

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/>

Research Commons at the University of Waikato

Copyright Statement:

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

The thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

Teu le vā- Cultivating the space between
An investigation into Samoan-Palagi intimate partner
relationships

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of

Masters in Psychology

at
The University of Waikato

by
HANNAH FINNIGAN



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2017

Abstract

This thesis investigates how Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships flourish. Key areas of investigation include important factors influencing participants' relationships, what flourishing means to participants, how the flourishing of each partner is supported by the relationship, and how partners negotiate the *vā fealoaloa'i* (relational space) between them. A qualitative research design was used to examine the lived experiences of two Samoan-Palagi couples. The theoretical framework for this research was informed by the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach, *fono fa'atalatalanoa* (narrative dialogue) and positioning myself as a naïve learner in the research. Data collection involved multiple interviews, first with both partners of each couple and then a follow-up interview with each individual. The information shared in these interviews is presented in two case studies. The findings of this research advocate for flourishing relationships as a process, and suggest that by looking after the relational space and constantly attending to the relationship, it may flourish and grow. The relational space does not refer to a single domain, but is holistic and addresses each partner in their totality. Flourishing, for participants, involves the development of interdependence by navigating a continuum of individual and collective needs, in order to support the relationship. This research provides insight into how *vā fealoaloa'i* (the relational space) and *teu le vā* (tending to/looking after this space) can operate in intimate partner relationships.

Fa'afetai tele lava

My participants, I am humbled by the generosity of your friendship, time, and beautiful stories. I am forever grateful for your courage to share and engage in this discussion. Thank you also for your graciousness as I navigate the domain of research as a beginner, with all the laughs and learning along the way.

My supervisors, Dr Byron Seiuli and Dr Bridgette Masters-Awatere, I am beyond grateful to have your guidance. Thanks for providing the space for me to learn, my growth has been exponential through this project. Byron, thanks for your tremendous levels of graciousness in my naivety, encouragement throughout the journey and your acceptance of my curiosity.

To Jillene and Judy, thanks for supporting me to give this work the care it deserved.

I sincerely acknowledge the scholarships awarded to me during my research project. The Maori & Psychology Research Unit Research Graduate Scholarship, The University of Waikato Master's Thesis Award, and a Master Degree Study Award from the Health Research Council. Thank you for the support to travel and complete this project.

To the village that surrounds me, there was never a moment in this thesis-forming journey that I could have done this alone. It is the beautiful people in my life who have kept me going and made this happen. It has been a journey in vulnerability and knowing my need for guidance and support, I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn just how well supported I am.

To my family, Mama, Papa, Bex, Izy, Lidy, Tay and Lukie, you have taught me most and make me want to pursue relationships that flourish.

This is for you.

Uncle Kieren, for teaching me the honour of research. You have always had an uncanny knack for being there at the moments I need it the very most. You and Auntie Ngaire have been such a huge support in this journey for me. You have

started something in our family, and it is my prayer that your legacy of humble curiosity continues long beyond me.

The community of Te Rautini, thank you for your support of everything that I am. I am so thankful for a place to belong and a safe harbour in the journey to know reconciliation.

To my life friends who hugged out my tears, listened to my heart and never stopped believing I could do this. You teach me just how powerful friendship can be. Ajay, thanks for letting me talk it out and showing me how it should have been done all along. Thanks Beka and Bidy, for the coffee, hugs, and pats on the back no matter how far away you ended up. Ruthie and Pete thanks for keeping me off the streets, literally, and running alongside me all of the way. Thanks Dee, Fozzie and Tom for giving me a place to laugh and refuel.

Benjamin, you give me the greatest amount of hope for the experience of flourishing. Loving you has set me free. Truth is it's you who made me really believe this and it's no exaggeration to say I would have never finished this without you. I love you.

Most importantly, Agaga Paia, thanks for giving me a dream.

It's been a wild ride, and I'm so grateful for every bump and blind corner along the way. May you continue to complete the good work in me. Bring on our next adventure.

Afio mai Agaga Paia

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Fa’afetai tele lava	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures.....	vii
Glossary.....	viii
Prologue	1
Chapter One: Introduction	
Thesis outline: Mapping the journey ahead	4
Literature Review	6
From Aristotle to Gottman: Studies on flourishing.....	6
From Samoa to New Zealand: Samoan-Palagi relationships	12
Cross-cultural relationships.....	21
Summary	23
Chapter Two: Methodology	24
Establishing an appropriate method	24
Ethical considerations	26
Privacy/confidentiality	26
Consent.....	26
Cultural safety	26
Participants	28
Case studies	29
Data collection	31
Data analysis	36
Limitations	39
Exiting the research.....	41
Summary	42
Chapter Three: Case Study 1.....	43
Background	43
Faith	45
A cord that is not quickly broken; a strong foundation	45

With God intertwined in our lives; A community through faith.....	50
The three-stranded cord that links the past to the future	51
Dreams	53
Dreaming as a problem-solving strategy	54
The dream of family	55
The greater dream	57
Summary	58
Chapter Four: Case study 2	60
Background	60
Flourishing is being healthy; flourishing is happy kids	61
Teu le vā: protecting the family space	62
Teu le vā; nurturing the sacred space	65
Flourishing is good conversation	67
Good conversations happen face-to-face	68
Good conversations involve non-defensive listening.....	69
Good conversations involve self-disclosure.....	71
Good conversations are edited	74
Summary	75
Chapter Five: Discussion.....	77
Overview of the discoveries from each thesis chapter.....	77
How do Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships flourish?.....	79
Teu le vā.....	80
Implications and future directions.....	89
Conclusions and final reflection.....	91
References	94
Appendix 1: Uputāua Therapeutic Approach.....	103
UTA Components: Conceptual meaning and usage	104
Appendix 2: Information Sheet	106
Appendix 3: Consent form	108

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Sternberg's triangle as drawn by Oord (2007)</i>	9
<i>Figure 2: Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (Seiuli, 2013)</i>	15

Glossary

The glossary in this section is set according to the Samoan alphabet.

A, E, I, O, U, F, G, L, M, N, P, S, T, V, H, K, R

<i>‘āiga</i>	Member of the nuclear and extended family	<i>le vā tapuia</i>	A sacred space to relate
<i>alofa</i>	Love, affection, charity	<i>loto fa’atasia</i>	Collaborative approach
<i>‘ie lavalava</i>	sarong	<i>malaga fai faiva</i>	Fishing journey
<i>‘ifoga</i>	Traditional ceremony of forgiveness	<i>mamalu</i>	dignity, prestige, sacred
<i>ola fa’aletino</i>	Physical wellbeing	<i>mana</i>	power, authority, dignity
<i>ola fa’aleagaga</i>	spiritually	<i>matai</i>	chief
<i>ola fa’alemafaufau</i>	Psychological wellbeing	<i>meaalofa</i>	a gift, a treasure
<i>ola fa’alelagona</i>	Emotional wellbeing	<i>palagi</i>	Westerner or European
<i>Fa’aloalo</i>	Deference, respect, politeness	<i>solu</i>	trample upon
<i>fa’afetai lava</i>	Thank you	<i>Talofa lava</i>	welcome, formal gesture of greetings
<i>fa’alavelave</i>	crisis or emergencies /giving out of concern	<i>tausi tua’oi</i>	external boundaries
<i>fa’asamoa</i>	Samoan way of life	<i>tausi le vā</i>	honouring relational spaces
<i>fa’atalatalanoa</i>	Narrative dialogue	<i>tautua</i>	service
<i>Faifeau</i>	Church minister or pastor	<i>tua’oi</i>	boundaries
<i>faletalimalo</i>	House for welcoming and hosting guests	<i>vā fealoaloa’i</i>	relational space
<i>feagaiga</i>	Covenant or code		

Source: Adapted from (Seiuli, 2015)

Prologue

E poto le tautai ae sese le atu i ama

The expert fisherman may have all the skills, but there's always the possibility of mistakes.

The above Samoan proverbial expression derives its meaning from the tasks involved with a fishing expedition, particularly the important role of the master fisherman. The proverb acknowledges that in spite of all the preparations, navigational skills, perceived knowledge and care taken to ensure a successful fishing journey; a master fisherman will at times fall short or make mistakes.

As I introduce my research journey I refer to the above proverb. My preparation for this research journey began through relationships developed while in Samoa as a volunteer. I am Palagi and do not have immediate familial connections to Samoa. Instead, this topic derived from relationships forged through that experience and a resulting academic interest. To contextualise my journey and begin the presentation of research, I share my story.

In 2013 I travelled with some friends to spend a month in Samoa. The brightly coloured houses, sticky heat and beautiful people welcomed me warmly. I am still surprised at how much arriving created a feeling of familiarity and being home.

For that month, I volunteered in Apia with a non-profit organisation that worked with victims of physical and sexual abuse. Although I had been educated on the significance of domestic violence as a global issue (Tauasosi, 2010), it was through the organisation I volunteered with that I first learnt about the prevalence of domestic violence throughout Samoa. Upon learning of my psychological training, the organisation's director became interested in the contribution this might make to the organisation's attempts to address domestic violence in their community. Many questions were asked that I did not have answers for, but it ignited in me an interest that fuelled postgraduate study and the development of this research topic.

In particular, as I investigated factors that have influenced the development of domestic violence, I became increasingly aware of the lack of literature that might counteract it and support people in developing healthy relationships. Although my investigations and academic journey have allowed me to understand more about violent relationships, this gave me no advantage in understanding what might be necessary for a healthy intimate partner relationship. So began the investigation into how intimate partner relationships might become healthy, drawing from Samoan-Palagi traditions.

My experience and knowledge of *fa'asamoa* (Samoan way of life) is limited and only just beginning to develop. I am also only a beginning researcher. Although I prepared and sought continuous guidance in navigating the cross-cultural space, my novice understanding of Samoan culture may mean that I made some mistakes. Like the fisherman, despite preparation and care throughout this research journey, at times I will have fallen short. Thus before I begin the presentation of my thesis, I humbly seek grace from my participants and from Samoan audiences who may read this thesis, in my attempt to present a perspective of what flourishing relationships mean for interracial Samoan-Palagi couples.

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis asks “*How do relationships flourish, specifically in Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships?*” This research project represents a journey similar to the fishing expedition introduced in the prologue. My research journey began in Samoa, where the research topic was initially developed, seeking to investigate how Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships can provide insight into a greater understanding of flourishing relationships (Anae, 2010). This research journey and the literature reviewed are grounded in two ways; the first is my investigation into flourishing relationships, and the second considers cross-cultural interactions between Samoan and Palagi peoples. Although the literature on flourishing relationships is growing (Caughlin & Huston, 2010) there is limited research on how cross-cultural relationships may flourish, particularly for Samoan-Palagi relationships. I was interested both in how investigating flourishing relationships might enhance the scholarship on Samoan-Palagi interactions and conversely, how a cross-cultural perspective might inform the literature on flourishing relationships. In particular, this research looks at Samoan cultural concepts that are relevant to relationships but have not yet been explored in the context of intimate partner relationships.

As I investigated how cross-cultural relationships flourish, I also became aware of navigating unfamiliar cross-cultural spaces during the research process. As a result, my primary concern was to act in culturally appropriate ways and to look after this cross-cultural space, usually referred to by Samoans as *teu le vā*. I explore this Samoan cultural concept in greater detail later in this thesis. The research provided many opportunities for me as a *Palagi* (westerner or European) to learn from my participants by assuming the role of a curious learner rather than a research expert. The concept of the curious learner draws from the theoretical principles of narrative therapy, acknowledging one’s limitations as a learner while also creating a therapeutic space for the investigation of important research topics (Lee & Roth, 2004). As a learner, I assume a position of not-knowing, hence curiosity, allowing my participants to share their own narratives and to attribute their own meaning to these stories. This way of engaging participants also encourages them to explore their stories as the experts and primary interpreters of

their lived experience (Freedman & Combs, 1996). My position as curious learner builds on the work of O'Regan (2006) as a Palagi researcher in Samoa. More discussion of this position is provided in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Key questions were developed to guide my investigation into Samoan-Palagi flourishing relationships:

1. What factors are important to my participants' relationships? (e.g *āiga*/family, history, other relationships, church, connection to culture)
2. What does flourishing mean to participants? What about in relationships?
3. How is the flourishing/wellbeing of each partner supported in their relationship? How do the partners in the relationship negotiate the space between (*vā fealoaloa 'i*) partners?
4. What are some of the difficulties they have faced in their relationship and how have they overcome these?
5. How has the relationship developed or changed over time?

Thesis outline: Mapping the journey ahead

Chapter One presents the literature reviewed for this research project. In this chapter, I acknowledge the two key areas of the literature reviewed and where they intersect to support the value of this research project. Firstly, I examine and review the concept of flourishing, with a particular focus on flourishing intimate partner relationships. Secondly, I explore and discuss the sociocultural background in which my two case studies find their contextual meaning. Here, historical interactions between Samoan-Palagi until recent periods are summarised, highlighting relevant interactions that contribute to a greater understanding of Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships in contemporary New Zealand.

Chapter Two examines the theoretical and practical approaches used in this research. In particular, I discuss the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (UTA) (Seiuli, 2013) as the most appropriate Samoan-focused methodological approach to data collection for my research. An important aspect of the methodology chapter includes the steps I took to care for the cross-cultural space when I

engaged my participants in interviews. The processes for semi-structured interviews and analysis of the data that formed the case studies are also discussed in this chapter. Thematic analysis is presented as a key method of analysis in the case studies of this research.

Chapters Three and Four present my key findings in the form of case studies. Case study one introduces Fetu and Mira, whose strong Christian faith, alongside their individual and family dreams, make a key contribution to their flourishing inter-racial marriage. Their commitment to respecting and complementing their differences is linked to concepts of *feagaiga* (covenant relationship), a recurrent theme in this chapter.

Chapter Four presents Leo and Maia's case study, with the key theme of *teu le vā*, which for them occurs through constant and respectful communication. In this case study, *teu le vā* processes are represented as being deeply embedded in the family space that enables their relationship to flourish.

Chapter Five presents a discussion of relevant findings and insights gained from this cross-cultural research. First, the findings from the case studies in regard to participants' experiences of what constitutes a flourishing relationship are presented. The persistent theme across both studies, *teu le vā* is discussed in depth. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research implications and ideas for future research.

Literature Review

This section provides a review of the literature that informed the overall focus taken in this research. As indicated in my introduction chapter, there are two key areas that relate to this research project. Firstly, flourishing has been seen as a way of examining human potential since the time of Aristotle. Since then, the understanding of flourishing relationships has developed and progressed through many decades of research. Secondly, this thesis connects the exploration of research on flourishing to Samoan-Palagi encounters. The first encounters between Samoan and Palagi peoples began in earnest with missionary journeys to the Pacific in the 1800s (Tauasosi, 2010). In the following century, the Treaty of Friendship signed between Samoa and New Zealand resulted in many Samoans migrating to New Zealand (Lilomaiaava-Doktor, 2009). From then to now, Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships have become increasingly common both in New Zealand and in Samoa. This research project arose from the author's interest in how the scholarly exploration of both flourishing relationships and interracial relationships might intersect to provide development in each domain, extending understandings of how Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships may flourish, with a particular focus on the New Zealand context.

From Aristotle to Gottman: Studies on flourishing

Flourishing is described as a positive psychological construct, a measure of overall life well-being, and consistent with the broader idea of happiness (Keyes, 2002). The importance of human flourishing is often acknowledged as being first explored by Aristotle, who believed that all people had the inherent potential to flourish (Youngkins, 2010). Flourishing, also referred to as *telos*, occurred when a person was doing what they ought to do, alongside doing what they wanted to do. In more recent times, human flourishing has become a key focus in the area of positive psychology. Prioritising prevention over treatment, the principles of positive psychology involve building hope, optimism and courage to shield against psychological illness or dysfunction (Entwistle & Moroney, 2011). Hodgetts, Stolte, and Rua (2016) argue that in a similar way to health, it is the obligation of society to provide the resources and conditions that promote the flourishing of its members. They insist that awareness of the ways in which the

flourishing of communities can be supported is an obligation for all psychologists in New Zealand.

With regard to flourishing, Keyes (2002) emphasized that eradicating illness and disorder by itself will not ensure flourishing. Keyes states further that mental health is seen as ranging from the absence of mental health (languishing) to optimal mental health (flourishing). Languishing is not necessarily a state of mental illness but of living with despair or the absence of positive emotions toward life. According to Keyes (2002), mental health is a complete state in which there is both the absence of mental illness and the presence of positive emotion or flourishing.

In the Māori world, Durie (2015) offers the concepts of *Mauri noho* and *Mauri ora* as another way of conceptualising mental health factors that align with languishing or flourishing in the New Zealand context. In *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world), *mauri* is the vitality or energy of a whole person, in terms of spirit, mind, body, and relationships. *Mauri noho* is languishing, while *Mauri ora* is flourishing. *Mauri ora* involves experiencing an enlightened spirit, an alert and inquisitive mind, a fit and pain-free body and engagement in relationships that nurture and are mutually beneficial (Durie, 2015). Durie's emphasis on the importance of mutually beneficial and nurturing relationships position relational flourishing as a component of overall flourishing.

In a similar approach to health and flourishing, Samoan models of health reiterate this holistic notion of health and wellbeing. One example of a Samoan model of health is the *Fonofale* model (Pulotu-Endermann, 2009) developed through research with groups of Samoans, Cook Islanders, Tongans, Niueans, Tokelauans and Fijians sharing their beliefs and values of health. According to Pulotu-Endermann (2009), these ethnic groups shared important views on aspects such as family, culture, and spirituality. A *fale* or house is used to illustrate a way of conceptualizing health for Pacific people. In the metaphor of the *fale* the foundation or floor, posts and roof are incorporated in a circle to represent continuity and holistic ideas of health. The floor represents the family, which may include nuclear and extended family and is the basis of social organisation. Genealogy and ties to the land and sea are included here as a basis for health. The

roof is culture, constantly shifting and evolving, providing shelter for the family throughout life. Four *pou* (posts) connect the family and culture, via mental, physical, spiritual and ‘other’ dimensions. Environment, time and context are also included as factors that cocoon the *fale* and affect each other and health and wellbeing overall. Embedded within the Samoan view of health is a strong emphasis on relationships and relational health. The prominence of healthy relationships for overall flourishing strengthens the need for this investigation into how relationships may flourish.

Flourishing relationships

The study of flourishing relationships is critical for understanding flourishing of people overall. Flourishing relationships are not only important as an element of an individual’s social experience but are also acknowledged as an important focus for investigation on their own. One of the major themes in positive psychology suggests that close relationships are essential to well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2000). As previously mentioned in Durie’s discussion of *Mauri ora*, healthy relationships form an essential element of overall flourishing (Durie, 2015). In Samoan models of health, social relationships are an essential element of health and wellbeing (Pulotu-Endermann, 2009; Seiuli, 2012). *Fa’asamoa* also supports the notion of relationships as an entity needing nurture. *Vā fealoaloa’i* is the sacred space between people that needs to be tended and cared for so that it may also flourish (Anae, 2010; Mila-Schaaf, 2006).

Many theories have been developed to analyse the complex and extended process of individuals coming together to build a healthy relationship. Research on flourishing relationships began in the 1960s and 1970s (Caughlin & Huston, 2010) with a focus on attraction and the development of intimacy and commitment. Initially, research focused on experiments that explored attraction between strangers in a controlled setting; the priority was understanding how and what formed relationships. In the 1970s, the focus extended to understanding what was needed to build intimacy in relationships. A key concept that emerged was the importance of responsiveness, which related to how people believe their partner attends to their needs, goals and values. Caughlin and Huston (2010) explain that responsiveness is demonstrated in ways in which one partner accommodates the other beyond their own immediate interests. Partners who

practice responsiveness regularly describe the actions of the other as an attitude of caring and are ultimately argued to develop in levels of interdependence. According to Kelley (1979) Interdependence theory suggests that individuals develop a positive intimate relationship as a result of a transformed motivational pattern of interdependence. Instead of focusing on their individual self-interests, partners act together in ways to support their mutual interests (Kelley, 1979). The development of mutual interests and interdependence is drawn upon to discuss what a flourishing looks like in a relationship in later chapters.

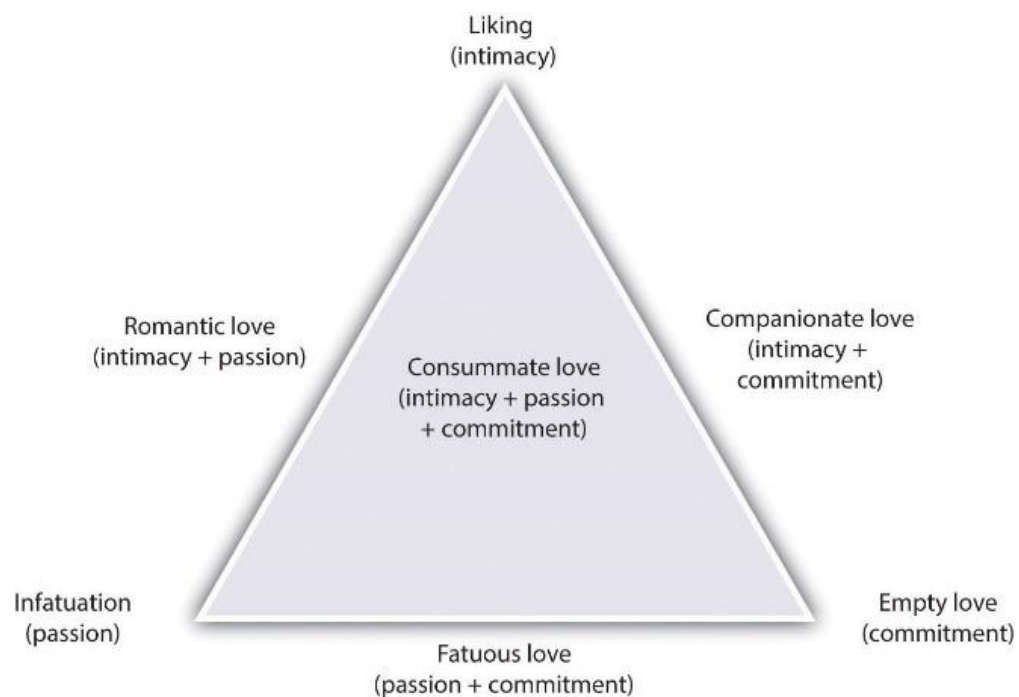


Figure 1: Sternberg's triangle as drawn by Oord (2007).

Research in the 1980s and 1990s focused more on distinguishing different types of love, such as the differences between romantic love and sexual desire (Caughlin & Huston, 2010). Sternberg's triangular theory of love, as represented visually in Figure 1 posits that three components of love: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment, can be seen as three sides of a triangle. Intimacy in the triangle refers to the emotional closeness and connectedness that may be present in many relationships from friendships to romantic partnerships. Intimacy is the 'warmth' in a relationship, described as largely deriving from emotional investment in the relationship (Sternberg, 1986). The passion component of

Sternberg's triangle refers to the "drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation, and related phenomena" (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119). Passion includes sexual desire as well as other needs like self-esteem and self-actualization. The passion component is described as deriving from motivational involvement in the partnership. The decision/commitment component of Sternberg's triangle is the cognitive element of the relationship, essentially the decision to be in and to stay in a loving relationship. This refers to both the short-term decision to love someone and the long-term commitment to maintain that love (Sternberg, 1986). These components of love can then be combined to form eight types of love, from infatuated love that involves only passionate love, to consummate love that involves all three elements of Sternberg's triangle (Sternberg, 1986). Sternberg's triangle is applied in this research to case study one in particular.

The three elements of Sternberg's triangle that form consummate love: emotional investment, motivational involvement, and the cognitive commitment to love, have been applied to the structure of the neoclassical psyche (Diessner, Frost, & Smith, 2004). This triadic structure of the mind was widely used by scholars such as Plato and Thomas Aquinas and continues to underpin studies of religion and psychology in the western world. The neoclassical psyche was described by Socrates as consisting of three parts: the logical-rational (logiston), the spirited or affective (thymia), and the desiring (epithymia). Through this association with early understandings of the mind, Sternberg's understanding of relationships is tied to a western worldview. The influence of this worldview is relevant to this research as a significant effect on Palagi or contemporary New Zealand culture, and is thus a relevant factor in investigating what influences Samoan-Palagi interactions.

In the early 2000s, research shifted towards focusing on the processes that support flourishing relationships. Driver and Gottman (2004) endeavoured to explain why some couples approach conflict with more effective strategies than others and found that those who show playfulness and enthusiasm during everyday contact are able to thrive despite some disagreements. The findings of this research support play and enthusiasm during everyday encounters as helpful for building feelings of affection that then minimize the impact of challenges that

do arise. Another example of research focused on processes that lead to flourishing relationships is that of Eckstein, Eckstein, and Eckstein (2014). They present four “R’s” as core processes for flourishing relationships: Respect, Responsibility, Review, and Release. Eckstein et al. (2014) research on the processes that help relationships to flourish is applied to each of the two cases of this research in their respective chapters.

Other evidence also shows how the passage of time may impact relationship flourishing. There is evidence to suggest a decline in marital satisfaction after the birth of a child, with satisfaction not picking up until children have left home. Eventually, older couples tend to derive more pleasure than distress from their marriages (Caughlin & Huston, 2010). The changes in the life course of a relationship indicate that time can be an influence on the development of a flourishing relationship. Relational development over many years together is also consistent with the *soul-mate model*, in which a flourishing relationship is held to be achieved through completing tasks in seven developmental stages (De La Lama, De La Lama, & Wittgenstein, 2012).

Over the decades of development in understanding flourishing relationships, research on attachment and social support has continued, with attachment stabilized as the single most studied concept in relationships (Caughlin & Huston, 2010). Beginning with the research of Bowlby and Ainsworth, working with small children, attachment theory has gained considerable empirical support and has developed to show important implications for adult relationships. Attachment theory suggests that a warm and responsive caregiving style provides infants with a secure base from which they are able to explore the world. These experiences in early relationships create internal working models that can influence cognition, affect and behaviour in later relationships and attachments (Shaver, Mikulincer, Simpson, & Rholes, 2010). Bowlby also believed that attachment styles should change in patterned and predictable ways in response to how people are treated by attachment figures across different phases of social development (Shaver et al., 2010). This research considers, in case study one in particular, how attachment might inform an understanding of relational needs for a flourishing relationship.

From Samoa to New Zealand: Samoan-Palagi relationships

This chapter now moves to a discussion of Samoan-Palagi encounters; this discussion supplements the previous section on flourishing to illuminate the need for an investigation into flourishing Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships. Also, the review of Samoan-Palagi relationships provides the sociocultural context for my case studies in later chapters. I begin with the nascence of my curiosity and the setting for my first Samoan-Palagi encounters: the islands of Samoa.

The Independent State of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa) is a nation comprised of four tropical islands in the South Pacific Ocean: Savai'i, Upolu, Manono, and Apolima (Seiuli, 2015; Stewart-Withers & O'Brien, 2014). Savai'i and Upolu are home to most of the population, with Apia, the capital, located on Upolu. In contemporary Samoa, the people speak one language, and have a cultural tradition which is relatively consistent across the country. Despite previous colonial governance, the land, resources and political power remains at the village level and in the hands of the *fono* (the village council), *matai* (head of the extended family) and *āiga* (the extended family or kin group). Traditional and contemporary governance merge, as political leaders are selected from existing *Matai* structures (Stewart-Withers & O'Brien, 2014).

In order to understand relationships for Samoan people, it is important to understand the Samoan way of life or *fa'asamoa*, which some authors have described as much more than just a distinctive lifestyle (Seiuli, 2013, 2015). It is often allied with the historical practices of ancestors and with family history (Cribb & Barnett, 2010). The structures of *fa'asamoa* are maintained by adherence to cultural customs. These include practices such as the giving and receiving of *ava* (respect), *fa'aaloalo* (reverence), and *alofa* (love, compassion and concern) (Stewart-Withers & O'Brien, 2014). This way of life is traditionally organised around the *nu'u* (village), and the most important social unit within that is the *āiga* (extended family) (Cribb & Barnett, 2010). In traditional Samoan culture, each person belongs to an *āiga*. It is within the *āiga* that healthy behaviour, discipline and cultural practices are learned. The Samoan concept of "self" or identity begins in the *āiga* and from this context the Samoan self matures into a place in the world (Seiuli, 2015). The health of family depends not only on

the individual but on how the family works together. Health or illness is a collective experience within the *āiga* (Enoka, 1997). For a Samoan person, personal wellbeing and lived experiences cannot be separated from their context in the *āiga* or family. Intimate partner relationships have an important part in the social unit of the *āiga* but they are not the only relationships in the *āiga*. In an examination of intimate partner relationships, the collective context of these relationships form an important area of focus as alluded to by Tui Atua (2009) below;

I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies . . . I share my tofi [an inheritance] with my family, my village and my nation . . . This is the essence of my belonging (Tui Atua, 2009, p. 80)

Tui Atua highlights the Samoan individual as intrinsically connected to the natural world, their ancestors, family, village and nation. Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, and Bush (2005, p. 303) echo the importance of connections by stating, “you cannot take a Samoan out of the collective context.” Instead, every Samoan person is connected to a family of origin, with specific ancestry relating to forebears (Lui, 2003). The significance of connection to ancestors, land, family and village explains some of the reasons for the approaches used in this research. The Uputāua Therapeutic Approach is a Samoan research framework that guides this research as a holistic investigation (Seiuli, 2012).

The significance of interpersonal connection is also evident in *fa’asamoa* in two concepts that relate specifically to understanding relationships. These are *le vā fealoaloa’i* (relational space) and *feagaiga* (traditional brother-sister covenant). Tui Atua asserts *vā fealoaloa’i* as the *fatu* (essence) of *fa’asamoa* (Anae, 2010). It is described by Wendt (1996, para. 15) as,

The space between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All.

Vā fealoaloa’i is an integral part of Samoan relationships, potentially even applied as a Samoan understanding of relationships. ‘*Teu le vā*’ is a saying that means to nurture, and to take care of the relational space (Anae, 2010; Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009; Seiuli, 2012; Tiatia, 2012). This can be done through

observing and obeying Samoan customs or social norms (Tiatia, 2012). *Teu le vā* processes act to support relationships through careful treatment of relational space. This relational space requires constant attention to avoid the space being *solu* (trampled). Failure to do so can result in the dishonouring of the *mana* (sacredness) of people and their families (Pereira, 2011; Seiuli, 2015). The importance of cherishing the relational space has been explored as necessary for developing culturally competent health services (Tiatia, 2012), research and therapeutic frameworks (Seiuli, 2012), schooling in New Zealand for Pasifika students (Anae, 2010), and social work practice (Autagavaia, 2001; Mila-Schaaf, 2006). What has not been explored before this research is how *teu le vā* functions in intimate-partner relationships.

Another key Samoan concept relevant to couple relationships is *feagaiga*. The word *feagaiga* comes from the word *feagai*, which means to be opposite to another (Latai, 2015). *Feagaiga* is a crucial part of Samoan life and is used to refer to various relationships in the family and village. In particular, it is often referred to as the covenant between brothers and sisters. Latai (2015) explains that in Samoa, to be opposite in this sense does not mean a state of conflict but rather mutuality and reciprocation. This relationship is described as central to maintaining a state of harmony and rightness in the family and the whole village (Latai, 2015). The importance of this relationship also indicates a larger family context and collective framework for relating. Although some literature has examined how the displacement of traditional roles may have negatively impacted intimate partner relationships (Cribb & Barnett, 2010; Tauasosi, 2010), there is a lack of research into how this concept may contribute to flourishing intimate partner relationships.



Figure 2: Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (Seiuli, 2013)

In consideration of the historical, cultural, ancestral, familial, spiritual and social features of *fa'asamoa*, the need for investigating intimate partner relationships in their context is established. As mentioned briefly earlier, the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (UTA) is applied as a framework for inquiry in this research that addresses the totality of a person. This includes consideration of the sacredness of customs and traditions, along with physical, psychological and social needs. The approach includes *olaga fa'aleagaga* (spiritual foundations), *tu ma aganu'u* (their customs and traditions), *āiga* (kin and relationship networks), and *laufanua* (environment). *Le vā fealoaloa'i* (relational space) and *Tausi tua'oi* (community boundaries) also have an important place in the approach. Each aspect is interconnected and protects Samoan cultural imperatives (Seiuli, 2013). More information on the UTA is provided in following chapters as it is identified as a significant methodological approach for this research.

Cross-cultural encounter

The first encounters between *Palagi* (European or white persons) and Samoan people began with sightings of the Islands from afar by Dutch explorer Jacob

Roggewein (Tauasosi, 2010). This was followed by the first non-Polynesian to land on Samoa, French explorer Le Perouse, who engaged in conflict with the Samoan locals. He then called the local people “a race of treacherous savages”(Meleisea & Meleisea, 1987). Le Perouse’s view shaped the European perception of Samoa and minimal contact was made between European explorers and the Samoan people until missionaries arrived in the nineteenth century (Tauasosi, 2010). Relevant to earlier discussion on *feagaiga*, it is reported that early Europeans visiting Samoa observed the high regard in social relations between men and women, as is particularly evident through the covenant (Tauasosi, 2010).

Mission work in Samoa began with John Williams and Charles Barff of the London Missionary Society in the 1830s (Latai, 2015; Tauasosi, 2010). Thornton, Kerslake, and Binns (2010) posit that the establishment of a permanent congregation was dependent on the church’s ability to adapt to Samoan culture, and as it did, with the approval of *matai*, Christianity spread rapidly. Christianity proceeded to become a fundamental part of Samoan cultural identity (Thornton et al., 2010). Examination of early Samoan-Palagi interactions highlights the important role of Christianity, a factor that persists in relevance to the discussion of contemporary Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships.

With the establishment of Christianity, the pastor was a novel figure to integrate into Samoan society. London Missionary Society (LMS) accounts report that by the 1850s pastors were fully supported by their local parishes and occupied a place of great privilege in the village (Latai, 2015). As a result, Malietoa Vaainupo, the paramount ruler who first received missionaries in 1830, made them the *quasi*-sisters of each village, endowed with the title of *Fa’afeagaiga* (Aiono, 1996). This title of honour meant Samoan paramount chiefs who accepted Christianity had their own *feagaiga*, ‘sisters’ to whom they were obligated (Latai, 2015). This also had an impact on the position of women as they reoriented from a complementary position as sisters to biblical wives. Cribb and Barnett (2010) argue that the allocation of *feagaiga* to the pastor had the effect of diminishing and disconnecting women’s position as *feagaiga* and ultimately their role in the wider family context.

In early colonial history the Germans, British and Americans showed great interest in the Samoan Islands. As a result, years of civil war occurred where each of the three foreign powers supplied arms, training, and in some cases combat troops, to the warring Samoan parties (Meleisea & Meleisea, 1987). Finally, in 1899 possession of the Samoan islands was divided between Germany and the United States of America. The eastern part of the islands formed the territory of American Samoa, comprised of Tutuila and the Manu'a islands. The western islands, comprised of the islands of Savai'i, Upolu, Manono, and Apolima became Western Samoa and are now known as the Independent State of Samoa (Meleisea & Meleisea, 1987; Seiuli, 2015). Germany maintained its presence in Samoa until the events of the Second World War.

New Zealand context

The Samoan-Palagi relationships informing this investigation are relationships formed and experienced within a New Zealand context. Interactions between Samoa and New Zealand first began in World War I, when Samoa was invaded without opposition by New Zealand forces on behalf of the British Crown. New Zealand then administered the islands under a mandate from the League of Nations from 1920 until Western Samoa gained political independence in 1962 (Cribb & Barnett, 2010). When Samoa gained independence, a Treaty of Friendship was signed with New Zealand and in 1970 Samoa became part of the Commonwealth of Nations (Cribb & Barnett, 2010; Meleisea & Meleisea, 1987). Since the Friendship Treaty was signed many Samoans have migrated to New Zealand for education, employment opportunities and enjoyment. The Treaty established a quota system that allowed entry to a select number of migrants on the provision they were able to secure accommodation and employment (Cribb & Barnett, 2010; Tauasosi, 2010).

It is widely understood that Christianity is a major aspect of Samoan culture and social life (Latai, 2015 ; Stewart-Withers & O'Brien, 2014). Thornton and colleagues (2010) argue that since gaining independence in 1962, the *matai*, the state, and the church have become the enduring pillars of Samoan society. The majority of the population of Samoa identify themselves as Christian (Latai, 2015). In the migration of Samoans to New Zealand, the church often serves as a centre of culture and community (Tiatia, 2008, 2012). Cribb and Barnett (2010)

support the notion that in response to the change in cultural context through migration, Samoans have largely replaced the village system with the church. The Samoan church in New Zealand acts to preserve *fa'asamoa*, maintain order and even care for the disadvantaged within the church community (Cribb & Barnett, 2010).

Tauasosi (2010) contends that in Samoa the influence of biblical teachings has impacted Samoan cultural traditions and intimate partner relationships in Samoan churches. As examples, legal marriage was introduced, and the *feagaiga* covenant transformed to honour *fa'afeagaiga* (village pastor). Tauasosi (2010) argues that Christian teachings support the hierarchical family structure of Western societies, with husbands as heads of households, and wives submitted to that. As Ephesians 5: 22-25 reads;

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Latai (2015) explains that this text is often interpreted as emphasizing the need of the wife to remain obedient to her husband. This is presented as transforming ancient notions of gender and rank in Samoa, resulting also in dysfunction within intimate partner relationships (Tauasosi, 2010).

In contrast, Lambert and Dollahite (2008) present research on the stability offered to marriages through biblical teachings on the three-fold cord. In their research, Lambert and Dollahite (2008) report couples as being strengthened by religious beliefs that include God as the third partner in their marriage. The research reported several participants as describing their marriage as forming a covenant in three ways; between partners and between each partner and God. God is credited with bringing couples together and maintaining their relationship as the three partners involved are believed to add strength to the union (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). This draws on the biblical metaphor of the three-stranded cord from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12;

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.
¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.

But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.¹¹ Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? ¹² Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

This metaphor uses a cord of three strands to explain the relationship being strengthened by having God as a third partner. Both excerpts from biblical texts quoted above provide examples of how Christian teaching may have historically and currently had an impact on experiences in intimate partner relationships, either in empowering or disempowering ways. Christianity has also had a significant role to play historically in Samoan-Palagi interactions. Therefore, in this research into experiences of flourishing Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships, Christian faith or spirituality forms a crucial area of investigation. In case study one, the significance of this biblical concept is reiterated by Fetu and Mira to contextualise their inter-racial marriage and life together.

Palagi culture

The term *Palagi* is translated as European or white person. Synonymous with this is *Pākehā*, the Māori name for the European settlers who came to Aotearoa (Walker, 1989). Within the scope of this research, Palagi refers to those settled in New Zealand, of European descent. Although differences can be argued, in this discussion of Palagi culture, the terms Pakeha and Palagi are used interchangeably as in a New Zealand context they can be mostly regarded as tantamount. This is also justified by the participants of this research identifying as both Palagi and Pakeha. These white settlers, my ancestors included, originated largely from Great Britain, Ireland and other European countries and came to Aotearoa in the late eighteenth century (King, 1985). In contemporary New Zealand, Europeans are now the largest ethnic group and as such constitute the dominant cultural group. New Zealand census records from 2013 show almost three-quarters of the population (74%) identify with one or more European ethnic group. While members of a dominant group do not tend to see themselves as having a culture, only ascribing culture to those in minority groups (Black, 2010), it is acknowledged here that there are cultural markers present and shared by Pakeha/Palagi in New Zealand. Many Pakeha may not have knowledge of their family history before arrival in New Zealand but they can generally trace their

origins back to Great Britain, Ireland and Europe (Black, 2010). It is the British or European origins of the early settlers that persisted to form modern Pakeha/Palagi culture. These cultural markers have since been nurtured in isolation from the rest of the world to form a distinct culture. In her research on Pakeha people marking cultural values, Black (2010) identifies egalitarianism, assimilation, superiority, and the combination of individuality and independence as core values of Pakeha culture. Within the focus of this research on relationships, individuality and independence are salient cultural values, as explored below.

Black (2010) echoes other literature on the construction of Palagi/Pakeha families as deriving from the individual. This can also be seen as a reflection of wider Western society in which the value placed on individuality encourages independence and autonomy. An example used by Black (2010) is the layout of a Pakeha household. While parents will usually share a room, children will often have a room of their own. Babies have their own bassinets, cots and eventually beds and are most likely to sleep in their own rooms from a very young age (Black, 2010). The value of autonomy is further apparent as children grow, reinforced by the education system in New Zealand that focuses very much on individual endeavour as a way of measuring achievement. When a child is grown, it is common that they leave the home and support of their parents for further education or employment. This further reinforces expectations of independence. The value placed on being independent is another way in which individuality in Pakeha culture is maintained (Black, 2010).

In *Understanding Pākehā*, a training brochure for new Polynesian migrants to New Zealand, the culture of Pākehā family life is described in relation to that of a Polynesian family:

In all societies, social life is organised around the family. However, the Pākehā family is very different from the Polynesian family. The Pākehā family usually consists of a married couple and their dependent children. Uncles and aunts, grandparents, and cousins are not generally regarded as family members, though they are relatives.

As a Polynesian, you feel a strong obligation towards your relatives because you regard them as family members. You would help them as much as you would help your children. While a Pākehā feels just as strong an obligation towards his wife and children, this does not always extend to his relatives because to him they are not members of his family...the word

“family” means different things to Pākehā and Polynesians (Vocational Training Council, 1975, pp. 4-5).

Although referencing an older publication the quote above resounds with more current literature such as the work of Black (2010). The excerpt suggests, supported by Black (2010), the Palagi or Pakeha family is organized around the individual; this extends but is generally limited to the immediate family. This does, however, create an emphasis on intimate partner relationships, as it is from these that the Palagi/Pakeha family germinates.

Cross-cultural relationships

This thesis focuses on cross-cultural relationships that are influenced by both Samoan and Palagi cultural traditions. Cross-cultural relationships can be defined as unions between “two people from different linguistic, religious or ethnic groups or nations” (Breger & Hill, 1998, p. 7). These relationships are more complex because in addition to differences in personality, gender and class, there is likely to be conflict around cultural differences that must also be resolved (Schafer, 2010). Couples may also be challenged by strong opposition to their relationship from their families, experience different views on childrearing, and may suffer societal intolerance of their relationship (Usita & Poulsen, 2003).

However, despite the multiple, complex challenges it is also acknowledged that intercultural relationships provide opportunity for the enrichment and development of the partners involved. Chan and Wethington (1998) report increased opportunity for development of social competence, personal growth, and social network expansion as some of the possible psychological benefits of intercultural relationships. By their very nature, cross-cultural relationships allow two distinct cultures or worldviews to co-inhabit and connect. As Chan and Wethington (1998) suggest, cross-cultural relationships have the potential to become an avenue for learning from each other. This thesis thus enquires into the understanding participants have developed about relating from two distinct perspectives, in order to contribute to the social science on flourishing relationships.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The Treaty of Waitangi was signed between the British Crown and Māori people in Aotearoa New Zealand on 6 February, 1840 (Barrett & Connolly-Stone, 1998). Te Tiriti o Waitangi was formed to guide interactions between Māori and the British Crown (Pākehā). However, provisions were also made for all peoples ‘yet to come’ to New Zealand. With *Palagi* classified under the British Crown and Samoan as *Tauīwi* (non-Māori foreigner), both partners in the relationships involved in this research are regarded as treaty partners. The three articles of the treaty make many provisions for a bicultural relationship between two very distinct cultures. While not classically considered as such, it is an important publication providing guidelines for a flourishing relationship between two cultures in the New Zealand context. This publication provides a context in which the Palagi-Samoan cross cultural relationships of this research were formed and can draw from.

The three articles of the Treaty make many provisions for both parties involved in the agreement. Overall, the spirit of the Treaty is argued as providing for the self-determination and flourishing of each Treaty partner through the protection of identity, treasures, equality and ability for self-governance (Barrett & Connolly-Stone, 1998). Since 1840 the Treaty has been repeatedly dishonoured and the potential for a flourishing relationship has been unmet (Barrett & Connolly-Stone, 1998; Orange, 2015). However, it stands as a reference or opportunity for engagement in a decolonising relationship that can embrace and honour difference and marry two distinct cultures. It is within Aotearoa New Zealand, the context in which the treaty applies, that each of the relationships involved in this research were formed and continue to flourish. Although the Treaty of Waitangi may appear less relevant to an investigation regarding interactions between other non-Māori cultures, it is an important and unique document, significant for cross-cultural interactions within New Zealand. Also, the provisions of the treaty are not unlike many of the concepts discussed in this research by participants engaged in cross-cultural interactions that flourish. It is mentioned briefly here to acknowledge its place in the New Zealand context as an historical publication that supports flourishing cross-cultural relationships.

Summary

Connections between Samoan and Palagi cultures began hundreds of years ago. Migration of many Samoans to New Zealand in search of opportunities has only strengthened that involvement (Tiatia-Seath, 2014). As a result, intimate partner relationships between people of these two cultures are increasingly prevalent in contemporary New Zealand. However, research on cross-cultural relationships in New Zealand is limited, particularly those involving Samoan-Palagi partners (Schafer, 2010). It is thus important to understand how those relationships are able to thrive and develop, which is a key aim of this study.

Cross-cultural intimate partner relationships also represent unique interactions that provide an opportunity to learn from a person of another culture. With the involvement of *fa'asamoa*, relationships concepts like *vā* can be understood in this context. While discussions of *vā* are often applied in research (Anae, 2010; Clayton, 2007; Cribb & Barnett, 2010; Enoka, 1997; Lui, 2003; Mila-Schaaf, 2006; Wendt, 1996), very little research has explored how the space between couples may be tended.

Through the introduction and review of the literature, the importance of relationships has been emphasised as crucial to the wellbeing of both Samoan and Palagi peoples. Flourishing relationships contribute strongly to the overall wellbeing of individuals and their communities. Thus, this research focuses on the question “How do Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships flourish?” We move now to the following chapter to explain how research methodology was developed to respond to the research topic and aims.

Chapter Two: Methodology

In the previous chapter, the rationale and context for this study were discussed. Also included in the introduction chapter was a discussion of the significance of *vā* in *fa'asamoa*. In engaging in research and selecting appropriate methodology, it was paramount that I considered the *vā* or the space between myself as a researcher and my participants. I am particularly aware, as a Palagi researcher examining Samoan cultural perspectives, of the need to *teu le vā* or look after this space. Tending to the relational space seeks to avoid violations of trust and any trampling of the space between my participants and myself as a researcher. This chapter begins by describing how the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (UTA) (Seiuli, 2012) was used as a primary tool in caring for the relational space, as the most appropriate methodology for this research. The chapter then presents details of how ethical concerns were addressed, the methods used for participant recruitment, frameworks for data collection and analysis by case study.

Establishing an appropriate method

By embarking on an investigation of 'how inter-racial relationships flourish' I committed to an endeavour dependent on qualitative research methods. In quantitative research, the logic is at a population level and depends on statistics; in qualitative research, the logic is at a conceptual level. The mechanisms and nuances of relationships are complex and unquantifiable, demanding an investigation that allows for the diversity of participants' experiences to be explored (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Qualitative research provides the opportunity to not merely generate statistics about relationships but to deepen understandings of their meanings, exploring the mechanisms operating in relationships that are flourishing. Within the relationships of each participant interviewed, there is a complex range of interactions that have formed the relationship. The development of case studies allows a focus on flourishing for each specific couple. This research was informed by *fono fa'atalatalanoa* (narrative dialogue) methods of enquiry in interviews and analysed to form case studies. Using case studies involved establishing a case study protocol, which will be discussed below as the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (UTA). Cases were also analysed and reported using rules of evidence, discussed later in the data analysis section of this chapter.

As I engaged with Samoan people and investigated important aspects of Samoan culture it was essential to draw upon a Samoan cultural research framework. A key focus of this research involved challenging the privileging of western values and allowing space for indigenous knowledge (Gresham, 2012). It has been a journey of engaging in research practices that honoured Samoan culture and values while also acknowledging my own westernised ideologies and behaviours. In order to engage appropriately in a Samoan context, it was important to use a holistic paradigm. A holistic approach considers body, mind and the social dimensions of a person (Lui, 2003; Seiuli, 2012; Tiatia, 2008). For a Samoan person, there is also a need to locate holistic understandings of their connection to the familial, ancestral, environmental and divine. To achieve this holistic approach, I drew largely upon the UTA. The UTA also considers the importance of how I began my engagement with the research and participants in an honouring and respectful process. By employing this approach, I was able to cultivate a space for “words of wisdom or sacred conversations” (Seiuli, 2012, p. 43). The primary method of data collection was through *fono fa’atalatalanoa* (narrative dialogue), which allows participants to share the narrative and wisdom of their relationship through conversation (Vaiioleti, 2006). The UTA provides a framework for engaging with and examining people, in this case as couples, in a culturally appropriate manner.

The UTA employs the metaphor of the *faletalimalo*, a modern Samoan meeting house built for welcoming guests. The three steps up to the *faletalimalo* represent the three steps to engagement, discussed later in relation to participant recruitment and data collection. By using the steps to engage, I was supported to *teu le vā* between participants and myself through the initial stages of research. Prioritising appropriate engagement also facilitated effective *talanoa* (narrative dialogue) and delivered rich insight into participants’ lived experiences.

The other elements of the *faletalimalo* (see Appendix one) helped to form the focus of my investigation. The UTA is also used to provide a holistic approach to case study analysis (further discussion is provided later in this chapter). In the context of my research, the UTA provided a framework both to engage in research in a culturally appropriate way and to investigate the topic of flourishing

relationships from a Samoan worldview. More detail is provided below on how the approach was applied in my research processes.

Ethical considerations

This research project was given approval by the Human Ethics Review Committee of the School of Psychology at the University of Waikato (file number:16:14). Key ethical considerations were privacy/confidentiality, informed consent and cultural safety.

Privacy/confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity were upheld as much as possible throughout my research. All identifying information was removed from interview summaries and this was checked closely with participants. Names were substituted with pseudonyms relevant to the research project. However, confidentiality for individual interviews was limited as the data gathered could likely be identified by the person's partner. This was explained thoroughly before scheduling individual interviews and participants were reminded before individual interviews began. By consenting to participate, participants accepted this limitation in confidentiality.

Consent

All participants were included in a process that enhanced their ability to give informed consent. Initial contact was made through informal conversations about my new research project. All participants were sent information about the study so they could examine for themselves the work they were invited to participate in. Most importantly, discussion occurred on the rights of either partner to decline to participate in the research or withdraw at any point. If both partners were willing to participate we were able to proceed with scheduling interviews. Before the initial interviews, a separate consent form (see Appendix three) was signed by both members of each couple. Before each interview, I requested participants' consent to have interviews electronically recorded as MP3 files.

Cultural safety

As a Palagi researcher engaging in cross-cultural research with (some) Samoan participants and investigating Samoan concepts, consideration of cultural safety was paramount. To begin with, I considered the application of emic and etic

approaches to research. Etic and emic are terms derived from the linguistic concepts of phonetics and phonemics. Phonemics focuses on the meaning and context of words, thus an emic approach focuses on investigating the unique characteristics of differing cultures. Phonetics is associated with the universal laws of language, and thus an etic research approach is focused on finding common dimensions across cultures (Bala, Chalil, & Gupta, 2012). Emic research, or an insider perspective, seeks to understand culture from the “native’s point of view”. On the other hand, an etic approach, or an outsider perspective, tends more to link cultural factors to external factors (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999).

In this project, as an outsider I drew largely on an etic approach to the research. I acknowledged my position as an outsider to the lived experiences of Samoan people. I accepted the limitations of my knowledge and inquired as a curious learner. Being constrained by my experience allowed me to focus on and draw from participants with curiosity and humility.

The emic/etic approaches were once considered dichotomous but are argued by Morris and colleagues (1999) to be more of a continuum. Although I undertook this research as an outsider and acknowledge some distance from the culture of my Samoan participants, I did not strive to remain wholly at a distance. Within the etic/emic continuum I assumed a position that was limited by being a learner in cross-cultural research, but I also located myself in the research. The work of Palagi researcher O'Regan (2006) in Samoa provided guidance for positioning myself in this research. O'Regan (2006) identifies herself and her work as influenced by Palagi culture yet co-collaborated and co-constructed with participants to engage with a Samoan worldview and values.

In particular, I was positioned in my research through *talanoa* (narrative dialogue). *Talanoa* requires engagement through conversation and relationship with participants. Case study research also involves fostering of close relationships rather than the neutrality or distance advocated in empirical research (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). In addition, being involved in investigating cross-cultural relationships allowed me a somewhat ethnographic approach to this research. The research provided many opportunities for me as a Palagi researcher

to learn from my participants, much more as a learner than a research expert. The result was a continual process of learning and evaluation throughout the research. As I learnt about the culture of participants and how they navigated the cross-cultural divide, I applied my learnings in our interactions as tools I could use to *teu le vā* in research processes. Research that is placed on a continuum between emic and etic approaches allows for an investigation by an outsider into relationships that shows common dimensions across cultures. In addition, the investigation can include unique characteristics of relationships informed by two distinct cultures.

The most significant way I was able to *teu le vā* in research processes and ensure cultural safety was through careful consultation. It is for this reason that I engaged the support and advice of one of my supervisors, Dr Byron Seiuli, who is a Samoan with research experience with Samoan communities in New Zealand and Samoa. Throughout this research project, Dr Seiuli provided guidance about the appropriate cultural procedures to undertake and any issues to avoid as a cross-cultural researcher. Cultural safety was also considered through the incorporation of Samoan research frameworks like the UTA.

Participants

This research targeted couples of a specific ethnic mix; that is, relationships in which one partner identifies as Samoan and one as Palagi. For the purposes of my research the term ‘couple’ extended marital partners to include “two people involved in a committed romantic relationship who share a household, a history and a planned future” (Biever, Bobele, & North, 1998, p. 182). Preference was for couples who had been in a committed relationship for several years, in order to reflect on how the relationship may have developed over time. Participants were recruited from a New Zealand population, interviews occurred across both islands of New Zealand.

For this research three couples were recruited for interviews. Two couples provided the data for case studies and the third couple an initial interview in which the narratives were synthesised into the overall research. Gathering data from a small amount of relationships allowed for intensive research into the particulars of flourishing Samoan- Palagi relationships. The relationships involved

were developed over many years through many difficulties and differences. Each case provided an opportunity to gather an array of insights into the complexities of human relationships. By focusing on two case studies this research was able to honour the many narratives my participants have constructed through years of flourishing together.

All of the couples interviewed were recruited through personal networks. As a researcher with no familial connections to Samoan communities, I related instead via relationships developed through life experiences and personal networks. These relationships provided a context for an investigation of sensitive and intimate areas of participants' lives. The research was then able to draw on the safety of existing relationships. Continuation of research relationships after the conclusion of the research project solidified this process and is also culturally appropriate by demonstrating a commitment to reciprocity in research.

Case studies

In each of the case studies for this research the real names of participants were replaced with pseudonyms. In assigning pseudonyms, I used the opportunity to acknowledge the significance of my participants in guiding me through the journey as we explored how relationships flourish in their personal lives. I reiterate here the key message from a Samoan proverb I introduced in the prologue to reflect on my research journey as similar to a *malaga faiva* (fishing journey). A voyage may be fraught with difficulties or unexpected challenges. Similarly, in this research journey, I knew I might make mistakes and that the requirements of the task were greater than the navigational skills or knowledge I alone possessed. Just as ancient Polynesian navigators were guided by the stars on their voyages into the unknown, I could look to the participants for guidance and direction when exploring the little-known domain of flourishing Samoan-Palagi relationships. Therefore, the names used for participants in my cases are also the names of stars in the night sky: Leo, Maia, Mira and Fetu.

Fetu and Mira were the first couple I invited to participate in repeated interviews; I had known them through personal networks for several years. After discussing my research with them they agreed to participate. Information about the research (see Appendix 2) was sent with an invitation to participate in my

research. They accepted this invitation and we scheduled their first interview together several weeks later. I followed the initial combined interview with separate interviews with each partner. Some of their responses were expanded upon after they reviewed summaries of their initial interviews. Conversations regarding the progress of my research and the details of their narratives continued throughout the duration of the research project. An added benefit of engaging with Fetu and Mira in this context was the learning I encountered about their passion to invest in the flourishing and wellbeing of Samoan communities.

The second couple I interviewed were Leo and Maia, known to me through personal networks for over five years. In a phone conversation with Leo, the research aims and goals were shared and he and Maia were offered the opportunity to participate. Leo and Maia agreed to participate in the study and inquired about the possibility of scheduling interview times. However, due to their very busy schedule it was several months before they could engage in the interview process. We first met for an initial shared interview in their home, where together Leo and Maia shared significant events from 30 years of being in a committed relationship. The next day I met with Leo and Maia individually outside their home for follow-up interviews. After the interviews, I sent summaries of each interview and updates on the progress of the research. When we continued to engage in settings outside my research we shared updates of our respective work. It is emphasised that there is a shared interest in each other's work and an understanding that we are connected in what we do by a desire to facilitate flourishing and wellbeing in Samoan communities.

A third couple were also invited to participate. After providing consent to become participants, we completed an initial interview together. They shared the story of their relationship over a three-year period; they had recently become engaged to be married. They enjoyed the chance to reflect and to hear each other's perspectives about the relationship. They were unable to schedule a follow-up interview due to time constraints but their narratives have been synthesised into the overall findings of this research.

Data collection

Once participant consent was acquired, scheduling an initial interview was negotiated around participants' needs. We settled on holding joint interviews with each couple initially, followed by individual interviews with each partner shortly afterwards.

In the process of engaging my participants in my research, I was guided by the steps of engagement from the UTA. *Meaalofa*, *Loto fa'atasia* and *Mana/Mamalu* describe the three steps to engagement. These three steps are described as vital for achieving therapeutic and beneficial outcomes (Seiuli, 2012). The first step, *meaalofa* is a Samoan word for gift or rituals involved in gifting, literally meaning "an element of love" or "an object of affection" (Seiuli, 2004, p. 6). In addition, *meaalofa* also encompasses the ideas presented by "...a love offering, a valued treasure, one's legacy, one's spiritual calling, and one's service in life (tautua)" (Seiuli, 2010, p. 49). As I first engaged with participants, I presented how my research project might be a service or gift to Samoan/Palagi communities. I shared my journey to arrive at the research project and the need to strengthen good relationships I believed it responded to. This was supplemented with my desire for practical and useful development in the area of flourishing relationships. As I explore how relationships flourish, I do so in order that the knowledge gathered may be beneficial to those navigating relationships, specifically cross-cultural, but all intimate partner relationships. In particular, I consider those who engage in intimate partner relationships with a limited or absent model for relating well. My invitation to participate was an opportunity gifted to participants and their acceptance of that invitation was a gift received from them. The reciprocal nature of *meaalofa* is a vital step not only in research approach, but in acknowledging important relationships within Samoan cultural space (Seiuli, 2015).

The second step of engagement in the UTA is *loto fa'atasia* or the collaborative (we) approach. *Loto fa'atasia* literally means 'to be of one heart or one soul' (Seiuli, 2012). This approach values me as a researcher being of one heart and one mind with participants and placing the needs of their communities over any expertise I might have assumed. As I informally introduced my research

to my participants, I aimed to acknowledge and honour their input in the formation of a research topic. From each of the participants I had learned significant lessons, whether it was my first introduction to Samoa in 2014 or through conversations around key concepts in *fa'asamoa*. Beginning my research project with acknowledgement of how our interests became interwoven also helped us to become of one heart and soul.

It was also important throughout the research that I collaborated with participants as experts on their own lives and environments. This collaboration is consistent with not-knowing in narrative therapy, as drawn upon by this research (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). Not-knowing acknowledges participants as the experts in their own experience; by then taking a position of learner I was able to join in the mutual explorations of participants' understanding and experiences (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). Collaborating with participants in the research process also used the *loto fa'atasia* collaborative approach. Collaboration supports the development of research that champions the epistemological foundations of Samoan communities and acknowledges members of the community as owners of their own solutions (Seiuli, 2012). As an outsider, I was privileged to be invited into the sacred space of participants' lives and relationships; it was thus incumbent on me to respect and honour this space.

In the process of interviews, collaboration was realised through the *fa'atalatalanoa* (narrative dialogue) approach. Narrative dialogue is not just an informal *talanoa*, but is directed by the research topic and guiding questions deemed appropriate to engage participants in richer explorations of their life narrative (Seiuli, 2015; Vaiolleti, 2006). I began my initial interviews by reiterating the focus of my research and allowed participants to explore the depth and breadth of their narratives in relation to the topic. Questions that were prepared for interviews were not rigidly followed but instead allowed coverage of the areas relevant to the research. This did not limit the information shared to set questions but enabled my participants to set the direction of our investigation as they drew on their experiences. In one instance, Fetu and Mira queried how much was needed for them to share from the earlier stages of their narrative. I affirmed again their role in determining what they felt was important to contribute towards the topic of flourishing relationships. I also reiterated the focus of the

conversation on how they have built a flourishing relationship and encouraged them to determine how much they would like to share to answer this. The ‘we’ approach is also important as the Samoan person is always part of a collective unit (Seiuli, 2012). As I engaged with research guided by a Samoan framework I acknowledged the connections and interdependence important for the acquisition of information.

Within the narrative dialogue of this research, I was positioned as a cultural outsider and curious learner (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Lee & Roth, 2004). As a cultural outsider, my lack of cultural experiences and understanding was at the forefront of my investigation. By acknowledging my limitations and position as more of a cultural learner than research expert, I was best equipped to inquire of participants. When engaging in interviews, I could express my position as a learner by declaring my limited experience and requesting more explanation from participants about their experiences and understandings of their relationship and culture. Smith (1999) emphasises the need for humility in research with indigenous communities. It was important throughout my research to demonstrate humility, especially in engagement with participants. Assuming the position of learner helped me to engage with humility, along with a deep curiosity about the life experiences of participants. This approach facilitates collaboration with participants as I could open spaces to be investigated or examined, but ultimately participants provided the direction and insight into their own experiences.

Mana/Mamalu or honouring represents the final step of engagement. In *fa’asamoa* the core values of *mamalu* and *mana* are connected to the foundational practices of honouring and maintaining dignity (Seiuli, 2012). It was imperative that I engaged in a spirit of humility and upheld the dignity of my participants and their communities throughout the research. Once the doors to engagement were opened I needed to ensure that the vulnerability participants might experience in the process was not taken advantage of. A major way I sought to maintain dignity and honour for my participants was to honour their stories and to safeguard the information shared with me. During interviews, I was cautious of protecting the dignity of participants, particularly in the way they were represented in their narrative. After their interviews, I maintained correspondence to solidify details and address any discrepancies or misrepresentations of the narratives shared.

Sometimes, all the editing required was to adjust a detail that participants were concerned might be identifying if used in the research project. By targeting such details, I demonstrated the importance of protecting the dignity and privacy of my participants, which connected to the processes of *teu le vā* (caring for the relational space). *Teu le vā* requires attending to the relational space so the *mana* (dignity) of those involved is upheld (Mila-Schaaf, 2006). This step to engagement thus helped to achieve the focus of *teu le vā* processes.

Another significant component of *mamalu* and *mana* is the validation of life narratives expressed by individuals and their families. By drawing on the relationship narratives of Samoan people and their Palagi partners this research offers validation of their narratives as a source of knowledge. The validation of life stories can be therapeutic in itself; a step in the restorative process for participants (Seiuli, 2012). Gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on their relationships, and all they had overcome, was expressed by all the couples interviewed. In particular, Leo remarked on how the research process had made him and Maia “rethink” the events in their life and he felt encouraged knowing they had “come a long way”. Secondly, the validation of narratives is connected to the preservation of Samoan epistemological foundations. A process of validation allows the prioritization of important Samoan traditions, customs and cultural expressions (Seiuli, 2012). My research aimed to explore cultural expressions and practices of *fa’asamoa* as relevant to intimate partner relationships. Concepts like *vā fealoaloa’i* have been researched in a wide range of Samoan contexts, but not often explored in the context of intimate partner relationships (Anae, 2010; Autagavaia, 2001; Mila-Schaaf, 2006). This current research adds to the understanding of important aspects of *fa’asamoa* as they are emerging in the specific and contemporary context of cross-cultural relationships.

After the steps to engagement had been taken, initial interviews began with *fa’atalatalanoa* that focused on participants voicing the story of their relationship. I began by reiterating my focus for the research and then let participants select the narrative they would share with me. In that time, they shared the events that brought them together and helped them to form a committed long-term relationship. I probed further to clarify details and questioned for meaning or when information was incomplete.

In the individual interviews with the two couples who contributed to case studies, I asked questions that drew on the pillars of the UTA. I enquired about their relationship using each of the pillars, foundation and boundaries of the UTA *faletalimalo*. These elements of health or wellbeing were investigated for their contributions to flourishing in relationships. *Ola Fa'aleagaga* (Spirituality) was an initial point of discussion for each of my participants, who considered this repeatedly as they told their stories. *Āiga Potopoto* (Family, Kin and Relationship Networks) as represented by the foundation of the *faletalimalo*, formed a critical role in interviews and the relationships of participants. *Tu ma Aganu'u Fa'asamoa* (Culture and Customs) were represented by the land around the *faletalimalo*. This was an essential backdrop for understanding participants' stories. Discussion explored the concepts of *fa'asamoa*, particularly *vā fealoaloa'i* (relational space), *feagaiga* (covenant relationships) and *tautua* (service). The internal boundaries of the *faletalimalo* represented *Le Vā Fealoaloa'i* (Relational Space); these boundaries were important for understanding how participants' relationships were able to flourish and also the boundaries necessary for the research relationship to flourish. *Ola Fa'aletino* (Physical Wellbeing), *Ola Fa'aleloto* (Social Wellbeing), *Ola Fa'alemafaufau* (Psychological Wellbeing) and *Ola Fa'alelagona* (Emotional Wellbeing) represent holistic elements of a person and were also applied to the relationship context through interviews.

Finally, the external boundaries referred to as *Tausi Tua'oi* served to guide my research. An important aspect of this was to maintain safety for the couple and their family during and after the research. I was mindful during interviews of the most appropriate spaces to have our conversations. In the case of initial interviews, I met with each couple in their homes following their invitation for me to engage with them in this manner. For individual interviews, a location that was more public but still allowed conversations to remain private, was selected for interviews. This was an important consideration for individual interviews with male participants. That is, as a female researcher, using this public boundary provided safety for both the participants and myself in our engagement. By being alert to the appropriate spaces for interaction with participants of a different gender, I cared for the space between us. This ensured that the *mana* of male

participants and the ongoing relationship between my participants was not trampled.

Furthermore, the scope of my research topic acted as a boundary for my research. Because I was committed to focusing on how relationships might flourish, by remaining concentrated on my topic, I did not need to explore in depth the negative and tense areas in the relationship. A focus on flourishing and ways of developing connection and resilience then protected the *vā fealoaloa'i*, relational space between the participants themselves, and between the participants and myself. For example, my inquiry into areas of tension or difficulty in the relationship was always with the intent of understanding how couples engaged concepts of flourishing despite such relational challenges. In this regard, I engaged restraint by not asking for examples of recent conflicts and instead encouraged recollection of examples from the past that were likely to be less emotive and more likely to be resolved.

Data analysis

After interviews, the data gathered was analysed to form two case studies. Case studies allow for intensive research that investigates a particular situation, or condition. This gathers insights into the underlying processes that explain a particular event or condition (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). In the circumstances of this research, case studies allowed for intensive investigation into relationships that experienced a condition of flourishing, along with contributing insight into how the couples involved were able to establish this flourishing relationship condition. Although case studies as a methodology may be criticised for having a lack of statistical generalisation this does not limit analytic generalisation. Analytic generalisation is explained as empirical results reflecting the theory or mechanisms at play in the cases studied (Lee & Chavis, 2012). Case study research thus becomes a useful tool to produce nuanced and practical knowledge about specific contexts and the complexity of human action (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). In this research, using case methodology allowed flourishing relationships to be explored in their context, inclusive of the complexity of human action and interaction. Multiple cases allow theory to be tested in different settings and context (Lee & Chavis, 2012). By including two cases, I could investigate the

condition of two distinct cross-cultural relationships that also considered two different contexts in which a flourishing relationship may form.

Embarking on case-based research also allowed me the opportunity to intimately engage with the people making up the cases. An investigation of human relationships cannot be engaged with at a distance, with neutrality and objectivity (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Instead, I sought to interact with my research. Indeed, I mentioned earlier that as I built relationships between participants and myself as a researcher, I was mindful of the cross-cultural spaces we had to navigate. Within the context of this research it was particularly important to constantly attend to *vā fealoalo 'i* (relational space). In this process, I was guided by my participants and their experience in navigating cross-cultural spaces. Throughout the research, I was able to apply the knowledge shared by participants to the relational space I needed to navigate. By engaging in case study research, investigations were able to be less exploitative and more in-depth. Participants had the time and space available to tell their story in full and as they required, allowing research to occur 'with' participants rather than 'on' subjects (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012).

In case study research, average or representative cases may not produce the most insights. Instead, there are numerous examples in the literature of insights from single cases, in particular, 'extreme cases'. Examples could include work by Newton or Foucault's work on the Panopticon (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Extreme cases allow the opportunity to discover underlying factors that may shape people's lives. In one sense, a cross-cultural relationship might represent an extreme case in intimate partner relationships, an area this research was open to explore with participants. In all human interactions, particularly those of an intimate nature, partners will encounter differences in values, worldviews, opinions and other elements of their unique identity. In a cross-cultural relationship, cultural differences may also include differences in language, worldview, religion and values. By examining how cross-cultural relationships may flourish through case-based research, we have the opportunity to develop knowledge about how a relationship may flourish despite significant difference between partners. These relationships can provide all intimate partner

relationships with insight from the investment they have made in navigating their differences to form a flourishing connection.

Instead of a cross-case analysis, both cases in this research are acknowledged as having meaning as stand-alone representations of how a relationship between Samoan-Palagi partners may flourish. Analysis of each case was conducted by considering it in its context. As argued by Hodgetts and Stolte (2012), a key task for case-based research is the use of macro and micro levels of analysis. By investigating single cases we can also explore the functioning of societies and social groups. Cases can provide an opportunity to explore how the social experience of a condition is portrayed. Information provided in the literature review provides a context both to cases of flourishing relationships and the social experience of their flourishing condition. The discussion chapter of this research draws together insight from both cases and the relevant literature to understand diversity and sameness between two couples who were both in Samoan-Palagi cross-cultural relationships.

Lee and Chavis (2012) emphasise that in case study research, a case study protocol is necessary to ensure that systemic and consistent data is collected. In this research, the UTA was used to develop a culturally responsive case study protocol. In case study research, it is also necessary to establish 'rules of evidence', meaning what is received as evidence from the data collected in research (Lee & Chavis, 2012). Important components of *fa'asamoa* as explored by UTA provided key areas of analysis for each case study.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, after each interview took place, the participants involved received a summary. Each summary included an overview of the discussion that occurred and often referred to participants' statements verbatim. I worked on sending summaries to participants as quickly after interviews as possible in order to confirm the presentation of their narrative while the interview was still fresh in their minds. Feedback was encouraged from participants and clarification was sought on important details of their narrative. Following a summary, I produced a 'story of flourishing' that began the process of organising the information to introduce the participants' story as a couple and key themes that arose from their interviews. Thematic analysis was used as a tool

for developing the analysis of the case studies; it is a method for analysing, identifying and reporting patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme captures something about the data in relation to the research question, particularly a pattern in the meaning participants make from their experiences. A thematic method acknowledges the researcher as having an active place in organising the themes of the research, and represents another way that I was not separate from but immersed in this research. The involvement of my research supervisors was also significant at this point. They helped to clarify what themes were most significant to explore and how participants' narratives might be understood from different cultural perspectives. Coding and analysis then developed from these 'stories of flourishing'. By exploring the key themes provided by participants' data, the analysis developed a focus beyond a mere retelling of a narrative to consider the significance of actions and events within that narrative. Identifying key themes also involves including themes that converge to create shared meaning.

The final product of the constant reiterating of analysis is the case studies explored in the next two chapters. Also, in the final chapter of this thesis, a discussion of the research findings is presented. The discussion explores a strong theme in both cases; the Samoan concept of *teu le vā*. This concept is exemplified in the experiences of both couples as they each constructed processes to care for the relational space between them while building a flourishing relationship together. Further discussion of key themes is explored in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Limitations

The focus of this thesis is on Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships. This limits the scope of this research in terms of other cultural perspectives on flourishing relationships. While analysis may provide useful information that can be applied in various intimate partner relationships, it cannot be assumed that information is relevant in other cultural contexts.

The participants in the case studies of this research happened to consist of couples in which the male partner was Samoan and the female partner was Palagi. It is possible that experiences of a flourishing relationship might be different for

couples in which the female partner is Samoan and male partner is Palagi. The scope of this research is also limited to heterosexual relationships, largely based on the established community connections of the researcher to couples who fit that criterion. Other demographics like age, life stage and relationship status could be included in research with a wider scope. The couples involved in the case studies for this research were both married and had children, although their experiences provided some variety within this; one couple had recently had their first child, while the second couple had their first child (and four more since then) over twenty years ago.

Intimate partner relationships are as varied as the people that make them up. Although this research captures a unique perspective on flourishing relationships, it does not encompass the experiences of all Samoan-Palagi flourishing relationships. A more thorough account of the experiences of Samoan-Palagi flourishing relationships would require more time and participants.

In conducting research that was culturally responsive and reciprocal in nature, I recruited participants from among personal networks. An implication of this was that as I navigated the cross-cultural space as a beginner I could draw on the knowledge of participants, and they could draw on their understanding of me formed through pre-existing relationship. I also continue to maintain the relationships through ongoing contact, allowing for safe navigation of cross cultural spaces. A limitation of this approach was that my relationship with participants could be argued to produce some bias and potentially skew results. This limitation reinforced my position as a curious learner in which I shed my assumptions in favour of engaging with curiosity. Although I had some relationship with participants prior to the research I had a very limited knowledge of the relationship between them. Instead I was able to apply my curiosity to gather insight into the unknown complexities of their relationships.

A major limitation in the methodology of this research was my position as an outsider researcher. As a Palagi, I acknowledge my limited understanding of cultural concepts, protocols and Samoan language. This may have made it more difficult for Samoan participants to share the nuances of their lived experiences, particularly in relation to culturally informed experiences. I also needed to be

mindful of the perils of conducting research that is not responsive to the needs of the research participants and their culture. However, being a non-Samoan researcher did allow me to enquire about Samoan perspectives from the position of a learner who was interested in things Samoan. In this position, participants could explain cultural practices and behaviours that they might otherwise expect a cultural insider to know. It also compelled me to recognise my limitations and seek the advice and direction of cultural advisors, particularly Dr Byron Seiuli, at each stage of the research process.

Exiting the research

It was important that my research design considered how I would conclude the work with my participants. After the interviews concluded, this involved providing participants with a *meaalofa* (gift) to honour their time and generosity in participating in the research project. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, participants were recruited from personal networks, which was done in part to cater for continuity in relationships and ongoing involvement with participants. The research process has enhanced the mutual trust, connection and respect of the friendships. I continue to engage with all participants outside of the research setting on a regular basis. I am committed to protecting their confidentiality by continuing to engage in a relationship that honours them and their relationships.

Dissemination of the research is also an important element of how I exit the research process. My intention is that the knowledge gained from this research might help to provide some form of practical or even therapeutic framework for people in cross-cultural, or any other intimate partner relationships. Dissemination will begin with the submission of the thesis and provision of a copy of the findings to participants. An opportunity for oral presentation of the results will also be considered, described by Smith (1999) as conforming to cultural protocols and expectations in indigenous communities. With regard to the dissemination of my findings, I consider the importance of *meaalofa* or reciprocity (Seiuli, 2012). It is vital to me that in response to all I have been able to learn from my Samoan participants, I give back and reciprocate the benefits of that shared knowledge.

Summary

In this chapter I have provided a rationale for and description of my research process. The reader is first introduced to the people who have been most significant to this research; my participants. I acknowledge them not only as key contributors to research findings but also as providers of guidance in respectful research processes. Throughout the research processes, my responsibility to *teu le vā* (tend to the relational space) was guided by the UTA framework alongside my Samoan participants. Many of the processes in this research are focused around how I, as a researcher, remained alert to *teu le vā*, between my participants and myself, and with the information retrieved from the interviews. Engaging in narrative dialogue for the investigation allowed participants to be honoured as co-creators of research, in a similar way to how *teu le vā* processes uphold the *mana* of those involved in relationship. Engaging in narrative research methodology involved a position of researching that is referred to as being a naïve inquirer, thus allowing my limited understanding of Samoan culture to open investigations of key concepts and experiences. As constant learning and evaluating of *vā* relationships occur, the researcher can attend to the relational space. Analysis of research by case study allowed holistic and contextual consideration of flourishing relationships, along with the researcher's intimate engagement with participants. Most significantly, the UTA was used in a variety of ways. This framework guided research engagement, inquiry and analysis. Therefore, the areas of focus in the UTA are connected to the data to be presented in the following chapters. As a result of treasuring the relational space, the research has strengthened existing relationships between researcher and participants, while generating rich insights into the complex, resilient and flourishing relationships of the participants. In the following two chapters the reader is introduced to the two case studies and their rich insights, followed by a discussion of the main findings.

Chapter Three: Case Study 1

With God intertwined in our lives, I promise to stay by your side. Living a life that will bring out the best in you, where I get to see your wildest dreams come true, wherever in the world that might be

(Wedding vows shared by Mira, interview 2, 14th July 2016)

This case study presents Fetu's and Mira's narratives related to their inter-racial marriage. Their wedding vows, which open this chapter, highlight the importance of faith and dreams as stable elements in their relationship that support flourishing. Faith and dreams are prominent in Fetu and Mira's relationship, not only in enjoyable times but also as they navigate conflict in their relationship. In particular, *teu le vā*, a Samoan concept of tending to the relational space between them, is applied to the processes Mira and Fetu employ to protect the relational spaces when facing conflict. First, to understand the relationship of Fetu and Mira, this chapter begins with a summary of their individual backgrounds as well as their relationship background. The personal summaries are then followed by two key sections using words from their vows to frame the themes for discussion; faith and dreams. In the presentation of this case, literature is woven into the discussion to offer psychological insight and extend current understandings of how this couple have been able to form and maintain a flourishing marriage.

Background

Fetu is a New Zealand-born man who identifies himself as Samoan; his father is Samoan and his mother is Tongan (raised in Fiji). In a family of five children, he is the fourth child, with two brothers and two sisters. His parents were *faifeau* ministers in a Samoan church in Wellington throughout his childhood. Sadly, his mother passed away while he was at university studying. Her death had a big impact on Fetu, his family and the wider community. Mira is a New-Zealand born woman of European (English and Scottish) ancestry. She grew up in a small town on the east coast. She is the youngest child of three children, with two sisters. She describes her family as "very faithful" and attended a variety of Christian churches with her family through childhood.

Fetu and Mira met during their first year at University; they were both 17 and living away from home for the first time. They had a sports day for their

hostel where they met and related well to each other. When Fetu asked if Mira missed her family, they both burst into tears on the field. Both Fetu and Mira commented on being surrounded at that time by people who were entirely focused on and motivated by their study. However, they both really struggled with moving beyond the loss of home and family. They became best friends and would "hang out and be family."

After university, there were many attempts by both partners to progress the relationship beyond friendship to romantic partnership. These attempts were unsuccessful but they continued to remain friends and made efforts to stay connected. They both developed in their faith individually over that time. Following time spent over summer working together, Fetu and Mira began a committed long-term relationship in 2011. For a year, Fetu and Mira lived in different cities while navigating their new relationship before deciding to settle in the Waikato together. Mira had a strong church community in the Waikato and Fetu experienced a great welcome from them. In late 2012, they were married.

A significant point in their marriage arose for both Fetu and Mira in 2015, when Fetu began to pursue his dream of representing Samoa in a sport. This presented some challenges, as it was a significant investment of time and resources. After many conversations with each other, family and trusted friends, Fetu and Mira decided together that they would live for a year in Samoa. The plan to move to Samoa was altered by the unexpected arrival of their first child and injuries sustained by Fetu that prevented him from playing that year. The changes in circumstances and redirection of their goals have allowed them the chance to reflect and dream again. It was at this point in their story that our interviews began and through discussion we explored what had helped Fetu and Mira over the years to develop a relationship that flourishes. Throughout Fetu and Mira's story, there is rich insight into the many areas of their flourishing relationship. However, this case focuses on the strongest themes organised around an excerpt from their wedding vows, emphasising faith and dreams as key themes in understanding how their relationship has been able to flourish.

Faith

In the vow, “*With God intertwined in our lives I promise to stay by your side,*” faith is presented as an important part of Fetu and Mira’s relationship. Their shared faith provides strength and unity in their relationship, and faith underpins many of the dreams they share. Faith is the three-stranded cord that connects them together and makes their relationship stronger. Both Fetu and Mira possess a strong personal Christian faith. They mentioned that for their wedding they used the metaphor of a three-stranded woven flax that is strong and not easily broken to design a ring and a flax-woven ‘*ie lavalava* (sarong). The three stranded cord is a biblical metaphor taken from Ecclesiastics 4:9-12; “*Two are better than one. Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*” The three-fold cord metaphor describes the process in which wife and husband, with God, create a strong bond together. This metaphor will be explained further and drawn upon to understand how faith has helped Fetu and Mira to develop a flourishing relationship.

For Fetu and Mira, the three-stranded cord metaphor operates in three distinct ways to support their relationship. Firstly, they are able to create a strong bond together, with God who is foundational and essential to their relationship. Secondly, the three-stranded cord of faith has also woven a community of support for Fetu and Mira. This further appeals to the notion in the metaphor that one may be overpowered, but multiple people in their community provide strength and resilience to their relationship. Finally, the durability of the three-stranded cord provides a link from their heritage to their future together.

A cord that is not quickly broken; a strong foundation

The biblical metaphor of a three-stranded cord frames Mira and Fetu’s relationship with God and each other as three separate strands that are bound tightly together to create a strong cord. Each partner (Fetu, Mira and God) in the relationship is represented by a single strand. Together the strength of each strand is reinforced by being intertwined with the others. The three-stranded cord metaphor also reinforces the distinct strength of each strand; the strands are not amalgamated into one cord. Instead, their singular strength is fortified through connection to each other, without losing the distinct identity of each cord. In a

similar way, Fetu and Mira demonstrate a personal journey in their faith that has strengthened their strands individually.

By drawing on the three-stranded metaphor to explain how faith can build a flourishing relationship, the Samoan concept of *feagaiga* can be applied. Fetu and Mira's ability to emphasise the differences between each other to enhance their relationship and complement each other can be related to *feagaiga*. As briefly mentioned in the literature review, the word *feagaiga* is derived from *feagai* which means to be opposite to another (Latai, 2015). However, in Samoa, this opposition does not imply conflict but rather mutuality and a reciprocal relationship. The *feagaiga* refers to a sacred covenant of mutual respect, giving special honour to the sister and reciprocal esteem to the brother (Latai, 2015). This reciprocity is based on the belief that all things, living and non-living, physical and spiritual, are interconnected and dependent on each other (Latai, 2015). This relationship is vital for sustaining social balance and dictating one's behaviour to others. The term *feagaiga* is thus a 'covenant' directed at maintaining a state of harmony between kin and within Samoan society as a whole (Latai, 2015). This covenant emphasises the importance of embracing difference for the balance and harmony of the whole family. In the relationship between Fetu and Mira, they demonstrate a strong acceptance of their differences; in gender, culture, and numerous personal traits. Their acceptance is supplemented by a strong commitment to show respect and relate well across their differences. They show that respectful deference and acceptance can allow their differences to complement each other and create harmony in their relationship and family. Throughout this present chapter, the themes of faith and dreams as supports for a flourishing relationship are repeatedly connected to the concept of *feagaiga*.

In the metaphor of the three-stranded cord, strong personal faith creates a strong strand that contributes to the overall strength of the three-stranded cord. Fetu and Mira each shared a description of their distinct yet strong and complementary expressions of faith. Fetu began by explaining

Both my parents were *faiifeau*, church ministers in a Samoan church in Wellington. I see my 'Samoan-ness' as my Christianity, they are one and the same. When I left home and was away from Samoan culture it was like

a separation of my identity, built on both my culture and my faith. However, the time I had at university strengthened my identity and helped me make my own connections back to my heritage. Moving to Auckland was another significant point in a journey of faith. Through the support of family, I was able to really face the grief of losing my mother. Pretty much every Sunday I rocked up to church and would just sit and cry...for a year.

In the quote above, Fetu explains how his church became his refuge and comfort when his mother passed away. Faith is also presented as a refuge for cultural identity. Fetu describes his Samoan identity as intrinsically connected with his Christian life. Although each part represents uniqueness, they come together somehow to form a strong bond that supports and maintains cultural identity wherever he is located. Tauleale'ausumai (1997) elaborates further on this apparently dichotomous relationship between Samoan culture and the Christian church, which coexists to support identity construction for many Samoans in NZ, similar to Fetu's experiences. Fetu adds that as he developed in his faith, it supported him culturally, emotionally, and socially wherever he was located. For Mira, her faith also grew and strengthened her over many years, providing strength wherever she was located. She notes

Spirituality and faith was a natural part of my childhood and adult life. I had spiritual experiences in childhood that felt both supernatural and familiar at the same time. After leaving home I pursued experiences, at university and abroad, to develop spiritually and engage in service in communities in need. In each place I lived, I knew it was time to move on when I sensed my time had finished there; faith guided me throughout my experiences.

Mira articulated a faith that has guided and grounded her throughout diverse experiences. Faith has strengthened Fetu and Mira both personally, strengthening their strand, and allowing them to draw on that strength to reinforce their marriage or the three-stranded cord. In their relationship Fetu and Mira describe their faith as:

Pivotal, foundational, and essential for keeping us together. Without God, we are so easily untwined, but with God, we are so strong. We are a team, the roles change, but God will walk with us and guide us ultimately. Faith is the foundation for us. It gives us stability even when there is not.

Even in times of uncertainty or disharmony in the relationship, faith can provide strength and commitment to seeing Fetu and Mira through difficult times. Fetu goes on to explain how faith strengthens them in conflict:

A lot of our strength in God comes from humility, awareness of our limitedness. God who is eternal and sovereign, created us. Our position becomes one of privilege, to be a part of life and do life with each other. That humility is healthy for us, to know that we are not better than each other. When it comes to conflict it's not worth holding on to an offence but being quick to apologise. Because God has shown us much grace, we extend the grace to each other. We have a saying 'its ok but it's not ok' when things go bad and we hurt each other, its ok I forgive you but that really hurt.

Fetu articulates the importance of humility and equality in his relationship with Mira. A faith in God provides the basis for understanding how they can be both limited as created beings and yet worthy of respect as the pinnacle of God's creation. They navigate conflict by not engaging in a power struggle or attempting to 'win' an argument. Mira explains the goal in conflict:

We know that the goal is to find a resolution, it's not to be right or be the most hurt or have the other person say sorry.

As this statement indicates, instead of trying to win an apology, or a fight, Fetu and Mira describe a process in which they show respect for each other and their differences, despite emotional turbulence or strong opinions. Over time they have learnt the best way to go about finding a resolution together. Fetu describes managing conflict as one of the most difficult challenges they have had to face together. Fetu also explains what they have learnt to do when facing a disagreement:

We've decided in our family we talk through things. We talk through how we are feeling, what's offended us and we try and be as frank about it as possible. We've had some failed arguments but the aim is the same, to try and sort it out as soon as possible and remain in that relationship, or in that space. Not to violate the other's trust or disrespect the other by taking off. Whether it's going for a walk or staying in the same room no matter how hard it gets. We are committed to the hard times.

Remaining committed during their relationship means Fetu and Mira developing their own rules of engagement when challenged by the differences they have.

These rules are reinforced by a faith that provides a belief in the sacredness of each partner in the relationship. Both partners even have an understanding that if they still do not find resolution on an issue then they can ask their partner to pray. This has proved to help find a solution in the past when nothing else could; a

particular level of resilience that provides security when all other measures are exhausted.

As mentioned throughout this case, the phrase *teu le vā* exemplifies how Fetu and Mira agreed to protect the space between them. By ensuring that they do not *solī* or trample the important space between them, they also act to preserve the *mana* of each partner in the relationship (Mila-Schaaf, 2006). A process that is engaged by both partners to continue to show respect in times of conflict and emotional intensity also resonates with much of the new research on how interactions are managed so the relationship may be preserved and grow through conflict. In particular, Eckstein and colleagues (2014) argue for Respect, Responsibility, Review and Release as core processes to support a flourishing relationship. Fetu and Mira show release when they have the humility to let go of offence, and they show review through learning about each other and developing a process to protect their engagement in conflict. Altogether, they display a focus on a process that has allowed them to cultivate respect in their relationship, a necessary ingredient for a flourishing relationship.

The strength provided by faith as compared to a three-stranded cord can also be linked to the psychological theory of attachment. As discussed in Chapter One, attachment theory provides insight into the dynamics of the parent-child bond and emotional needs of young children. The theory argues, reinforced by extensive research, that warm and responsive care by an attachment figure, particularly for children in the first years of life, will create a secure bond. This bond also forms an internal working model of expectations for relationships that are shown to persist throughout the lifespan (Shaver et al., 2010). Attachment theory has also developed, to show important implications for adult relationships (Shaver et al., 2010). This is often explained through the effect of internal working models, established through attachment relationships, that can influence cognition, affect and behaviour (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2009). In this research, the attachment styles of participants and the effects of these were not a focus. However, attachment theory is applied in this context as an explanation of relational needs to promote flourishing in intimate partner relationships.

Secure attachment links closely to the concept of flourishing. In the literature on attachment, children who experience responsive caregiving are essentially provided with a secure base from which they can explore the world. In the case study of Fetu and Mira, we see that attachment may also be used as a framework for understanding the necessary elements required to form a flourishing relationship. The literature on early attachment relationships indicates that if the needs for safety and exploration are met in interactions, then relationships may flourish. This is evident in the case of Fetu and Mira; by experiencing the conditions of a secure attachment, their relationship has flourished. Through a shared faith, they are able to form a sense of security in their relationship. Faith provides them with strength, personally and together, with a community that offers support, and with consistency through connection to both the past and future. Faith then provides the emotional security and safety needed in their relationship so it may flourish. Further discussion in this chapter addresses how dreaming together also contributes to the development of a secure attachment for a flourishing relationship.

With God intertwined in our lives; A community through faith

The metaphor of a three-stranded cord is also extended in this case to describe a flourishing relationship connected not only through faith but to a faith community. The strength of the three-stranded cord is further reinforced by many other strands woven into a flourishing relationship. The many other strands represent the members of a church community. Fetu and Mira describe their faith as being communal and emphasize the significance of their current church community. Church community provides Fetu and Mira with a support network with whom they share everyday life. Fetu explains:

Connection outside of our relationship is huge for us. Having a strong church community was a deciding factor on where we would live together when we decided to marry. Now we have some really strong people who know us well and know each other. They provide support for us individually and together. When we live far away from our family they can be like family for us.

A church community is likened here by Fetu to a family that supports him and Mira as individuals and as a couple. For many Samoans in NZ, the church community has become the pseudo-village, where support and fellowship with

other Samoans provide a safe place to practice their cultural values, as well as giving an atmosphere where the next generation of Samoans learn how to incorporate Samoan values into their everyday lives (Anae, 1998). Similarly, Fetu and Mira see their community as a place for support and activity; one that has a significant influence on their decisions for living and building a life together. Their community acts like a family or village, wherever they are located.

In times of conflict, church community can be especially helpful in supporting a flourishing relationship. Community relationships can provide support where honest and external perspectives are needed for support through life struggles. Mira explains how supports have worked for her and Fetu when facing conflict:

We each have people in our community that provide us with support. At the beginning of our relationship, we completed pre-marital counselling with church leaders. In our second year of marriage, Fetu wanted to move to Samoa in a month. I wasn't quite ready for that; we ended up going to church leaders and they talked to us objectively and sounded both of us out. At the time we were both really young and really passionate and strong-willed. We weren't able to see each other's perspective. They helped just by reiterating Fetu's perspective or articulating things in a way that I hadn't been able to.

Mira explains that seeking out this support is less about getting instruction or advice on how they should act and more involving someone who is able to look at struggles more objectively and expand their ability to understand one another. They do not only involve social supports in times when they are functioning and presenting well; they are also able to draw on their support when they are most vulnerable and uncertain. These supports are then able to assist Fetu and Mira when they need it most and create resilience in their relationship.

The three-stranded cord that links the past to the future

The final aspect of the three-stranded cord metaphor is the acknowledgement of the cord as connected to a heritage or legacy of faith. Instead of conceptualising each partner's strand as beginning only with them as individuals, the three-stranded cord is emphasised as emerging from the faith of forefathers. A flourishing intimate partner relationship represents an opportunity to bring together the strands of two families and connect the spiritual heritage of ancestors to the faith they practice now and the faith they are building in their family. For

Fetu and Mira, faith strengthens them as a couple, but their relationship is also able to flourish because it represents a coming together and continuation of faith over many generations. Regardless of the cultural differences between Fetu's and Mira's families, their Christian faith represents an important similarity that weaves their families together. Mira explains:

Faith is the primary reason for the love and acceptance from each other's families. It comes down to faith being such an integral part of our families because that's not the picture for all cross-cultural marriages.

Although their union required an adjustment by each family to another culture, Fetu and Mira's shared faith also meant that their relationship provided a continuation of a heritage of faith. Both families have possessed a strong Christian faith for many generations and were able to accept a marriage that would continue this legacy, without much difficulty.

The legacy of faith that continues through the relationship of Fetu and Mira can be likened to weaving a cord that connects forefathers with current generations and generations in the future. Faith is not only a set of beliefs or actions but part of a heritage of spiritual connection, strengthened by traditions of faith passed on to current generations. Fetu spoke about his heritage:

I have known a legacy of spiritual men in my family; my father, my grandfather. As part of that legacy, I am responsible for passing it on to my children. This heritage is both Samoan and Christian, intertwined and I am conscious of my responsibility to pass that culture and that Christianity onto my children.

Fetu grounds his practice of faith and cultural identity in both an inheritance as a son and a responsibility as a father. The cord he and Mira weave together with God is strengthened both by the connections to the past and desire to maintain that connection for the future. Mira adds, "God is the third strand, he is everything. We want the same for our baby as well, that's how we do life."

The connection of an individual or single relationship as connected to forebears resonates with concepts of faith and identity in *fa'asamoa*. I refer again to a statement by Tui Atua from Chapter One,

I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies . . . I share my tofi [an

inheritance] with my family, my village and my nation . . . This is the essence of my belonging (Tui Atua, 2009, p. 80)

Tui Atua explains the importance of a collective context for Samoan people, along with identity inherited through connection to ancestors. The features of the three-stranded cord also emphasise the strength of a collective, especially when inclusive of ancestors. Through the metaphor of the three-stranded cord, faith is understood not just as a temporal way to engage, but is embedded in heritage and the tradition of each partner's family. The importance of their forefathers' faith is important for both partners and reinforces their relationship with each other. A flourishing relationship means they weave together not only their lives and stories but their families' stories as well.

Dreams

In this case study, faith provides the basis or foundational needs for a flourishing relationship. However, not only does flourishing require basic survival needs or a lack of disorder, it also requires vitality, growth and exploration. Vitality in flourishing is consistent with Keyes' (2002) explanation of flourishing.

Flourishing people are described as truly living rather than merely existing (Keyes, 2002, p. 81). Flourishing thus requires not just living safely and having the necessities of life provided for; it involves vitality, exploration and living with passion. In this case, dreams are presented as that vitality. Formulating dreams allows a relationship to grow, for both partners to aspire to their potential and for them to come together to explore their place in the world. The importance of dreaming for Fetu and Mira is echoed by the excerpt from their vows, "I get to see your wildest dreams come true, wherever in the world that might be." Pursuing dreams and goals is a unique aspect of Mira and Fetu's relationship, an outcome of them coming together and a way they connect with each other.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, attachment theory can be drawn on to explain how faith and dreams in Fetu and Mira's relationship have allowed them to flourish. Understandings of attachment are applied to explore how Fetu and Mira are able to flourish as their faith and dreams cater for their relational needs. Faith provides emotional security and safety, much like the secure base in attachment theory. It can also be argued that because they experience safety in

their relationship, Fetu and Mira are able to explore their world and dream for the future. They even remark that in the process of finding each other and entering a relationship where they are safe and can belong, they have evolved into dreamers. As their relational needs are met, they can explore and create with their lives. They are able to think creatively about managing difficulties or obstacles in their lives and relationship. They are able to think about the future and what they most want from their lives and for their families. They even have the freedom and stability to dream for a better future for their community and how they might play a role in this. It is through both the secure base provided by faith and the chance to explore through their dreams that Fetu and Mira are able to flourish together.

In this part of the case study, I present three ways in which dreaming together can support a flourishing relationship. First of all, dreams can provide a mode of being creative that strengthens the relationship and helps in creating solutions to problems that arise. Focusing on dreams together promotes building unity and resolution in more difficult times. Secondly, shared dreams can allow a couple to come together and invest in their shared goals. Finally, by seeking out personal dreams and working together on shared dreams, the couple's goals can extend to dreams beyond their own family to include aspirations of service to the community.

Dreaming as a problem-solving strategy

Even when challenged by the differences in an inter-racial relationship, dreams can support the development of shared dreams as creative solutions to differences. Dreaming about the future can allow personal values to be identified and teased out, and solutions reached to bring the values of each partner together. An example from Fetu and Mira of navigating differences through exploring dreams is in regards to *fa'alavelave* (giving in crisis or emergency). Navigating financial obligations can be a common difficulty for Samoan-Palagi couples as each culture has a different perspective on financial obligations during crises or important events (Solomon, 2013). Fetu explained more of how he and Mira navigated the differences:

I think shared goals have been quite pivotal in helping us to have this conversation towards the same purpose. For instance, we love my dad who is elderly and on a sickness benefit. Mira was concerned about what would

happen when he passes away. In my experience, the whole community gets behind you and they bring gifts of money and fine mats so they could assist with that. In her experience, a funeral is a family's responsibility. So with my dad, we set up an account to put money away for anything regarding him. Whether it's taking him out for coffee or shared experiences in Wellington, or saving up for his funeral. Having a shared purpose has helped with that. Before, it was just giving the last cent you have as my family are big on generosity. She struggled with that because her dad's an accountant and she grew up learning to save.

In this statement, setting goals or managing difference can be challenging to the idea of flourishing. However, Fetu and Mira emphasise that instead of just selecting a compromise or middle point between their opposing differences, they often develop a creative solution that will satisfy the needs of each partner and their families. They will think beyond options offered to them and carve out a creative path of their own. By dreaming together Fetu and Mira are able to tease out the values and goals that are most important to them. From this position, they are then able to think divergently and conceive creative new outcomes.

Constructing creative solutions also allows diversity in their relationship. By creating a bank account with money set aside to meet the expenses of the family that may come up, Mira and Fetu can balance expectations from Fetu's family, such as *fa'alavelave*, with the expectations from Mira's family to be financially independent. Their approach to differences is related to the concept of *feagaiga*, as they let differences complement each other rather than oppose each other. Their differences are integrated to guide dream making and goal setting. As a result, Fetu and Mira's shared value of family is able to lead them to develop new and creative solutions to engage with both of their families, despite polarising cultural differences.

The dream of family

Not only do dreams act to bring elements of exploration and creativity into a relationship, they may provide strength and unity through developing dreams together. By having the chance to explore through dreams, the intersection of the dreams of each partner can also be discovered. As shared dreams are developed they can create a vision or goal in a flourishing relationship. An example of an important shared dream for Fetu and Mira is the dream of building a family. Fetu explains how this dream developed over their relationship;

What brought us together is our love for family. As we got closer we developed more interest in each other's dreams, passions and families. Initially, our shared dream was to get married. Once that was achieved we would produce a long list of goals for each year. With the arrival of our first baby we decided on just four goals: to love, laugh, pray and eat.. That is to *love* each other and baby, to make each other and baby *laugh*, to *pray* together, to *eat* together as a family and with others. Having just four goals for this year has allowed us to focus on what is most important for us both. Now we are more inspired to formulate what sort of family we want to develop.

Mira adds:

We are big dreamers, we have evolved into them over our relationship.

The above quotes details the journey Fetu and Mira have taken together establishing their dreams. Valuing family was what drew them together initially; as their relationship grew so did their dreams together. As they began their family, Fetu and Mira narrowed their goals and are now mostly focused on formulating what their family will be like. When describing what they dream for their family, Mira states:

It comes back to dreams, asking what we want our family to look like, culture-wise. Our cultures are so different. We each bring that different culture to what we are creating here. It's really important to us that we take the best from both our words. He hasn't been able to utilize and celebrate the Samoan language as he would at home. In one generation we could lose that. So that's really important to us that we capture that and use it in our home. His family are incredibly hospitable and really generous. And from my family, we take doing holidays well, going camping, hunting, surfing and fishing. Things that are really important from my childhood that I want for my kids.

As Mira's statement shows, their desire to create a family that draws from the 'best of both worlds' emphasizes their respect for difference. They express being committed to not just have one partner's identity replicated in the identity of their young family but allowing the ways they are different to inform the identity of their family. The dream of a family that draws from both partners' differences echoes the sentiments earlier regarding how Fetu and Mira allow their differences to complement rather than oppose each other. Their approach to difference in family is again related to the concept of *feagaiga*. By encouraging differences, Fetu and Mira are able to build a stronger family unit that uses each of their experiences. Also, as a result, the family Fetu and Mira are creating together has

its own distinct culture, not solely determined by one of their cultures. According to Solomon (2013), at the Identity Management stage, each partner in an interracial relationship learns to manage differences in their cultures to develop their own relational culture. The development of a shared relational culture was also mentioned in the discussion of interdependence theory in Chapter One. By responding to each other's needs in developing what they want their family to look like, Fetu and Mira can act to preserve their mutual interests. Being able to form a relational identity and culture has allowed them to work together towards shared goals. Through the case of Fetu and Mira, we see that a flourishing relationship doesn't just include two people who are tolerating another but who have become so interconnected that they share an identity, a culture of their own.

The greater dream

Ultimately, by dreaming to realise the potential of each partner and their potential together, dreams develop beyond just self and family. According to De La Lama (2012) the ability to focus on serving a cause greater than self and family is present in the late stages of their model of flourishing relationships (the Soul Mates Model). Couples are then engaged in a stage of renewal in which they are also likely to be engaged in devising a path for joint action. This stage makes way for the development of a legacy and the ultimate stage in a flourishing relationship.

Fetu and Mira participate in many faith-based activities for the purpose of contributing to the wellbeing of other couples and families. In recent times, Fetu and Mira's shared faith has provided the opportunity to work together in encouraging others in their journey. They often experience praying for friends and loved ones. This attracts and connects the partners together. Fetu describes it as "one of the most attractive traits I find in her". The ability to invest together in others' lives in their community also represents a source of connection. For Mira and Fetu, being able to dream, along with the stability provided by their faith, allows them to extend their hope and energies beyond themselves and their family.

Fetu and Mira also both describe a dream of living and working in Samoa in the future. This dream will provide their family with an immersive experience

in the language and customs of *fa'asamoa*, while also granting an opportunity to serve the community of Samoa. Fetu describes his vision:

I love Samoan people. The other day I was reading some articles about Pacific health in NZ and I almost cried. I love these people and it pains me to see their health, because that's my field of study, would be worse than others. The dream to move back to Samoa has always been on my heart, and we don't know for how long but we do know that I want to work there in my profession to provide some sort of service. I don't really know what that looks like yet but it's been an understanding with Mira ever since we were friends. As a family, it would mean that we would be immersed in the culture and the language. We want to be a family who can speak Samoan at home conversationally. That's another purpose for us going there. It's not just the language, it's the customs, I want our family to know. For me, the real beauty of *fa'asamoa* is the relationships and the deep honouring of those relationships. The real thoughtful, thoughtful actions.

In the statement above, Samoa represents a place for both Mira and Fetu where their family can be grounded in their identity and tradition. Connection to *fa'asamoa* is an important part of what they dream for their family. Also, from a larger perspective, the opportunity to invest in the health of Samoan communities is a dream greater than either of them or their relationship. This dream can relate to or even be explained by Samoan concepts of *tautua*. An integral element of *fa'asamoa*, *tautua* is described as one's spiritual calling and service in life (Lilomaiaava-Doktor, 2009). Fetu describes applying his profession in a community in Samoa where it is deeply needed as his service. By exploring dreams together and developing a dream for service to their community, Fetu and Mira uncover a spiritual calling or life service.

Summary

This case study is structured around the themes of faith and dreams articulated in the wedding vows: "With God intertwined in our lives I promise to stay by your side, where I get to see your wildest dreams come true". Faith is presented as the three-stranded cord intertwined into Fetu and Mira's relationship. Faith has woven strands developed through personal faith to create a strong foundation or secure base in a flourishing relationship. The theme of faith is related to *feagaiga* as differences are respected as complementary and able to strengthen the cord as a whole. Faith also allows many strands to be woven together, representing a

community or village of faith that supports a flourishing relationship. Finally, faith as the three-stranded cord allows an intimate partner relationship to continue a legacy of faith from the past and continue that heritage into the future. Faith is related to the secure base discussed as a relational need in attachment theory; through faith, a strong and secure relationship can develop. Each element of faith that supports a flourishing relationship is evident not only in times of ease but especially when conflict occurs in the relationship.

Dreams are a secondary and complementary theme to faith in this case study. Dreams support a flourishing relationship by bringing partners together while they can also explore their differences. Developing dreams allows creative solutions to be reached by teasing out the values of each partner to find convergent goals. Fetu and Mira emphasize that they strive to draw together the 'best of both worlds' in their relationship and draw from the different strengths of both partners to complement the whole. Through a process of exploring their dreams, Fetu and Mira are able to combine their goals to focus on shared dreams together. A further outcome of developing dreams together allows progression beyond just aspiring for the potential of partners or the relationship but for the potential of a better society.

Through faith and dreams, a relationship can flourish with both security and freedom. Faith supports and strengthens a relationship grounded in heritage and connection to a community. Dreams allow partners to explore and live out their potential, while coming together. Samoan concepts of *feagaiga* are related to the respect for difference as complementary rather than opposing, allowing solutions to be reached and dreams to be created together. Attachment theory also relates to understanding how the security of faith and exploration through dreams can support a flourishing relationship. Overall, Fetu and Mira show that through a shared faith and by constructing dreams together, they can develop a relationship that fulfils, grows and flourishes.

Chapter Four: Case study 2

Flourishing is being healthy, healthy in communication, Maia being healthy, healthy is not being sick. When all those things are good, you flourish. Flourishing is good conversation, flourishing for us is happy kids, they are all part of it. When things are flourishing at home and with Maia, work is easy. When they are good, I'm good.

(Leo, interview 2, 20 August 2016)

This chapter presents the case study of Leo and Maia. The main theme of their case is *teu le vā* (tending to the relational space), which is used to explore how Leo and Maia have developed a flourishing relationship. As mentioned in earlier sections of this thesis, *teu le vā* refers to the importance of nurturing, cherishing or protecting the *vā* or relational space (Mila-Schaaf, 2006; Pereira, 2011; Tiatia, 2012). Through tending to the relational space, Maia and Leo's relationship has been able to flourish and grow. Leo provided a statement of flourishing that captures the essence of *teu le vā* and I have used it to open this case study. Embedded within Leo's quote and reiterated in the interviews with Maia and Leo are two key aspects of how this couple *teu le vā* in their relationship: the family context and good communication are the tools they find most helpful as they create a flourishing relationship. This chapter begins with the background of Maia and Leo's relationship, followed by a discussion of how they have attended to and cultivated the relational space through family relationships and good communication, to create a flourishing marriage.

Background

Maia and Leo met at high school when they were 14 and 15 years old; she was the teacher's pet and he was the 'naughty kid'. Concerned that they were spending a lot of time together, a teacher warned Maia's parents about Leo's potentially negative influence, so they requested his presence at church and Sunday lunch. Maia's parents became like second parents to Leo, which helped to foster a relationship of deep trust. From then onwards, her parents and sister continued to be a strong source of social support for their developing relationship. Leo's mother migrated from Samoa before he was born and worked four jobs to keep her family going. He is the younger brother to four sisters. He grew up without his father but with a stepfather whom he witnessed being violent towards his mother.

After six years of dating Leo and Maia were married. There was no engagement because by that point, no one was surprised and marriage was seen as the next step for them as a couple. After the birth of their first child, Leo and Maia moved to a small town due to Leo's work commitments. While the move was only for a year, Leo and Maia found it a very challenging time because they were living away from their family support and had a newborn baby. Leo and Maia had to rely on each other and felt they became a stronger couple as a result. They both refer to that time as the making of their relationship.

Maia and Leo went on to have two more children, during which time they moved to several different cities in New Zealand. For several years they were youth pastors, and they helped with a tsunami relief project in Samoa. The relief work allowed them to develop a relationship with a Samoan agency working with children. In 2013 they adopted a baby from Samoa, and later started a fundraising trust together. They are currently in the process of adopting two more children from Samoa into their family. Leo and Maia continue to live and work in NZ but travel frequently to contribute to the organisation they work with in Samoa.

Over 24 years of marriage, Maia and Leo have faced challenges, but together they have developed a flourishing relationship that they describe as "getting better and better". The next section focuses on exploring how Leo and Maia *teu le vā* by investing in family and developing good communication.

Flourishing is being healthy; flourishing is happy kids

The process of *teu le vā* or nurturing relationships is crucial in a communal cultural framework because in the *fa'asamoa* context, a Samoan person does not exist as an individual (Anae, 2010). Through relationships, a Samoan person is contextually connected as part of a larger network of family and kin relations (Autagavaia, 2001; Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009). In this regard, the family that Maia and Leo have developed, particularly with their children, gives context to their relationship, providing a space that they belong to and derive identity from. For Maia and Leo, the family space is identified as the most important space in which they *teu le vā*. By tending to the relational space they have built a flourishing relationship and a flourishing family. Tiatia (2012) explains *teu le vā* as a Samoan imperative to both *protect* and *nurture* the *vā* or relational space. For Maia and

Leo, nurturing the family space is achieved by honouring the sacredness of *vā* relations through the spiritual development of their family. Also, to protect the *vā* in their family, Leo and Maia give careful attention to their relationships with each other and their children. They also demonstrate how they protect the *vā* through building a family that is free from violence. The following section extends the *teu le vā* processes further with a focus on two key aspects as communicated by both Maia and Leo: protecting the family space and nurturing the sacred space.

Teu le vā: protecting the family space

As mentioned earlier, *vā* is the relational space that needs to be protected, otherwise, it may be *solī* (trampled). Damage to the relational space could then also damage the *mana* (dignity) of those persons relating through the space (Clayton, 2007; Mila-Schaaf, 2006). For Maia and Leo, protecting their family relationships is a focus of their relationship and life together. Their capacity to care for their growing family is explained by their ability to *teu le vā* in the relational space of the family. Leo explains the importance of family by emphasising this as the space they protect. Leo outlines practical decision-making that prioritises relationships within their family space when he states:

Family looks like me coming home from work at a decent time. We also have this rule where I come home, ten minutes I get to be blah, then I'm dad. Kids have a rule of thumb 'shake it off before you come in'. So many times in the early days I'd bring work home before I realised that wasn't healthy for us. Its important to put my husband hat on. And if I need to talk about work stuff that's not done in family time, that's just done with me and Maia. Even if it's pastoral care stuff or issues we are facing with family members that's just done within us. Family is protecting that space.

In his statement above, Leo emphasises the family taking priority, especially given the likelihood of external pressures demanding his time. He also describes how his children have requested that he psychologically separate what happens at work from their family environment. Such steps ensure that the issues of the day or workplace are prevented from entering the cherished family space.

Legitimising boundaries placed by the children also illustrates the participation of all members of the *āiga* (family) in the *teu le vā* process. According to Mila-Schaaf (2006), the *vā* exists not just between individuals but between families. Thus everyone in the family is responsible for collectively respecting, nurturing

and protecting the *vā*. Leo and Maia also cater to the needs of their family by making their own time, just between themselves, so they can discuss the events of their day or challenges they are facing. Their family space is where their relationship is embedded but they have also established boundaries to protect their family space from the challenges they face as adults.

Another way Maia and Leo *teu le vā* and protect the relationships in their family is evident in environments where they have high demands on their attention, like the church they worked in or other public arenas. In these environments, Leo and Maia have developed ways of communicating to prioritise the family. Leo explains:

Even when we are in public arenas, our kids know we will drop anything for family. We have a code that if they come up and put their hand on my shoulder, if they are feeling anxious, then whoever I'm talking to, I'll finish the conversation and they get the focus.

As Leo's statement indicates, it is such safeguarding measures that can protect Leo and Maia's relationships with their children and each other. The process of *teu le vā* ensures that Maia and Leo and their children continue to protect the family space, even as they explore the world outside of their family home.

Each example of protecting family space provided thus far acknowledges the importance of attending to the relational space for a flourishing relationship and family. A further important aspect of protecting the family relational space is ensuring that it is safe from violence. For both Leo and Maia, having a safe family is of particular importance because as a child, Leo experienced violence in his family. He made a commitment to not let violence be a part of his family. Together, Maia and Leo have spent years cultivating a space that is safe and free from violence. Maia and Leo shared the experience of their pre-marriage counselling. Maia explains:

One of the things I got told in my individual counselling session was that Leo would probably end up beating me; he would be abusive, because of his upbringing. I think they actually used that word beating.

Leo explains the counsellor's comments as an assumption based on his upbringing and the physical abuse directed at his mother by his biological father and stepfather, which was taken to mean that he, also, would be violent. Both Maia

and Leo recalled the prejudice of health professionals providing counsel and how out of place those assumptions were even at the time. Instead, Leo dissected the process he underwent to ensure that he was a non-violent partner and father, to establish a relationship and family that is flourishing. He explains:

I was brought up in a lot of violence. I grew up quite angry because I had no dad, I was sick of being poor, I was sick of not having a mum and I was sick of getting a hiding. And then when I made a commitment to follow Jesus, I thought "surely there has got to be something better than this" and I came to my own conclusions that if God is love, I won't do that to my kids when I get married. Because I'd seen a lot of brokenness and what domestic violence does; it was just my constant when I was growing up, every day.

As Leo explains in his statement above, by applying Christian values of *alofa* (love, compassion), he recognised and rejected ways of relating that trampled *vā* relationships and that he did not want to participate in. He stated further, "I don't want to be like that".

As Leo developed his Christian faith, his belief supported his resolve. He states: "if God is love I won't do that to my kids". This recognition was followed by faith in a new experience of relationships. He believed "there must be something more than this". This was aided by the inspiration he was able to draw from Maia's family. Leo described Maia's parents as his first opportunity to witness a healthy relationship, stating: "her mum and dad were the first time I got to see what it looked like to be a mum and dad." Leo's actions of *alofa* are supplemented by drawing upon the value of *fa'aaloalo* (respectful practices). Leo decided "no, violence stops now" by choosing to engage in practices of respect for the safety of his family. He took ownership of the anger he experienced, which could threaten the cultivation of a safe family. He resolved that it then was a matter of, "just me dealing with my anger issues". Leo and Maia are able to cultivate a space that is safe for their family particularly through the application of *alofa* and *fa'aaloalo*, two significant dimensions of *fa'asamoa*. These respectful practices nurture the *vā*, the space between in family relationships, and allow Maia, Leo, and their family to flourish.

The process that Leo and Maia embarked on to ensure their family was free of violence can be linked to Durie's explanation of flourishing or *Mauri ora*.

Durie (2015) uses *Mauri noho* to explain languishing, which involves relationships that are disempowering and humiliating. On the other hand, flourishing or a state of *Mauri ora* involves relationships that are nurturing and mutually beneficial. Maia and Leo's story together is an illustration of a journey from *Mauri noho* to *Mauri ora*. Although Leo knew relationships that were disempowering and violent through his childhood, by a commitment to *teu le vā*, his children experience a childhood exposed to relationships that are nurturing and mutually beneficial. A flourishing relationship is demonstrated by Maia and Leo as a process, a movement from relationships that are languishing to relationships that are flourishing. This is consistent with how Maia and Leo described their relationship as flourishing by an "upwards flourish." Through the *teu le vā* process, Leo, Maia and their family have been able to move in an upwards flourish from languishing to flourishing. Maia and Leo demonstrate a relationship that is mutually beneficial and nurturing and have also developed relationships with their children that are safe, nurturing and beneficial.

Teu le vā; nurturing the sacred space

An important aspect of *teu le vā* is the emphasis on *vā* relationships as sacred and originating through a creator God relating to his creation. In talking about *vā*, Autagavaia (2001) accentuates the sacredness of the *vā*. The relational space needs to be cared for through focused intentions and conscious actions, to maintain and protect the *vā* as something sacred. Anae (2010) proposes that through protocols observed by *teu le vā*, the sacred nature of people is protected and enhanced. The spiritual underpinnings of the *vā* are explained by Tuagalu (2008) as foundational to the *vā* relations between people. *Vā* has been defined as the relationship between the creator and the created (Aiono, 2003). Spirituality is an important part of how Leo and Maia *teu le vā* in their relationship and family. They treasure their relationship as embedded in a sacred context and part of how they relate to God. Both Maia and Leo share a personal Christian faith and assert that their relationship would not exist without their shared faith. Maia states:

Faith is what is most important to me, and I know for a fact that Leo and I wouldn't be together if it wasn't for faith and our relationship with God. And our kids wouldn't be as great as they are without that.

Leo also stresses the importance of faith for them as a couple:

Everything is centred around God in our family, even when we talk about other stuff that's all centred around who God is to us. And the kids know that. Regardless of whether they follow him or not, that's who we are; we pray every night, that's what we do. We go to church, that's what we do. We want our kids to know that regardless what ever job they get, I don't care what it is, I care that they know who God is. And that he's the centre of it all; Mum and Dad will let you down but God never will. And they get that, I hope they get that.

As the above statement from Leo endorses, faith is the thing that holds them together and is the centre of their family. He reiterates that faith provides both stability and belonging for Maia and Leo together. They both describe their faith as the most important thing to them and what holds them together.

Faith for Maia and Leo is strongly linked to *tapua'i* (worship) and *tautua* (service). Aiono (2003, p. 49) defines *tapua'i* as "worship of God for the good of someone else." Le Tagaloa's definition highlights the communal experience of worship; not only is it an action that connects worshippers with God but worshippers with each other. This is reiterated in Aiono (2003) definition of *vā* as first of all, the relationship between the creator and the created. *Tapua'i* is expressed as an imperative to make a connection with the creator in an act of worship (Aiono, 2003). Maia and Leo engage in forms of worship such as worshipping together with a church community, and prayer. As parents, they have involved their whole family in the practices of their faith, so they are able to *teu le vā* in their relationship and their family. In the initial stages of building a family, Leo and Maia describe the difficulty they had in attending a church meeting with small children; they were unable to listen or participate because of being preoccupied with child-minding. But they learnt to prioritise attending church services to nurture their own spiritual connection and continue to tend the connection between each other.

In another form of *tapua'i* or worship, prayer is an important way they connect with God and each other. Leo and Maia recount learning early in their relationship that prayer was essential and helped them to survive challenges they encountered together. Now, they regularly pray together and with others in their church community. Prayer is also important in how they *teu le vā* with their children. As Maia recounts:

We had years where we didn't have a lot of money and no job and we relied on faith. And we would pray together as a family, and when the kids had a school trip we would be honest with them and say 'we don't actually have any money, we need to pray about it.' So they would see God provide the money.

By praying together, Maia and Leo invite their children to participate in a form of worship in which they all may connect with their creator and with the other members of their family. Maia explains that they wanted each form of worship to become a natural part of the family space. As a result, it has become natural for their children to pray about things, especially things that might be worrying them. This form of worship offers a spiritual practice that can assist Maia and Leo, and their children, to *teu le vā* in their family.

Another important element of faith for Maia and Leo is *tautua* (service). *Tautua* is described as an integral element of *fa'asamoa*, articulated as one's spiritual calling and service in life (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009; Stewart-Withers & O'Brien, 2014). Leo and Maia make several connections between their faith and the service they engage in. Leo describes his Christianity as "outworked" through work in his community in Samoa and in New Zealand. Maia says:

Our worst fear is to go to church every Sunday until we are eighty and never take that risk. God has big plans for us. Our whole relationship has been that. It hasn't always been easy.

In her statement, Maia emphasises the value of living a daring life that involves service. They prioritise a faith that involves action and service to their community, here in New Zealand and in Samoa. The service to their community is experienced and motivated by giving voice to the voiceless, often referring to the Samoan children they work with who have become disconnected from their family. They express the love they experience in their connection with a creator God to aid a greater collective good.

Flourishing is good conversation

This chapter now shifts its focus to understanding how *teu le vā* processes may involve good conversation or communication to facilitate a flourishing relationship. *Vā* was described, somewhat curtly, in Pratt's *Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (1911) as "a space between". Wendt (1996)

expands on this description by emphasising that *vā* is not just space that separates but a space that relates. Maia and Leo demonstrate most clearly their ability to *teu le vā* and relate in the space between each other through communication. For Maia and Leo, each experience of good communication acts like a thread woven across the space between them to create connections and develop a pathway by which they can relate. Good communication, as used by Maia and Leo, can also be linked to *talanoa*. Lilomaiaava-Doktor (2009) describes *talanoa* as engaging people in dialogue so that a mutual agreement is reached for the good of all. Dialogue that promotes shared benefits distinguishes between communication and good communication. By communicating well, Maia and Leo promote mutual agreement as an outcome. Several authors, including Caughlin and Huston (2010); Fowers (1998); Gottman and Gottman (2017) promote the importance of communication for developing a flourishing relationships. There are several reasons that communication has allowed Leo and Maia to survive and flourish together. Communication enabled them to overcome challenges they have faced together and supported their relationship to survive. Good communication has also allowed them to *teu le vā* so they can relate across the space between them and flourish and grow. Here, an explanation of how Maia and Leo use good communication to flourish is presented by explaining four aspects of their communication style. The first aspect is face-to-face communication, a prominent point of discussion in their interviews. Additional aspects resonate with the principles of good communication developed by Gottman and Gottman (2017): non-defensive listening, self-disclosure, and editing.

Good conversations happen face-to-face

In the distinction between communication and good communication, an aspect raised in this case study was methods of communication. Particularly in an age where there are many different possible modes of communication, it is important to consider what is most helpful for good communication. This consideration is also consistent with principles of *fa'aaloalo* (respect), in which communication is best achieved through face-to-face contact (Lui, 2003). Lui (2003) further explains *vā fealoaloa'i* as the way to maintain relationships, with *fealoaloa'i* referring to face-to-face, thus reiterating the importance placed on meeting face to

face to maintain good relations. Leo and Maia understand the utility and the limitations of each communication mode they use. Leo explains:

We don't text a lot, we talk a lot. We haven't gone a day without talking. When I was in the islands, we were forever talking on the phone. Because you can't understand context by text and there something about hearing someone's voice. When we are at home locally and there are big things to talk about then it is *kanohi ki te kanohi*, the face-to-face. It has to be the face-to-face, we won't make any decisions via telephone, I will always wait till I'm home before making any decisions.

As the above statement indicates, for Maia and Leo, speaking to face to face on important issues is their priority for good communication. Talking with each other as much as possible is important, and they also consider context is required when talking to foster good conversations. The way Leo and Maia approach communication and the modes they employ are part of how they *teu le vā* in their relationship

Good conversations involve non-defensive listening

Gottman (1994) presents non-defensive listening as potentially the most important communication skill. By listening non-defensively, partners can focus on what the other person is saying and attempt to understand it as much as possible. This promotes mutual understanding and distracts the focus from defending oneself and planning responses (Fowers, 1998; Gottman, 1994). Maia and Leo refer to this process as “just listening”. Gottman explains that if partners can position themselves in a neutral or empathetic manner, good communication can develop and the other partner can show vulnerability and be encouraged to share private information (Gottman, 1994). Leo and Maia are constantly talking with each other but also indicate that sometimes the most important part of communicating is just listening to what their partner has to say. Leo acknowledges the importance of listening and looking through his wife's eyes. In his words:

There will be times more when she is talking and I'm just listening. I'll get it a bit hoha, but then she will be saying “This is what I'm seeing babe”. I respond, “Oh yeah, I hear ya”. I think that's the important thing, looking through your spouse's eyes and getting to know where they are at.

Leo's statement illustrates an empathetic position in which his primary goal in communication becomes understanding his wife and trying to see issues from her perspective. Just listening to each other can allow Leo and Maia to learn about

their partner and find the common ground they describe as essential to work together. Leo and Maia emphasise how communication requires and allows acceptance of each other to develop. Empathetic listening that is accompanied by acceptance of a partner extends Gottman's ideas on non-defensive listening. By remembering what they know of each other and focusing on accepting who their partner really is, Maia and Leo are able to communicate more effectively with each other. Leo states:

It's important to not expect something of Maia that she is not. I've got to remember who she is. I love goofy movies, Maia loves horrors. Communication is a biggy.

Here, Leo gives an example of a small difference between them, in movie preferences, that he has confirmed through communication, but goes on to stress the importance of accepting this and adjusting expectations of his partner accordingly. In other research on conflict management, Gottman and Gottman (2017) refer to 'peaceful dialogue' as a process where couples have learnt to accept their differences. Partners can move into peaceful dialogue if they display a fundamental acceptance of their partner's personality or attributes. Non-defensive listening for Maia and Leo thus also incorporates a lack of defensiveness about differences, instead accepting differences as inevitable and manageable.

Another feature of communication Maia and Leo add to the picture of non-defensive listening is a willingness to apologise and an openness to compromise. Perhaps best understood as a result of good non-defensive communication, Maia and Leo have cultivated a humility and flexibility that has allowed their relationship to flourish. Leo explains:

I have learnt to say sorry. I think for us learning to compromise and learning to communicate within that is pivotal. I've probably said sorry so many times, and the day that I stop there is probably something wrong with me. I say sorry to my kids a lot when I've stuffed up, because that was never said to me growing up. Apologizing is really important to me.

Instead of defending their actions as superior or final, Maia and Leo have learnt and practised how to say sorry to each other. By listening to their partner non-defensively they can learn how they may have been impacted by situations and are both willing to express apologies for grievance or discomfort they may have caused. This can also progress to being able to make compromises. For Maia and

Leo, learning to hear from their spouse changes their perspectives on issues raised, allowing possible renegotiation of their own position. Interacting with humility and developing habits of apologising can also release both partners from the pressure to always get things right. In *fa'asamoa*, if the harmony of relational bonds is distressed, they can also be restored. A person can work through a process of *fa'atoesege* (formal apology) and seek *fa'amagalo* (forgiveness). The sentiment of *lotonu'u* (maintaining or restoring pride) is essential (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009; Stewart-Withers & O'Brien, 2014). Maia and Leo refer to a (maybe less formal) process of presenting an apology to each other and allowing forgiveness. Apologizing can also be understood as accepting individual responsibility to maintain symmetry and harmony in the *vā* (Anae, 2010). Both Maia and Leo acknowledge the importance of harmony to *teu le vā* in their relationship and in their relationships with their children. Their readiness to apologize promotes harmony in relationships and invites forgiveness into the relational space between them.

Good conversations involve self-disclosure

Self-disclosure refers to the various ways in which couples are able to express themselves to their partner (Gottman, 1994). Through spending time together, talking with each other and sharing feelings, intimacy develops and deepens between couples. Another way self-disclosure supports intimate relationships is by allowing the space for each partner to share what they need from the other. The space between couples then becomes a space of sharing needs with the other and gathering nurturance from the space (Fowers, 1998; Gottman, 1994). In the process of *teu le vā* through communication, the space between couples is both nurtured and provides nurturance. Being able to listen, understand and respond to another's needs aids in replenishing the relationship. Self-disclosure can also involve partners sharing how they feel about the relationship. By describing feelings, a partner can express how they might be impacted by the other's behaviour or any issues that arise. A third way that self-disclosure supports good communication is through ongoing, open conversation that helps to maintain partners' feelings for each other. By expressing thoughts and feelings to a partner an individual is able to grow and remain in love through constant communion. Ongoing conversations also allow the couple to learn more about each other and

grow together. All of these forms of disclosure involve vulnerability as partners share their intimate thoughts and feelings with the risk of being met with indifference or misunderstanding by their partner.

Maia and Leo use many elements of self-disclosure in their communication with each other. They describe prioritising time to spend together, talking through the basic events of their day and the big issues in their lives. Leo recounts how they prioritised time together and talking when first presented with the challenges of a new family,

Our kids probably grew up in cafes because that was one thing we wouldn't give up. Even when we didn't have any money, we would go and get one cup of coffee and share it. We would say "can we have one cup of coffee and two cups please".

Maia adds:

But that was it, if we were having the crappiest day ever we would go out, that was the non-negotiable. We wouldn't do anything else but we would do that.

Similar to the accounts above, both Maia and Leo recount experiences over 20 years ago when it was very difficult to make time to communicate with each other, but this would be their priority, even if they did nothing else. These conversations involve giving time to hear the thoughts and feelings of each partner.

Most particular to Maia and Leo is a communication style that is continual and allows for growth. They use ongoing communication both in the everyday events of their lives and when resolving conflict or in times of difficulty. Maia reflects:

When there has been things completely out of our control that has happened, we have to just keep talking. Sometimes Leo will come to me and say "we have got to keep talking about this".

Leo and Maia both express their commitment to continue talking if an issue is unresolved or a decision is incomplete. Self-disclosure then transforms times of difficulty or conflict into opportunities to learn about each other and to develop the ability to relate to each other better. Leo elucidates this when explaining how

he will listen to Maia in order to understand her better as natural changes and growth occur in her:

Even the way she looks at the world is different every day. There's always a change in the landscape. And that is the same for me, my theology has changed from what it was two weeks ago. I think listening is a big thing. I'll listen to where Maia is coming from, what she's interested in, what she's reading; she's a bookworm.

Leo refers to a nuanced understanding of his partner gained by listening to her self-expression and continuing to have conversations as changes occur over time. In doing so, Leo allows Maia to be fully free to share of herself and be known well in the relationship. Through self-disclosure from each side of the relationship, a greater understanding of each partner is available. Even if each partner is changing, by nurturing the space between them in communication they are able to navigate the space as it shifts and maintain connection with each other.

Ongoing communication also allows Leo and Maia to grow both as individuals and together. By communicating continually, Leo and Maia acknowledge the relational space between them; they acknowledge the distinctness they have from each other and the different perspectives they may hold. They communicate to share their individual perspectives with each other. This also allows their differences to inform each other and assist each other's growth. Leo illustrates in reference to cultural differences:

I've learnt to look at the world through a Western culture, and I'll say to Maia "you gotta see it through a Samoan context." For Maia and I, we have made our own world, we have learnt to be in both worlds together. Learning to understand each other is important.

Through self-disclosure, in this case about culture, Leo and Maia can help each other in understanding their cultures. Both partners are then more capable of interacting with two cultures; together, they can navigate a culture other than their own. They have also been able to develop an identity unique to themselves as a couple, using two different cultures. By tending the relational space between through good communication, Maia and Leo are able to grow in their individual capacity and also in their identity as a couple. The development of an identity as a couple can be related to interdependence theory, as described in Chapter One, and mentioned in Case One. By learning from each other, developing their 'own

world' and learning to be in both of their individual worlds together, Leo and Maia have created a shared identity. Again in this case, we have a couple who are not just surviving their relationship but are interconnected and have developed a flourishing relationship with an identity of its own.

Good conversations are edited

In literature on good communication between couples, the importance of balancing self-disclosure with editing is emphasised (Fowers, 1998; Gottman, 1994). Editing is the skill of deciding between several things to say to a partner and choosing that which is most polite. The level of politeness is a habit developed alongside a partner and varies for each relationship. Editing thus monitors the levels of honesty in communication to minimise destructive communication. Maia and Leo indicate that they communicate differently now than when they first started out. As young newlyweds, Maia describes them as fighting all the time, with hostility, sometimes for days at a time. But now, Maia and Leo have learnt a lot about what is unhelpful to communicate through many years of being in a relationship. Maia explains:

We have just got better and better. Now, we just don't make such a big deal about stuff. When we first got married we would fight all the time; I would wind him up, he would do something to really annoy me. You mature, you don't make a big deal. And kids do that because it's not just about you anymore; you pick your battles. And you get to know each other better. You are still always learning about your partner all along the way. Over time you know what works, what doesn't, you learn to deal with things easier.

As the above statement highlights, the more they understand the other partner, the more they can effectively edit their conversations to show politeness when it is most important. There are some things that are not helpful to share with their partner. Leo uses the example of commenting on his partner's clothing. He acknowledges that he would not make negative or unhelpful comments about what Maia wears as it is not his place to do so. This shows how he might look after the space between in their relationship by acknowledging the boundaries and limitations of his communication

Expanding on Gottman's articulation of communicating through editing, Leo indicates developing self-awareness as helpful for communicating. Editing

communication has helped him to develop an awareness of how the emotions he experiences might impact his encounters with Maia. Therefore, he not only selects the most appropriate or polite information to share with his spouse, but considers the emotional stability that he can maintain in their communication. This awareness is paired with taking responsibility for his own emotions and responses. He states:

I know when I need to walk out of home and just go for a run if I'm mad because I'll just say things I can't take back. That's probably what we learnt from our early years, being together as teenagers, there is the stuff I said I wish I could take back, what I said in the heat of the moment.

In this regard, by developing awareness of himself and his own emotional state and taking responsibility to manage that, Leo can minimise destructive communication and protect the relational space between him and Maia. It is particularly evident how the skill of editing for good conversations has been developed over time by Maia and Leo to grow a flourishing relationship.

Summary

Maia and Leo provide an exemplar of a flourishing relationship established over 30 years of being together. They use many skills to relate to each other. What is of particular relevance to this study is their ability to flourish as a result of how they *teu le vā* in their family space and through good communication. First of all, Maia and Leo demonstrated that the marriage relationship does not exist in isolation; their relationships flourish not only because they can *teu le vā* in the space between each other, but also in the important space between them and their children. These *vā* relationships are reciprocal, relationally giving them purpose and direction while also giving life and sustenance to other *vā* relationships in their family. *Teu le vā* remains vital in the family space by protecting individual and collective relationships and keeping them safe from neglect or violence. Also important is Maia and Leo's faith, which is evident in how they *teu le vā* in their relationship, particularly through their belief in a creator God connected to them and others as created beings.

Secondly, in understanding how Maia and Leo relate across the space between them, towards a relationship that flourishes, it is essential to discuss good communication. Communication provides another level of support in the process

of *teu le vā* for this couple. Maia and Leo fulfil the principles of *fa'aaloalo* by prioritizing face-to-face communication to maintain good relations. Through the tenets of good communication proposed by Gottman (2017), we see how non-defensive listening, self-disclosure and editing are expressed and expanded on as Maia and Leo *teu le vā* in their marriage. Good communication is supported by the application of principles such as *fa'amagalo* (forgiveness), *fa'aaloalo* (reverence) and *tuao'i* (boundaries) (Seiuli, 2012). Through a framework of good communication, Maia and Leo can relate to each other, learn and accept each other, grow together and flourish every day. Through significant investment in their relationship over the past 30 years, Leo and Maia have tended to the space between in their cross-cultural marriage, in a manner that has allowed their relationship to grow and get better. In this manner, a flourishing relationship has developed as the evolving process that both Maia and Leo aspired to for their future.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Intimate partner relationships are a significant part of well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2000). In Samoan culture, a person cannot be considered independent of their relational context; in fact, Tamasese argues that “you cannot take a Samoan out of the collective context” (Tamasese et al., 2005, p. 303). In this collective context, relationships are integral to the wellbeing and identity of the self. Research on relationships is necessary to develop understanding of this important area of wellbeing. This thesis asked - “*How do relationships flourish, specifically in Samoan-Palagi Intimate Partner relationships?*” Investigating the potential of human relationships offers insight into how flourishing can both shield against psychological dysfunction and promote vitality in relationships. In this chapter, the conclusions of this research are presented and discussed. A major finding is the presentation of relationships as a process of flourishing, an aspect of participants’ lives that must be constantly attended to. This is also connected to concepts of *teu le vā* (tending or nurturing the relational space).

This chapter is presented in four sections. The first section provides an overview of the complete thesis. The second section discusses the research questions of this project and the findings reached, with a particular focus on the overarching theme of *teu le vā* in both case studies. The third section discusses the implications of my research findings, and the fourth section examines possible future research directions and presents the final reflections of this thesis.

Overview of the discoveries from each thesis chapter

I began this thesis with a personal narrative of how I came to explore flourishing Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships. I drew upon a Samoan proverb that uses a *malaga fai faiva* (fishing voyage) as a metaphor for a journey that cannot be navigated without unexpected challenges.

Chapter One of this thesis provided a contextual background for my research journey into the under-explored area of flourishing cross-cultural relationships. The review first canvassed the literature on flourishing relationships as it relates to this study. Secondly, it examined the relevant literature to provide a socio-cultural understanding of historical Samoan-Palagi interactions. Concepts

like *vā fealoaloa'i* (relational space) and *feagaiga* (covenant) were introduced because they are important in understanding knowledge around relationships in *fa'asamoa*. The review of Samoan-Palagi relationships also provided the sociocultural context for the case studies.

Chapter Two opened with acknowledgement of *vā* between my participants and myself, and the need for me to look after the relational space. Looking after research relationships included using culturally appropriate frameworks. The Uputāua Therapeutic Approach is acknowledged as a culturally responsive framework that provides guidance for engaging with participants and areas for exploration in qualitative research interviews. I also assumed the position of “curious learner” and drew upon a *fa'atalatalanoa* (narrative dialogue) approach in interviews. My supervisors and research participants were also acknowledged as significant guides in the navigation of my research project. The two case studies comprising my research are summarised here and shared findings are discussed later in this chapter.

In Chapter Three I presented Fetu and Mira' case study, centred around an excerpt from their wedding vows. These vows highlight the importance of faith and dreams as stable elements of their relationship that support flourishing. In the vow, “*With God intertwined in our lives I promise to stay by your side,*” faith is suggested as an important part of Fetu and Mira's relationship. Faith is the three-stranded cord that provides strength, community and a legacy to their relationship. Attachment theory was used to understand faith as providing the emotional security and safety needed in their relationship so it can flourish. Dreams were also clearly distinguished as important for Fetu and Mira. Dreams enable Fetu and Mira to come together to create solutions when differences or difficulties arise in their relationship. A shared dream of family also allowed a flourishing relationship to form and gather context for Fetu and Mira. Ultimately, dreaming includes a greater context in which they aspire to make valuable contributions to Samoan communities. From an attachment perspective, it can be argued that because they experience safety in their relationship, Fetu and Mira are able to explore their world by creatively problem solving and dreaming together. *Teu le vā* was explored throughout the case with regard to how Fetu and Mira are able to care for the relational space, even during difficult times. *Feagaiga* aspects of

relating were applied to describe their emphasis on the differences between them as complementary rather than in opposition.

I then introduced and discussed the case study of Leo and Maia in Chapter Four. Their experiences in creating a flourishing relationship also show a process of *teu le vā*, as they work together to take care of the relation space between them as a couple. The way they *teu le vā* is embedded in a family context and demonstrated by good communication. The *vā* or space between Maia and Leo is grounded in family, particularly the one they have grown together. Important elements of *teu le vā* in their family include protecting and nurturing the *vā* (relational space) spiritually, physically and emotionally. Principles of *alofa* (love, compassion) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect) are used to protect the family space and allow Maia and Leo to *teu le vā*. For Maia and Leo, communication supports the way they *teu le vā* in their intimate partner relationship. Good communication is supported by the application of principles such as *fa'amagalo* (forgiveness), *fa'aaloalo* (reverence) and *tuao'i* (boundaries). By developing and maintaining good communication, Maia and Leo can relate across the space between them, enabling them to develop resilience in difficult times, and flourish more and more with every passing day.

The two case studies demonstrate the distinctly different ways in which participants developed a flourishing relationship. They also show similarities in how these relationships have been able to flourish. Each case contributed to developing an understanding that when *teu le vā* occurs in an intimate partner relationship, the relationship may flourish. The next section will explore this theme in more depth.

How do Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships flourish?

The main focus of the research was “*How do relationships flourish, specifically in Samoan-Palagi intimate partner relationships?*” In order to answer this overarching question, the following sub-questions were developed to also guide the research:

- What factors are important to my participants' relationships? (e.g. *āiga*/family, history, other relationships, church, connection to culture)
- What does flourishing mean to participants? What about in relationships?
- How is the flourishing/wellbeing of each partner supported in their relationship? How do the partners in the relationship negotiate the space between (*vā fealoaloa 'i*) partners?
- What are some of the difficulties they have faced in their relationship and how have they overcome these?
- How has the relationship developed or changed over time?

This section provides a more detailed discussion of the overarching theme of *teu le vā*, addressing the sub-questions above as they related to answering the overall purpose of this research: *how do relationships flourish?*

Teu le vā

Teu le vā was a recurring theme across both case studies. As discussed throughout this thesis, *teu le vā* emphasises the need for relational spaces to be cared for through focused intentions and conscious actions, to maintain and protect the *vā* as something sacred (Seiuli, 2013; Tiatia, 2012). Anae (2010) explains that through the protocols observed by *teu le vā* – tending the space between – the sacred nature of people is protected and enhanced. I focused on two significant aspects of *teu le vā* to explain how both couples developed a flourishing relationship. Both couples showed how *teu le vā* involved a process that enabled their relationships to flourish. The individuals in each partnership constantly tended to the space between themselves to ensure the ongoing flourishing of their relationships. Also, the many ways in which couples showed how they *teu le vā* are applicable to Samoan frameworks of wellbeing and illustrate that the relational space connects to all elements of wellbeing (Seiuli, 2015; Tamasese, et al, 2005).

First of all, the theme of *teu le vā* helps to frame thinking about flourishing relationships in terms of a process. This is also connected to the second research question, which asked what flourishing meant to participants in their relationships.

The *vā* requires constant protection to maintain the health of the relational space. In both cases when they referenced flourishing, it was to emphasise that their relationships developed over time and required constant attention and care. Fetu and Mira showed how they practiced *teu le vā* in many aspects of their life and its impacts on the flourishing of their relationship. They demonstrated, particularly when they had differences or disagreed, the importance of a process that honoured and cared for their relationship and each other. For Leo and Maia, this process has become increasingly successful over time as they have learned about each other and gathered tools for relating. Maia described a flourishing relationship as getting “better and better”; it is an ongoing process of improvement. Flourishing through a process is consistent with Durie’s definitions of flourishing or *Mauri ora* as a movement away from *Mauri noho* or languishing (Durie, 2015). Instead of flourishing being a state or achievement reached, it is conceived as a direction or goal to be pursued. The importance of an ongoing process is evident and the process is supported through the maintenance of several key areas of their relationship. Both couples in this research reflected on how they have grown together over many years of relationship. In the interviewing process, it was mentioned that they started their relationships with a very limited understanding of how they might flourish, but learnt to draw from their strengths together, to reach a state of flourishing in their interactions.

When couples like these are able to *teu le vā* in their relationships, they flourish to a level where they develop interdependence. In this regard, not only do couples solely seek to fulfil their individual needs, but they begin to act together in ways to support their mutual interests (Caughlin & Huston, 2010; Kelley, 1979). The couples in this research indicated how they have learnt to act according to the best interests or the identity of their couple over time, rather than of independent individuals. The development of interdependence in a flourishing relationship is presented as occurring through the navigation of a continuum, with individual needs at one extreme and the needs of the relationship or collective context at the other end. By navigating between these extremes, the needs of each partner can be addressed while also considering the wider context and identity of the relationship. As a result a couple may care for both partners in their relationship. It is also evident that although interdependence theory addresses the

development of shared motivation for the relationship, this research also displays how couples not only intend to support the interests of the relationship but by doing so can create a shared life. Both couples emphasise how as they have tending the relational space, they draw closer, understand each other and can even build shared meaning into their lives. Couples in a cross-cultural marriage do not just learn to be more confident in their own culture but learn to “be in both worlds”. As the relationship grows, partners in the relationship do not only show their responsiveness to the needs of the relationship but the relationship can be responsive to each partner too.

Secondly, when addressing the ways they *teu le vā* in their marriages both couples referred to some key aspects of their relationships, such as the spiritual, cultural, family, emotional/verbal and physical spaces all being important to how they *teu le vā*. They each discussed *teu le vā* processes across many dimensions consistent with holistic wellbeing. These dimensions also connect to holistic models of health and research such as the Fonofale model or the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach (UTA), which address the whole person (Pulotu-Endermann, 2009; Seiuli, 2012). Addressing physical, psychological, social elements of a person is important along with locating that person within their familial, ancestral, environmental and divine connections. Pulotu-Endermann (2009) Fonofale health model incorporates the values of many Samoans, Cook Islanders, Tongans, Niueans, Tokelauans and Fijians participating in health workshops from the 1970s to 1995. Communicated by Pulotu-Endermann (2009) is the importance of family, culture and spirituality for all these groups. In UTA, a *faletalimalo* (meeting house) is used as a metaphor, with aspects of engagement forming the land, roof, foundations and posts of the *faletalimalo* (Seiuli, 2012).

Consequently, I drew on the key components of the UTA (see Appendix 1) and extended it as a framework for conceptualising my research findings. The remainder of this section uses the connections between the dimensions of the UTA and the ways in which my participants engage and relate to each other to *teu le vā*. In this way, the UTA approach moves beyond being solely a framework for a research engagement and is used as a model of relational wellbeing. It can also be applied as a framework to understand the important elements or spaces in intimate partner relationships, which when attended to can help the relational

space to flourish. In particular, this discussion addresses two key research questions: firstly, what factors are important in my participants' relationships? And secondly, how is the flourishing of each partner supported in their relationship? That is, how do the partners in the relationship negotiate the space between (*vā fealoaloa 'i*) each other? Each of the important factors in participants' relationships is addressed in this holistic model (UTA). Exploring each of these dimensions also explains how the totality of each partner can be addressed in a flourishing relationship, as the many dimensions of the relational space are attended to. *Teu le vā* is then presented as a holistic process in which the totality of each partner is engaged and attended to, in order to build a flourishing relationship.

Spiritual life

Aiono (2003) describes *vā* as the relational space between creator and created. By tending to the relational space with their creator, both couples stated that this enhances and supports the relational space between them. In both case studies, Christian faith or spirituality was acknowledged as providing an integral structure to the relationship. For Fetu and Mira, (hereafter identified as Case one), faith was likened to a three-stranded cord that when intertwined, helps to strengthen their relationship with each other and with a creator God. Maia and Leo (referred hereafter to as Case two) declared that they would not be together if it was not for their faith. The connection provided by a shared faith also explained their deep connection to *fa'asamoa* and Christianity. Thornton and Colleagues (2010) describe the Christian church as forming the foundation of Samoan society, while Anae (1998) also asserts that Samoan identity is deeply connected to the church. A shared Christian faith allows unity and common values to bring each couple, and their families, together. Both couples also said that their faith provided them with resources and support that enabled their relationship to flourish.

For Leo and Maia, an important aspect of how they *teu le vā* in their relationship and in their family is their faith. *Tapua 'i* (worship) and *tautua* (service) are important aspects of how Maia and Leo express their faith and provide further opportunity to *teu le vā* in their relationship. Prayer is an integral part of *tapua 'i* for both couples and was cited as a practice they can use when developing unity and even when no other option for resolution is apparent.

Attending to the *vā* (relational space) in their spiritual life provides both couples with the unity and resources to create a flourishing relationship. This flourishing relationship also supports the sacredness of each participant; as they *teu le vā*, they uphold the *mana* of those involved in the relational space.

Faith also helps partners to navigate their own needs, the needs of the relationship and the values of faith and culture. Faith provides significant personal values that partners can live by individually and through their relationship, while belonging to a faith community that supports each partner and their relationship. In a Samoan-Palagi relationship a Christian faith can provide collective and holistic values to emphasise the important similarities between partners, rather than cultural differences.

Culture

Cultural identity is described as not a concrete or absolute experience but as a dynamic and evolving context, depending on where an *āiga* or community is located. Mila-Schaaf (2006) explains *vā* as being defined by the context in which the interaction occurs; when the context changes so too does the interaction. Identity is thus fluidly and relationally dependent (Mila-Schaaf, 2006). Case one emphasizes the importance of *teu le vā* in the cultural space as an ongoing process important for the flourishing of their relationship. The processes participants have used to tend to the cultural space also answer the research question that asked “What are some of the difficulties faced by participants and how have they overcome these?” As might be expected of a cross-cultural couple, managing two cultural identities within their relationship and with their children represents a significant challenge.

In case one, participants referenced the challenge, as described by Tui Atua, to Samoan people in retaining their culture when not living in Samoa and not attending a Samoan church. In case one, the participants explained the development of cultural identity as an ongoing conversation, particularly represented by attempts at language revitalization. They both prioritized tending to language development for themselves and their family, particularly within New Zealand culture where the English language is dominant and pervasive. The dreams that contributed to flourishing in case one often revolved around being

able to speak Samoan as a family within ten years. In this flourishing relationship, the Palagi partner focuses on the recognition of *fa'asamoa* and the need to give preeminence to the language and culture so it is not lost in their Palagi-dominated context. By embracing her husband's culture and difference, his Palagi partner can reciprocate his experience in engaging in Palagi language and culture, facilitating their ability to connect and become one. By prioritizing language revitalization as a couple, the value of Samoan culture is embedded in their family and for future generations.

Family

Family is acknowledged as including nuclear as well as extended family. Seiuli (2012) explains the *āiga* as having a role connected to all other elements of spirituality, culture, physical characteristics, emotional wellbeing and psychological functioning. It is within the context of the *āiga* that the Samoan identity begins and matures (Seiuli, 2012). For both couples, *āiga* or family gives context to their relationships. They *teu le vā* in their intimate relationship as part of a wider context. This allows them to flourish in their relationship and also provides the context to which their flourishing relationship contributes. *Āiga* provides important support for an intimate partner relationship.

In case two, a flourishing relationship is strongly embedded in *āiga*. This couple has been able to connect and grow together in the space they have cherished not just between themselves but with their children. According to Mila-Schaaf (2006), *vā* exists not just between individuals but within families. As such, everyone in the family is responsible for collectively respecting, nurturing and protecting the *vā*. In case one, the greatest dream is for a family strong in its faith and cultural identity. Together the couple work towards this dream, drawing from the cultural traditions of both their families, fulfilling roles they have established together and investing in the family space.

Physical

The physical dimension acknowledges the significance of and connection to the physical world for Samoan people (Seiuli, 2012). There are important physical principles, expressed by participants as necessary to observe in order to protect and enhance the relational space. In each of these principles for tending to the

physical spaces of a relationship, *faa'alolalo* (respect) is a key value of *fa'asamoa* that is drawn upon (Tiatia, 2008). Employing respect in physical interactions helps to create a relational space that is safe and can then flourish. In case two the importance of physical space in simple processes like communicating with each other was acknowledged. Communication through face-to-face contact is prioritised as being the most effective for good communication. Face-to-face communication is also consistent with principles of *fa'aaloalo* (respect), which state that communication is best through face-to-face contact (Lui, 2003). In Case one, several examples emphasised the need to protect physical relational space, particularly in times of conflict. Physical positioning was acknowledged as significant during disagreement. The recommendation from this couple is that taking a walk or completing an activity alongside each other allows conversations to continue while not physically opposing each other. By physically positioning themselves in a manner that supports working together they are able to care for the relational space and find resolution.

Avoiding an oppositional stance allows a couple to navigate their individual needs while also addressing the needs of their relationship. Being positioned alongside rather than opposing each other can also be related to concepts of *feagaiga*, in which differences are regarded as complementary rather than oppositional (Latai, 2015). The partners in *feagaiga* contribute in different ways to support balance in harmony in the covenant and the wider collective context. Partners can address the emotion they may be experiencing in a way that is respectful to their partner and ultimately benefits their relationship. Partners working alongside each other are granted the space and freedom to express themselves while still remaining in the relationship. Working together and caring for the relational space also prevents the space from being trampled. In case two, protecting the relational space from violence was emphasised. The care taken to look after physical spaces works to protect the relational space from being damaged if partners feel misunderstood or emotions become heightened. By tending to the physical aspects of the relational space, individual needs in the relationship can be cared for and the relationship strengthened. Navigating the continuum of needs can build interdependence in the relationship, a measure of flourishing in this thesis.

Social

The social dimension emphasises wellness obtained from social values. Both couples described several ways in which their social world supports their ability to *teu le vā* and build a flourishing relationship. Other social relationships can allow exposure to other perspectives and individual support during difficult parts of their life. Being known in other social contexts supports and enhances, rather than detracts from their relationship. These relationships, particularly those established in church communities, can form significant support networks, particularly when the support of family is not readily available. For both couples, their faith communities are an important form of social support and at certain points in their lives have functioned like an extended family.

Social support was also described as important for both participants in periods of stress or even relationship difficulties. In case two it was particularly important to have social supports to draw on when they had their first child and lacked understanding of what to do in parenting tasks. Case one includes several instances in which involving trusted people to help reach a solution for a difficult problem was beneficial. At such times, social support draws on more resources and perspectives than they are able to provide from within their relationship. The support they have received has been most helpful, not so much for the advice given but for assistance in understanding each other and seeing their partner's perspective. In the process of help-seeking, support people may fill the role of outsider witnesses, a position used in narrative practice. Narrative practice is grounded in the idea that the stories we tell about ourselves are not only private but also a social realisation; we seek to have these stories reflected back to us to claim our identity (Freedman & Combs, 1996). An outsider witness can act to acknowledge claims for identity and share in stories that elucidate what is valued by us (Freedman & Combs, 1996). In case one, using someone who could act as an outsider witness affirmed the identity and values of each partner within their relationship. By recognising values they can tease out the shared values they hold and use this information in problem solving.

Psychological and Emotional Life

Psychological dimensions can be referred to as life according to the mind. This element is concerned with the impact of thought processes and decision making

(Seiuli, 2012). The emotional dimension refers to how thoughts and emotions are nurtured. In this discussion, the interconnectedness of psychological and emotional dimensions is acknowledged and they are thus discussed together. In the case of each couple, tending to the psychological and emotional relational space is particularly important in times when conflict occurs.

For both couples, the main way they nurture and protect the emotional and psychological dimensions of the relational space is through effective communication. For both couples, one of the most difficult challenges they have faced is learning how to go about managing conflict. Processes for managing conflict are addressed in response to the two research questions “How do relationships develop over time?” and “What are the key challenges couple face over time?” In each case many processes were described that demonstrated how they have been able to care for the psychological and emotional elements of the relational space, so the thoughts and feelings of each partner are respected and the relationship supported at the same time. Over time the relationship has grown as they navigate the continuum between individual and collective needs more effectively. The progress of each couple emphasises how interdependence can be developed over time. It is also apparent that one of the most significant challenges to couples also represents one of their areas of greatest development.

In case one, specific rules of engagement were articulated as protecting the emotional and psychological space between partners. In using the rules they developed together, they consistently engage with respect for each other and in doing so guard against destructive emotional patterns. As a result, they are able to reach a resolution where they can “enjoy each other again”. Case two highlights the importance of particular communication techniques like non-defensive listening and self-disclosure to care for the emotional space. Non-defensive listening was emphasized as just listening and trying to see things from a partner’s perspective. Non-defensive listening like this is argued to involve a partner positioning themselves in a neutral or empathetic manner and results in the other partner being encouraged to show vulnerability and share information (Gottman, 1994). Self-disclosure supports good communication through ongoing, open conversation that helps to maintain partners’ feelings for each other. In both cases it was evident that by sharing their feelings intimacy was able to deepen in the

relationship. Good communication ensures that couples develop a relationship that can flourish by growing and deepening in intimacy.

Tending to psychological and emotional elements in the relationship not only helps with conflict but also allows participants to draw closer and understand each other better. Both couples indicated that when they had developed their understanding of each other they could also experience a shared understanding of their experiences and relationships. Each couple has deepened and extended their understanding of each other over time. They are constantly learning from each other and taking on new information about their partner. Gottman (2017) describes this as shared meaning, a major component of his sound house for good relationships. In both cases, communication has developed a shared understanding or shared life according to the mind. A shared life is linked to interdependence and reiterates the importance of navigating the individual experiences of psychological and emotional dimensions and sharing these experiences to promote connection for the development of the relationship.

The spiritual, cultural, familial, physical, emotional and psychological spaces of wellbeing are represented in this research as areas in which the relational space may also be nurtured. In this way the space between includes relating to the holistic elements of a person, and addressing them in their totality. The process of *teu le vā* is emphasised as ongoing and holistic (Anae, 2010; Mila-Schaaf, 2006; Seiuli, 2012; Tiatia, 2012). Although these holistic dimensions are distinct, the boundaries between them can become blurred as the connections become more apparent. By caring for the psychological spaces and communicating well, the couples in this study have also cared for the emotional dimensions of their relationship. Again, in each of these dimensions – psychological, emotional and psychological – both couples have been able to develop and grow over time together allowing their relationship to flourish. This further illustrates the importance of looking after the many dimensions of the relational space.

Implications and future directions

Teu le vā is an important concept in *fa'asamoa* that has been investigated in many different contexts in recent literature. The importance of cherishing the relational

space has been explored with regard to its role in developing culturally competent health services (Tiatia, 2012); research and therapeutic frameworks (Seiuli, 2012); schooling in New Zealand for Pasifika students (Anae, 2010); and social work practice (Autagavaia, 2001; Mila-Schaaf, 2006). What is less studied is how *teu le vā* may be applied in the context of intimate partner relationships. It is important that cultural concepts of *vā* and *teu le vā* are applied to significant relationships such as intimate partner relationships. Understanding how intimate partner relationships *teu le vā* and flourish is also important for an *āiga*, as the context in which children and young people grow to maturity. It is important that the younger generation are exposed to ways of looking after the relational space in intimate relationships. This research project has explored experiences in relationships in which *vā* is cherished and looked after. These relationships provide guidance through a model of relating well.

This research may contribute to research with couples and couples therapy. By considering the *vā* between intimate partners, conversations may be able to occur within unique intimate partner relationships about how the space between partners operates and is cared for. The principles of *teu le vā* with regard to a relationship require a focus that is holistic and continually nurtured. For those who have experienced intimate partner relationships that are not flourishing but languishing, the stories and experiences of *teu le vā* as it relates to flourishing may provide hope and guidance. Each area of wellbeing for *teu le vā* in relationships can provide areas to focus on for couples wanting to draw on their strengths to improve their connection and develop a flourishing relationship.

As this current research demonstrates, investigating relationships in various cultural context provides insight not only into the relationship that exists but also into how cultural variables may inform flourishing relationships. In particular, studying cross-cultural relationships can inform the understanding of psychosocial factors associated with intimate partner relationships. This research could be extended to investigate how relationships may flourish in other cultural contexts.

Within the scope of my research, important concepts of *feagaiga* were not fully explored in relation to intimate partner relationships. More research could be

done to address how this significant relational concept might apply in Samoan intimate partner relationships.

Conclusions and final reflection

As my thesis draws to a close I remember the fisherman. I began this journey into uncharted waters, hopeful that I could discover how relationships can flourish. I was curious about what insights an investigation into Samoan-Palagi relationships might gather. This investigation focused on couples' experiences of what flourishing was; the important factors influencing flourishing relationships; how flourishing was supported despite challenges to the relational space; and how flourishing relationships developed over time. I reflect now on my main conclusions.

Most prominently, flourishing is presented in this thesis as a process or a direction. That is, instead of a destination or an achievement to be attained, a flourishing relationship is experienced through a process of careful and constant attention. A Samoan perspective frames the process of flourishing as supported by *teu le vā* – cultivating the relational space – so relationships are both protected and nurtured. A flourishing relationship maintains that there are no experts in these relationships, only people who are at different points in their journey towards a flourishing relationship. Just as I positioned myself in this research as a curious learner, I remain in this position even in my own relationships, understanding that the learning never ends as long as there is another person involved.

As couples *teu le vā*, they navigate the continuum of needs between themselves and their partner. This navigation is holistic and constant. Each partner has invested in caring for the relational space in a multitude of dimensions; spiritual, cultural, family, social, physical, emotional and psychological. In this way, tending the relational space addresses the totality of each partner, incorporating a collective context inclusive of family, religion and culture.

Although each relationship is unique and requires partners to cultivate the relational space, this research does provide many comments from my participants about how they have cultivated the relational space to produce a flourishing relationship. The couples who have guided this research suggest that the family

space is an important part of the relational space in an intimate partner relationship and can help a couple to flourish. Good communication, especially when accompanied by acceptance and humility, can also help a relationship to flourish. Through a shared value of faith, a relationship can flourish. By dreaming together couples may flourish. By regarding difference as an opportunity to provide balance and complement each other, a relationship can flourish.

Developing a flourishing relationship is a unique experience for all who embark on the journey. However, regardless of the couple, regardless of the extent of their differences, regardless of whether they are an inter-racial couple or share many key similarities, each couple must navigate the continuum for themselves. The couples in this research developed their relationships by constantly tending and navigating the continuum between individual needs and the needs of the collective. In their own ways, the couples demonstrated how they were able to develop an interdependent identity, in which they could manage their individual and their collective needs. Generally, and as indicated in the literature review, Samoan culture emphasises collective values whilst Palagi or western culture has a more dichotomous position and is individualistically focused. However, the Samoan-Palagi couples in this research demonstrate the potential for unification of these apparently diametrically opposed cultural perspectives. It is evident through the relationships between Samoan and Palagi partners that flourishing in relationships can involve a fluid navigation of these two extremes. The differences that are resolved can be related to the concept of *feagaiga*, as they seek to complement rather than oppose each other; this maintains harmony and balance in family and communities.

Finally, I reflect that – possibly because of the influence of my Palagi culture – when starting this project I instinctively felt the pressure to work hard and focus on completing my thesis as an achievement. However, the further I moved into this research journey, the further I moved away from trying to achieve or even complete a task. Instead, I refer again to the proverb that opened this thesis to better explain my research as a journey embarked upon. Just like the *malaga fai faiva*, I had a limited framework for all that I might discover by setting forth on this journey, and plenty of uncertainty about my own skills for undertaking the tasks required. Along the way I was guided by my supervisors

and participants in all areas unfamiliar to me as an outsider researcher. As a result, this is beyond anything I might have achieved alone; it reflects a journey in which I have been guided, joined, encouraged and during which I have grown immensely. As I approach the final step of engagement in my research journey I refer to the final step of engagement in the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach.

Mana/Mamalu or honouring represents the core values of honouring and maintaining dignity (Seiuli, 2012). I turn the focus towards the lived experience of my participants, so generously shared in this research project. Thank you for letting me into your lives and stories. May my journey, sharing your stories and wisdom, honour the bravery and beauty of your relationships. *Fa'afetai tele lava ma ia soifua manuia*

References

- Aiono, F. (1996). *Motugaafa*. Apia, Western Samoa: LeLamepa Press.
- Aiono, F. (2003). *Tapua'i: Samoan worship*. Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press.
- Anae, M. (1998). *Fofoa-i-vao-'ese: The identity journeys of New Zealand-born Samoans* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Auckland, New Zealand.
Retrieved from <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/66>.
- Anae, M. (2010). Research for better Pacific schooling in New Zealand: Teu le vā—a Samoan perspective. *Mai Review*, 1, 1-24.
- Anderson, H., & Goolishian, H. (1992). The client is the expert: A not-knowing approach to therapy. In S. McNamee & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Therapy as social construction* (pp. 25-39). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Autagavaia, M. (2001). Social work with Pacific island communities. In M. Connolly (Ed.), *New Zealand social work: Contexts and practice*. (pp. 72-84). Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press.
- Bala, M., Chalil, G. R. B., & Gupta, A. (2012). Emic and etic: Different lenses for research in culture. *Management and Labour Studies*, 37(1), 45-60.
doi:10.1177/0258042X1103700105
- Barrett, M., & Connolly-Stone, K. (1998). The Treaty of Waitangi and social policy. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 11(December), 29.
- Biever, J. L., Bobele, M., & North, M.-W. (1998). Therapy with intercultural couples: A postmodern approach. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 11(2), 181-188. doi:10.1080/09515079808254053
- Black, R. M. (2010). *Treaty people recognising and marking Pākehā culture in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10289/4795>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Breger, R., & Hill, R. (1998). Introducing mixed marriages. In R. Breger & R. Hill (Eds.), *Cross cultural marriage: Identity and choice* (pp. 1-33). New York, NY: Berg Press.
- Caughlin, J. P., & Huston, T. L. (2010). The flourishing literature on flourishing relationships. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 2(1), 25-35.
doi:10.1111/j.1756-2589.2010.00034.x
- Chan, A., & Wethington, E. (1998). Factors promoting marital resilience among interracial couples. In H. I. McCubbin (Ed.), *Resiliency in Native American and immigrant families* (Vol. 2, pp. 71-87). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Clayton, L. (2007). *Patterns and motifs in the vā: A Samoan concept of a space between* (Masters thesis). Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. Retrieved from
<http://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/handle/10292/366>
- Cribb, J. O., & Barnett, R. (2010). Being bashed: Western Samoan women's responses to domestic violence in Western Samoa and New Zealand. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 6(1), 49-65. doi:10.1080/09663699925141
- De La Lama, L. B., De La Lama, L., & Wittgenstein, A. (2012). The soul mates model: A seven-stage model for couple's long-term relationship development and flourishing. *The Family Journal*, 20(3), 283-291.
doi:10.1177/1066480712449797

- Diessner, R., Frost, N., & Smith, T. (2004). Describing the neoclassical psyche embedded in Sternberg's triangular theory of love. *Social Behavior & Personality: an international journal*, 32(7), 683-690.
- Driver, J. L., & Gottman, J. M. (2004). Daily marital interactions and positive affect during marital conflict among newlywed couples. *Family Process*, 43(3), 301-314. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2004.00024.x
- Durie, M. (2015). Mauri ora *Healing Our Spirit Worldwide Seventh Gathering*. Kirikiriroa, Hamilton, Aotearoa, New Zealand:
- Eckstein, D., Eckstein, S., & Eckstein, D. (2014). Creating respect in couples. *The Family Journal*, 22(1), 98-104. doi:10.1177/1066480713505062
- Enoka, I. S. (1997). "Aiga"—a partnership in care through continuous collaboration: My Samoan experience. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 26(3), 99-104.
- Entwistle, D. N., & Moroney, S. K. (2011). Integrative perspectives on human flourishing: The imago dei and positive psychology. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 39(4), 295-303.
- Fowers, B. J. (1998). Psychology and the good marriage. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 41(4), 516-541.
- Freedman, J., & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Gottman, J. (1994). *What predicts divorce: The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gottman, J., & Gottman, J. (2017). The natural principles of love. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 9(1), 7-26. doi:10.1111/jftr.12182

- Gresham, R. (2012). Trusting relationships: A key for cross-cultural engagement. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34(5), 491-501.
doi:10.1080/1360080x.2012.715998
- Hodgetts, D. J., & Stolte, O. E. E. (2012). Case-based research in community and social psychology: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 22(5), 379-389. doi:10.1002/casp.2124
- Hodgetts, D. J., Stolte, O. E. E., & Rua, M. (2016). Psychological practice, social determinants of health and the promotion of human flourishing. In M. Waitoki, J. Rucklidge, J. Feather & N. Robertson (Eds.), *Professional practice of psychology in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2nd ed.). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Psychological Society.
- Kelley, H. H. (1979). *Personal relationships: Their structures and processes*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Taylor & Francis.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2002). The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 43(2), 207-222.
doi:10.2307/3090197
- King, M. (1985). *Being Pakeha; an encounter with New Zealand and the Māori renaissance*. Auckland, New Zealand: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Lambert, N. M., & Dollahite, D. C. (2008). The threefold cord: Marital commitment in religious couples. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(5), 592-614. doi:doi:10.1177/0192513X07308395
- Latai, L. (2015). Changing covenants in Samoa? From brothers and sisters to husbands and wives? *Oceania*, 85(1), 92-104. doi:10.1002/occe.5076
- Lee, K. S., & Chavis, D. M. (2012). Cross-case methodology: Bringing rigour to community and systems change research and evaluation. *Journal of*

Community & Applied Social Psychology, 22(5), 428-438.

doi:10.1002/casp.1131

Lee, Y.-J., & Roth, W.-M. (2004). Making a scientist: Discursive "doing" of identity and self-presentation during research interviews. *Forum : Qualitative Social Research*, 5(1)

Lilomaiaava-Doktor, S. (2009). Beyond "migration": Samoan population movement (malaga) and the geography of social space (vā). *Contemporary Pacific*, 21(1), 1-32.

Lui, D. (2003, 13-14 September). *Family: A Samoan perspective*. Paper presented at the SF national conference, Christchurch Convention Centre, New Zealand. Wellington, New Zealand: Mental Health Commission.

Meleisea, P. S., & Meleisea, M. (1987). *Lagaga: A short history of Western Samoa*. Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific.

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2009). An attachment and behavioral systems perspective on social support. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 26(1), 7-19. doi:doi:10.1177/0265407509105518

Mila-Schaaf, K. (2006). Vā-centred social work: Possibilities for a Pacific approach to social work practice. *Social Work Review*, 18(1), 8-13.

Morris, M. W., Leung, K., Ames, D., & Lickel, B. (1999). Views from inside and outside: Integrating emic and etic insights about culture and justice judgment. *The Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 781-796.
doi:10.2307/259354

O'Regan, B. (2006). *Ietoga: Samoan educators' educational journeys* (Masters thesis, Christchurch College of Education, New Zealand). Retrieved from: <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/2841>

- Oord, T., J. (Ed.). (2007). *The altruism reader: Selections from writings on love, religion, and science*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press.
- Orange, C. (2015). *The Treaty of Waitangi*. Wellington, New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books.
- Pereira, F. T. (2011, 10-12 June). *Tausi le vā*. Paper presented at the When Culture and Care Connects Conference, Auckland, New Zealand
- Pulotu-Endermann, F. K. (2009, September 7). *Fonofale model of health*. Paper presented at the Pacific models for health promotion, Massey University, Wellington. Retrieved from <http://www.hauora.co.nz/resources/Fonofalemodel explanation.pdf>
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. (2000). Interpersonal flourishing: A positive health agenda for the new millennium. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4(1), 30-44.
- Schafer, G. (2010). Multiple identifications, movement, and place making in cross-cultural heterosexual relationships in New Zealand. *New Zealand Sociology*, 25(1), 4-25.
- Seiuli, B. (2004). *Meaalofa: A gift handed over. Making visible and accessible Samoan counselling in New Zealand*, (Masters of Psychology, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand).
- Seiuli, B. (2010). Meaalofa: Making Samoan counselling practices accessible and visible in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Counselling*, 30(1), 47-63.
- Seiuli, B. (2012). Uputāua: A therapeutic approach to researching Samoan communities. *The Australian Community Psychologist*, 24(1), 24-37.

- Seiuli, B. (2013). Counselling psychology from a Samoan perspective. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 42(3), 50-58.
- Seiuli, B. (2015). *Ua tafea le tau'ofe: Samoan cultural rituals through death and bereavement experiences* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/>
- Shaver, P. R., Mikulincer, M., Simpson, J. A., & Rholes, W. S. (2010). Attachment and relationships: Milestones and future directions. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27(2), 173-180.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London, UK: Zed Books.
- Solomon, C. (2013). Connecting interracial relationships to Polynesian culture. *Colloquy*, 9, 21-38.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93(2), 119-135. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.93.2.119
- Stewart-Withers, R. R., & O'Brien, A. P. (2014). Suicide prevention and social capital: A Samoan perspective. *Health Sociology Review*, 15(2), 209-220. doi:10.5172/hesr.2006.15.2.209
- Tamasese, K., Peteru, M. C., Waldegrave, C., & Bush, A. (2005). Ole taeao afua, the new morning: A qualitative investigation into Samoan perspectives on mental health and culturally appropriate services. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 39, 300-309.
- Tauasosi, T. (2010). *Sauaga o tamaitai e a latou tane i Samoa: Wife abuse in Samoa* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i Manoa, Hawai'i.

- Tauleale'ausumai, F. (1997). The word made flesh: A Samoan theology of pastoral care. In P. L. Culbertson (Ed.), *Counselling issues & South Pacific communities*. Auckland, New Zealand: Accent Publications.
- Thornton, A., Kerslake, M. T., & Binns, T. (2010). Alienation and obligation: Religion and social change in Samoa. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 51(1), 1-16.
- Tiatia, J. (2008). *Pacific cultural competencies: A literature review*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Health
- Tiatia, J. (2012). Commentary on 'cultural diversity across the Pacific': Samoan cultural constructs of emotion, New Zealand-born Samoan youth suicidal behaviours, and culturally competent human services. *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, 6(02), 75-79. doi:10.1017/prp.2012.9
- Tiatia-Seath, J. (2014). Pacific peoples, mental health service engagement and suicide prevention in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care*, 7(3), 111-121. doi:doi:10.1108/EIHSC-10-2013-0023
- Tuagalu, I. (2008). The heuristics of the vā. *AlterNative*, 4(1)
- Tui Atua, T. T. T. E. (2009, 03 November). *O le e lave i tiga, ole ivi, le toto, ma le aano: He who rallies in my hour of need is my kin*. Paper presented at the NZ Families Commission Pasifika Families' Fono, Auckland, New Zealand
- Usita, P. M., & Poulsen, S. (2003). Interracial relationships in Hawaii: Issues, benefits and therapeutic interventions. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 2(2-3), 73-83. doi:10.1300/J398v02n02_06
- Vaioleti, T. M. (2006). Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 12(2006), 21-34.

- Vocational Training Council. (1975). *Understanding Pākehās: A pamphlet to help Polynesian migrants understand the European New Zealander's way of life and work* Wellington, New Zealand: Vocational Training Council.
- Walker, R. (1989). Māori identity. In D. Novitz & B. Willmott (Eds.), *Culture and identity in New Zealand* (pp. 21-34). Christchurch, New Zealand: GP Books.
- Wendt, A. (1996). Tatauing the post-colonial body. *Span*(42-43), 15-29.
- Youngkins, E. W. (2010). Human nature, flourishing, and happiness: Toward a synthesis of Aristotelianism, Austrian economics, positive psychology, and Ayn Rand's objectivism. *Libertarian Papers*, 2(35)

Appendix 1: Uputāua Therapeutic Approach



Source: Seiuli, 2013 – Reproduced with permission from the author

Retrieved from

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/10659/Counselling%20Psychology%20from%20a%20Samoan%20perspective%20-%20Seiuli%202013%20-%20NZ%20Journal%20of%20Psychology%20Vol%2042%20No%202%202013.pdf?sequence=2>

UTA Components: Conceptual meaning and usage

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 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>Āiga potopoto</i>	Family and relationship networks	Serves as the foundation of collective identity and belonging for members.
Internal Boundaries	<i>Le vā fealoaloa'i</i>	Relational space	Safeguards individuals and families in their respective roles and responsibilities.
First Pillar of Wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'aletino</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'alemafaufau</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 outside community including health 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	Acknowledge indigenous expertness to healing and restorative journeys.

Appendix 2: Information Sheet

Talofa lava,

My name is Hannah Finnigan and I am a Masters student in Community Psychology at the University of Waikato. I am driven to pursue this course of study by my passion for people and desire for social justice. I was heavily impacted by time spent in Samoa in 2013 and began postgraduate studies with a vision for one day working in Samoan communities. My master's research represents a combination of many passions and a key part of this journey.

A lot of research has been done on aspects of relationships that can be harmful to families, couples and the people within relationships. I want to know more about how relationships might work well and allow the people involved in the relationship to flourish.

I have chosen to explore Samoan-Palagi flourishing relationships – those aspects of relating that works well and are life affirming. In particular, I would like to investigate concepts and ways of relating that are meaningful in Samoan/Palagi relationships.

My research involves at least two interviews per person. All interviews will be scheduled with you before taking place. The first interview will be jointly held with both partners and should last 60-90 minutes. A follow-up interview will be arranged after our first meeting. Key topics that I would like to explore with you will include; differences/difficulties in managing the space between (vā fealoaloa'i) partners, similarities/differences between cultures/family/relationships, family/personal history, and how having children may have affected things (if applicable).

The research is part of a bigger research project funded by the Health Research Council. Participation in the study is voluntary, this means you are free to decline to participate or withdraw from the research. You have the freedom to withdraw at any point of the research without being questioned or coerced to continue.

It is my intention to protect your identity at all times. The information you provide is kept confidential and secured. Only my research supervisors will have access to the raw data from our interviews, as an important part of my commitment to ethical and academic supervision. I am supervised by Dr Byron Seiuli and Dr Bridgette Masters-Awatere from the School of Psychology, University of Waikato. Dr Seiuli is a Samoan with many years of counselling and researching experience in the Samoan community. Dr Masters-Awatere is an experienced community researcher in multiple areas including; Māori health, domestic violence and evaluation research.

This research project has been approved by the School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee (Dr Rebecca Sargisson, phone 07 557 8673, email: rebeccas@waikato.ac.nz)

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the study at any stage, you can contact:

The researcher: Hannah Finnigan, Email: hanafinn@waikato.ac.nz

The supervisors: Dr Byron Seiuli, Email: byron@waikato.ac.nz

Dr Bridgette Masters-Awatere, Email: bridge@waikato.ac.nz

Faafetai tele lava ma ia manuia,

Hannah Finnigan

Appendix 3: Consent form

A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant.

Research Project: Flourishing relationships: cultivating the space between

Please complete the following checklist. Tick (✓) the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
1. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (or it has been read to me) and I understand it.		
2. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this study		
3. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given regarding the study and I have a copy of this consent form and information sheet		
4. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty		
5. I have the right to decline to participate in any part of the research activity		
6. I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.		
7. I understand that although best efforts will be made to uphold confidentiality, it may be possible that I can be identified by my partner or other people who read the final report.		
8. I consent to my interview being recorded electronically		
9. I wish to view the summary report of my interview		

Declaration by participant:

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee (Dr Rebecca Sargisson, phone 07 557 8673, email: rebeccas@waikato.ac.nz)

Participant's name (Please print):

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Declaration by member of research team:

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name (Please print):

Signature: _____ Date: _____