (Mulitalo-Lautā, 2000; Va'a, 2001) and its adhering values. This value must be a prominent part of any health research process involving Samoan participants because generosity is a hallmark of Samoan reciprocal culture (Seiuli, 2013). In many relational contexts, not only is meaalofa an imperative practice, it is generally expected, so it pays well for one to be prepared in advance.

Loto fa'atasia (the collaborative approach) is represented by the second step. *Loto fa'atasia* can be literally translated as 'to be of one heart or one soul' (Seiuli, 2013), thereby inviting into research processes intentional co-collaboration (see White & Epston, 1990) between researchers and the Samoan community being researched. Intentional collaboration is a 'we' approach; one that is relational and community-based, not isolated or individuated. For those seeking to engage in Samoan-focused research with Samoan participants, co-collaboration is focused on research engagement *with* people, not *on* people. Research that is carried out in a collaborative manner critically acknowledges Samoan expertise and wisdom in their lives and healing journeys. Co-collaboration allows the voice of those Samoan communities being researched to become the prominent voice in the presentation of their indigenous cultural knowledge alongside that of the researcher or research team.

Mana ma mamalu (maintaining honour and dignity), as represented by the third and final step of engagement, reminds researchers of the role that honour and dignity plays in Samoan people's lives. When considering the context of honour and dignity, one must remember to enter into the sanctity of participants' lives and of their 'āiga in a spirit of humility. Here, it is advisable for the research to learn how to defer to, honour and respect participants, thereby acknowledging them as *tufuga* (experts) in their life journeys. Maintaining honour and dignity is an intentional and purposeful therapeutic value that supports the expressed life narratives of individual participants, as well as their 'āiga and community

of support. For researchers, this reciprocal process allows them and their participants to honour each other throughout all of the process involved in Samoan-focused research.

The components of the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach discussed in this section serve as a reference guide for some of the cultural protocols and practices that one must attend to when researching Samoan communities. The UTA framework also serves to remind those interested in researching Samoan communities of their responsibility to *teu le vā* – to take care of the relationship with participants and their families, and the wider Samoan community.

Concluding Thoughts

This paper discusses the UTA model as an alternative framework to Samoan health research, one that is underpinned by the values and practices of Samoan or fa'asamoa. As significant as this approach is towards engaging Samoan knowledge in the process, the UTA does not represent the only voice on Samoan health research. There is room to add valuable contributions to research approaches that are Samoan-focused and sensitive to Samoan people overall. This paper explores the usefulness of the UTA approach particularly when researching Samoan men impacted by death and grief experiences. The various components provided by the UTA allow room to explore the richness that resides in cultural practices that must be accounted for when researching Samoans in New Zealand, Samoa, and wherever they are located. Additionally, there may well be some level of applicability of parts of the UTA framework to other Pasifika settings; however, it is for those other Pasifika cultures to decide which parts may be useful and which parts may not. Likewise, other Samoan researchers may find limitations with the UTA model, and may add other Samoan or Pasifika-focused methodologies to make this approach relevant to their target audiences. That is for them to decide. Nevertheless, the value that this approach brings to Samoan-focused research, as well as its encouragement of researchers towards cultural sensitivity when engaging Samoan people in research adds new insights to the canon. *Soifua ma ia manuia!*

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