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# **RING OF CONFIDENCE**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for**

**the degree of**

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## ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study of how eight Year 12 and Year 13 Pacific teenage females living in Auckland and Rotorua defined the concept of confidence and examines how they perceived family, church, school, friends and community influencing their confidence levels, either positively or negatively, and what factors they believed could help to improve their confidence levels in these different settings. A comparison of the two sample groups from Rotorua and Auckland was undertaken to determine whether living in a community where Pacific people are either the majority or minority, impacts differently on their overall confidence. It is within this framework that this study will discuss how the Pacific teenage female's confidence contributed to their own psychological wellbeing.

The semi-structured interviews and focus groups were the techniques used to collect rich qualitative data. The general inductive approach was used to analyse the qualitative data related to the research objectives. Specific categories and themes were developed which captured core messages reported by the participants. Categories that emerged for positive influences on confidence included 'encouragement, enjoyment, development, achievement, and spirituality / cultural identity'. For negative influences, categories included 'judgment, the fear of, family / friends, and culture'. Ways to improve one's confidence highlighted categories of 'communication, motivation, and enjoyment'.

Living in a community where Pacific people are either the minority or the majority does have some impact on the confidence development of participants. All the participants agreed that having confidence enabled them to make decisions about study, career goals, as well as broader life choices, and that all these factors contributed to their psychological well-being.

This study suggests ways confidence can be improved and the results are discussed in terms of the theories of perceived competence, self efficacy, motivation goal theory, and the social exchange model, and how motivational issues relate to one's psychological wellbeing.

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

***“The kingdom of Heaven is within you... Seek ye first the kingdom of Heaven and all things will be added unto you.” Matthew 6: 33***

Growing up in a family of 6 girls, my mother raised us on her own from the age of 35 years, after being widowed at a young age following the sudden death of our father at 43 years of age. My mother was faced with having to make all the decisions on her own about finances, accommodation, her children's care and protection, education, health and how to maintain her psychological wellbeing as well as that of her children. Confidence is something my mother had to have or quickly develop in order to bring up her children, as she was a migrant to New Zealand, she was not educated here, and she was not fluent in the English language. I believe my mother was my first role model of confidence.

I grew up in the East Auckland suburb of Glen Innes during the 1970's where there were about 6 Pacific Island families living in the area. Throughout my primary, intermediate and college education I was part of an ethnic minority group. The majority culture of students during this time was Pakeha (New Zealanders or white European) and then Maori. I attended Auckland Girls Grammar School in Form 5 and 6 and this was my first experience of learning together with hundreds of other Pacific Island students. However, this changed

again when I attended Otago University from 1983 -1985 and I was once again part of an ethnic minority group in all my Arts papers.

Upon reflection, I realise that being part of an ethnic minority group affected my confidence at different stages of my learning. During primary schooling, I was not so aware of my being different from others. I competed academically with fellow students and saw learning as fun and exciting. In class I would assume roles of responsibilities in class like class captain, sports captain, bell monitor and road patrol. I was confident in carrying out these roles.

It was when I reached Intermediate School years that being Samoan started becoming an issue for me. Derogatory words were used to describe my ethnicity for example – ‘bunga’, ‘coconut’, ‘blackie’, ‘nigger’ to name a few. It was not ‘cool’ to be a Pacific Islander in the 1970’s with Pacific Islanders competing with New Zealanders for employment, the immigration issue of over-stayers and being different to the mainstream culture. I tried to blend in with others and hung around mainly with the Maori students not advertising that I was Samoan. I can remember there were a few students who arrived from Samoa and their behaviour was not what I considered to be cool. I can remember avoiding them and feeling embarrassed by them. I can remember showing confidence in areas of learning and sport, which I enjoyed, for example, subjects like maths, which I excelled in, and playing representative hockey. I can remember playing the piano for the choir at a school concert at night, and being a member of the Mt

Wellington Youth Council and travelling to the Beehive in Wellington to represent the Mt Wellington Borough Council. These two activities would have required a certain amount of confidence, looking back at that time.

At college, one of the things, which drove me to succeed academically, was to prove to others that this 'Samoan' was just as good as anyone. I became protective of who I was and would clearly state that I was Samoan rather than be mistaken for being Maori. In sporting and social events, I enjoyed being noticed for my achievements or strengths. I had a fair amount of confidence, which at times turned into defiance if I came across any form of what I thought was injustice towards myself or my friends.

At university, my confidence plummeted being in a strange city at the bottom of the South Island, not knowing anyone other than my sister and brother-in-law, and being part of the minority again where my reputation did not precede me. I was definitely not outspoken, and most of the time I felt invisible during lectures and tutorials. However, I did develop a strong sense of pride about being Samoan because I met other Samoans and Pacific Islanders who were studying towards professions that I never thought Samoans would pursue – medical, law school and business qualifications. After completing an Arts Degree in 3 years, I developed the belief that anyone can achieve their goals if they put their mind to it and work hard.

When I joined the workforce in 1986, I was one of two Pacific Island social workers in the northern part of Auckland. I was very green in terms of social work experience and acquired many of my skills from members of my team who were middle-aged, white, middle class women who had worked in other professions prior to becoming social workers. Even though it took many years to gain confidence amongst my peers, I showed confidence in working with children, young people, and families. I could relate to these families being from similar working class backgrounds. We had lived in the area for some years, and I had established some good networks with the Glen Innes and Panmure communities.

Within the last decade changes have occurred in social work and I have had the opportunity to attend training, workshops and conferences specifically for Pacific Island social workers and this has been a unique experience. To be in a learning environment where I am amongst my own people or those very similar to me allows for confidence that I never experienced in all my years of schooling from primary through to university in the 1970s to early 1980s. To share common experiences, values, and humour are just a few things that have served to enhance my confidence in myself as a Samoan woman, in my work, my academic studies and in my family life as a wife and mother.

In hindsight, there were major influences in the development of my confidence over the years, beginning in the home within my family, amongst my friends,

certain intervals during my school life, within my church and the wider community which also included cultural and sporting activities.

Although confidence is something that has helped me to succeed in my academic study and work life, confidence is not always seen as a positive attribute within my own culture. When growing up in a Samoan family, it does not always pay to have too much confidence otherwise you could be seen as 'showing off' or 'being too cheeky' – 'fia poto'. Your family plays an important part in keeping you grounded by reminding you that your successes are not just your own, but that of your family and especially God who plays the major part in these successes. Families are your biggest critics, and can either make or break you, depending on how you deal with this criticism. For example, for me the sibling teasing made me feel really dumb, but this also made me determined. I was going to prove that I was not the dumb baby in the family and that I was going to succeed. Sometimes your parents may say harsh things about the way you behave or perform a task or activity but this is their way of trying to motivate you to strive for excellence. In a way this "reverse psychology" has contributed to my determination and motivation to work hard at the goals I have set myself, have confidence in my ability to achieve these and reap the benefits with the knowledge, skills and experiences that are gained along the way.

The research topic started to evolve from discussions between my daughter and I, about her and her friend's future study, career options and some of the life

choices they made about boyfriends, drugs, alcohol and sex. I shared with my daughter how I arrived at decisions around study, career and my own life choices. We spoke about how confidence played a very strong part in making these decisions and achieving goals. From this discussion emerged an interest in whether the factors that influenced my confidence 25 years ago were still influential factors for today's Pacific teenage females. Growing up within a minority culture in one's community, I believe, made a difference to my confidence. The question arises whether growing up within a majority culture in the same community I grew up in, has made a difference for the Pacific teenage females today.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Teenage or adolescent years can be marked by dramatic physiological and psychological changes. One transition point that can influence how teenagers handle these changes is the move from school education to tertiary study or employment. Pacific parents' expectation for 18 year olds is tertiary study, both tertiary study and part-time employment or full-time employment (Barwick, Gray, Martin, & Asiasiga, 2002). How teenagers manage this move from college education to tertiary study or employment requires confidence in their ability to perform and to achieve the goals set in whatever study or career path they have chosen.

Exploring how Pacific teenage females define confidence and identifying the key contributors to the development of their confidence, is the main focus of this research. While many adolescents experience of the transition from childhood to adulthood is a relatively smooth one, for others this transition period is characterised by increased risk of suicide and depression. Female adolescents are at a higher risk of attempting suicide and suffering from depression. The Pacific context in which Pacific teenage females live (low socio economic, high number on benefits, unemployment almost double the national rate) places them at a further disadvantage. By understanding what influences female confidence, perhaps professionals such as psychologists, teachers, health workers, and coaches to name but a few are then able to implement more effective programmes to develop or improve the confidence

of Pacific teenage females and assist them through this transition from adolescence to adulthood.

**Confidence:** *(noun) Freedom from doubt; belief in yourself and your abilities.*

Self-confidence is having confidence in oneself. It is generally perceived as having the courage to speak in front of a large number of people, the willingness to try something new, the willingness to go against what others are thinking or doing, the ability to comfortably do something he or she could not do and/or the willingness to explore what has not been explored. Confidence or self-confidence has been used interchangeably with concepts such as self-esteem, self concept, self efficacy throughout literature in some disciplines and at other times these concepts have been treated as separate concepts.

Until recently, New Zealand youth have been overlooked in terms of national policy, age-specific health services, and nationally representative population-based databases. This is despite New Zealand's current generation of youth recording among the highest rates of unintended pregnancy, suicide and self-harm in the Western world (Ministry of Health, 2000 and 2002). There have been studies based on the concepts of self-confidence, self-esteem, self concept and the affect the perspectives of education, health and welfare have on these concepts during the adolescent's transition to adulthood. There is a specific paucity of information on the health and wellbeing of Pacific youth and in particular, Pacific female youth.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the major influences of confidence for Pacific teenage females and the impact of these influences upon their decisions about future study, career and life choices.

The general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) employed in this study allowed participants to share their experiences without being informed of prevailing theoretical perspectives about concepts of confidence, self esteem, or self-efficacy. This study's methodology, findings and discussion sections that follow, address the following research objectives:

1. To define what confidence means to teenage Pacific Island females;
2. To describe positive influences to teenage Pacific Island females confidence in the different settings;
3. To describe negative influences to teenage Pacific Island females confidence in the different settings;
4. To describe how to improve the confidence of teenage Pacific Island females confidence in the different settings;
5. To examine whether confidence impacts on future study or career decisions and life choices of teenage Pacific Island females ;

6. To examine whether growing up as a minority in your community has any impact on the development of confidence for teenage Pacific Island females;
7. To contribute to the body of knowledge on how confidence contributes to the psychological wellbeing of teenage Pacific Island females in New Zealand.

The chapter on findings outlines the substantive theory that captures the Pacific teenage female's experiences, of defining and improving their confidence, and how confidence impacts upon decisions about future study, career and life choices. The final discussion chapter provides a summary conclusion of the main findings as it relates to the aims and objectives outlined from the beginning, as well as its significance. Included also are the limitations and possibilities for future research.