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Fetu'utu'una'i le vā
Navigating relational space:

**An exploration of traditional and contemporary pastoral
counselling practices for Samoans**

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

Doctor of Philosophy

at Massey University, Albany
New Zealand

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Abstract

Pastoral counselling is one of the important roles of ministers in Samoa. An emerging ethos of individualism is challenging traditional notions of collectivism in *fa'a Samoa* (culture and traditions of Samoa). This evolution has been identified and described as the 'changing Samoan self'. Traditional approaches of counselling employed by ministers in the past must adjust to align with the changes faced by church members today. This thesis presents the voices of 34 Samoan participants living in Samoa that include ministers, minister's wives, *matai* (title-holders), New-Zealand born Samoans, church members, and service users of a domestic violence agency. Participants shared their expectations of being counselled as well as counselling others, together with reflections concerning effective and ineffective counselling practices. A Samoan research methodological framework called *Tafatolu* (three-sides) has been conceptualised and used herein as the methodology for this project. *Tafatolu* methodological framework involves the synthesis of three key parts that this project considers as valuable to any research—a 'contemporary academic' approach to research, a 'cultural' approach, and the 'self' that represents the researcher's perspectives and positioning within the project. Collectively, these three parts have assisted this project in the collection and analysis of data that have informed this study. The findings from this research have highlighted the emergence of a changing Samoan self and counselling practices that remain centred upon God. *Fetu'utu'una'i le vā*, (Navigating relational space) emerged as an applicable approach to pastoral counselling for Samoans today. The enforcement of *fetu'utu'una'i le vā* has evolved alongside a changing Samoan self, from the use of physical force, to verbal force, excommunication and punishment, to now include conversations through dialogue.

The findings from this research have forged a theoretical framework of pastoral counselling for Samoans, presented as a continuum of traditional and contemporary understandings. Recommendations from this research propose pastoral counselling practices that cater for both traditionalists and contemporary Samoans.

Dedications

Our lives as servants of God are dedicated to our Lord.

This work is in memory of our loved ones whom our Lord has called:

Papatiso Fa'aolaina Pala'amo aged 2 months (1974): my younger brother

Latai Pala'amo 47 years (1990): my mother

Norman Otele Pala'amo 26 years (2008): my youngest brother

Auola Fiu Tialino Samuela Gibbons 75 years (2008): my father-in-law

Rowena Ana Tua Pala'amo 29 years (2009): my younger sister

Faiupu Maggie Samuela Gibbons 78 years (2012): my mother-in-law

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This work is dedicated to my father Fosi who risked his own life to save mine, from a drowning incident when I was 5 years old.

This work is dedicated to my best friend and soul mate, my wife Lemau, and to our sons Norman, Alex, and Jayden: the most supportive, patient, and loving family that any father could hope for.

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Glossary

<i>aiga</i>	family
<i>alofa</i>	love
<i>amana'ia</i>	to be acknowledged
<i>e sui faiga ae tumau fa'avae</i>	practices change yet foundations remain
<i>EFKS</i>	Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
<i>EFKS</i>	CCCS: Congregational Christian Church Samoa
<i>fa'aaloalo</i>	respect
<i>fa'aSamoa</i>	culture and traditions of Samoa; Samoan way of life
<i>faiifeau/ fa'afeagaiga/ —fa'afeagaiga taulagi</i>	minister
<i>fale tele</i>	family meeting house, Samoan open house
<i>faletua</i>	minister's wife
<i>faufautua</i>	advice-giving
<i>fetu'utu'una'i le vā</i>	navigating relational space
<i>fetu'utu'una'i muniao</i>	manoeuvring a fisher's rod
<i>fetufa'aiga</i>	sharing perspectives; pastoral counselling
<i>fono</i>	meeting
<i>Fono tele</i>	Annual General Assembly
<i>i'omata</i>	apple of the eye
<i>ie lavalava</i>	sarong-like wraparound
<i>lē amana'ia</i>	not to be acknowledged
<i>lotu afiafi</i>	evening devotion
<i>matai</i>	title-holder
<i>matai alii</i>	chiefly title-holder
<i>moana</i>	ocean
<i>palagi</i>	Westerner
<i>talanoa</i>	talk; discuss
<i>tama'ita'i</i>	woman; eldest female sibling
<i>tapu</i>	sacred
<i>tele</i>	many

<i>telē</i>	major
<i>tōfā fetu'utu'una'i</i>	reflective wisdom
<i>tōfā mamao</i>	critical wisdom
<i>tulafale</i>	oratory title-holder
<i>vā</i>	relational space between people
<i>vā fealoaloa'i</i>	relationships
<i>va'aalo</i>	bonito canoe

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Prologue

(Three Minute thesis speech titled “God, Pastors, Counselling” by the author delivered at the ‘Three Minute thesis speech competition 2014’)¹

There was a time in Samoa when the church minister, or pastor, was the first person you contacted when you had problems. Issues with one’s spouse or partner, domestic violence, drugs and alcohol issues; the minister often was your ‘go-to’ person for these issues because people often believed that what the minister said was the God-given truth.

But that was then; for many Samoans today, what the minister says to go and do is not enough for the people to obey. Why? Because the Samoan person is changing rapidly in many ways.

Some of us here may understand this. You build up enough courage to talk to someone concerning your problems, but then afterwards, you are left feeling more confused. My PhD research looks at what the Samoan person has changed from, where he or she is changing to, and how will knowing these changes shape a revised way of counselling done by ministers today.

Finding a Samoan word for counselling was a challenge, because there is no such word in our language. There are words that suggest advising, but counselling is much more than that.

A Samoan proverb: ‘manoeuvring a fisher’s rod’, comes close to what counselling should be today. It refers to the traditional Samoan canoe fishing for the bonito fish. The fisher in the middle steers the canoe to where the fish are; the fisher at the rear manoeuvres the rod. When a fish takes the hook, the fisher yanks it out of the sea yelling, ‘here comes the fish’ and the middle fisher must steady the canoe so that the fish lands into the canoe, in front of him. Success. Counselling today by ministers should be like this. The minister

¹ This national and international speech competition required speakers to explain their doctoral research within three minutes.

manoeuvres during the counselling encounter, while the minister's wife, steadies and directs where the process goes. Sometimes this is the case, but mostly, the minister acts alone in a two-person canoe.

For my research I interviewed church ministers, church members who went to their minister for counselling, and those who chose not to but sought counselling through agencies in Samoa. I discovered that those who went to agencies, rather than their minister for counselling, wanted justice. Going to the agency led to the bad person being locked away. For those who sought counselling with their minister, they saw him as being God's representative on earth. Going to the minister, for them, was like taking their problems to God. It gave them spiritual healing.

So, wouldn't it be great if I could devise a counselling tool for ministers that is social, brings justice, as well as being of God, and gives spiritual healing? A tool that draws people to come and talk to their pastor.

This tool may be Samoan in design, but it is also useful for many others who have navigated their way through different oceans, and made places like Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, their homes.

Winning speech of the Massey University Three Minute thesis competition, 2014
Represented Massey University at the Trans-Tasman Three Minute thesis finals, 2014²

² The Trans-Tasman Three Minute Thesis Finals in 2014 was held at the University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia.