

EXAMINING BARRIERS TO COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AS EXPERIENCED BY  
SAMOAN MEN LIVING IN HAWAI'I

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**ABSTRACT**

To date, Samoan men remain underrepresented in college classrooms. In this thesis I examine the factors that may be preventing Samoan men from attending college, which in turn, leaves them shut out of particular job opportunities. Using a grounded theory approach, I conducted fourteen semi-structured interviews with Samoan men living in Kalihi. Through these interviews, I was able to learn more about the specific barriers that prevented them from going on to higher education. My findings suggest that family remains deeply important, and that a responsibility for caring for one's parents and elders can be directly at odds with going on to post-secondary studies. Furthermore, longstanding cultural biases and stereotypes held about Samoan men causes some to internalize the idea that college is not something 'for' them. Taken together, my findings offer up an important look into the interpersonal, cultural, and structural barriers that make it difficult for this demographic to go on to college providing an important ground upon which further interventionist studies can be built.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

As a young Samoan girl born and raised here in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, I grew up recognizing the differences between cultural and Western ways of executing respectable tasks. Priorities between Samoan and Western culture were often quite distinctive and uniquely executed. My family, who were migrants from Samoa, made the ultimate sacrifice and travelled to the United States leaving all that they had behind. My family came to Hawai‘i in hopes of a better future that would possibly provide greater job opportunities, health care, education, and more. In traveling to the United States with my grandparents, my father took on major responsibilities as a teenager to care for his parents who weren’t eligible for employment due to disabilities and health concerns. My father made it a priority to seek work out of high school at the age of eighteen to earn a source of income for his family.

Although he was eligible to attend Chaminade University, he did not pursue a higher education, mainly because of the restrictions of his immigration status and needing to obtain financial security. Employment took priority over receiving a higher education given the situation my father and grandparents were in; they were emigrants trying to navigate themselves through a new country and prioritizing their responsibilities. Other than completing high school, employment was a fundamental way of survival regardless of the wages offered. By working, my father was able to happily provide needed prescriptions and other essential supplies for both of his parents. Through this, my father displayed selflessness, an important part of the Samoan culture: caring for our families was and still remains top priority.

I remember waking up to the sound of my father’s alarm clock that would get him up for work at the crack of dawn. My mother made sure to gather his work clothes, shoes, and other necessities to assist him in getting to work on time and to also ensure he had everything he

needed before leaving home. The most exciting moments in waking up before sunrise was joining my parents for an early morning drive to drop my father off at work. His workplace was usually a warehouse and even upon changing jobs, the pattern of working at a warehouse or as a security guard remained. Each time he returned home from these types of jobs, his uniforms would be drenched in sweat and it would just repeat day after day.

In Samoan culture, men are expected to work at an early age to accommodate working class parents. Here in America, although there are many opportunities available to the general public, many Samoan men do not qualify for well-paid positions due to standards and expectations of the American society. Samoan men have historically and still to this day experienced discrimination which in turn discouraged them from seeking employment outside of laboring jobs that offer minimum wages. Most Samoan men I know work as security guards, construction workers, craftsmen, sanitation workers, cooks, and delivery men; all of which require physical efforts that will eventually start to weaken their bodies at an early age and lead to health issues. Among these particular jobs, my own male relatives, friends and their fathers, have seized a position in one or more of these professions which evidently provided very limited benefits through their own experiences.

To this day, it is common to see that many Samoan people are still working tirelessly for a minimum wage pay in the United States of America, a place where the “American Dream” exists for the rich yet remains just out of reach towards minority communities. Society often stresses the importance of going to college and earning a degree in order for more opportunities to be made available for an individual. However, chances of that actually happening remain very slim among minority groups. Only a few Samoan men that I know have had the opportunity to

experience what it's like to even become a college student. I wanted to better understand why so few Samoan men go on to college, inspiring my thesis topic.

In this thesis I conducted interviews with fourteen Samoan men to learn why they did not go on to college after high school. I utilized snowball sampling as a recruiting tool and grounded theory as a theoretical framework for this study. The goal of this research is to explore common factors that have affected the decision making of Samoan men and serves as an opportunity to give them a chance to voice their concerns and share their experiences. Furthermore, it is my goal to better understand the root(s) of this issue to find solutions that will better examine the college enrollment experienced by Samoan men living in Hawai'i to increase the college enrollment rates among Samoan men.

As a result of my undertaking of this research, I argue that establishing more school and community programs will provide additional resources that will accommodate Samoan men in overcoming personal, educational, and employment challenges. My goal in conducting this research is to lay the groundwork for future interventions that will ultimately result in an increase of college enrollment rates among Samoan men through innovations that provide a sense of belonging and guidance as well as a pathway to success. I strongly believe that programs focused on student and individual success consist of professionals that can abet in completing required applications for both college and employment purposes. If these opportunities are made available, more Samoan students and parents will appreciate the assistance that will educate them more on opportunities that are fitting for their living statuses. The more knowledge Samoan parents can gain from these programs, the more likely they will invest their time and effort in allowing their sons' to pursue a college education and also strive to become a stronger support system for them.

## CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine some of the underlying issues that prevent Samoan men from furthering their education and advancing in American society. These findings will allow for understanding of how cultural values, morals, and/or traditions play a significant role in the decision making and learning opportunities of Samoan men. Samoan communities are often understudied which explains the lack of knowledge that people outside of the culture have about Samoan people and their traditions. This thesis is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What structural barriers are described by Samoan men that prevent their enrollment in college?

RQ2: What do Samoan men want or need to make post-secondary college education a viable option?

RQ3: How is the Samoan culture positively or negatively affecting their decisions on whether or not to go onto college?

I address these questions through a qualitative approach to data collection. By answering these research questions, it will provide answers and solutions to help ease these worrying concerns for the Samoan community both locally in Hawai'i and throughout the Samoan diaspora. In addition to a literature review, I also provide an introduction to the essential parts of the Samoan culture that distinguishes it from other cultures as a means to provide additional context and motivation for this study.

My research is underpinned with a belief that my participants are the experts on their own lived experiences; I understood my role as to listen to suggestions from each participant that would help other Samoan men earn a college education in the near future. To improve this

particular area of research, it is essential to take into consideration the voices of this particular group. The insights gathered from each interview will be a step in the right direction. Each response holds value and hope for the future since only a few studies to date have specifically centered the experiences of Samoan people. My goal is to provide a grounding for future studies to look into reasons that are causing low college enrollment rates, reasons preventing Samoan men from enrolling into a post-secondary institution and determining how the Samoan culture may be positively or negatively affecting them. The efforts in seeing positive change or even an attempt to initiate ways to start collecting new data and creating more opportunities for Samoan men starts with a vision, a voice, and building towards it.

### CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The first section of the literature review highlights two of the most important attributes that shape the lives of Samoan people. These two attributes are best known as the fa'a Samoa (Samoan way) and the Matai system (Chiefly system) which creates a foundation for how Samoans should live their lives humbly and respectfully. The second portion of the literature review will discuss European influences as well as the transition and acculturation of Samoan individuals who have moved to the United States from their homelands to seek better opportunities. In the third section, I express the importance of how Samoan children are raised in the culture. Through the fa'a Samoa way, Samoan children are raised with discipline as a way to mold behaviors and to teach them. In the following section, I introduce the psychological perspective on child rearing practices. The purpose of this section is to highlight areas that may hinder the growth and confidence of young Samoan individuals which may contribute to low self-esteem and confidence. Finally, I conclude with a section about my specific area of intervention; this section introduces possible ways to assist Samoan men in life especially in furthering their education by going on to college after completing high school. I highlight the importance of understanding critical aspects of the Samoan culture so that appropriate interventions can be established accordingly.

#### **Fa'a Samoa**

Before I go into details as to why I feel this topic is essential for discussion, I will introduce various features of the Samoan culture that will be important to understand certain parts of this literature. For readers who are unfamiliar with the Samoan culture, it will be helpful to understand that there are two critical aspects that help shape the lives of young Samoan men. First, is the "fa'a-Samoa," or the Samoan Way. The fa'a Samoa is the foundation of Polynesia's

oldest culture dating back some approximately 3,000 years (National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa, 2017). Secondly, is the “Pulega a Matai,” or the Matai system. These two critical aspects of the Samoan culture underline the importance of morals and values as a code of honor for Samoan men and women to live by. The Samoan Way consists of three key elements- the matai (chiefs), aiga, the extended family and ekalesia or church (Samoa Tourism Authority, 2019). Samoa in general is a traditional society governed by the fa’a Samoa (Samoan Way) that is also supported by other factors that include land, ceremonies, and respect. The respect of one's elders is strictly adhered to and being of service to your family is your primary duty (Samoa Tourism Authority, 2019). In early history, Samoa followed a natural pattern of raising their aging family members as a way of honoring the circle of life while maintaining a strong relationship within families. Elders are the keepers of history and ones who sustain the culture and share the importance of Samoan traditions, beliefs, language, and expectations of the Samoan Way. Samoan families care for their aged relatives motivated by a love and respect for their elders. Knowledge and wisdom are passed down from the elderly, which is significant to the culture and the way children should be raised.

Today, Samoan families continue to practice the importance of the fa’a Samoa to teach their children the knowledge that once kept them as humble and respectful individuals. These values apply strongly regardless of where Samoan families reside: fa’a Samoa is fluid and evolves overtime. However, it is also believed that “e sui faiga ae le suia fa'avae” meaning “although things evolve and change overtime, the meaning and purpose of the foundation remains the same”. For example, Samoans living in Hawai‘i or anywhere outside of Samoa, the bestowment of chiefly titles includes soda cans with dollar bills attached to it as an offering acknowledging village chiefs, elderly, or visitors; however, in the old days, fa’a Samoa was

conducted using a husked coconut. The overall culture emphasizes the importance of these values to properly raise their children to understand honor, respect, humility, and cultural expectations. Cultural expectations reinforce rules and regulations as a way to keep individuals from going astray and also losing their identity as Samoans. The fa'a Samoa is a strict standard of how the Samoans believe a person should live his or her life based on family, community, and selflessness (Safari the Globe, 2013). In other words, fa'a Samoa refers to a complex cultural code that guides and teaches individuals on how to lead their life (Cultural Atlas, 2019).

### **Matai System**

Secondly, the Samoan Way supports the matai system. The matai system is an authoritarian system that was strategized and created to classify chiefs and leaders. The hierarchical system consisted of worthy Samoan men who were and are able to conduct the job and duties of a chief. Few women were also capable of holding matai titles; however, as a female (regardless of whether she is a matai or not), it is deemed appropriate according to fa'a Samoa, for a male (ideally a matai), to speak on such occasions (Palenapa, 1993). Similar to other cultures, men and women both hold different strengths and are seen as fit for certain jobs. This in particular acknowledges our Samoan men. Chiefs are extremely respected and acknowledged for taking on a challenging role in shaping rules that would work to build a strong community. People rely on appointed chiefs as leaders to create the best decisions possible for the overall wellness of the people. The matai system was embedded into the Samoan culture many years ago where rules were applied to administer and manage the peace and harmony within the community. Majority of the decision makings conducted within the matai system contained agreements that were made to benefit the Samoan community.

These Samoan foundational systems were established to set goals that could only be achieved through working together which is still practiced today. Through this technique of order, Samoans were recognized for their outstanding abilities in managing methods that emphasize the importance of respect among people, villages, and churches so that life within small communities is successful. In other words, anything other than family, faith, and respect was considered secondary traits that still strongly exist today. I also recognize that the uniqueness of the Samoan culture has been effective in maintaining their traditional way of life and accommodating families. Therefore, both the fa'a Samoa and the matai system play a crucial role in managing the communal economy, protect, and distribute family lands, and being responsible for the welfare of all members in their aiga or family (National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa, 2017). To oversee options, matai's are socially and politically the representative heads of every family in Samoa. In this case, it is critical for Samoan men to uphold their entitlement to gain and maintain respect. As a group, they were the decision-making and disciplinary body in the day-to-day running of village affairs (Palenapa, 1993). This expresses the types of responsibilities expected of Samoan men who will instill noble courtesy for Samoa and its people. Because of these specific rules, men are obligated to take care of family responsibilities above all else, which may also become a contributing factor as to why Samoan men are tending to cultural—rather than personal— matters as their first priority. Therefore, Samoan men have essential roles that may be challenging for them to take on other duties outside of culture. In the next section, I will discuss some of the challenges Samoan men encountered during their transition.

## **Acculturation/Transition**

The importance of understanding the essentiality of fa'a Samoa and the matai system is to highlight key roles Samoan men hold not only within the culture itself but within their own homes. Although both men and women play a critical role, men are more likely to be accountable for their families in decision making and stability. Here in the United States, it is difficult for Samoan men to simultaneously satisfy both American and Samoan cultural expectations because the two cultures have more differences than similarities. Before colonization, Samoans lived a simple life. They believed in their own deities until missionaries introduced Christianity. Christianity was introduced to Samoa in the 1830's by missionary John Williams of the London Missionary Society. I believe that this encounter was the beginning of European influences that have altered parts of the culture and has led many Samoan families into acculturation and adapting to American culture. Because of the foreign encounter, what seemed to be powerful assets to the eyes of Samoan people became a way to convince the people to follow their lead of missionaries into converting to Christianity and also suggested reforming some aspects of their fa'a Samoa traditions:

Chief *Malietoa's* decision for him and his people to embrace Christianity was influenced to some extent by the material possessions of the missionaries and the desire to learn more about the world of the missionaries. Samoans saw education as an essential way whereby they could share in some of the benefits of European culture. (Palenapa, 1993)

Based on these written records, missionaries had the power to influence Samoan people through ownership of materials. In the eyes of these islanders, they were witnessing foreigners with objects they have never seen and perhaps objects that hold great value and power. These missionary men colonized the island and influenced Samoan people to convert over to

Christianity because they saw that Samoans were godless people and claimed that the soil of Samoa would be a great place to plant their religious faith. With this particular narrative, these missionaries convinced many Samoans to learn the English language, participate in school sessions, and attend church to honor their newly introduced 'God' and his purpose. Claims and promises drew more individuals into following missionary customs; however, people made their own decisions on whether or not to participate.

Without a doubt, European contact influenced the Samoan culture and introduced systems that created boundaries that did not previously exist. When schools were established, learning was conducted within a four-wall structure. However, who were they serving? Why were classrooms built in a closed space? What set of goals did European settlers have in creating a structure as such? Why were Samoans forced to learn in an enclosed environment that they were not familiar with? Why couldn't these settlers learn to adapt to the Samoan culture and seek better ways to bridge the learning styles of two different cultures? The purpose of an education system was built to accommodate a European audience. As Pacific Islanders, being one with nature conducting hands-on practices was the most effective way one could learn and enhance their knowledge. Learning in a box-like setting was not the best interest for Samoans which only created limitations forcing them to transition as if they had to learn how to walk again. Learning the English language was another challenge introduced.

*Learning* is how a student obtains information, how they understand material (Iosefa, n.d.). *Schooling* is the way these kids are being taught, the way in which the material is being presented to them (Iosefa, n.d.). There is a distinction between schooling and learning which is an area our education system has failed to examine. If enough studies were conducted in the past addressing the obvious low college enrollment rates among Samoan men, there would have been

innovations set in place to assist this vulnerable population who have been neglected in earning a higher education here in the United States. As researchers, we must inquire about lesson plans and who it serves. If there's a specific audience these curriculums were created for, immigrants were definitely excluded. Why couldn't some lessons be taught outdoors rather than indoors? Why are teaching styles mainly from a textbook rather than firsthand accounts or through oral traditions? Samoan men were required to learn in a classroom setting established mainly for a European audience. The schools do not foster an environment that allows the student to appreciate the material (Iosefa, n.d.).

This is where educators must observe their surroundings and take the initiative through teaching in a way a textbook can't teach. I strongly believe if educators recognize the struggles of Samoan men in a classroom, teaching styles will be altered in a way to accommodate a wider variety of students and their learning styles. If educators overlook the weaknesses of their students, it is likely that the lessons they are delivering will not serve its purpose. An education plays a role in one's success; however, this would not be so if students are not able to attain all the information given delaying their knowledge on specific topics presented in classrooms. It is important to know how curriculums are created and the audience it serves to understand how we can improve teachings that will serve a diverse population and be culturally competent and mindful that people learn in many different ways and that some students come with more disadvantages than others. The system totally disregards the cultural background of these students, setting them up for failure in the system and leaving them in a vulnerable position (Iosefa, n.d.).

We must not allow teaching styles to be structured specifically to accommodate one audience but ensure lessons can reach broadly to assist students in developing their full potential

and retain information that will be applicable later on in their lives. Fortunately, in the Samoan culture, being told what to do and how to do it was the ultimate way children learned to navigate their childhood through all aspects of life in terms of love, respect, discipline, faith, education, family, and other responsibilities. So, what we've learned is that Samoan men already come from a culture that learns through listening. Purcell (2007) conducted research among 66 participants who were involved in interviews, focus groups, and case studies. He argued that lectures were favored amongst teachers and students and found that the vast majority of participants in his study (85%) agreed that lectures were the best method for learning. He explains that the students attribute this desire to the Samoan culture being an auditory one which means a culture dependent on hearing and listening. If this is the ultimate way Samoan people learn, college enrollment percentages should be much higher because the American school system teaches just that and delivers messages through lectures; unfortunately, this is where the issue lies and that there are barriers between the sending and receiving of messages and content. Odden (2003) explains that Samoan patterns of social learning have an important influence on the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and practice. Iosefa (n.d.) pointed out that the school system is failing the student because they disregard the cultural methods of learning that these students are familiar with. Recognizing and understanding these patterns will greatly assist teacher-student approaches and create a much more engaging learning environment.

The culture itself has had its shares of reforming to accommodate and meet the expectations of foreign influences and to an extent, jeopardizing their cultural identity to meet western expectations. In Mcdade's (2002) quantitative study, he found that the Samoan community slowly changed as western civilization influences impeded on the fa'a Samoa (Samoan way of life) lifestyle that was already in place. Therefore, I believe we should

acknowledge the efforts of Samoan people for learning to adapt to a new culture and understand the sacrifices they've given up continuing to live by these influences. As a matter of fact, cultural practices should be honored and invited more into American culture and be valued in society especially with their success in many aspects of life that were practiced before America became America. Samoan men are descendants of very skilled ancestors whose gifts are far beyond what a textbook can teach. Samoan men today carry great skills far beyond their physical attributes are known for. The next section will highlight the differences between the Samoan and Western culture in raising children which will prove the distinctions each culture has in how they believe their children should be raised.

### **Raising Children**

Parenting styles differ between Samoan and western cultures. The Samoan culture applies a critical approach in raising children because they believe in molding their children into becoming great citizens and respectful individuals. This Samoan belief emphasizes the physical disciplining of their children when necessary. Samoans believe that to fully mold a child into a good, respectful citizen, a child must be appropriately disciplined even to the point of hitting, or what is better known to Samoans as sasa (hit/smack), otherwise, they did them a great disservice. In this case, a consistent dialogue between a child and parent is almost nonexistent because a child is not supposed to talk back to their parents. A child's job is to listen and learn. In western traditions, children are encouraged to share their feeling with their parents without feeling as if the child is being disrespectful. There is a saying in the Samoan language, "Fa'amaini le pa'u ona uma lea ole fa'alvogata (hit/smack etc. literally, 'sting the skin') to stop misbehavior" (Tanielu 1997, p. 47). This perspective in the Samoan culture is viewed as a form of love, or as

western readers might understand, “tough love.” Samoans insist that if a child is not physically punished after being told repeatedly to stop misbehaving, he or she will soon hurt themselves.

The Samoan way emphasizes the importance of respect and well-behaved manners. Although western cultures often mistake physical discipline for physical abuse, Samoans value this aspect of child rearing in order for a child to establish well-mannered behaviors. Culturally, they viewed the western translations of discipline as soft and inappropriate. Samoans believe, if necessary, there is a place for reasonable physical discipline in order for a child to learn his or her mistakes, otherwise he or she will repeat that same mistake. The role of disciplining children in the Samoan culture often reflects the form of behavior displayed by the children.

Undisciplined children are viewed as an act that brings disgrace upon parents and families. From an adult’s or parent’s perspective, behaviors of children should be closely monitored to avoid animosity from other people. In the Samoan culture, one person represents a village which is why direct attention is always given to a child. When a child demonstrates inappropriate behaviors, physical and verbal discipline in the Samoan culture is key to shaping them into adapting positive behaviors. In some cases, the overuse of discipline can be daunting. Although physical and verbal discipline has positively shaped the lives of young Samoan individuals, especially Samoan men, the following section will introduce new findings that are often surpassed disregarding underlying factors preventing Samoan youth from progressing in life.

### **Psychological Perspective on Child Rearing Practices**

I decided to include this section in my thesis to highlight new findings that are a result of constant verbal and physical discipline as they further highlight the divide between Samoan and western cultures. Culturally, physical disciplining in Samoa may be appropriate in teaching children right from wrong. There is a system that may not be readily understood by American

culture, but it works for how things are managed in Samoan culture. Outsiders who are against physical discipline practices may say that physical discipline was never part of the Samoan culture, but this influence has been practiced for decades with a majority of positive outcomes. With physical disciplining, many Samoan children have learned to be obedient and respectful, especially towards their elders. Today, many things have changed. Because I would like to see more of our Samoan men become more successful here in the United States, I would like to introduce some of the new psychological effects that may explain some factors preventing Samoan men from living life to their fullest potential. Although the majority of Samoan youth have experienced old school discipline and have accepted this form of teachings, throughout time and evolution, generations have learned that there's a slight need of reformation when it comes to physical or verbal discipline. I feel that to an extent, a handful of Samoans can handle the pressure they get from verbal and physical discipline; however, it can be mentally overwhelming and demeaning to one's well-being. In many cases, it can negatively impact one's self-esteem forcing Samoans to believe that they are incapable of being independent and obligated to be under the demand of someone else. This contributes to why many young Samoan men and people choose to stay silent and refrain from voicing their concerns. They are accustomed to the Samoan way in respecting the superior figure and are often put in situations that create a feeling of feeling less than. I believe will allow me to be the voice for Samoan men; to share their worth and their stories that often become a barrier to their lives here in the United States.

In my own personal experiences, I feel Samoan individuals encounter many challenges due to the lack of encouragement in expressing opinions and public speaking within the Samoan culture. The fear of getting disciplined plays a key role in keeping individuals from exploring new ideas and places. Any form of consistent discipline affects individuals mentally which later

results in an isolated behavior or lack of self-confidence and many other negative mentalities. According to a Canadian study conducted by Castelloe (2012), their research showed that spanking erodes developmental growth and decreases a child's IQ. The physical disciplining of children causes cognitive impairment and long-term developmental difficulties which is what many Samoan children are encountering. Studies have proven that spanking reduces the brain's grey matter which is a connective tissue between brain cells. Grey matter is an integral part of the central nervous system and influences intelligence testing and learning abilities (Castelloe, 2012).

Unfortunately, the customs of the Samoan culture are great in strongly implementing rules among young individuals; however, adults and authoritative figures in Samoa are not realizing that physical discipline and aggressive dialogues negatively affect one's cognitive development. This would explain another reason why Samoan individuals are not advancing in both business and an educational context as quickly as the majority of other culture groups that make up most of the percentage of higher positions in professional settings. Now that the world is evolving, and more studies are being conducted to prove the causes and effect of things, people should start recognizing the issues to create slight changes to benefit the younger generation so that they may become great future leaders and discover their full potential. Noah E. Borrero et al (2010) examine the academic and cultural identities of Samoan high school students. They argue that the students struggle with negotiating cultural and academic identities in the ecological contexts of home, peer, teacher, school, and community (Borrero et al, 2010). They described the reciprocal, contradicting, and alienating nature of Samoan and academic identities in the face of negative stereotypes, competing relational obligations, and low expectations (Borrero et al, 2010). Some of the more important findings from their qualitative

study were what it means to be Samoan and trying to be academic (Borrero et al, 2010). Samoan students tend to associate family and community with what it takes to be a successful student (Borrero et al, 2010). The most important part of the Samoan culture is tending to family and community needs which becomes a difficult task in also balancing the importance of education and what it takes to be successful in a classroom or even going onto college.

Castellone (2012) has established results that explain how the practices of discipline in the Samoan culture affects the human brain. Due to the negative effects of the brain, people experience a sense of isolation or rejection because they are not able to develop information quick enough to provide instant feedback. For example, because an individual was raised in a strict culture that practices discipline and aggressive dialogue, chances are the brain has been affected to where the child is discouraged to speak up because they are so used to being told not to speak. The lack of confidence affects their performance which also leads to self-doubt. Fear prevents people from succeeding which is one aspect we are trying to prevent Samoan men from falling deeper into. Times have changed and opportunities are out there. We must encourage that taking risks and exploring what the world has to offer may change the minds of people who feel oppressed. I believe the Samoan community deserves more attention as a vulnerable group who has been neglected for too long. In the next section, I provide ideas and areas of interventions that could greatly assist Samoan men in grasping greater job opportunities and furthering their education beyond high school.

### **AREA OF INTERVENTION**

In the United States, one in three students leave before graduation, which means that more than 7,000 students decide to drop out every day (Miller, 2015). An astonishing 1.2 million students will more than likely not graduate with their perspective class (Swanson, 2004).

Although the U.S. was once a world leader in high school completion, now America is ranked 17th in developed nations for graduation rate (Moore, 2017). These findings show how students are slipping through the cracks in an education system that fails to recognize a student's struggle within a classroom. Academic performance is one of the most influencing factors that cause students to quit school (Moore, 2017). Academic performances should be carefully monitored especially for students who seem to fall behind in class. The authors Weis, Farrar, & Petrie (1989) express that 37.0% of students with grades C and below are more likely to leave school than those who make A's and B's. Students that have failing grades and have been retained are more likely to quit school. Students that left school said that they had to be retained in a class or failed, so they were too embarrassed to come to the same class the next year (Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989)

Dropout rates can definitely be prevented even more so if students are comfortable to confide in their teachers. Unfortunately, students reported, if they would have known earlier that they were behind in their credits, which would cause them not to graduate on time, then they would have applied themselves more. The schools did not provide academic support or any type of help to these failing students right away therefore resulting in them falling so far behind that they could not graduate on time even if they wanted. Educators must use preventative methods by monitoring students' progress throughout their middle school and high school grades in order to seek out at-risk students and provide assistance to them. Educators must be able to identify early signs of students that are at risk of failing other than just grades they are earning on work (Moore, 2017). When students become disengaged from their classwork, discussions, homework, and/or attendance, it should serve as warning signs that must be noted and taken seriously for the sake of the student's progress in the future. When educational practitioners begin to monitor

students' progress more efficiently, and actually take preventative steps for those that are at-risk sooner, then there will be hope for a decrease in the dropout rate (Moore, 2017). When students are dealing with issues in or out of school, many times their grades are the first things to suffer (Youth who drop out, 2000). A push in assuring education systems are doing all they can to accommodate students who struggle in particular subject areas will bring positive change and encourage students to complete different grade levels.

Outstanding efforts in accommodating vulnerable communities begin with identifying the causes and the effects of possible issues, understanding the audience who is being served, and gaining background insights that would allow a type of intervention to be established. In this case, I believe establishing more school and community programs will greatly increase the college enrollment rates among our Samoan men because programs will be able to provide guidance for students who are in need of direction and direct them towards great opportunities that will later inspire future careers and build network with others who have experienced success in business, law, outreach, public health, and other successful careers. When such careers are presented during the early stages of one's life, more time is granted to plan ahead and prepare for future tasks that need to be completed to achieve such goals. Research has shown that stakeholders from the K-12, college, government, and community sectors in each jurisdiction who express concern about the number of high school graduates who appear unprepared to succeed in college and careers (Carreon, Dandapani, Herman, & Scanlan, 2017). Here, considering the reasons behind these expressions should initiate some sort of observation task among these classrooms. For this research, being attentive to the performance of Samoan male students in high school or college should be examined as a way to identify any weaknesses preventing their progress.

The purpose of school and community programs focused on islander groups should encourage and welcome a space that will allow Samoan men the chance to speak on behalf of their experiences as well. For example, due to low college enrollment rates among Pacific Islanders, a program called “The Pasefika Passion Pipeline” at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa was established by Dr. Tina Tauasosi as a way to provide college opportunities for Pacific Island students through the University of Hawai‘i Community Colleges which can be found at <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/omsspasefika/>. The program offers a free three-credit college course at one of the selected community colleges such as Honolulu, Windward, or Leeward Community College as an early head start into one’s first college semester. A partnership with these campuses provided courses such as Philosophy, English, Math, etc. By way of recruitment, occasional visits to public high schools during events provided an opportunity for programs to set up booths and pass out flyers. A student sign-in sheet was made available for follow-ups and for further instructions in joining the program. The uniqueness of this program was the willingness, passion and drive of the leaders. During the summer program sessions, mentors prepared life skills activities to educate Pacific Island students in being responsible young adults through each given lesson. Mentorship included college presentations at various high schools, financial aid and college application assistance, and tutoring sessions. The ultimate drive behind this program was to help Pacific Island students transition into higher education that will later help their families by seeking good jobs.

### **Motivations and goals of this thesis**

Drawing on my personal knowledge of the Samoan community and the academic research conducted to date, this thesis is focused on better understanding the causes of low college enrollment rates among Samoan men. Specifically, I want to understand the decision-

making process by which Samoan men seek employment after high school, rather than pursuing a college degree. It is important to raise individuals who can pave the way for future generations which is a solution we can work on today to prepare Samoan men for careers other than heavy labor, football, or the military. Along with more programs, more funding and more leaders in authoritative positions should learn and understand the Samoan cultural values, child raising, learning styles, and religion to better assist this population of individuals. Learning common strengths or even weaknesses among Samoan men is one way to provide an agenda that would better teach them how to utilize their skills and to redirect their interest in considering college to enhance their knowledge and talents. The lack of them in college classrooms raises concerns that our Samoan men are at a disadvantage here in the United States.

Given that a college education is commonly regarded as a viable way to maximize one's ability to think critically, gain broader insights and experiences, as well as improve one's chances to better their occupational and employment opportunities, the potential achievement of Samoans specifically and Pacific Islander youths in general, is not realized (Tsutsumoto, 1998). We must not limit opportunities to mainly sports such as football; instead it is important to encourage other career interests and jobs that will set Samoan men up for financial and personal success. Many of the programs that currently exist are athletic programs which allow Samoan men the chance to attend college on football scholarships, other programs exist to provide a pathway to college via military service. However, such pathways tend to be limited and may not encourage other interests such as engineering, nursing, biology, etc. How can we create other pathways to higher education that do not involve sports or require military enlistment? To address this ongoing issue, my thesis puts forward the suggestion that more programs should be established to help improve areas that will allow Samoan men to strive in academic areas and

boost their self-esteem and confidence. To genuinely help our Samoan men in achieving higher goals and attending college, more studies need to be conducted. However, in “An investigation of Samoan Student Experiences in Two Homework Study Groups in Melbourne”, Vaoiva Ponton (2017) found that:

It is an attempt to inform schools and stakeholders alike (including tertiary providers) that existing educational programs are deficient in catering to the needs of Samoan students as learners. This impacts on the opportunities for these students to continue their education and prevents access to higher education for many. It is important that their experiences are shared to enlighten educators that, not only in the secondary setting, but more importantly, in tertiary sectors, there are certain barriers preventing Samoan students from accessing opportunities in higher education (Ponton, 2017, p. 349).

By doing this, program staff and members can identify what some of the common issues are and adjust program duties accordingly. Detailed evaluations will allow programs to gather new ideas to help Samoan men progress in society where they will become stronger leaders and be capable of setting higher standards for the younger generation. Having the right support goes a long way and can make the biggest impact. With great support comes great progress especially amongst migrant groups due to their disadvantages in the United States. This is why we must pinpoint the issues because with the lack of research, we are incapable of identifying the factors that are restricting our Samoan men from obtaining college degrees. Therefore, it is my duty to highlight the issues and introduce ideas to help programs diversify their goals in broadening their mission to be fitting for Samoan men and understanding the struggles that come with their cultural expectations.

The more programs that successfully assist Samoan men in going to college, it is most likely that other programs will follow for the benefit of the Samoan community and other similar island groups. Given that statistics show very low college enrollment rates among Samoan men, an attempt to look at factors that prevent them from attending college should be an urgent priority for present and future studies. According to the “Demographic, Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics for Selected Race Groups in Hawaii” published by the Research and Economic Development and Tourism, statistics provided show that 40.6% of Samoan students earned a high school diploma or equivalent, 34.3% earned some college credit or an Associate’s degree, 11.9% earned a Bachelor’s degree, and 2.8% earned a Graduate or professional degree compared to the White and Asian population (Research and Economic Analysis Division, 2018) Although this graph does not provide specific statistics on Samoan men, this gives an idea of the amount of Samoan people obtaining a degree or earning credits. The importance of this study will hopefully take us beyond what’s visually and statistically presented. This platform will allow the voiceless to be heard and for the unseen to be seen.

## CHAPTER 4. STUDY DESIGN

In this chapter I detail how I recruited participants to partake in my study. Although this was slightly challenging to coordinate, I was able to use my existing networks and relationships with community members to assist me in gathering potential study participants. My focus in finding my participants specifically focused on reaching out to the Samoan men in my community. I was able to locate participants through social media, word of mouth, and through phone calls made to male friends. Here I emphasize how building trust and relationships allowed me to gather and collect the important seasons among the lives of Samoan men who strive to succeed in America.

### **Participant Recruitment**

Participants were recruited by means of a snowball sample. The snowball sample is a recruitment method used to find participants who are sometimes difficult to find for research. The first participant will recruit others because (in theory) the effect is to get the ball rolling to collect more “snow” that will expand the sample size. In this case, my first participant recommended a friend where that friend recommended another friend and the sample went on until I managed to reach fourteen participants. Each member was kind and approachable and our positive conversations led them to feel comfortable vouching for me to their contacts, which made it easier for the recruitment process to continue until I reached thematic saturation.

I conducted interviews with fourteen Samoan men who attended school at the intermediate level, graduated from high school, earned an Associate’s degree, or went on to earning some college credits. I focused my recruitment on Samoan men who lived in Honolulu, specifically Kalihi, because Kalihi is known to be one of the most diverse communities in Honolulu. It hosts a range of small commercial and industrial businesses and serves as a home to

long-time residents and new immigrants (City and County of Honolulu, 2019). With the many challenges immigrants face coming to the United States, specifically Hawai‘i, generations today still carry the burdens long after their elders migrated here.

To support my study and build relationships with Samoan men in Kalihi, I began with reaching out to Samoan men I knew who were either friends or relatives. I was able to utilize social media platforms to contact participants, shared information about the study by word of mouth, and through personal contacts. My job as the interviewer was to make sure each participant was comfortable and willing to share anything that they felt people needed to know about. They understood that this was an opportunity where they could give some insights into what it’s like living as a Samoan man in America. One thing to know is that there is a divide in culture and mutual understanding of people's lives and situations. To boldly speak and advocate for themselves and other Samoan men, every participant shared their stories effortlessly and offered to assist me in any other projects I had planned to support the cause. I want to shine light in this matter as my own insider status meant that I was already aware of some of the issues facing the Samoan community as I have experienced them in my own life, as described in the introduction to this thesis. This allowed me to quickly develop trust with my study participants, which may not have been as easily earned if these interviews were conducted by someone who is an outsider to this community.

During my interviews, I decided to protect the identities of my participants for many reasons. Oftentimes, people are uncomfortable about sharing their experiences with their names attached. Every word shared was welcomed without hesitation because we created a safe space of storytelling. Protecting their identities was my main priority. Kalihi is a small, tight knit

community. It usually doesn't take much to figure out the connections between people and names which is why I decided to create pseudonyms for each participant.

### **Grounded Theory**

This research was theoretically guided by grounded theory, an approach to qualitative research that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived or “grounded” theory about a phenomenon (Davidson, 2001). This theory takes an inductive approach where a search can begin with a specific topic that will eventually lead into a conversation of a more general topic. For example, this particular study is focused on understanding the barriers that are preventing Samoan men from attending college; however, by using the grounded theory and having an open discussion with participants, there was a possibility that through my conversations with participants would uncover other issues that I was not primed to expect, as they were never introduced in other previous studies or noticed by previous researchers. The benefit of finding new data will help lay the groundwork for future research about minority communities who are encountering multiple issues and that scholars need to direct attention towards these vulnerable areas. The primary objective of grounded theory, then, is to expand upon an explanation of a phenomenon by identifying the key elements of that phenomenon, and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to the context and process of the experiment (Davidson, 2001). In other words, the goal is to go from the general to the specific without losing sight of what makes the subject of a study unique (Davidson, 2001). Therefore, the grounded theory is the most reasonable that will best collect proper data to support and find answers in helping the Samoan community.

### **Brief Introduction of Participants**

Through each interview, I've learned how Samoan culture greatly instills the importance of love, honor, and respect especially for one's parents. Samoans practice humility at a very young age who mature to be respectful, hardworking, and mindful of their loved ones. Each participant expressed the importance of family and caring for them which is their top priority. The majority of what they do in life revolves around their families and I argue that it shows just how family-oriented Samoans can be. We are a collective community that shows concern for even extended members outside of their immediate families. In the following section, I have provided participant responses briefly summarizing their personal background and experiences attributed to pseudonyms.

**Keeko:** Keeko traveled back and forth between Oahu and Samoa throughout his childhood. Living here, his family was a part of the Section 8 program. He understood that finances were sometimes an issue and was always willing to help his parents as much as he could. He attended school while he was here in Hawai'i; unfortunately, moving back to Samoa, Keeko did not complete middle school or go onto high school because as a teenager, he was embarrassed by a teacher. This resulted in great discouragement for him. Keeko dropped out of school at a very young age and began working. His only focus was to work and provide for his parents. Since then, he has been working tirelessly to earn money to send back home to Samoa to support his mother, sisters, and grandparents. If he were to complete school, Keeko would have joined the military like his three other siblings. He strongly believes that children should care for their parents as long as they're alive. Keeko believes that the men in the family carry heavy responsibilities. He values the traits of Samoan men and the great work ethics they hold and believes that Samoan men are hardworking and selfless individuals.

**Funa:** College was an option for Funa because he wanted to further his education and play volleyball at a higher level beyond high school. Funa lived in the Kalihi area for the majority of his life and he has also lived in public housing. What prevented Funa from attending college was the lack of funds and moving away from his parents. Samoans often find it difficult to leave their parents because they worry about their well-being. Funa grew up seeing how much his parents cared for their families so that was something they wanted to replicate. Funa believes that more programs and scholarships are needed to provide more opportunities to Samoan men so that they can explore the world and seek other opportunities.

**Mo:** Mo was one of the only participants in this study who completed college. Upon graduating high school, Mo made it his priority to pursue a higher education in honor of his family. The sacrifices his family made by moving to the United States motivated him to complete college and obtain a degree. Because his family was supportive of his decision, his transition and journey throughout college was successful. Financial aid covered the majority of his tuition which saved his family a lot of money. He agreed that one of the main issues Samoan men face is generally not knowing in terms of where to find good opportunities. Mo stresses the importance of the Samoan culture and the responsibility one holds. He thinks that having more Samoan leaders will encourage more young Samoan people to pursue their dreams and become successful.

**Roman:** Roman was born and raised in the Kalihi. He was a standout football player at one of the public schools in the area with a good academic standing. He was passionate about going to college and playing football but ultimately was not able to complete a degree because of the lack of financial support. Roman went off-island to attend college for a short period of time but could not afford to pay for his college tuition. He found himself paying everything out of

pocket, far away from family, and feeling homesick. There were no programs in high school to help him transition into a college that would support his passion for football. If there were more programs and scholarships available at the high school Roman attended, he would have continued on with college or even transferred to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

**Lester:** College was an option out of high school. Lester’s family wanted him to join the New Mexico Military Institute or attend college here in Hawai‘i. Because he was constantly being told what to do with his life, he became overwhelmed and decided not to pursue college or enroll into the New Mexico Military Institute. Lester lived in Samoa and later moved to Hawai‘i after his mother passed away. During his transition to Hawai‘i, Lester felt like he couldn’t fit in. He tried coping as best as he could and also tried building a better relationship with his family. His family was more focused on other issues and was unable to provide support to help Lester to integrate into his new home. He managed to push himself and now has a good paying job that supports his growing family. In his interview, Lester shares the importance of how men are responsible for providing for their families.

**Tavena:** Tavena was born and raised in the Kalihi area. He was a standout player at his high school and wanted to pursue both college and football, but he had no financial support from either his high school or family. Money was always an issue; he described that he and his family were living paycheck to paycheck. He had a few other siblings totaling to eight people in their household and his father was the only parent working to support them. In his interview, Tavena agreed that more programs and scholarships would definitely provide more opportunities for Samoan men and will encourage them to go to college. Although he was able to earn some credits, his goal shifted from finishing college to working and help his father to provide for their family, feeling it was his duty especially because he is the eldest son.

**Lota:** Lota was born and raised in Kalihi. He and his family have been living in public housing for years. One of the main reasons he considered college was because of football. Without football, Lota felt as if he had no sense of direction or purpose even pursuing college. Lota was a member of the Pasefika Passion Pipeline where he managed to earn some college credits with the help of college coaches and mentors. One thing that discouraged him from continuing his degree was going to college and not seeing people who looked like him. He felt out of place and started losing his confidence. He also shares that it is difficult to make decisions on your own when family is usually involved.

**Teva:** Teva took it upon himself to stay back home to work instead of going away for college. Being one of the eldest children, he felt he had to take on the role of helping his father out instead of his two older siblings. At some point he felt working was also expected of him, so he did just that. He found a job right out of high school and learned to mature quickly and took on adult responsibilities. Although he got accepted to schools in the mainland, he had to sacrifice his opportunities to support his family financially.

**MJ:** Mj had the chance to go to college but ultimately decided not to attend. He was content with graduating from high school and moving to Hawai'i from Samoa. MJ felt that college was not a necessity and that he knew everything he needed to know about the career he wanted to go into which was car audio engineering. He was raised by his father and was given the chance to pursue his career in Honolulu. In his interview, MJ stresses the importance of how important family is in the Samoan culture. Everything a child does revolves around their families which is why people who move out of Samoa are to earn money and send money home to their families who have limited income and resources.

**Naino:** Naino was born in American Samoa and later moved to Hawai'i. He lived in public housing with his cousins, aunties, and uncles. He was focused on helping his parents with money and finding a job was his main priority. As time went on, he worked multiple minimum paying jobs and started a family of his own. Naino states the importance of honoring your parents and being respectful.

**Simi:** Due to long registration lines for college, Simi redirected himself to the recruiter's office where he signed up for the army. His mother encouraged him to join the military for a better future for himself and to avoid any trouble or negative influences. Another reason he did not want to attend college was because he did not want to burden his parents and felt that the military would allow him to be independent.

**June:** June was born and raised in Kalihi and lives in public housing with his mother and brothers. One thing he thought would have been helpful in high school was learning the importance of credit scores and how it would impact people's lives. Going away to college, he realized how much having a good credit score was needed and the power that came with having access to credit. He encountered many obstacles and did not qualify for many things for simply not knowing what a credit score was. Moving to pursue a higher education was one way June could become independent without burdening his parents. He believes that educating students on basic life skills will prepare them as young adults looking to be independent and successful. He understands the struggle and hardships Samoan men and families go through which is why he believes more programs should be established in assistance to vulnerable communities.

**Jay:** Instead of attending college, Jay went to a trucking school which was college accredited. He made this decision for the benefits and because it would prepare him for a high paid position as a truck driver. Jay had a family of his own at a young age which motivated him

to successfully complete the trucking program to provide and build a future. He and his family lived in a public housing which pushed him to enroll in the trucking program. One thing he values about the Samoan culture is discipline. He believed discipline shaped him and taught him to be respectful and humble.

**Tiso:** Tiso was born and raised in Kalihi and lived in a public housing. In high school, there was a lot of gang violence. He received support from his counselors that allowed him to complete high school. If he knew the importance of why counselors were trying to push him to go to college, he would have attended, and things would have changed for the better. He understands that Samoan men often face challenges of peer pressure which keep many from pursuing a higher education.

## CHAPTER 5. RESULTS

Based on the interviews gathered for this study, each participant shared a unique part of their lives that introduced some challenging and rewarding times. Although each participant experienced different occurrences in their lives, I gathered many similarities that have affected the lives of Samoan preventing them furthering their education and rising above. Part of the reason why Samoan men are unable to attend college after high school is because:

1. Their families are not financially stable
2. They are obligated to tend to family responsibilities such as working at an early age or having to care for the elders within their homes
3. They are unfamiliar with proper steps in applying to college
4. Some decided to join the military
5. Parents were more concerned about their safety traveling far away from home
6. There were very limited programs available and not enough scholarships for Pacific Island students
7. Unable to successfully complete college because of non-residential tuition are costly
8. One did not feel that college was a necessity due to learning all that they needed to in high school to get into a career in automotive
9. Dropped out of middle school because they were embarrassed by a teacher
10. Had children at an early age

Among my 14 participants, some of the most common issues Samoan men encounter are language barriers, stereotypes, low college enrollment rates, and the lack of good-job opportunities. To heal a community means to understand. I argue that the most productive way to heal communities is to allow their very own members to be a part of the solution. Inviting

outsiders to try and fix a problem they know nothing about will create more problems and prolong issues that could have been solved sooner rather than later. I strongly believe that research will not be successful if the target group is not involved. Because I wanted to encourage more Samoan men to rise above in society, I needed to gather their stories. This is why I made the decision to interview Samoan men from the most vulnerable parts of Honolulu as a way to advocate for them, invite educational and employment opportunities, and connect them to resources. Alongside collecting personal experiences, I conducted my interviews at a setting comfortable for my participants. I created interview questions and asked each participant to share their responses where I recorded and transcribed. Some interviews lasted longer than others with no time limit. To alleviate any pressure, I allowed each participant an adequate amount of time to share their personal experiences and to take lead in the interview. Wherever our discussions took us, we gathered and captured real life events that happened.

To assist my data gathering, I used grounded theory to build my study as a way to gather details from the ground up. If I came in with some knowledge, my participants had the ability to introduce me to other events I knew nothing about. As much as this was conducted for others to see things eye to eye and understand where Samoan men come from in the strictness of their culture, I was able to learn and understand that Samoan men continue to sacrifice more than what seems to be. They are often expected to mop the ocean or count every grain of sand. My decision to include longer excerpts from each of the interviews instead of short snippets is to allow participants' voices to remain strong and central to my discussion about how to improve the prospects of Samoan men being able to complete their college education. The thought came to mind that one way we as a community can assist in helping our vulnerable group is to encourage

higher education upon the completion of high school and establish more programs that understand the struggles and leading issues preventing Samoan men from attending college.

### **Common Struggles**

I asked all of my interview participants about what are some common struggles that are faced by Samoan men. The most frequent response was that negative stereotypes limited the opportunities for Samoan men. My participants commented on how these stereotypes, combined with a language barrier, lead to strangers making assumptions about their intelligence. MJ elaborated:

Every day, people judge us because we are Samoan. You got people looking at you like you're the bad guy. I get the "stupid guy." Samoans aren't stupid. I put that out there. Samoans I feel are shy because of the barrier with language. There are many smart Samoans; it's just the language barrier, you know, like they're so limited with what they know in English. They can speak so much Samoan and when you speak to them in English, they're like what? But if you were to translate that in Samoan, they would answer every question that you asked them.

Stereotypes often take a toll on Samoan men being that some feel as if their skills and talents are limited to sports and heavy labor. Their strengths are seen as "fit" for construction, football, security, etc. Some ways that the Samoan culture have been generalized in pop culture and American society have set boundaries allowing one to settle with low paying jobs, continuing their education, or simply having confidence in themselves to pursue greatness. For example, Funa explained,

I think they [Samoan men] face a lot of stereotypes. Because we are bigger and looked at as strong people, we are already placed in that category of, "oh he's going to play sports" or "oh, he's going to do construction." I think that this is a struggle in itself because we start to believe it. We struggle mentally by what people say about us.

In the Samoan culture, people find comfort in each other. Although stereotypes often have a negative impact on Samoan people, Samoan people can always rely on their family and friends for support. It is in the Samoan culture to care for others which is why you would often

hear of relatives raising other relative's children. In the context of this study, Samoan men were raised to look out for one another especially if one of their own kind is in a difficult situation. For example, if someone is in need of a job and can't seem to find one, there are always friends and family ready to extend an application from their jobs to get that family member or friend hired. The setback in this case is when some Samoan men become comfortable working with family members and friends creating boundaries for themselves to not seek other greater opportunities. They begin to think that working with their friends and family is enough to get them by. Unfortunately, they become attached, making it harder for them to leave minimum paying jobs because of simply working with people they are close to. Observing these moments teach us as researchers to be creative in how we choose to establish innovations. How can we encourage Samoan men to be independent outside of their comfort zone? I believe that recognizing skills and potential among Samoan men will allow Samoan men to move towards opportunities rather than away from it. Part of the struggle is the feeling of not belonging anywhere. In addition to asking about struggles they felt were prevalent among Samoan men, I also asked my participants to describe some ways to alleviate these struggles. MJ was firm in his belief that education was the answer. He went on to say:

To me, all of the questions you asked me all boils down to education. I went to a private school and at my private school, they spoke English, barely any Samoan. There's a lot of Asians, there's a lot of palagis (Americans). There were English white people. You're lucky if you can speak Samoan words to any kid in that school. But as soon as you get to high school, I transferred to a public high school. I felt like I knew so much, but that was because not so many kids didn't know how to speak English. If you translate that English into Samoan, they would probably be able to answer everything, which I think it all boils down to a language barrier issue. If all Samoans knew how to speak English properly, it would take them a lot further than where they are as far as coming out of high school, because still a lot of kids after high school, they learn a lot more English. But, I think they could further their education a lot more if they were able to come up and break the language barriers.

These responses show just a small amount of what Samoan men endure. Stereotypes, language barriers, and lack of education are just a few things that negatively impact Samoan men keeping them from reaching their full potential. Stereotypes mentally affect the way Samoan men think about themselves forcing them to believe in other people's judgements. I want to encourage our Samoan men to take little offense to the stereotypes put out by others with broken dreams and know that they come from a line of strong and independent ancestors. Secondly, language barriers were never an issue among immigrant groups to begin with until colonizers introduced the English language for their own benefits. Samoan men who speak the Samoan language are at a disadvantage because opportunities are usually written and presented in English; however, if opportunities were presented in the Samoan language, the more likely it is for Samoan men to hold high paying positions and progress quickly in America. This also calls for companies and organizations to be more culturally adaptive and translate expectations and job descriptions that can be read, received, and understood by others who are non-English speakers.

Thirdly, allowing Samoan men to further their education will definitely put them forth and off to a go start in life because they are learning and gaining skills needed to be independent and successful. Samoa is an underdeveloped country where education is limited; therefore, providing more programs to assist Samoan men and support their education will tremendously help them here in the United States. As mentioned previously in the areas of intervention section, more programs will be successful in assisting Samoan men by understanding ways of one's culture. Evidently, participants of this study agree in establishing more programs willing to provide a sense of direction to success. More programs can assist in funding scholarships to pay for tuition fees, equipped Samoan men with skill sets and information to become successful community leaders and businessmen, be a network and bridging tool, and assist families in

understanding the importance of allowing Samoan men the time and space to attend college and explore their potential.

### **Family Responsibilities**

One of the main themes mentioned across all interviews was the importance of family. In a Samoan family, children are raised to honor and respect their families regardless of age. Honor begins from birth and understanding begins with maturity. When a child is taught specific mannerisms and behaviors at a young age such as “speak only when you are spoken to”, they will carry that with them along the way. When a child is told to always respect and care for their elders, as they become older, they will honor those teachings. When a son is told to always protect and look out for his sisters, he will grow up to make sure of that. Being part of a collective culture can be described in the common saying, “It takes a village to raise a child”. Considering the feeling of others and being raised by a big family makes it difficult for young individuals to determine their own independent future. When asked about barriers preventing finishing school, many participants spoke of family obligations. Relating back to the information I provided in the literature review of this thesis, family is important in Samoan culture. For example, if your parents are struggling, as their child your priority is to help them. Tavenua describes it as such:

In our culture, we are not forced to work, but it’s common sense to want to work if money becomes hard to stretch. If you see your parents struggling, drop what you are doing and help them. Other families get it much worse. I have friends who actually want to go to college but are forced to work because their parents really do need the help. Being that we are our parents’ children, they become our first priority. We also need to make sure that we help lift the load off of their shoulders, so we can all move forward together.

This is not to say that family responsibilities are always negative. To be clear, having strong family ties and an extensive support system can be a source of comfort, especially as one is trying to establish a new life here in Hawai'i. MJ explains this difficult balancing act:

I can say that all in two words, family first. I don't know if that is a good or a bad thing. You always want to make sure you support your family any way possible. Positively, your family is supportive of what you do. Some Samoan families can be very supportive, other Samoan families still live on the strict side of culture where kids are not allowed to do much but be around the family to take orders. I know some people who go to college and work but are always required to send most of their paychecks to their families. If that did not happen, some people's families would be upset and start saying things that would discourage their kids which affect them and cause them to give up in school and other life goals. Not too many people in Samoa make at least \$10 an hour. You have to go to the states to make a decent amount of money. The negative thing about going to college is not being able to bring in income. Some kids I know end up dropping out of school to go back home to something they are not happy with because they're told that going to college doesn't pay the bills.

With these concerns, it is crucial that our education systems implement courses that educate Samoan men on how to invest and grow their finances. It is clear that Samoan men have obligations to ensure the wellbeing of their families before anything else. One of the biggest struggles of Samoan men is trying to earn enough money to provide for a large household. With a minimum paying job, Samoan men are limited to doing just that and not having enough funds for themselves. Most of them are unable to invest or save because of the high demands expected by families who need funds. Samoan men work hard only to survive off of the last couple dollars left of their labors; however, an education that teaches ways in managing finances will positively impact the lives of Samoan creating healthier habits for themselves and their families.

### **Structural Barriers**

Credit scores and life savings would have greatly prepared Samoan men for adulthood. Unfortunately, few of my participants knew how or where to apply for credit. My participants were not aware of the importance of credit cards, renting property, and maintaining a good credit

score. Part of our education should have covered ways in how credits can be applied for and how they can be used. One participant didn't realize until going away for college that having credit is important even for a small apartment if a college dorm was out of their budget. Credit scores are like report cards that show how responsible people are. One thing that Samoans might take for granted is the need for credit in all aspects of American life, not just attending college. June explained that choices that he made earlier in life would end up negatively impacting his credit score which in turn made it difficult to go to school or even to find his own apartment. When asked if there were things that he would have done differently, his answer illustrates the lifetime of difficulties that can face someone who is not given the chance to develop credit earlier in their adult life:

You know what? In all honesty, the biggest thing that I think would've helped out and it taught us from the bottom, damn credit scores. For real. We did not know anything about credit scores until we were out of high school. We were living at home and that everything was dependent on paying your bills on time. If we knew anything about that I'm pretty sure we would've tried to exercise better habits. Doing everything on time so that way you're able to create because that in general helps out. Trying to get loans. Trying to get a spot to live. Trying to get a cell phone. Trying to get a car. That would've made it easier for us to go to school. When I went to school, I didn't have no credit. A lot of stuff that I tried to apply for, they did not approve for it. All of that stuff went right back to my parents, which already I was trying to avoid but in order for me to get on with it. Probably a program teaching kids how to care more for their credit scores. Get programs to help us in preparing for where in life do we kind of go. Like I said, that's probably one of the biggest ones in helping us apply for different scholarships. Helping us try to get down to which direction in life are we going to try to go? Who's going to be doctors? Who's going to be mechanics? Who's going to computer techs? Try to pinpoint it before they get into college. Even when we get into college, kids still don't know what they're trying to do and that's the risk. I knew what I wanted to be when I was in elementary and middle school and that helped me set the path that I wanted to go to. Imagine if I didn't know where I wanted to go? I would've never known in high school; I would've never known in college. Even if I graduated from college, I would be like okay what's the course I'm going to take next because I still don't know what the hell I want to do. I still don't know what I'm good at. But, if you have programs that can pinpoint their strong points in their life or what strong qualities that they have, it'd probably help them out a lot. It'd probably help them find where they're trying to go. A lot of kids when they get in there, they take the class or they take their courses and they find out it's not for them and they still got to pay for it, you know what I mean?

Our education system is not equipping our Samoan men with information that can help them transition into adulthood. Young adults who are unaware of financial benefits will struggle to make ends meet and miss out on opportunities that could've helped with a jumpstart to life. Not everyone comes out of high school with money saved in the bank. Sometimes, all people need is a loan to cover small fees. June explained if he knew about credit scores, his life would have been different, and he would have exercised better habits had he known about these available services. There needs to be programs set in place to educate our Samoan men who want more for themselves. It is not fair to teach students everything else but the most important factors that can set them ten steps ahead. Being independent is usually very difficult in the Samoan culture because everything goes through parents. It is important to get fee

Furthermore, when Mo was asked "Would it have changed anything if you had the chance to attend college?" he responded:

The biggest issue for Samoan men and people in general is not knowing. Not knowing where to turn to is the start of the issue. If one doesn't know where to go or who to turn to, they will be lost. I'm sure many Samoan people struggle with finding ways to strive in Hawai'i. Hawai'i alone is too expensive for just one person supporting themselves. I have many family members that moved to Hawai'i from Samoa thinking it would be easier for them to start their lives, but it's also a great challenge. Their English is not all that great but imagine if there were programs that helped them improve their English, it would be easier for them to express themselves and maybe find better jobs. They would even be able to go to college and not have to take beginning level classes to reach required scores.

In a society we strive to live in now, I strongly believe school and community programs are needed to increase the college enrollment rates among Samoan men because everyone has their own learning preferences. The expectations here in America may not be the same expectations Samoan families have for their children because of morals and values they believe in. I think it's important to observe our surroundings effectively and monitor the performance of this vulnerable community and assist groups heavily affected. We must ask ourselves, "Why are there few

Samoan men attending college after high school?” or “What are Samoan men doing after high school if they are not attending college?” One thing we fail to do is recognize the issues happening in low-income communities so that solutions to the issue will be effective. Mo finds that programs will definitely help Samoan men find a sense of direction.

In response to “What types of responsibilities were expected of you as a male in your Samoan family?) MJ stated,

I don't know. Samoan men in high school usually the responsibilities are after school, you go home and you got to make food for your family. Usually back home in American Samoa you don't have gas operated machines. Well you do, the fortunate families but most families had to start the fire to cook whatever foods they had for that evening either it's banana, breadfruit, or taro. You got to get the firewood and then start the fire. That's how you do it old school.

Each family has a history of their own. There are some families who are more fortunate than others where they can afford technology to assist them in daily activities. In the Samoan culture, children are taught to do things by hand whether it's harvesting, cooking, and lifting heavy items. Samoan men are usually in charge of preparing meals and women are in charge for tending to the children and elderly at home. Both tasks are heavy tasks that require time and attention. These duties begin first thing in the morning until the sun sets. Here in America, things go by at a much faster rate. Technology and machinery completes tasks quickly. Unlike other students who are able to go out with friends after school, Samoan kids already have a task to do for their families. There are chores that need to be done or an elderly home that needs to be taken care of. The selflessness instilled among Samoan kids is humbling because they continue to place God and family first. Therefore, more opportunities need to be offered to Samoan men to progress in America. With the work ethics they carry as well as their determination, we must create programs to give them a chance to care for their families and put them in leadership roles to inspire.

## CHAPTER 6. Discussion

By conducting this research, I am able to demonstrate that one of the reasons why there are few Samoan men attending college is due to family responsibilities and the lack of financial support. Throughout multiple interviews, a common theme was that my participants relayed that they have little to no financial support and their families are unable to afford costly tuition fees. By examining the responses of my study participants, it has been made clear there are factors that are positively and negatively affecting Samoan men. The positive effects of Samoan culture on these men ensure humility, love and respect for family, hard work, dedication, faith, and more; however, the negative effects with critical expectations prevent Samoan men from advancing in the United States. In the orders of God (faith), family, then self, every child must be in line with their faith following family. Family duties require finances which is why Samoan men tend to work out of high school. Money is a significant factor in the Samoan culture because it provides stability. For many families, Samoan men are told to find jobs after high school rather than attending a college they can't afford. Because of this type of mentality, it makes it difficult for Samoan men to make decisions on their own. A lot of validations before committing to an offer needs permission regardless if one is able to make decisions on their own. This all refers to child raising in the Samoan culture and its teachings.

As a result of the disadvantages Samoan men encounter, the majority of my participants are residents of low-income housing or were a member of the section 8 program at some point in their lives. Many families move between shelters and overcrowded Section 8 housing and the last thing we should allow is more families becoming homeless. There are currently 6,100 federal and State public housing units in Hawai'i and a waiting list of over 10,000 with the Public Housing Authority. I believe that Samoan families are part of a systematic structure that

makes it harder for them to find affordable housing or well-paid jobs. Today, there are still many Samoan families currently living in low-income housing in the Kalihi area. Multiple men in one household are working minimum wage jobs and struggle. I feel that a lot of our Samoan men are capable of overseeing management positions but are not sure what steps to take to get there. I believe programs that can provide the right help for multiple sectors of this issue is worth looking into because I believe it will increase the college enrollment rates among Samoan men, degree completion, and less Samoan families in poverty.

The expectations of the Samoan Way put young adults in a position where problems are often left unsaid. Feelings of low self-esteem surface, self-confidence is lost, fear of maturing escalates, and problems are left bottled up which start affecting the minds of young Samoan individuals. Therefore, I would like to stress the importance that having more school and community programs focused on assisting Samoan men will bring great change and liberate even Samoan families from being oppressed. More school and community programs are needed to encourage Samoan men and their families to seek long term opportunities rather than short term opportunities. We must highlight the importance of this matter for quick and significant changes to be made in this community. With the initiation of a potential intervention through more programs, I feel great changes will surface and uplift the Samoan community in helping to shape confident and strong Samoan men who will become courageous community and individual leaders.

Attending school and getting a proper education has become linked with “success” in western society. Therefore, it is important for Samoan men living in the United States to earn a higher degree to increase their chances of qualifying for better job opportunities. Unfortunately, some cultures are at a disadvantage due to the lack of funds, school and community programs,

and leaders that understand common issues happening within vulnerable communities. Sometimes these disadvantages take a negative toll on students. Students that are English language learners often fall behind due to language barriers between them and other staff and peers in the school building. It can range from how lessons are delivered or simply due to personal issues or cultural obligations preventing one from completing certain tasks. Lectures and lessons taught in school can be understood by way of presentation and clarity. So, as researchers, we need to understand that everyone progresses at their own pace especially when transitioning between different cultural backgrounds. Programs are an essential way to bridge both cultures to improve the understanding of Samoan and Western cultures.

Therefore, establishing more school and community programs will definitely create a space that would provide services to help Samoan men strive in the United States. Learning how to navigate life in a new environment is difficult and can be intimidating but knowing that there are services that specifically fit a person's needs will definitely increase one's trust and confidence to overcome fear and strive. We must focus on the causes of low college enrollment rates among Samoan men and also find the best alternatives to increase the college enrollment rates in positively assisting Samoan men to give them a chance to experience reasonable paying jobs and being successful. Transitioning and acculturating in the United States can be difficult which is why I created interview questions as a way to collect responses from fourteen Samoan men here in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

## CHAPTER 7. Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to highlight the importance of establishing more programs to assist Samoan men in furthering their education and setting higher standards for themselves. This goal was motivated by recognizing the lack of Samoan men within my classes and my observations of the employment patterns Samoan men are constantly falling into. To make a difference for upcoming generations, my goal is to initiate change for the benefits of male family members and friends to feel inspired and become leaders. By conducting 14 interviews with Samoan men who currently live in Hawai'i, I have discovered many leading factors preventing Samoan men from attending college. Family is a crucial part of the Samoan culture which is important for people and researchers to understand to properly approach members for data collection. The thoughts and experiences shared by the Samoan men who spoke with me for this study show that it can be difficult to attend college knowing there are heavy obligations within their family homes. Parents are highly valued in the Samoan culture and it is often taught that children are to care, respect, and honor their parents at all times. Therefore, as a result of completing this research, I believe there is a way to encourage Samoan men into going to college as well as assisting their families through these transitions. I feel that more studies need to be conducted to help bridge a gap of opportunities and family support. I think more statistics should be made available in properly tracking the progress of Samoan men attending and completing college among the years to monitor ways to bring positive change the Samoan community

I believe more programs that focus on understanding aspects of the Samoan culture and the demands of the culture will greatly alleviate and lighten the barriers keeping Samoan men from living a better life here in the United States. We must also partner with high schools that consist of high enrollment rates of Samoan men to begin sharing the importance of college and

also prepare lessons that would educate our students on credit scores, property ownership, finances, and more. In the future, I would like to conduct a study on Samoan women and some of the issues they've encountered. I feel that men and women face their own challenges and have underlying issues that many do not see. The most critical part of this research was being able to conduct interviews among fourteen Samoan men who were willing to share their experiences and concerns as to how future studies can help increase college enrollment rates among Samoan men. Upon initiating this particular study, I decided to conduct a qualitative study by constructing twenty-three open ended questions that would initiate important conversations with each participant. My goal was to allow my participants the chance to openly share their experiences as a male in the Samoan culture as well as types of responsibilities expected of them. Therefore, to create a solution in increasing the college enrollment rates among Samoan men, we must find the root of the cause and seek answers directly from the Samoan community whom we are serving.

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