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"The Core of Who We Are": Social Capital as a Tool for Empowerment in a Tongan Diaspora Community

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Education

by

Alexandra Faye Halpern

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

"The Core of Who We Are": Social Capital as a Tool for Empowerment in a Tongan Diaspora Community

by

Alexandra Faye Halpern

Master of Arts in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Edith S. Omwami, Chair

Rooted in six months of ethnographic fieldwork in a Tongan Diaspora community in southern California, this thesis analyzes the role of community in the Tongan Diaspora and its function in increasing social capital. This research demonstrates how Tongan community members negotiate meaning together to form a collective identity, and use language to create a cohesive and closed social network. It reveals that through membership in speech community, agency and identity construction, Tongan community members are part of a closed network with enough social capital to increase the cultural wealth of their community. By tapping into the existing funds of knowledge in the community, members have the tools for empowerment that can overcome many of the challenges that they face, including socioeconomic injustice, gang violence, and negotiating multiple sociocultural realities. The research provides an example of an existing powerful example of peer-leadership, and the potential for further community empowerment.

The thesis of Alexandra Faye Halpern is approved.

Teresa McCarty

Marjorie Harness Goodwin

Edith S. Omwami, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

This thesis is dedicated to the members of the Tongan community who opened their doors with a willingness to share from which the whole world can learn. Thank you for inviting me into your churches, cultural events, homes and hearts. Your *tauhi va*, reciprocity, was made evident, and it is my hope that this research can return your kindness in some small way.

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List of Terms

Fale'koloa	Small grocery store or kiosk
Koloa	Non-functional wealth items such as mats and barkcloth
Kainga	Extended family or clan
Kavenga	Responsibility to family and community
Anga fakatonga	"The Tongan Way"; practicing a Tongan way of life, especially in the Diaspora, by demonstrating the core values of Tongan culture
Palangi	A person of European or Western descent
Faka'apa'apa	Respect; one of the four core values of Tongan culture. In order to preserve hierarchy, there is a tradition of sacredness around the sister. Distance between brother and sister is essential. The other three core values are loyalty, humility and reciprocity.
umu	An earth-oven used for cooking on special occasions
Tuonga'ne	All brothers or male clan members of a female
tuofefine	All sisters or female clan members of a male
Tau'olunga	Traditional dance performed by an unmarried female
'ofa	Love
Fahu	Oldest paternal aunt; the highest ranking member of a family
Mehikitanga	All sisters of a father
kava	Beverage made from the crushed root of the kava plant
Tapa or *ngatu*	Cloth made from the bark of the paper-mulberry plant
Fakame'	White Sunday; a celebration of all youth or children in a community
Kiekie	An ornamental girdle worn around the waist on semi-formal occasions; made from pandanus, hibiscus or palm, part of the *koloa*
Ta'ovala	Woven mat worn around the waist at formal occasions

Chapter One: Introduction

Pikipiki hama ka e vaevae manava.
Keep our outriggers close together so we can share life.
-Tongan proverb

1.1 A Typical Tongan-American Experience

It was a hot January day as I took the exit for Los Angeles International Airport off of the 405. I parked on a quiet residential block in front of a small, pale blue house with a fenced yard and a warning sign, "Beware of Dog." I was in Lennox, a largely urban, densely populated neighborhood in south Los Angeles, where most of California's largest Tongan community resides. I walked the uneven sidewalk, uncut grass tickling my ankles. As I moved towards the church, a giant shadow of an airplane approached from behind, the belly of the machine so close that I actually ducked. *Iberian Airways*, it read - an international flight. It couldn't have landed more than half a mile from where I stood.

Having spent time in Tonga a few years before, I already knew that church was important to Tongan culture. After doing superficial research, it became quickly apparent that this particular church in Lennox was the place to start in making contacts and observing life in the Tongan Diaspora community.

It was 1:20 in the afternoon, and I joined the last few latecomers streaming into church. Services had just begun a few minutes ago. I approached slowly – I hadn't been invited to the service, and didn't know anyone attending. Church has always been a foreign place to me. I grew up Jewish and in the deep South, so attending any church in California, let alone where I knew no one, was certainly out of my comfort zone.

Christianity came to Tonga in the late 1800's, and it spread rapidly. Today, more than a third of the country practices in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, a branch of

the Methodist Church (this was also the denomination of the church I was observing). Another third practice Mormonism and Catholicism. Religion was important in Tonga– many listened to sermons on Radio Tonga during the week, and all commerce was at a standstill on Sundays. The church is more than just a religious place of worship, however. It is also a cultural center, where people gather for birthdays, celebrations, funerals and meetings. It was the community center of village and town life in Tonga, where life both began and ended.

Even in Los Angeles, where there was little discernible evidence of Tongan culture, the church in Lennox stood large and bright and central on a main street, visible to many. Ailine[1] called the Lennox church the "typical Tongan-American experience."

> It's really unique…it's not just the Tongan experience. It's like a mix of American poverty with the Tongan determination to preserve community…it's a good mix to see what it means to exist in this country as a Tongan, because the community is largely there (Ailine, February 26, 2015).

The sanctuary was about half-filled. Both men and women wore traditional Tongan *ta'ovalas,* or woven mats, around their waists. Well-dressed children were running up and down the aisle, but nobody seemed particularly disturbed by it. A woman sat behind me with three small children on and around her lap, and several others approached her now and then. A few teenagers sat with their families.

Wood paneling was peeling from the walls and pillars. The maroon carpet was struggling to hold on to the floor, forming dangerous mounds all through the aisle. There were ceiling fans, but they weren't on despite the heat of the day. A few people fanned themselves furiously with hand-held fans made of woven pandanus leaves.

[1] All names in this thesis are pseudonyms

I looked for a bible to follow along with the service, but there were none. At the front of the church was a large projector screen, usually with Tongan transliteration of psalms that we collectively sang. The entire service, from choir songs to sermons, took place in the Tongan language.

Without knowing Tongan, there really was no way to participate in religious, and by extension cultural life. The occasional cries of the children in English were the only traces of familiarity to my own life as an outsider (Observation, January 25, 2015).

1.2 Background

During my undergraduate studies at Brandeis University, I attended two semesters abroad in Tibet and Jordan. Inspired by these experiences, I decided to travel around the world after graduating instead of working or continuing with my studies. Having learned very little about the Pacific Island nations (I studied Middle Eastern Studies at Brandeis), I decided to start in the tiny island kingdom of Tonga. I didn't know much about the country, and was determined to learn as much as possible during my time there. While in Tonga, I lived with a family on the outer island group of Vava'u and assisted as a store clerk in their *fale'koloa*, or market, and later worked on an organic farm on the main island of Tongatapu. These were exciting experiences in which I was fully immersed into the culture, forced to learn the language as a clerk in the market and developed personal relationships with extended family networks in the community. Despite having spent time later that year in Southeast Asia and Africa, my experience in Tonga left a deep imprint on me, and I have been looking for a way to incorporate this experience into my work ever since. Upon moving to Los Angeles for my graduate studies, I knew that I wanted to work with the Tongan community in some capacity.

When I began this study in the fall of 2014, I knew very little about the experiences of Tongan American communities, or even the Tongan Diaspora as a whole. My experience with Tongan culture came from the few months that I spent in the nation, which was five years prior. My initial literature review led to my understanding of trends in migration from Tonga, and the threat that this trend poses to cultural preservation; thus, I began my research by seeking to understand cultural preservation over time and space. However, the more time I spent speaking to members of the community, the more I understood the issues within; thus, my research shifted considerably from its birth until now. Many of my participants spoke at length about the issues facing their community: poverty, gang violence, and internalization of stereotypes, for example. In many ways, their experiences reflect those of other marginalized Asian and Pacific Islander communities in the US. However, particular aspects of the Tongan value system and the nuances that make Tonga itself so unique in the South Pacific differentiated this community from its AAPI neighbors. I also found that there was an absence of literature on the experiences of Tongan communities in the US; while ample research exists on migration and the effect of this trend in Tonga, little research has been done on the generations of American-born Tongans. Thus, while the results of this research are specific to the Tongan community in Southern California, many aspects can be applied to other Pacific Islander communities across California, and even the US.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

As I stated previously, my research objectives have undergone many transformations since the fall of 2014. Nearing the end of my data collection phase, my

research questions were: 1-Why is cultural and linguistic sustainability a priority to Tongan Americans? 2-How is culture "learned" and "taught" across generations? 3-How has Tongan culture changed over time and space?

However, after conducting fieldwork and doing initial analysis, I decided to use my research to address what I believe is a more important issue: what is the best practice for community empowerment for the Tongan community in Los Angeles? To answer this question, I restated my research objectives in the form of the following questions:

RQ1: What is the existing structure of the Tongan Diaspora community in Los Angeles?

RQ2: How does one become a full participant in the Tongan community?

RQ3: What are the challenges to community cohesion?

RQ4: How can community contribute to empowerment?

1.4 Significance of Research

This research will be significant firstly in portraying the lived experiences of a particular Pacific Islander community in California. As there is little research done with respect to this particular community, I hope that this paper will serve as a foundation for future research. Secondly, by answering these research questions, conclusions can be made about the best practices for empowerment in a community that is marginalized and underserved. This can be used to establish groups and organizations based on the findings of the research in order to empower future generations of Tongan Americans, as well as other Pacific Islander communities. It is my goal that the findings of this research will influence or contribute to successful, organized groups working towards empowerment in a disempowered community.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is comprised of nine chapters that present the research methods and findings. In chapter one, I provided the background and rationale for this research, as well as its significance and objectives. In chapter two, I will review existing literature on this topic, as well as provide a theoretical framework through which I view the research. Chapter three will review my methodology, which outlines how the research was executed and analyzed.

In chapter four, I include four narrative profiles to introduce participants whose voices and opinions will be seen throughout the text. In chapter five, I provide socioeconomic context into the specific community where I conducted research, and in chapter six, I describe the existing structure of the community.

In chapter seven, I detail language in particular as a tool for community cohesiveness and empowerment. This chapter is inspired by my experiences as a student of Ethnography of Communication at UCLA. Chapter eight discusses peer-led spaces as best practice for transferring funds of knowledge into capital. Finally, I conclude in chapter nine with suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Review of Existing Literature

This research examines the social capital and potential for empowerment of a Tongan community in California, for which there is little existing literature. However, there were several works that I turned to for background into my study. Small's (1997) *Voyages: From Tongan Villages to American Suburbs* provides a thorough ethnography on why migration from Tonga occurs, how new immigrants experience life in California, as well as how outmigration affects communities that remain in Tonga. By spending a 30-year period with an extended family straddling the Pacific Ocean, Small's analysis sheds light on the effects of migration and globalization on the people of Tonga and its Diaspora. She illustrates a transnational family, the role and impact of remittances, and the phenomenon of a nation that straddles an ocean. Small also writes at length about her own experience as a researcher, and her positionality as a non-Tongan immersed in a Tongan community; in this way, she provided insight into the best practices for communicating with and integrating into the Tongan community, and I often turned to her methods for inspiration in conducting fieldwork.

In addition to Small's ethnography, several articles speak at length about Tonga's unique migration pattern. In Ahlburg's (1996) *Remittances and Income Distribution in Tonga*, he focused on the effect of remittances from international migration on income distribution in Tonga. Ahlburg claimed, "Tonga is a particularly interesting case to study since it has significant outmigration and remittance inflows" (1996, p. 392). The rate of population growth in Tonga is less than .5 percent per year, further proving the rapid pace of outmigration, and thus the growing communities abroad. In Ahlburg's study of income

distribution in Tonga, he found that 90 percent were recipients of remittances, which made up 52 percent of cash income and 28 percent of total income (1996, p. 393). Ahlburg's study further proves the unique connection between Tongan communities abroad and in Tonga, as well as why communities abroad spend the little income they have to support their communities in Tonga. Ahlburg also provided details to add to Small's analysis on why outmigration began to take place, such as an emerging perception of higher incomes in the US, expansion of the Mormon church and availability of educational scholarships (1996, p. 397). This provides more insight into why the Tongan community in Los Angeles continues to grow, as well as constraints to socioeconomic success.

An important work by Otsuka (2007) is *Making a Case for Tongan as an Endangered Language*, which argues that the rapid migration from Tonga, as well as the power of globalization, threatens Tonga's cultural values and traditions. Because the Tongan nation is spread across the globe, "the Tongan case shows that a minority language group can be defined in terms of a unit much larger than a state, namely, the whole global community" (2007, p. 453). Otsuka covered the brief history of Tonga's language decline, as well as the possibility for continued decline. His article provides insight as to why language is an important aspect of my research; while he focused on language as a medium of education within Tonga, he did not expand upon language as a form of identity in the Diaspora. Otsuka's work points out that the Tongan language is undergoing a shift, rather than maintenance, and provides preventative measures to thwart that shift, such as raising awareness in the Diaspora.

In a work that focused on how young children develop culturally specific social skills, Mavoa, Park, Tupounuia and Pryce (2004) compare Tongan and European children in their ethnographic study *Tongan and European Children's Interactions at Home in Urban New Zealand.* This study was particularly helpful in gaining an understanding of expectations for Tongan children at home, and what are considered child-appropriate behaviors, as well as how these expectations might clash with child-appropriate behaviors outside of their communities. The authors wrote that there may be tension between the school system and families from ethnic minority group; "in particular, migrant families may face greater challenges than other minority groups as they strive to balance the expectations of children in their new society with those of their original homeland" (2004, p. 546). This work shows that while the Tongan community may face many of the same challenges as other minority groups, their status as migrants who are tied economically and culturally to their homeland makes their case nuanced and distinct. The issue of sociocultural expectations at home versus in American society came to light throughout this research, as participants explained that despite not understanding certain traditions, they were expected not to ask questions, creating a generational disconnect. Mavoa, Park, Tupounuia and Pryce's article further explained this phenomenon through sound qualitative research.

Maron and Connell (2008) lend further insight into migration from Tonga and its subsequent effect on identity formation. They discussed the role of large kin and church congregations as important networks. They also discussed the importance of remittances as part of the "altruistic yet oppressive nature of Tongan cultural aspirations" (2008, p. 176), and discuss values such as generosity, respect, sharing and obedience. Through

these values, Maron and Connell discussed the important role of church as "the village" (2008, p. 176), and how that places emphasis on familial obligation to contribute financially to church and other fund-raising drives for communities in Tonga, despite consuming migrants' resources (2008, p. 176). This work supports many of the claims made by participants about community resources.

Finally, it is nearly impossible to discuss Tonga without referring to Morton, whose works on child socialization (1996) and the impact of migration on identity (1998) are often cited. Morton wrote about reasons for migration and approaches cultural identity from an ethnographic stance. She discussed the impact of globalization and modernization, and the varying implications of what it means to be Tongan in the global context, which I touch upon in this research.

While the existing literature provides the history for the creation of Tongan communities in California, as well as their affect on communities left in Tonga, there is no research on the current state of Tongan communities, their socioeconomic statuses, and potential tools for empowerment and success; it is with great hope that the following research will fill some of these gaps and provide a tool for Tongan American communities, taking into account their unique experiences as Tongans and as Americans.

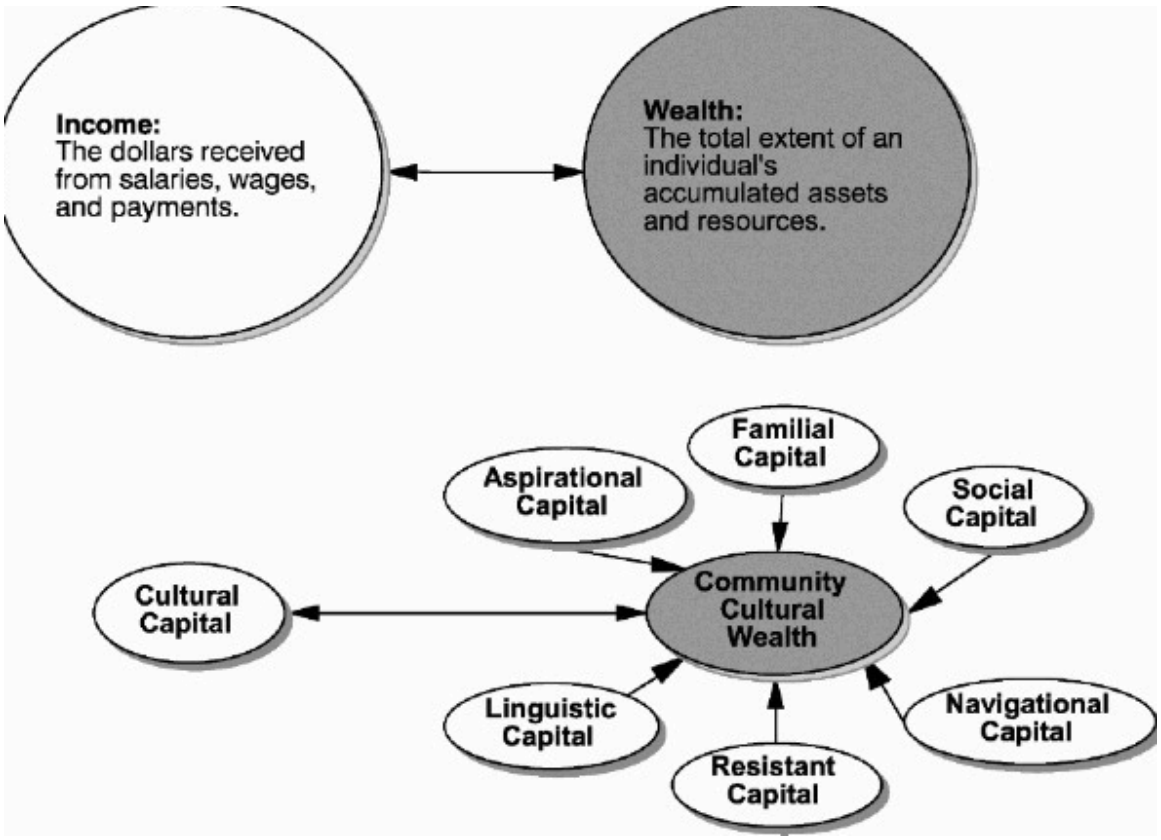
2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Community Cultural Wealth

Traditionally, cultural, social and economic capitals are defined within the limitations of the white, middle class experience – this includes one's particular values, as well as one's accumulated assets and resources. As Yosso (2005) pointed out, "cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an

accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are *valued* by privileged groups in society" (p. 76). Through a critical race theory lens, the definition of community cultural wealth is expanded to include the assets accumulated by Communities of Color, and values these resources as highly as those of privileged groups. Instead of focusing on income, the concept of community cultural wealth expands the concept of one's wealth to "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Critical race theory views one's cultural wealth through six different forms of capital, demonstrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: a model of community cultural wealth, adapted from Oliver & Shapiro (1995)



Each of these forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but are dynamic processes that build on one another (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). For example, it is clear in the case of the Tongan community that linguistic capital and familial capital are mutually dependent to some extent (intellectual and social skills gained through communication experiences in multiple languages or codes rely on one's experience speaking Tongan at home with the family, from whom one gains a sense of cultural intuition), though they also function independently. For the sake of this research, I will be relying most heavily on the concept of social capital, which I expand upon in the next section.

By accruing capital in these various forms, a community is able to increase its cultural wealth and be seen as valuable as privileged classes. "The main goals of identifying and documenting cultural wealth are to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities" (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). By identifying already existent strengths and assets, communities are able to focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses, which can prove to be a powerful tool for resisting marginalization.

2.2.2 Social Capital

Social capital is one of the six forms of community cultural wealth as identified by Oliver and Shapiro (1995) in Figure 1. While it is clear that each form of community cultural wealth is mutually dependent and build upon one another, I will focus on this particular form of capital in detail as it relates to both my research in the Tongan community as well as the rest of my theoretical framework. As Yosso defined it, social capital is "networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through

society's institutions" (2005, p. 79). By making connections with one another, and keeping them over time, people are able to work together to achieve things that they either could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty. People connect through a series of networks and they tend to share common values with other members of these networks; to the extent that these networks constitute a resource, they can be seen as forming a kind of capital. As such, the more people you know, and the more you share a common outlook with them, the richer you are in social capital (Field, 2003, p. 1). One of the preeminent scholars on the concept of social capital was Bourdieu (1986), who adopted the concept of social capital in order to explain the academic achievement gap between children of different social classes (Field, 2003, p. 16). Bourdieu's treatment of the term includes the idea that cultural and social capitals are the products of accumulated labor. As such, individuals have to work at social relationships in order for them to maintain their value, essentially treating relationships as investments. A social network is a valuable asset; networks provide a basis for social cohesion because they enable people to cooperate with one another – and not just with people they know directly – for mutual advantage (Field, 2003, p. 12) The stronger the social relationship, the higher the aggregate of actual and potential resources one has.

Bourdieu's concept of social capital was expanded upon by James Coleman (1988), who believed that one's community is a source of social capital that can offset some of the social and economic disadvantages of an individual person or family (Field, 2003, p. 23). This definition expands upon the Bourdieuian idea of strong social relationships. Coleman provided the following example to explain some of the benefits of community:

> A mother of six children, who recently moved with husband and children from suburban Detroit to Jerusalem, described as one reason for doing so the greater freedom her young children had in Jerusalem. She felt safe in letting her eight year old take the six year old across town to school on the city bus and felt her children to be safe playing without supervision in a city park, neither of which she felt able to do where she lived before. The reason for this difference can be described as a different in social capital available in Jerusalem and suburban Detroit. In Jerusalem, the normative structure ensures that unattended children will be 'looked after' by adults in the vicinity, while no such normative structure exists in most metropolitan areas of the United States. One can say that families have available to them in Jerusalem social capital that does not exist in metropolitan areas of the United States (Coleman, 1988, p. S99).

As Coleman described it, social capital is a public good that is created by all who are part of a structure, and demands the cooperation of individuals who are at the same time pursuing their own self-interests. Obligations and expectations between individuals, trustworthiness in a social environment, open channels of information and behavioral norms are all part of Coleman's idea of relationships that constitute social capital (1988, p. S103). As such, stability and common or shared ideology are essential to building community. Social capital is of value, then, not only in the acquisition of credentials but also in both cognitive development and in the evolution of a secure self-identity (Field, 2003, p. 24).

One of Coleman's influential works on social capital reported that in a particular Chicago high school, peer group influences were more likely to shape views than those of adults such as parents and teachers (Field, 2003, p. 22). One's peers – the most direct form of community outside of the home – is a prime example of Coleman's idea that relationships constitute social capital.

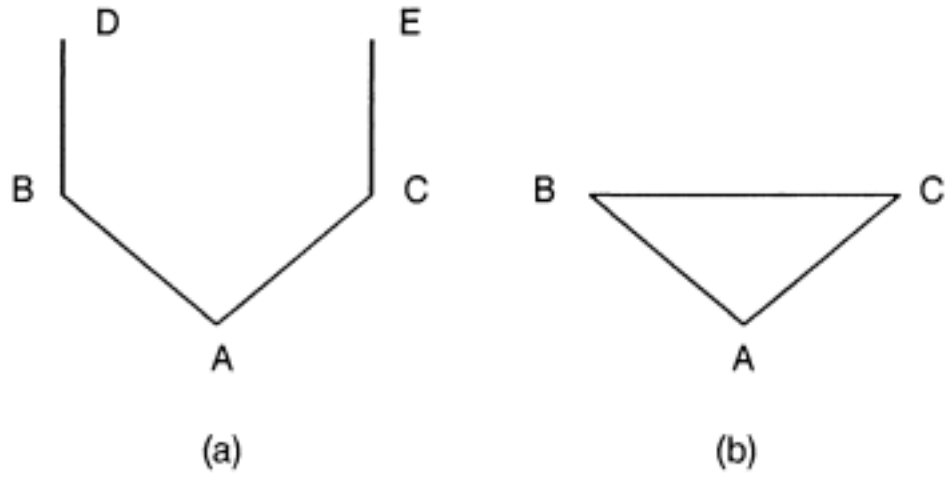
Benefits of Social Capital

Field (2003) described some of the specific benefits and powers of social networks; for example, economic performance is often better in well-connected communities than in poorly connected ones (p. 50). Job seekers throughout history are no strangers to the fact that community connections are the main bases for recruitment. Furthermore, trustworthy networks are essential for the exchange of innovation and knowledge (Field, 2003, p. 54). Another specific power of social networks that resonates particularly with my research in the Tongan community is the potential benefit for health and well-being. Field connected good health as a result of social cohesion, as a cohesive community can furnish tangible material assistance, reinforce healthy norms, lobby more effectively for medical services and stimulate the immune system through interaction (2003, p. 58). Reinforcing healthy norms is an important result of social capital found within the Tongan community, who rank as one of the most obese populations in the world. The effects of peer leaders who advocate for and demonstrate healthy living and obesity prevention are clear and tangible in this particular case. Another benefit that Field described which is also important in my research is social capital as it relates to crime and deviancy. Field pointed out that criminality thrives in neighborhoods where most people do not know each other well, supervision of teenage peer groups is minimal and civic engagement is low. The greater the cohesion and shared expectations of the community, the lower the rates of crime (2003, p. 61). Crime and cohesion are also cyclical; communities with low levels of crime will more easily develop and maintain strong social networks.

A Closed Network

The remaining important aspect of social capital is an effectively closed network. According to Coleman, effective norms within a social network are created by the existence of closure, which limits negative external effects and encourages positive ones (1988, p. S105). In Figure 2, it is clear than a network lacking closure is exposed to many more potential influences than a network with closure; these influences can change the expectations and tacit rules within a community, as well as dilute the power and benefits described previously of the social network. To explain closure, Coleman provided the example of children within a school, where there "exists a high degree of closure among peers, who see each other daily, have expectations toward each other, and develop norms about each other's behavior" (1988, p. S105). Closure sets sanctions that can monitor and guide behavior. In order to help explain how closure is effective in creating social capital in the Tongan community in Los Angeles, I rely on speech community (Gumperz, 1968), which I expand upon in a following section.

Figure 2: Network without (a) and with (b) closure, adapted from Coleman (1988)



2.2.3 Agency

Despite its often-controversial usage, I also rely on the concept of agency as a lens through which to analyze my research, especially as it relates to speakers of the Tongan language. In describing agency, I choose to take up Ahearn's (2001) definition of the term as "a socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112). In Linguistic Anthropology, the term most often refers to how speech both shapes and reflects social and cultural realities. An agent refers to a person who is engaged in the exercise of power in the sense of the ability to bring about effects and to (re)constitute the world (Ahearn, 2001, p. 113). Language is thus a form of social action; by participating in tacit language codes in the Tongan community, members exercise power over social situations and the meaning they want to convey in those situations. Language and power are intertwined, as each word is socially charged (Ahearn, 2001, p. 111). The power of the spoken word to constitute social meaning is explained by Bourdieu (1991), who maintained that symbolic violence occurs when individuals mistakenly consider a standard dialect or style of speaking to be truly superior to the way they themselves speak, rather than an arbitrary difference afforded social significance (p. 170). This proves true in the Tongan community's apparent language shift described in chapter seven. However, agency in language can have the opposite effect as well by creating an empowering social situation.

Duranti (2007) proposed that agency has three important properties. The first is that those with agency have some control over their own behavior. Secondly, those with agency have consequences for themselves or others, or they have some affect on themselves and others. Finally, those with agency are responsible for the outcome of their actions (p. 453). As far as agency in language, Duranti wrote that a speaker intends to perform a certain act through linguistic expression (2007, p. 457). By speaking specific

utterances in a specific way in a particular setting, a speaker has control and power over their social and cultural reality.

Ahearn iterated that agency is not synonymous with free will (2001, p. 114); instead, it should be made clear where agency is located. For the sake of this research, individual speakers of the Tongan language hold agency in their conscious ability to define their sociocultural realities specifically through the spoken word.

2.2.4 A Speech Community

Because my research relies heavily on language as a characteristic of creating a closed social network, I analyze the data through the lens of a speech community. Gumperz (1968) argued that a speech community is one characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs (p. 66). I argue that a speech community contributes to creating closure in a social network that is has significant differences in language usage than others. According to Gumperz, grammatical rules are not the only things to define how a language is used. A person's choice "from among permissible alternates in a particular speech event may reveal his family background and his social intent" (1968, p. 66). In a community where more than one language is the norm, such as the Tongan community, there is a wider scope of linguistically acceptable expressions and ways to convey social meanings. This relates to a shared set of social norms, in which there is a specific relationship between speech and social action. Those who share in those social norms are part of a speech community. Being a member of the Tongan Diaspora speech community, in which multiple linguistic codes are necessary for negotiating sociocultural reality, is another effective way of creating a closed network in which outside influence is lessened, and the strength of the

social network and social capital is augmented. As such, membership in a speech community contributes to closure, thus augmenting the potential for community wealth.

2.2.5 Funds of Knowledge

In discussing community cultural wealth, wealth is not viewed as explicitly financial capital accumulation. Expanding upon this idea through ethnographic research is the funds of knowledge concept. Knowledge in this context refers to someone's social and labor history, household practices, ideas about childrearing and values about education, and the term funds creates this knowledge into a kind of currency that can increase a household's economy (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt & Moll, 2011, p. 164). This theoretical framework documents knowledge that might be embedded in the life experiences of underrepresented students and families, and that tapping into these funds can provide a vehicle for empowerment. Funds of knowledge provide a very concrete way to make pedagogy culturally relevant and effective.

Funds of knowledge shares commonalities with the forms of capital outlined in community cultural wealth; however, Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt and Moll (2011) point out that having access to different types of capital, such as social capital, does not automatically translate into activation or mobilization of cultural resources (p. 170). Funds of knowledge therefore complement the concept of social capital by providing a path for practice, rather than simply theory. Working with teachers is essential, and requires an effort to eliminate deficit mentalities, focusing on the attributes that students bring to a learning space rather than their deficiencies. This concept will be applied in chapter eight, in which peer-led learning spaces prove to be important pedagogical tools in the Tongan community.

One characteristic of the funds of knowledge framework is transmission; that is, the framework serves as a basis for re-thinking what is useful knowledge for under-represented students (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011, p. 177), and for making available the cultural and ideological tools to transform their social capital and funds of knowledge into agency. Thus, another important characteristic is conversion, or the process by which students and families convert their funds of knowledge into forms of capital. In order to do this, and to activate capital, it is important to understand current power relations, and thus the 'currency exchange rate' that each form of capital might have. Thus activation, a third trait of the framework, is the process in which individuals take advantage of an investment to achieve a certain goal (Rios-Aguilar, et al., 2011, p. 178). Not all types of knowledge will be beneficial in any given context. It is important to understand what one's capital is, and when or how it can be used as actual exchange. By combining the concept of funds of knowledge with social capital and community cultural wealth, an individual is better prepared to understand barriers and influences on success and to combat power dynamics. Funds of knowledge encourage practice in addition to theory, and are thus a useful tool in framing this research.

2.3 Conclusion

Social capital, speech community, agency and funds of knowledge incorporates many of the themes and codes that are found throughout my research – the concept of collectivity, communalism, identity, meaning making, and framing identity within history for empowerment. By placing these themes within the lens of these frameworks, I will be better able to address the challenges and obstacles that the Tongan community faces. Working with funds of knowledge – truly a framework meant for the practitioner – can

assist in giving value to the social capital of a community, and in turn increase their community cultural wealth. These interrelated theories will be the framework by which I define my research, and will assist in analyzing the data in the following chapters.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Research Context & Entering the Field

This ethnographic study of a Tongan Diaspora community took place over a six-month period in a community in south Los Angeles in 2015. Located in this community is the Lennox church, the largest and most well known Tongan church outside of Tonga. Its geographic position near Los Angeles International Airport makes it an epicenter for newly arriving immigrants and visitors.

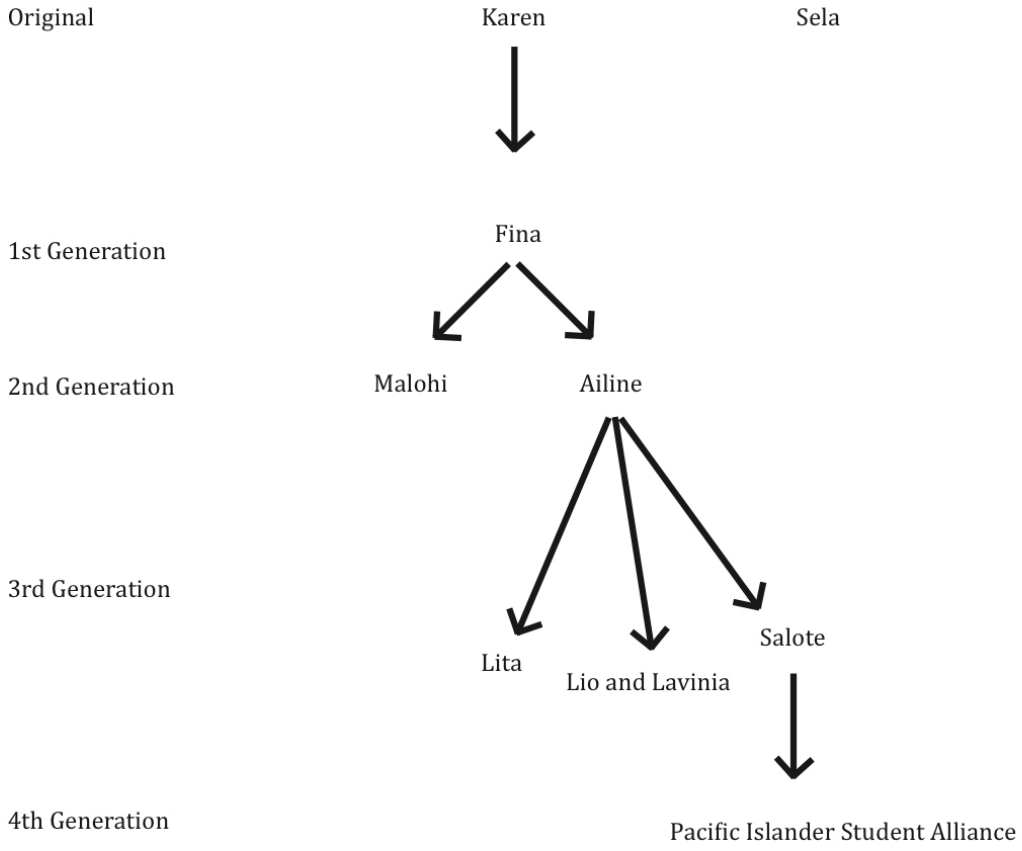
Data collection for this research included (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews, (2) participant observation, (3) transcription of audio-recorded data, (4) a focused group interview and family interview. Initially, gaining access to interview participants and community events proved to be a challenge, as I had no contacts or connections. After a few weeks of attempting to find the best access point, I made contact with my initial participant, Karen, through social media; she serves as a Lennox church youth group leader, and manages the group's social media account. Karen and I met at a Starbucks near the church. After speaking, she put me in touch with one of her peers, Fina, who eventually led me to Ailine, and so on. Thus, I used snowball sampling as a method of recruiting participants, as well as choosing what to observe. The process of snowball sampling was particularly important for my research; Noy (2008) wrote that "research is processual, dynamic and holistic" (p. 334), and a critical-reflexive perspective should be applied to the entire process, from recruitment, to data collection and analysis. Figure 3 details my sampling stemmata, which illustrates the course of the sampling process. According to Noy, data accessing and data collecting are mutually dependent; if a participant leaves an interview feeling discontented, or if the researcher did not win the

participant's trust, the chances that the participant will supply referrals is decreased, and vice versa (2008, p. 334). The use of snowball sampling is furthermore inextricably linked to the concept and framework of social capital.

> Informants who possess social capital and are willing to share it – or to perform and embody – with the researcher are those informants who are members in social networks, who have more friends and acquaintances than others, and are therefore located centrally. In snowball stemma these informants are depicted as inhabiting network junctions, where their 'network capital' assumes a visual manifestation (Noy, 2008, p. 334).

Essentially, the snowball stemma depicted in figure 3 became part of my data; those who's social capital became apparent worked in certain facets of the community, and were thus important players in accumulating community cultural wealth.

Figure 3: Snowball Stemma



All of my participants chose the location for interviews, mostly at cafes and other convenient locations for them (see Table 1 for full data management). However, the uniting criterion for participation was connection to the Lennox church. Though most of the Tongan community lives geographically near the church, some of my participants grew up outside of this neighborhood. However, the Lennox church, Lennox park and the businesses in the Lennox neighborhood are important spaces for the community and feature prominently in this study. Below I outline the implementation of research methods.

Table 1: Data Management

Data Type	Pseudonym	Date	Where	Length
Interview	Karen – American born female	January 21, 2015	Starbucks, Crenshaw Blvd, Hawthorne	46:06
Observation	Sunday church services	January 25, 2015	Lennox Tongan Methodist Church	1 hour
Interview	Fina – Tongan born female	January 30, 2015	Starbucks, Lawndale, CA	1:22:29
Observation	Lennox Park/Sunday church services	February 8, 2015	Lennox Tongan Methodist Church/Lennox Park	1 hour
Interview	Ailine – Tongan born female	February 26, 2015	Café Mak, Koreatown, CA	1:39:09
Interview	Sela – American born female	March 5, 2015	APIOPA Office, Downtown LA	1:10:07
Interview	Malohi – American born male	March 12, 2015	Starbucks, El Segundo and Hawthorne Blvd, Hawthorne, CA	58:38
Family Interview	Lio and Lavinia – Tongan born married couple	March 20, 2015	Culver Palms Methodist Church, Culver City, CA	1:14:29
Interview	Lita – An American born female	April 3, 2015	Long Beach City College, Long Beach, CA	1:00:04
Observation	PISA cultural show rehearsal	April 27, 2015	United Grace Methodist Church, Riverside, CA	2 hours
Focus Group	Pacific Islander Student Assoc. at UCR Caroline, Tina, Ofa, Emily, Salote, Giselle & Nanice	April 27, 2015	United Grace Methodist Church, Riverside, CA	1:32:33
Observation	Fakame' celebration	May 3, 2015	Long Beach Tongan Methodist Church	4 hours
Observation	PISA cultural show	May 16, 2015	UC Riverside	3 hours

3.2 Interviews

In order to collect data to answer my research questions, I used in-depth interviews and participant observation. Over the course of four months, I conducted six individual interviews, one family interview, and one focus group consisting of seven

people. Table 2 details the research participants and interview information. For each, I conducted semi-unstructured interviews, as "less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). According to Merriam (2009), it is best to get descriptive, relatively neutral information about the phenomenon at interest at the beginning of an interview to lay the foundation for more in-depth questions (p. 103). My participants come from a variety of experiences, and by unpacking their statements and asking questions about the answers they gave, I found myself able to extract a richer, deeper analysis of the topic. All interviews took place in English, with occasional Tongan words or expressions used throughout.

Table 2: Interview Participants Overview

Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Place of Birth**	**Date of Interview**	**Location of Interview**	**Referred by**
Karen	Female	California	January 21, 2015	Starbucks, Crenshaw Blvd, Hawthorne	n/a
Fina	Female	Tonga	January 30, 2015	Starbucks, Lawndale	Karen
Ailine	Female	Tonga	February 26, 2015	Café Mak, Koreatown	Fina
Sela	Female	California	March 5, 2015	APIOPA Office, Los Angeles	n/a
Malohi	Male	California	March 12, 2015	Starbucks, El Segundo Blvd, Hawthorne	Fina
Lio and Lavinia	Male/Female	Tonga	March 20, 2015	Culver Palms Methodist Church, Culver City	Ailine
Lita	Female	California	April 3, 2015	Long Beach City College,	Ailine

Focus Group – Salote, Caroline, Tina, Ofa, Emily, Giselle, Nanice	Female	California	April 27, 2015	Long Beach United Grace Methodist Church, Riverside	Ailine

Through this mostly unstructured protocol, I was able to gain insight into aspects of the culture that I wouldn't have known otherwise. I am sensitive to being non-Tongan and understanding that questions I might plan before a structured interview may not be relevant to my participants' experiences. I am extremely conscious of imposing exogenous meanings to participants' lives; since I am not Tongan, I am hyper-aware of failing to appreciate participants' classifications by lapsing in classic ethnocentrism, and allowing categories, standards or meanings from my own culture to describe the Tongan context (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995, p. 131). As the interviews progressed, I formed questions based off of comments made by my participants in order to drive the direction towards my research objectives. Table 3 illustrates my interview protocol, with sample questions created before interviews to help maintain focus.

I also conducted participant observation; I attended Tongan church on three occasions, including one important cultural event, as well as a cultural show put on by my focus group participants.

Table 3: Interview Protocol

Participant Category	**Beginning of Interview – Unstructured, Grand Tour, Context**	**Deeper into Interview – Semi-Structured, Concrete Details, Reflection**

Tongan-born Participant	Please tell me about where you were born. What was your childhood like? When did you move to America, and why? How is life different here? How is it the same? Tell me about work, school, home, church, culture, language and family. Give me a Grand Tour of your life in America. Describe a typical day.	What do you do to honor your Tongan culture? What does being Tongan mean to you? What do you consider part of your cultural identity? What are some differences between life in Tonga and the US? Are you worried about future generations of Tongan Americans and your culture? What traditions do you want to pass on to your family? Who do you identify as your community?
American-born Tongan Participant	Tell me about where you were born. What was your childhood like? What generation American are you? Tell me about work, school, home, church, culture, language and family. Give me a Grand Tour of your daily life. Describe a typical day.	What do you do to honor your Tongan culture? What does being Tongan mean to you? What do you consider part of your cultural identity? Is it important to learn about your culture? Have you learned Tongan? What traditions have been passed on to you by your family? Are you worried about future generations of Tongan Americans and your culture? Where do you most learn about Tongan culture? What does being Tongan mean to you? Do you feel more Tongan or more American? Who do you consider your community?

3.3 Focus Group Discussion

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic, I engaged a group of Tongan-American females in a focused discussion. In this semi-structured discussion, I prompted the group with an open-ended question (example: how do you define your community), and allowed the discussion to proceed from there. Participants answered based off of my original question, or based on their peers' answers. This was a true discussion, in which participants agreed, disagreed and responded to each other's comments.

Participants in this group were all members of the Pacific Islander Student Alliance at a University of California campus, and were all of Tongan or half-Tongan descent. Therefore, all of the participants came from similar backgrounds and had similar experiences. Furthermore, the participants were friends who were working together closely each day in preparation for a cultural show. The participants were comfortable around each other, particularly discussing sensitive or private topics, and understood the best ways to respond to each other. Furthermore, there were tacit rules of engagement already in place within the group. For example, when a participant made a statement that everyone agreed with, the other members of the group would snap their fingers. This was the most recognizable form of agreement within the group, and a cue for which I was able to base further questions or topics for discussion. As such, I focused equally on interaction as I did participants' opinions. I attempted to consider the opinions in the group as being constructed collectively. Smithson (2000) defined the 'collective voice' as "a group process of collaboratively constructing a joint perspective, or argument, which emerges very much as a collective procedure which leads to consensus, rather than as any individual's view" (p. 109). Therefore, I attempted to gauge the reactions of participants to their peers as part of the collective opinion.

Due to the sense of community already formed within this particular group, their similar cultural backgrounds and the tacit rules of practice, I found the focus group discussion to be an incredibly rich source of data. Thus, I sought specifically the best way to analyze a group discussion. According to Smithson (2000),

> Many articles based on focus group research appear to be treating the data as identical to individual interview data, and the unique aspects of focus groups are habitually ignored in the analysis. An important characteristic of focus groups is that it is often stated that groups, rather than individuals within groups, are the

> main unit of analysis. A question addressed in this paper will be: how can a group be seen as a 'unit of analysis?' (p. 105).

I attempt to answer this question in Chapter eight through an analysis of the focus group and a discussion of peer-led spaces.

3.4 Analysis

I employed eclectic coding during my first stage of analysis, and predominantly used In Vivo, Emotions, Descriptive, Values and Versus coding. Saldaña (2013) wrote that eclectic coding is an appropriate initial and exploratory technique with qualitative data (p. 189) in order to discern as many phenomena as possible. After my first round of coding using these methods, I created a code tree; this visual led me to realize that my codes and research questions were not reflecting the depth and richness of information that I had collected.

As a result, I reframed my research questions using a new theoretical framework (social capital) which I felt more appropriately reflected my data, as well as the "so what" of my research. After reforming my research questions, I coded all interviews a second time, using primarily Values and In Vivo coding. I chose In Vivo coding because I wanted to "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). Considering the ethnographic nature of my research, as well as the striking patterns found across my data, In Vivo coding was an appropriate tool for analyzing the words of my participants. I also found that Values Coding provided new perspectives into how my participants viewed their identity formation, attitudes towards their community and culture, and the various value systems that they must reconcile.

After a second draft of coding, I reworked my code tree and used subcoding to detail and organize my codes in order to answer my research questions (Saldaña, p. 79).

For example, I began to notice a relationship between many phenomena I was coding; I felt that many of my codes ("It's like Hawaiian", "Fresh off the Boat" "Stereotypes as a cultural norm") fell under the category of another code ("It was hard to define who I was"); thus, I made this code the theme and subcoded based on this choice. I also counted the frequency of my codes to help pick out themes. Subcoding provided me with the backbone and outline for this paper. I chose not to use any software in the analysis process, as I am a tactile learner; by physically holding, highlighting and marking my data, I was able to better comprehend the richness of my participants' words.

3.5 Conversation Analysis

In order to analyze the importance of language in obtaining social capital, I employed Jeffersonian (1974) transcription methods specifically to excerpts where participants speak about the Tongan language. C. Goodwin and J. Heritage (1990) described conversation analysis as directly addressing the issue of describing events from 'the native's' point of view (p. 301). Considering the ethnographic nature of the research, it became impossible to separate the words of my participants from the contexts of the interactions. By viewing utterances as forms of action, the words of my participants gained depth and richness that was absent from simple transcripts, as well as added truth and context to their meanings. Conversation analysis "places new emphasis on participants' orientation to indigenous social and cultural constructs" (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p. 283). Conversation analytic transcripts are detailed enough to capture what is said and how it is said, and "facilitate the analyst's quest to discover and describe orderly practices of social action in interaction" (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013, p. 1). By presenting the words of my participants through Jeffersonian transcription methods (as

outlined in table 4), it is possible to cite their actual embodied and situated original words. Furthermore, cultural values are the causal drivers of social behavior (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p. 284), and conversation analysis considers cultural context as an integral part of a speaker's utterances. This method was particularly useful in analyzing multiple speakers, such as family interviews and the focus group, as speakers "hold one another accountable for meaningful participation in a collaboratively sustained social world" (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p. 288). As such, it was important to analyze not only the speakers' words, but also their reaction to their peers, their embodied interactions and mutually negotiated utterances. I chose to employ this particular transcription method specifically when participants spoke about their relationship to the Tongan language, as language is a major part of my analysis.

Table 4: Jeffersonian Transcription Features

Feature	**Meaning**	**Example**
Dash mark	Cut-off: a dash marks a sudden cut-off of the current sound	like she said, we need to really -
Bold Italics	Emphasis, including change in pitch or volume	it comes with a cursing word right after that you know like ***get it done***
Left bracket	An overlap bracket marks where current talk is overlapped by other talk	we yeah we tend to just do that. Um- [yeah, it
Colons	Colons indicate that the sound preceding is noticeably lengthened	it comes off to you:: like really::
Period	A period indicates falling contour	that's how we learn our language.
Question mark	Indicates rising contour	sometimes in Tongan? I feel like
Comma	Indicates falling-rising contour	when it comes off in like English, it just sounds
Equal Sign	Latching- there is no	Speak English at school =

	interval between end of a turn and start of the next piece of talk	so we don't lose our language
Tildes	Slurred speech spoken rapidly	it just sounds so easy, like, oh~whatever.
Numbers in parentheses	Marks silence in seconds	then probably around like (1) little bit after
h in parentheses	Aspiration such as laughter, breathing, crying	But when (hhhh) they (hhhh) say (hhhh) it in Tongan

3.6 Narrative Profiles and Thematic Analysis

As part of my written analysis, I employ narrative retellings of in-depth interviews with four of my participants. By retelling my participants' words in a literary impactful way, it became easy to pick out their "motifs" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 134). Saldaña pointed out "insight into the meanings of participant stories depends on deep researcher reflection through careful reading of the transcripts and extensive journaling" (2013, p. 134). Giving voice to the participants in a study can take away from the theory and method dichotomy of research, and instead indicates that there is "a story in the study, a tale in the theory, the parable in the principle and the drama in the life" (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 161). In the narrative profiles, I attempt to maintain my participants' voices, use descriptive detail and create a temporal story arc. The ultimate goal, as Saldaña explained, is to create a story as a researcher representation that depicts how and why particular outcomes came about, or otherwise leave open-ended structures that ask provocative questions (2013, p. 134). The literary element I chose to employ in crafting the narratives was in the form of a monologue. The narratives are in first-person point of view, and convey different tones depending on the content of the transcripts. My intent in writing narrative profiles is to introduce the reader to community members and

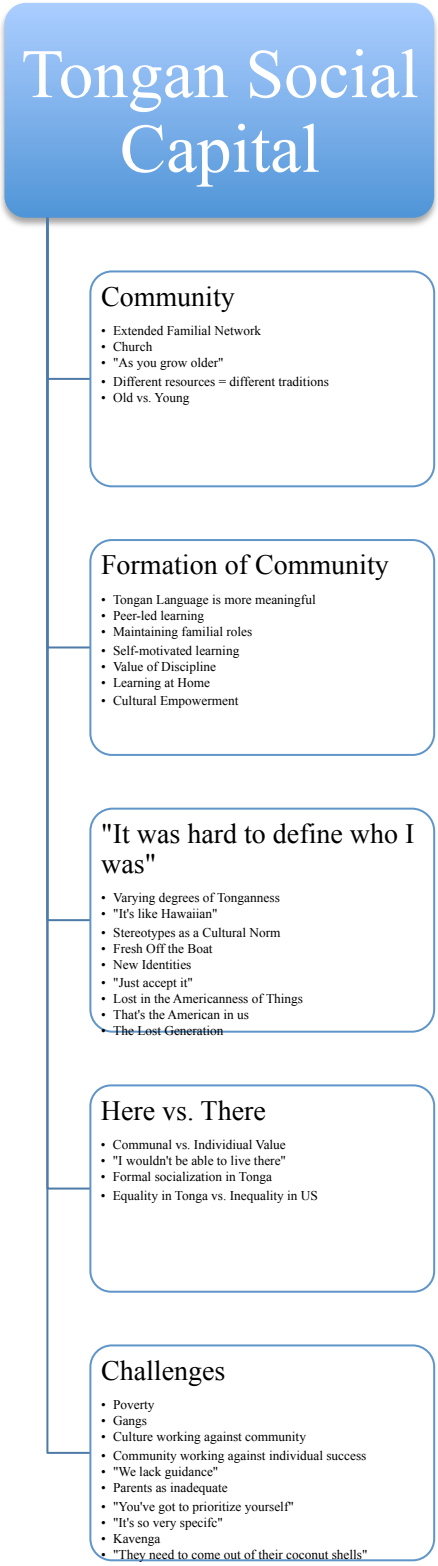
participants who's voices will be used throughout the analysis, as well as introduce some of the themes, codes and motifs covered in the research.

To follow the narrative profiles, I employ thematic analysis to break down the major themes and codes in the research and relate the narrative retellings to the theoretical framework. A visual of the themes and codes analyzed in this research is outlined in figure 4.

3.7 Positionality of Researcher and Limitations

As a non-Tongan, my access to the community was limited at the beginning of my research; I spent much of my fieldwork process making and requesting contacts and attempting to gain the trust of community members. Over time, I was welcomed into the community and able to immerse, in part because of my own experience traveling to and living in Tonga several years before. Based on this experience, I had background knowledge on Tongan culture and values, though limited by my inability to speak the Tongan language. However, I came to this research with a respect for and interest in Tongan culture and history. As such, my interviews served to collect data on a particular phenomenon as well as provide me with basic literacy in Tongan culture, traditions and values.

Figure 4: Visual of themes and codes



Chapter Four: Narrative Profiles

4.1 Sela

Sela is one of two participants who I recruited without snowball sampling, though many participants suggested I reach out to her. We met at her office, the Asian and Pacific Islander Obesity Alliance in downtown Los Angeles, and sat in a quiet common room. A member of the Tongan church and a prominent leader in the community, Sela spoke at length about identity formation and building.

Building Confidence in Who I Am

I was raised in a community that is predominantly Latino, and so we were the only Tongan family around. People are always surprised that I wasn't raised in Lennox or Hawthorne, where the large Tongan community is, and I think that's why it was difficult to define who I was. I definitely could relate somewhat to a person of color's experience because that was a majority of the people around me, that's the environment I was in. As far as what it meant to be Tongan, I never knew what to say when people would ask me what it was. I would just say, oh it's the same thing as Hawaiian or Samoan. It was easier to explain it that way. Being young, I just accepted it as that, since I couldn't really define it.

Once I got to high school, I started identifying with other Pacific Islanders, like the Samoan community. And that's when I began to question things. I questioned myself, like if I was representing myself as a Tongan, because I realized I was representing all Tongan people, and that was scary. I realized it wasn't OK to just go around telling people it was the same thing as being Hawaiian or Samoan. So I began to explore what

my culture is, and slowly began to build some confidence in who I am as a Tongan, in my cultural identity.

I started asking my mom questions, asking the elders questions. I tried to understand what some of our values mean, like the value of love and respect. I tried to see things from the Tongan context, since I didn't grow up in the Tongan context. I grew up in the American context with Tongan in me.

"We're in the Lost Generation"

Church was huge growing up. My parents made sure we went to church every week. I learned the language at church. It was also really important to maintain culture in my house; for example, the relationship between a brother and sister[2]. My parents were very strict on that we couldn't be in the same room, or if my sisters and me were in the living room, my brothers would need to leave. Just little things like that. It was just normal in our house. But as I got older, I was struggling with meaning. I like to understand things, not just have them given to me and I'm supposed to accept it. I think a lot of Tongan people just accept whatever is in front of them, as is. Now, it's all I do. If I don't get something, I know who I can ask and who I can talk to. What does this mean and why do we do it…and I when I find out the meanings behind it, its like, wow. Our people are so dedicated; it's kind of scary sometimes.

At first, I expected my parents to have all the answers. But I realized that my parents didn't know everything about culture. They didn't know how certain customs or values originated. When it came time to question certain values, they couldn't answer.

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[2] F*aka'apa'apa*, or respect, is one of the core values of Tongan culture; in order to preserve hierarchy, a tradition of sacredness is created around the sister. Distance between brother and sister is essential (Mavoa et al, 2004, p.555).

And history stuff they couldn't really answer. My parents didn't have the opportunity for education. What we learned from my parents growing up was with my mom, how to take care of the house. And from my dad it was being out in the plantation and how to grow food for your family to eat. They would tell us about their experiences basically, but if we had questions about history, they couldn't tell us because they didn't know. That's when I realized that learning had to be something I do on my own. I've started doing research on my family, learning where we come from, who is who, and I feel like its something I need to understand in order to represent myself, my family and my culture, especially to someone who's not Tongan.

We're in the lost generation of not knowing what it means to be Tongan. It's a knowledge that needs to be nourished and taught, because we're totally lost. Our generation totally internalizes stereotypes. And there is a disconnect between our parents and us. Trying to make that connection, it's been a constant battle my whole life. A lot of parents are first generation here and they only know what they know from growing up in Tonga. And it's totally different here.

"That's the American in Us"

When I first started to explore my culture, I had trouble with it because some of it I wasn't cool with. Like how my brothers got to go to college away from home and my parents preferred me to stay local just because I'm a girl. So to me that meant, is their education more important than mine? That's when my Western influence kicked in, because we learn so much about sexism. But what does that mean in the Tongan context, right? So that was hard to balance. Or things like weddings and funerals and birthdays. It was taught to us in a non-formal way, because we just did it and knew that's what we do.

But it was a lot of work too, and my American side was like, why are we doing all of this work? We carry so much. Tongan people are very passionate about culture and family, and I get it, but it can be a lot. I've just got to accept it. I can't just stop it from happening. But I've learned to accept it and embrace it and just know that this is who we are.

At home, my parents spoke to us in Tongan, but they didn't expect us to speak Tongan back. I wish I was a little bit more invested in it growing up, because I'm not fluent in the language and I wish I was. I'm not even confident enough to speak to an elder, because of the insecurity I have of not saying things the way they are supposed to be said, or pronouncing it wrong. It's something I struggle with, because a part of my Tongan identity is the language.

"Changing the Narrative"

I work for Asian and Pacific Islander Obesity Alliance, and we're focusing on the Tongan community. We are trying to promote health in a culturally relevant way. Going to the market down the street that sells Tongan food, that's part of your health. Gardening is very much part of our identity, instilled in our culture, but we're a lost generation to that. We're trying to teach people that this is what our ancestors did. We're trying to build the next generation of leaders who can hopefully represent our people in a way that changes the narrative of what it means to be Tongan; that we are not just involved with gangs, or athletes, or uneducated.

We have all these activities and the kids participate and love it, but with the Tongans it just takes one incident to push people away and feel isolated. We want to figure out what we can do to raise our kids in a safe and healthy environment. My parents

raised us in a non-Tongan environment as gang prevention. That was the reality; I have two brothers, and a lot of my cousins were in gangs. My parents wanted to make sure we were safe. The con was not being able to interact with other Tongans that could have added to my cultural identity or knowledge, but the pro was we could focus on our education. So now that I'm older, I try to give back and be a resource for people who don't know a lot about college.

I feel like the core of who we are is a collective culture and a collective people. We all have a responsibility to teach culture, and I would hope that four or five generations down the line, we're just as strong in the culture as we are now. As a community person, the work never stops. I'm the type of person that says, what more can we do? It's hard for me to take things at face value, especially if I see potential for things to be better. Our kids have so much potential, and our own leaders, our community leaders, need to steer them in the right direction. We need to shed a more positive light on what it means to be Tongan.

4.2 Ailine

Ailine is a highly regarded leader in the Tongan community, and I was very excited to meet with her at a café in Koreatown, Los Angeles on a weekday afternoon. She had just finished work for the day at Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, a non-profit she founded. Ailine also runs PILOT, a leadership program for Pacific Islander university students, and had recently played a role in publishing an in-depth Pacific Islander demographics report, which became a useful tool for my research. After our meeting, Ailine referred me to many of her peers and students.

Foundations

I was born and raised in Tonga. My family came here when I was 13. I like to brag that my foundation for education was in Tonga. There was definitely a foundation for striving and persistence, and that cultivated really early back in Tonga. Study skills and reading skills and being able to communicate, and being disciplined. And that is something that I find now that I work with college students, they don't get that. So I always feel proud of my foundation for education there.

There are obviously many disparities that exist in education here. Back home, besides socioeconomic status, there isn't much that differentiates people. You don't have to deal with race and poverty, and all the schools are pretty much the same. Everything is a little more equal there. As opposed to here, where students have to face so many different things that get in the way of education. Depending on where you live, the quality of school is going to be very different for someone else, so there are many other varying factors that exist for Tongans here than back home.

In Tonga, when you finish high school, the avenue for you to go to college is overseas. My parents felt that the quality of education was better on this continent, so they decided to move here. We moved to Monterey, which is a mostly affluent, white, older, well-off community. They decided to move us there because they didn't want us to be distracted by the other Pacific Islanders that were already settled in Los Angeles. They were aware of gangs and different kinds of social issues, and they didn't want us to be influenced by that. So they moved us somewhere where there were no Tongans at all! We didn't even go to Tongan church. Cultural things were reinforced at home, like my language skills. I think I speak it better and understand the technical aspects of the

language better than some Tongans who finished high school in Tonga. For the most part, my parents made sure we received those cultural things at home because they knew we weren't going to get it elsewhere.

"We Were the Most Tongan"

We were the most Tongan of our family because we were the ones that came here the latest. Whenever we were around family who were born and raised here, we were very much more Tongan than they were, because the culture was reinforced at home. We had the same values as my cousins, but the practice of respect between brothers and sisters looked very different between me and my brothers and my cousins and their brothers. It wasn't applied the Tongan way, I guess.

When we first moved here, there was a sense of me being not American enough. My cousins taught me how to put mousse in my hair so it looked like the style. As we moved through high school, that kind of shifted, because they wished they spoke the language more, and started to value things a little bit differently. Some of them didn't care, they liked being Americanized, but some of them started to ask questions. The first thing that came up was wanting to learn the language, and then knowing your place in the family. Like the first thing I do when I go to my paternal aunt's house is wash the dishes and put things away, I don't go sit in the living room. So they started to notice those things.

When I started going to community college everyone used to call me whitewashed. And I was like, I'm more Islander than you are! I was born and raised back in the islands! And they would say, well, you talk like a white girl. Now, every time I say I'm Tongan, I always have to qualify that I was born and raised in Tonga and then moved

here. Sometimes I say that I'm an Americanized Tongan, because I grew up here and it has definitely shaped me.

A Sense of Responsibility

I'm the chief operating officer for Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, which is a nonprofit that I founded. It's a pursuit of social justice for all Pacific Islander communities through advocacy, research and leadership development. Before that, I managed the Tongan Community Service Center. I went to UC San Diego, where I got my Bachelor's in Biochemistry and Biology, and my Master's in Biology. Then I was on my way to medical school, and I decided that before that, I had to find out what my community needs so that I'd know how to be the best physician for my community. You know, I don't just want to be a doctor at a hospital somewhere, I really want to help my community. My passion is health, but through my community work I've learned that I really love policy work, and working with young people. I think it's because I'm sharing what I know; I see that I know more than my Tongan peers, especially culturally, so I feel a responsibility to share it. But the sense of responsibility to share what we learn is not unique to me. I know many of my peers feel the same way. There is a sense of giving back that is almost intrinsic for Pacific Islander people. So if we build a pipeline of young leaders, then naturally they'll find a way to give back and help progress the community in a way that is really meaningful for the next generation.

A Culture of Warriors

If you're part of a culture, it's a continuing thing. We are built from this culture that has such a great legacy that nobody knows about and nobody teaches here. Think about ownership of land and being able to navigate the sea without technology, those

sorts of things. Too many times our kids grow up stereotyped with such negative things. So reminding them that they come from a culture that is of warriors that had their own civilization in the middle of nowhere. Without anybody's interference they were able to trade and exist and grow; the strength of our people's tenacity and ability to survive. They've never had that sense of, 'you belong to this. This is your stock'.

We're the last generation that's directly connected to back home. So we're more connected than the generation that are largely born and raised here, grew up in this culture and only know their Pacific Islander identity by name, and cling onto stereotypes. So if we don't do something to culturally empower our generation now, our community will not be able to thrive. There is urgency, because once you lose that connectedness to culture and purpose, then you just exist here. Then you are just another impoverished community that's lost, trying to find their way here.

4.3 Malohi

I met Malohi at a Starbucks in south LA, near the Lennox church. A large, hulking man, Malohi was overcome with emotion throughout our conversation. He paused periodically to cry, to cover his face with his hands or shirt, or to stare silently out of the window at the parking lot. He had been referred to me by his cousin Fina, and was both excited to share his story and wary of what I intended to do with the information.

"I Bleed Red, White and Blue"

I'm the eldest of five. My parents came from the island, and we're the first generation here in America. It's funny because I was born here, but when I went to school I was an ESL student, because Tongan is all we spoke in the house. When we got

older, we started speaking in English, so my parents did too. Right after high school, I went to the US Army and did a couple tours of Iraq. I served for 14 years, and it was a privilege to serve with my brothers. Some of them didn't make it back. I bleed red, white and blue. My grandfather is the one who forced me to go into the military. He told us, you know, we came to this country and we flourished. What other country can do that for us? What better way to give back than to serve? And that's the reason I went in.

"God Has His Way"

God has his way of working. Funny thing is, I went to Iraq and was never hit. Just one time by some RPG shrapnel, that was it. Then I come home. I'm coming out of church and I get shot by a drive-by. I come back from war, and I get shot at church, a place I should have been safe. That just made me realize how messed up my community is. To clarify, I was shot by a Samoan gang. After I got shot, I became an advocate for trying to find peace between Tongans and Samoans. I value peace more than war. I've seen war. When you get to the edge of hell and see what war does, you'll fight for peace. After I got shot, I applied for my construction license. I'm in the process of getting my certification as a disabled veteran and owning a company. My aim is to start this business so I can support a community program.

Burdens

In Tongan culture, family is everything. Especially being the oldest. My parents bred me since I was little to take care of my brothers and sisters. That is the duty of the oldest, you have to carry everything. You have to help your parents with bills, cooking and cleaning. I have a *kavenga*, which means a duty to uphold my family's name. If there is a funeral of a fourth or fifth cousin in New Zealand, I have to go and show my

presence. What I represent is not just myself. I represent my cousins and all my father's fathers. In return, that holds the bond of the family together. I'm fulfilling my duty as the oldest child.

Some of the ways of Tongan culture, its fine, its what makes us Tongan. But they need to change a little bit of the priorities around, to adapt to here. *Kavenga* is fine, to a certain extent. But we need to concentrate on ourselves. We are in desperate need of help. The elders, they keep to the old ways back in Tonga. Instead of investing in our community, they are investing in people and churches back in Tonga. Somebody in Tonga would come and need help for money, and my church will bend over backwards to make sure that person gets money. And we are left with the bill, every single time. It seems like all the resources we come up with, we basically give it away, forget about ourselves. We shouldn't be helping other people. Yes, I know it's a good thing, helping other people. It's what makes us Tongan, is helping each other. But there is a limit. They leave us dry and tired. Basically, we have nothing to build on.

Lacking Guidance

I'm an American. Like I said, I bleed red, white and blue. It's just, in my experience, there is a certain way Tongans should carry and limit themselves. There is nothing wrong with the American way, but sometimes it's too much. Less is enough. Just be grateful for what you have. We hold the Tongan values, but we don't know how valuable it is. To my community, it's not something to be carried on with pride. To them, its just chores.

A Tongan lady approached us yesterday. She was dropping off one of her nephews at the church, and she was teasing him, saying that he needed to get a job. And

one of the youths there said, “we’re willing to do whatever it takes to get a job, but we don’t know how. We lack guidance.” And that’s when it hit me, when I heard that. There are Tongans in Sacramento, in the Bay area, and they are doing their thing, community-wise. But in LA, it’s different.

I should have died so many times. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do, or what God intended me to do. I don’t know what the *kavenga* is for me.

4.4 Fina

My second participant, Fina and I met at a Starbucks near her home in Lawndale, Los Angeles. Fina described herself as someone who was excited to participate in as many things as possible, and always looking to expand her network and knowledge. She was happy to talk to me about differences between life in California and life in Tonga, where she grew up.

Seeing Life in Different Perspectives

I finished high school in Tonga in 2005, and came to Los Angeles in summer 2006. I chose to come here because my mom has four siblings out here, so before the recession, my uncle was able to pay for my tuition. So we had that family support. Almost all of my uncle’s kids are in university, so it was a good environment for me. I study mechanical engineering. My goal is to go to university, but I’m still in college for financial reasons.

My family is strict, conservative, straight up. But at some point here in the US, since there is diversity and you meet other people, you catch on to their culture and think it’s better than ours. Then we come back home to tell our parents and they think we are

crazy. Growing up as a child, you just do whatever your parents tell you to do. But when you get older, you see life in different perspectives, and you change a little. You still have those Tongan values deep down in your heart. It's just that the other ones are more fun and have more freedom. When I first came out here, I looked at some girls like, "I can't believe the things you are wearing." But now it's normal to me.

I have friends from all over the world. My boyfriend is half Italian-Nigerian. I like learning about other cultures. Tongan culture isn't the only one in the world that's right. When I started learning about other cultures, I became more open-minded and stopped stereotyping. I have more of an understanding and respect of other people and their values. Sometimes when there are no Tongans around, I forget what I can or can't do. I'm learning so much interesting stuff from my boyfriend, and I'm like, I can't believe there's so much better stuff out there in the world. I tend to believe that, but sometimes I have to stop myself from thinking that way. For example, with relationships in American culture. Couples in America move in together. That is not accepted in my culture. I had a really hard time with it, and I kept going back and forth. Because on the one hand, I really love this guy, I really want to live with him. But just thinking about how I'm the oldest daughter and our culture doesn't accept this, I couldn't do it. I love him and all that, but I couldn't do it. I see a lot of people out here, and I envy them. Sometimes, I wish I grew up here. My parents can't just let me go, like the American way.

"Even Though it's Good, it's Different"

On a Sunday in Tonga, you know it's a Sunday. Nothing is open, and you keep that day holy. Out here, when you're in church it's the only place where you feel like, "OK, its Sunday." And right when you walk out of the door, you go to the store and all

that. My cousins and me always talk about the *umu* when you come back from church. It's different out here, because you come back from church and you go to Hometown Buffet. Even though it's good, it's still different. An *umu* compared to Hometown Buffet? I would pick the *umu*.

In Tonga, there is a point in your life where you feel like you want to step up and commit yourself to important positions in the church. You feel ready, spiritually ready. It's really important that you repent completely. Out here, I feel like they are just picking people, even if you are still young and still go party. When I came out here, the minister at the church said, "You're doing the service on Tuesday night." And I was like, "What? I'm not ready for this. This is crazy." It was really hard for me. In Tonga, most people my age are participating in choir or have responsibilities in the church. But out here, the adults are in the choir and the younger generations do whatever they want. We would have been stepping up to be Sunday school teachers in Tonga, but here, it's still the older folks. So just imagine when they are gone; I don't know what's going to happen to the future church.

In Tonga, it's more about collectivism. But out here, it's more individualism. For example, in Tonga, when you cook, it means you're cooking for everybody. But when I stay with my cousins in the US, they just come in with their own food, cook for themselves and go to their room. So at first, I was like, you're being selfish right now. You're not sharing. But I got used to it. I realize that kids out here, if their parents don't teach them to share, they're not gonna do it.

"Minority of the Minority"

Our church is the most populated and significant out of all the Tongan churches in America. We're right next to the airport, so all the Tongan folks that come through LAX come to us. Even when the princes and king come to LA, we're the church they come to. If you go to Australia, for example, and say, "I go to Lennox church," they will know it. And it's sad because Lennox church is where a majority of Tongans are attending, but they are not involved in the community. It's like they are just stuck in that little space. They aren't even involved in the Lennox community, and the Lennox community doesn't even know that the Tongan church is world known. It's really crazy to think about; we're this huge Tongan church but we're not reaching out to the community.

A lot of people don't even know Tonga, it's so sad! My first few semesters here I would just say, we're Hawaiian or we're Samoan. Right when you say that, people are like, oh wow! And I'm like, no! We're not Samoan, but we're similar to Samoan! The Tongan community is a minority of the minority; we are barely visible. It affects the mentality of people growing up in Hawthorne and Lennox. You see drug dealers and liquor stores everywhere. You eat at Burger King. It's unsafe to walk around. It's normal to them, but at some point, you've gotta change the way you're living.

Most of the guys at my church work in construction, and most of the girls work at the airport. It's sad, because the girls my age, I'm like wow, you can do way better than this, throwing bags at the airport. To them its easy money and you get to help out your parents. But it's like, why don't you help yourself first? Don't you care about your future?

Opening Doors

I started school in ’06, but by ’08 I had to drop out because my uncle couldn’t pay for it anymore. That caused my student visa to expire, and I was devastated. I stayed home for five years just doing nothing. But during those years, my cousin worked at the Tongan Community Center, so I started volunteering there. Then I got connected to a woman who was leading an empowering Tongan women group. She exposed us to a lot of stuff, and I’m not just saying random stuff. We went to voter registrations, we would volunteer at Pacific Islander festivals, educational workshops. We translated a book into Tongan and presented it to the author, it was really awesome. That gave me the motivation to do something about my life, not just sit around and wait for someone to marry me.

I got an internship at the Tongan Center, and the first thing that came to my mind was to collect and document the stories of undocumented students as an advocacy tool. Now they have a booklet of stories of undocumented Tongans, and that opened up many doors for me. I started doing legislative visits at the Capitol; I’ve been on panels and forums. Through these internships, I’ve been able to pay to go back to school, since spring of last year. It feels good, but it’s hard.

Now I’m interning for the Faith Advisory Board; we are trying to recruit young leaders from different Tongan churches to create programs to promote healthy living in the Tongan community. It’s been really hard for us to get people committed to what we are doing. Tongan kids, they don’t really see the long run of the importance of it. One of our goals is to have access to green spaces for Tongans. We have a garden for the community, and we’re going start planting Tongan food. We have a relationship with law enforcement so that if we have an event at Lennox Park, the Tongans will feel safe since

there is a history of gang violence there. Every Wednesday we have free Zumba at church. We have hikes, just to expose kids to different things. We have a workshop on air quality in Lennox, which is really bad because the airplanes are flying right above us. I think the environment has a huge impact on Tongans; it clashes with our health, and the way we think. We hope kids will learn about the differences between our environment and neighborhoods with fresh air, and start to see things from a different perspective.

4.5 Conclusion

In the above profiles, each participant speaks about defining and negotiating identity. As the participants became older or gained more experiences, their perceptions of self changed. Sela, for example, stopped defining Tongan as "like Hawaiian or Samoan", whereas Fina, faced for the first time with diversity, began to use this phrase to help identify herself to others. The participants speak about negotiating multiple identities as both Americans and Tongans. While Fina appreciates her American experience for its diversity and exposure to other cultures and values, Sela finds it difficult to embrace both of her identities simultaneously. In an effort to overcome this, she picks out pieces of each value system that she appreciates, such as the Tongan values of love and respect and the American ideals of gender equality. Ailine finds herself identifying more strongly with one value system (Tongan) over the other, identifying herself as an Americanized Tongan. She refers to herself as more Tongan than her cousins and peers who were born and raised in the United States. Malohi, on the other hand, repeatedly mentions that he bleeds red, white and blue, and feels sense of pride in his American identity that is absent from the other participants' voices. It is clear that identity within the community is not

uniform; each member has different life experiences and values that create a sense of heterogeneity. However, as each participant attempts to navigate their identity as an individual, they also work to do this as a collective unit. For example, each participant feels a sense of responsibility to help others define themselves in an empowering way. Each participant wants to change the narrative of what it means to be Tongan. Malohi, for example, sees his community as affected by gang violence and wants to instill leadership that will change that. Ailine hopes to inspire her community by implanting a 'culture of warriors' narrative in which young members consider the historic strength and power of the Tongan people. Sela hopes to inspire her community through health and obesity prevention, and Fina works to help her community see their lives from a different perspective. As an undocumented student supporting herself through higher education, Fina feels strongly about changing the way the Tongan community sees themselves, as well as how they are viewed from the outside as a minority. As community leaders, each participant struggles to help their community define and empower themselves as Tongan-Americans, despite the challenges that they often refer to.

Sela, Ailine, Malohi and Fina are only a small sampling of the 14 people with whom I spoke about their experiences as members of the Tongan community. Each of these four participants represent the opinions voiced by their peers and other members of their community, from their experiences growing up to the challenges they face collectively. Speaking with these four participants led me to better understand the experiences of the Tongan-American community in Los Angeles, and I will use their narratives to assist in analyzing the data in the following chapters.

Chapter Five: Context

5.1 Tonga and Migration

"We and our descendents must own Tonga for ever. Let it be written in your hearts these words, Tonga for the Tongans [*Tonga ma'a Tonga*]"
-King George Tupou I, 1875

The Kingdom of Tonga is an archipelago of about 175 islands spread north to south over 500 miles of ocean in the South Pacific; with 56 of those islands inhabited by humans, Tonga has a population of about 100,000. As a constitutional monarchy, Tonga is the only nation in the South Pacific that never lost its sovereignty or came under foreign rule or government. This freedom "convinced Tongans of their historical agency: their ability, as a nation, to control their own history as it unfolded. They have not needed to reappropriate a colonial past" (Morton, 2001, p. 39). Since the unification of the islands by King George Tupou I, the earliest legal codes prohibited the sale of land to foreigners (Morton, 1999, p. 236). The kingdom's traditional roots run deep, and it has little outside exposure due to its geographic isolation and an undeveloped tourism industry.

It is now estimated that more than half of all Tongans actually live outside of Tonga, with the majority in Australia, New Zealand and California (Taufatofua, 2011, p. 5). Almost every household has a relative resident in another country (Otsuka, 2007, p. 450). Migration began in the mid-20th century as young Tongans perceived a gap in economic and education opportunities. They first migrated from their villages or outer-islands to the capital city of Nuku'alofa, and from there to nearby New Zealand and Australia. As Connell and Conway (2000) wrote, "migration is both a catalyst and consequence of economic change…migration and circulation are integral components of

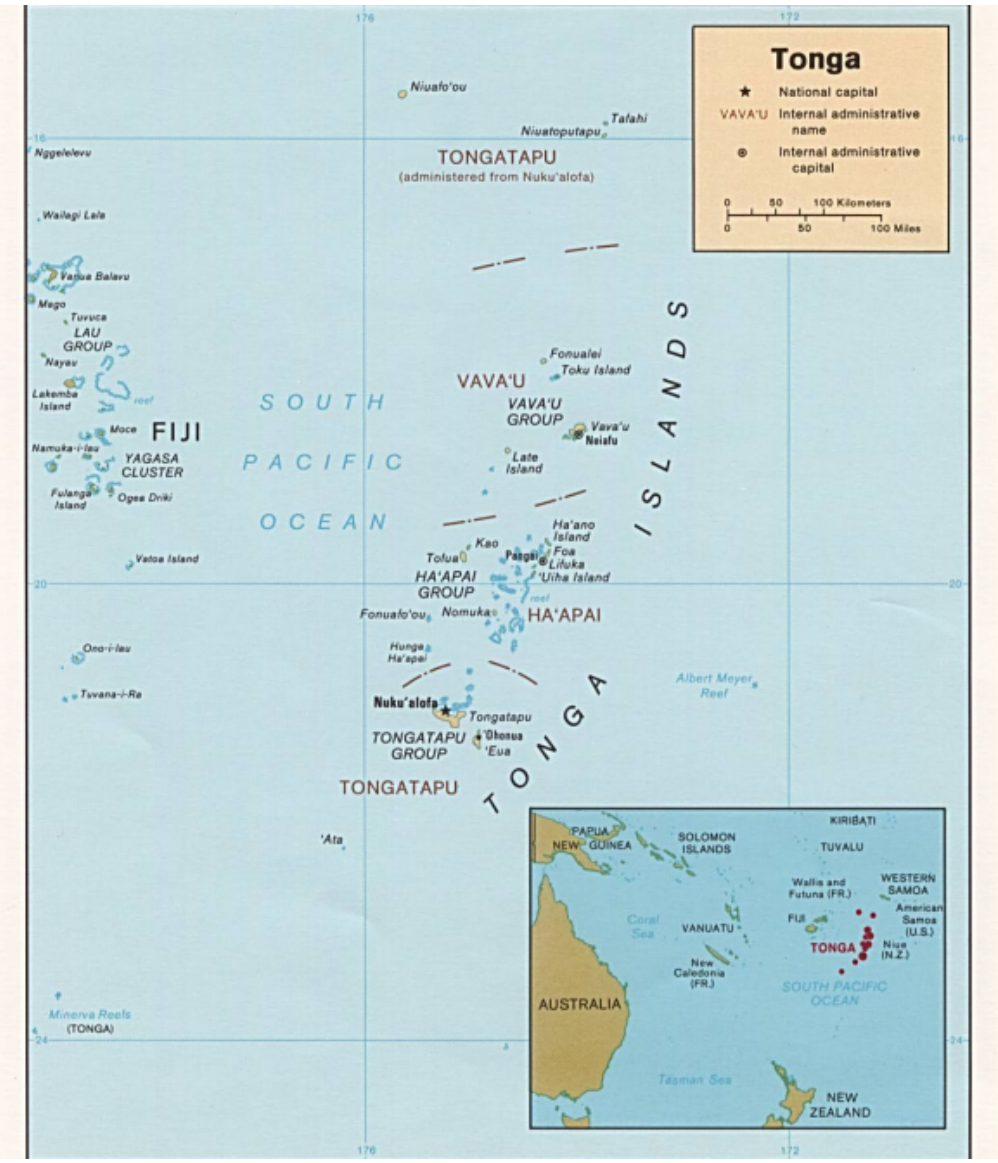
involvement in a peripheral economic and social system, and a means of responding – whether directly or indirectly – to the contemporary situations of economic travails and dearth of viable opportunities for livelihood" (p. 56). The induction into the global economic system changed life in Tonga; cash began to hold an increasingly important place in daily life. The purchasing power of money interrupted the traditional subsistence economy (Small, 1997, p. 26). The formation of viable communities abroad provided cushion for new immigrants.

I often refer to the Tongan community in Los Angeles as diasporic. Safran identified a diasporic community as one with "a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (1991, quoted in Morton 1998, p. 7). Though Tongans are not in forced exile, such as other communities referred to as diasporic, issues in Tonga such as land shortage, unemployment, low wages and perceived opportunities in western societies make migration imperative for many Tongans (Morton, 1998, p. 7). The Tongan Diaspora is known both for its concentration in certain cities (Auckland, Salt Lake City, and Sydney, for example) and its dispersal throughout many countries around the world.

Once large-scale migration took place, families in Tonga began to depend on their relatives abroad to provide economically. Today, remittances make up the largest part of Tonga's economy – both household welfare and the entire country's economic system. In 2007, 39% of Tonga's GDP came from remittances, making it the second highest recipient of remittance flow in relation to the size of its economy in the world (Taufatofua, 2011, p. 5). Tonga is described as a MIRAB economy, dependent on

Migration, Remittances, external Aid and government Bureaucracy as its major sources of revenue (Otsuka, 2007, p. 451). It is safe to say that Tonga, as a nation-state, is economically dependent on migration. Many young Tongans feel a responsibility to migrate in order to provide for their families and communities.

Figure 5: Map of Tonga, from *'Eua Man & Biosphere Report*, 2004



In California, the Tongan community ranks as the most economically disadvantaged ethnic group. The community in Los Angeles, for example, has a per

capita income of $9,651, lower than any other ethnic group in California. 59% of Tongan Americans in LA are low-income, and 47% of Tongan American youth in LA live in poverty (Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, 2014). As Yuko Otsuka argues, "socioeconomic factors contribute to a speaker's decision on whether to maintain or give up the intergenerational transmission of the language" (p. 447). If a community feels they are socially and economically disadvantaged because of their language and culture, there is real danger of extinction. It is clear that economic instability threatens the cohesion of the community and its traditional practices. Through the creation of a cohesive network with social capital, the Tongan community in Los Angeles has the opportunity to form a positive collective identity that could serve as a tool for empowerment.

5.2 Pedagogy of a Culture

Throughout the course of my research, I saw many patterns of how people become socialized into the Los Angeles Tongan community. The most frequent place that participants cited was church. Religious life is central to the Tongan community. Aside from attending services on Sunday, cultural and community life revolves around the church: funerals, weddings, kava circles, and ceremonies are a few examples of activities that take place at the church. "The important role of Christianity within Tongan culture usually allows migrants to cope more easily with the changes, problems, shocks and issues associated with migrating overseas and living in a culture very different from their own" (Maron & Connell, 2008, p. 176). Furthermore, the Lennox church is the largest Tongan church in the world, known throughout Tonga and its Diaspora. According to Sela, a member of the Lennox church, church is where she learned the Tongan language, which wasn't enforced at home. She mentioned that speaking in Tongan was emphasized

at church, and therefore it became a structured learning environment. This structure did not simply take place during Sunday services, but the almost daily activities, youth group, choir, or ceremonies.

Though church plays a central part in many people's lives, it was not the only space where socialization happens. Karen, for example, was born and raised in Los Angeles by Tongan-born parents. Although heavily involved in church and youth-group activities, Karen insisted that parents hold the responsibility to socialize their children as members of the Tongan community.

> To me its like saying, 'Hey, my mom is a millionaire but I have no money.' You know? What was the point of your mom being a millionaire? And that's like me saying, 'Hey, my mom's Tongan, but I don't know nothing about that culture' (Karen, January 21, 2015).

Karen believes that everything starts at home, where you are with your parents everyday. For many Tongan Americans, they are the direct link back to Tonga. However, as time goes on, the genealogical line will progress further away from that direct link – and linguistic or cultural socialization might not be feasible for many parents. Fina expressed this idea when she said, "my uncle and my folks, they're the ones that migrated from Tonga so they have those strong Tongan values and ways of culture. But the ones that grew up here, got married and had kids, they kind of lost that" (Fina, January 30, 2015). Fina spoke at length about her fears for the future of her community. She reminisced about church in Tonga, and how you begin to take on important responsibilities as a youth – things like choir, youth leadership, and sermon preparation. When speaking about the Lennox church, where she now attends, Fina said,

> The choir on Sunday, its only the parents. In Tonga, at our age, I would have been in the choir already. We would have been stepping up to be Sunday school teachers in Tonga. But out here, it's still the older folks. So just imagine when

> they are gone. I don't know what's going to happen to the future of the church (Fina, January 30, 2015).

Fina's fears are not unique in the Tongan community. Without the formal process of socialization and immersion into the community that happens in Tonga, Tongan immigrants to Los Angeles fear for the future of their community, values and traditions. Wenger (1998) noted, "newcomers must find a place in relation to the past. In order to participate, they must gain some access – vicarious as it may be – to the history they want to contribute to; they must make it part of their own identities" (p. 157). With that in mind, participants cited one last important piece to community socialization: self-motivation. Tongan culture is hierarchical in nature; status in the community changes according to who you are, your familial lineage, and who else is in the room with you. Traditions can be technical and specific. Ailine emphasized that it's nearly impossible to sit through a ceremony and expect to absorb what's happening around you when she explained, "When you give to this person, what kinds of things are you giving them based on their standing in the family? You give the paternal aunt these kinds of things at this kind of occasion, and it's so very specific" (Ailine, February 26, 2015). Ailine bemoaned that her family migrated from Tonga before she had the chance to complete Tongan Studies, the formal process by which students in Tongan schools are socialized into their culture. Ailine listed some of the subjects of Tongan Studies, including king lineages, classical poetry and songs, cultural traditions and Tongan language. As such, she insisted that Tongans raised in Diaspora communities need to be self-motivated to understand their community's culture. "It's a rare few that will go sit next to an elder and say, 'what is going on? What does that mean?" (Ailine, February 26, 2015). Asking questions, paying attention, attending events and doing personal research are all essential

components to understanding the values and traditions of the Tongan community; as such, the first step is realizing that these values are worth understanding to begin with.

5.3 Challenges

In order to understand the importance of social capital and how funds of knowledge can contribute to empowerment, it is essential to build context as to why this is particularly important for the Tongan community in Los Angeles. As Malohi made evident, the community faces many social and economic challenges. In California, the Tongan community ranks as the most economically disadvantaged ethnic group. As mentioned before, the community in Los Angeles has a per capita income of $9,651, lower than any other ethnic group in California. (Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, 2014). This is a staggering number, especially considering the potential household income that might be remitted back to Tonga. Fina described her community as "barely visible" and a minority of a minority; she claimed that this marginalization affects the mindset of the community, who feel that this is their lot in life. Ailine suggested that the economic injustice faced by the community serves to push people away from each other.

> It's the older folks who still hold onto the traditions and everything. And there's the young adult folk who are like, doesn't matter, I just want to make money for my family. So some of those cultural things are not that important (Ailine, February 26, 2015).

American born Tongans don't view community traditions or cohesion as highly as they do making money and surviving, and according to many people from the community, surviving financially is where priorities *should* be. Ailine, Malohi and Fina all suggested that Tongan Americans need to put their own self-interests above the community

interests. The phrase "prioritize yourself first" came up in almost every conversation with community leaders. In giving advice to her peers, Ailine said, "What are you gonna do about that for yourself? Not for the rest of us. Let's think about yourself first" (Ailine, February 26, 2015). This idea of individualism is in stark contrast with Tongan values of communalism. Essentially, leaders such as Malohi, Ailine and Sela advocate for shedding aspects of the Tongan value system, because by sticking to the Tongan system, you can't possibly survive in the American context. In discussing why many of her peers don't value education, Fina says that Tongan community members settle for jobs "throwing bags at the airport" or in construction so they can begin incurring an income to support their families.

> Especially girls my age, I'm like wow, you guys can do way better than this, throwing bags at the airport. You know? To them its easy money, you get to help out your parents. That's one thing, its like, why don't you help yourself first? Don't you care about your future? (Fina, January 30, 2015).

While Fina and Ailine encourage community cohesion as a vehicle for cultural empowerment, they also advocate for prioritizing yourself above the community in order to succeed in American society. There is embedded within this the idea that the community or culture might hold you back from success.

Economic injustice is not the only issue that the Tongan community in Los Angeles faces in maintaining social cohesion. Many Tongan Americans become involved in gang activity. Malohi is an example of a community member directly affected by Tongan involvement in gang violence; however, almost every participant I spoke with was affected in some way by the prevalence of gangs in the community. On speaking about her experience migrating to California, Ailine recalled that her parents decided to

move to a community without any Tongans so that she and her siblings wouldn't be affected by gang issues. Ailine's parents were forced to choose between their Tongan community and the safety of their family. They were not the only parents to make this decision; Sela was raised in East Los Angeles, away from the majority of the Tongan population. Though she still attended the Lennox church, she said of her parents' decision to raise her away from the community,

> I feel like my parents did that on purpose, because I think that was my parents' way of gang prevention. I hate to say that, because not all communities where Tongans live have gangs but that was the reality growing up. I have two brothers, and a lot of my cousins were in gangs…my parents wanted to make sure we were in a place that was safe (Sela, March 5, 2015).

This is another example of prioritizing the self over the community; despite working against Tongan communal values, it is an effort to survive and thrive in the American context. As mentioned previously, the communal aspect of Tongan culture is an essential way that children become socialized into the community. Through large kin and church networks situated in a small geographical area (Lennox), Tongan-American children accumulate cultural capital, form bonds with one another, learn the Tongan value system and create a backbone for a closed social network. It is clear that gang violence is pushing community members away from this opportunity. As Malohi explained, he was a victim of gang violence after leaving a cultural event at Lennox church; as a result of this regularly occurring violence, community members are hesitant to attend ceremonies or cultural events.

Many community leaders who are working towards cultural empowerment are impeded by gang violence in their work. For example, Sela and Fina are part of a team of leaders who established a community garden in Lennox Park, only a block away from the

Tongan church. The garden is used to plant traditional Tongan vegetables, encourage healthy eating, and teach the Tongan traditional value of agriculture and land use. In the same park, the group successfully advocated for the signs and instructions for fitness equipment to be in the Tongan language, as well as English and Spanish. They hoped to encourage the community to use the park as a resource for healthy living and community events and ceremonies. But, as Fina told me during our interview, there is a history of gang violence between the Mexican and Tongan gangs in Lennox, and "that's why it's hard for Tongans to go to Lennox Park, because of that history. Because Lennox Park is where the Mexican gang hangs out" (Fina, January 30, 2015). As such, many of the resources provided at this large public space are under-utilized by the Tongan community. Not only are they preventing cohesion, but gang issues are also changing the narrative of what it means to be Tongan. For example, Sela cited gangs as one of the "typical stereotypes that people have of Tongan people" (Sela, March 5, 2015). Many Tongan American youth feel that participating in Tongan gang activity is part of what it means to be Tongan, or exhibiting Tongan pride. Prevalent gang activity is therefore serving as a major challenge to creating a closed social network with members who are able to counter deficit perspectives (Rios-Aguilar et al, 2011, p. 170).

Like Malohi mentioned, community members feel that they lack the guidance to succeed. Despite initiatives by community leaders, Tongan Americans still feel socioeconomic pressures. Sela, in speaking about the initiatives she creates for the community, said "if you don't participate, you're not going to see any changes…I think a lot of Tongans, they just accept whatever is in front of them. They just accept it as is" (Sela, March 5, 2015). Sela is alluding to the community's need for guidance and leaders,

as well as self-motivation to create change. Leaders such as Sela, Ailine, Fina and Malohi recognize that their community "lacks guidance" and are working to fill those gaps.

Part of those gaps, according to Sela, is the inadequacy of many Tongan parents. Sela spoke at length about her parents' experiences in Tonga as subsistence farmers. As such, the information they chose to pass onto Sela and her siblings were "how to grow food for the family to eat, how to take care of your family, how to survive" (Sela, March 5, 2015). The experiences of Sela's parents, like many Tongan parents who are raising children in a different cultural context, differ vastly from the experiences of their children. As Sela said, "I feel like these parents, a lot of these parents are first generation parents here and I think they only know what they know from their experiences because they grew up in Tonga. But here, it's different" (March 5, 2015). Sela's comment makes evident that parents may not be able to provide the guidance that the community so desperately needs. Moving from a largely rural context to an incredibly urban one – Lennox has one of the highest population densities in Los Angeles – Sela's parents fell short of providing the guidance, discipline and education that is important to ensuring success for their children. Parents who immigrated to the United States and remain overly rooted in their Tongan heritage lack the desire to negotiate meaning and form identity in their new community, which can adversely affect their children. "The culture gap between successive generations frequently forces family members to negotiate the differences between the *palangi* [western] way and *anga fakatonga* [the Tongan way]" (Morton, 1998, p. 12). Furthermore, many parents are forced to work multiple jobs to support both their extended family in Los Angeles and their network in Tonga; this

results in the breakdown of the family structure, and many Tongan American children are left with a great amount of independence.

The last challenge faced by the community in an effort to create a cohesive and empowered population is that the traditions and values of the Tongan community are often viewed as detrimental, or working against the success of its members. Malohi spoke about the Tongan value of *kavenga*, or the duties and obligations you hold to your family and community. Many Tongan Americans feel the "burden" of being Tongan – of representing your entire lineage, of supporting an extended family, of full participation in traditions and of financial responsibilities. These burdens are part of *anga fakatonga* and maintaining traditional values. Part of this includes sending remittances to Tonga. Malohi felt strongly that people of influence in the community – church leaders for example – should be working to improve and invest in their Los Angeles community.

> Instead of that, they're investing in other things. Investing in people and churches back in Tonga. Somebody in Tonga would come and need help for money. My church would bend over backwards, help that person get money and be sent to Tonga. And we're left with the bill. Every single time. But that goes back to *kavenga*. *Kavenga* is fine, to a certain extent. But we need to concentrate on ourselves (Malohi, March 12, 2015).

Malohi feels that the community is working against itself, using all of its resources to provide for a place that Malohi, like many American born Tongans, has never even visited. Furthermore, the traditions and ceremonies that take place in the Diaspora require more money and more resources, because there is presumed access to these things. As Ailine explained,

> The way that things are practiced is a little different [in the US] because it depends on the access you have to resources and what kind of resources you have. The sentiment behind the traditions remains the same. Think about celebrations like weddings and birthdays, oh its way bigger now than it was at home [in Tonga]. It's like American, but raised to the power of Tongan!…People have

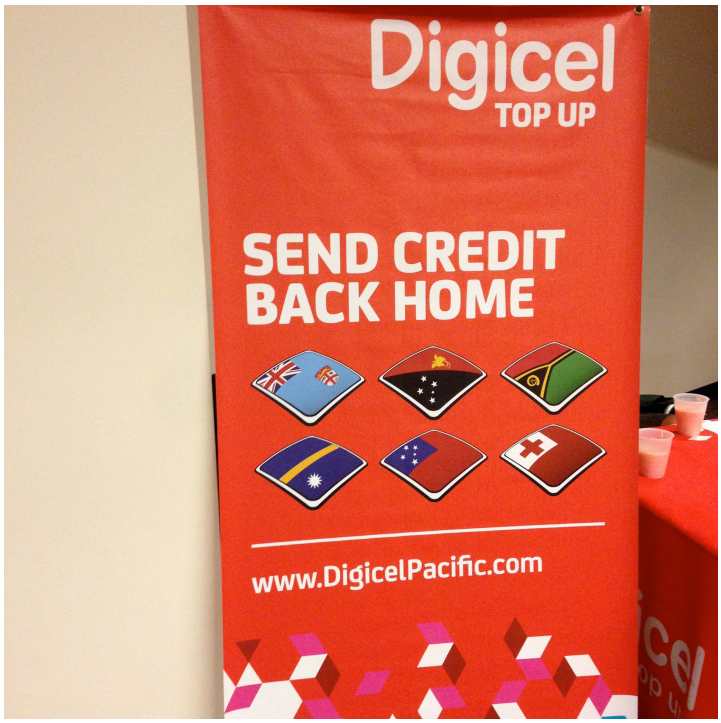
> access to more money so they get to rent out a ballroom at a hotel and have a 16th birthday with 25 cakes. You have the same celebration in Tonga, just at a smaller scale (Ailine, February 26, 2015).

Large celebrations are not restricted to personal and family milestones. Every so often, the church will have a feast – either a celebration of someone's accomplishments, or a fundraising event. Community members are expected to contribute hundreds of dollars worth of food and donations, sometimes forgoing rent and bills for the month in order to save face and represent the family through sizable contributions. As Maron and Connell (2008) wrote,

> Tongans in Western societies are rich – an illusion leading the homeland to request more and more money, consuming migrants' resources. This misconception, along with pressure on Tongan migrants to contribute to the church and other fund-raising drives, as a result of values instilled from an early age, emphasizes the familial obligations held by the migrants (p. 176).

As such, many Tongan Americans lack the financial literacy necessary to survive in American society, restarting the cycle of economic inequality. As a result, many of the values of Tongan culture – communalism, respect, familial duty – are viewed as burdensome by American-born Tongans, rather than tools for empowerment, reflecting the deficit mindset that funds of knowledge attempts to overcome.

Figure 6: Advertisement to remit cell phone credit back to Tonga at a local cultural even



Lio and Lavinia are a Tongan-born couple who migrated to the United States after they were married. After spending some years on the east coast, Lio felt that his community needed his guidance, and moved his family, including three children, to Los Angeles to work at the Tongan Community Service Center. He said that "we came back here because I wanted to work with the Tongans…people need to adjust, to come out of their coconut shells and smell the coffee. So that's why I wanted to come here and help them, hopefully break that barrier (Lio, March 20, 2015). Lavinia, a minister, decided to work in a non-Tongan, or *palangi*, church, though her family attends the Tongan church for important cultural functions. I spoke to the couple as a family with their eldest daughter. Immersed in their community yet with perspectives of outsiders, Lio and Lavinia spoke at length about the barriers to success for the community, many of them challenges generated from within. Lio, for example, agrees that members of the Tongan

community lack guidance. He says that "there are a lot of opportunities out there, but there is no one to show them the way" (Lio, March 20, 2015). An example of those opportunities that Lio speaks about is life insurance. According to the couple, funerals are long, expensive processes to which everyone in the community is expected to contribute. This is supported by Fua, Tuita, Kanongata'a and Fuko (2011), who described some of the expenses of a Tongan funeral:

> During a funeral, a family can spend money on catering services; on hiring tents, chairs, tables and a funeral car, and a cooler/freezer if the body is left for several days; on broadcasting the funeral announcement on radio; on video recording of the funeral; on hiring a PA system for the church service; and on purchasing a funeral casket, food, mats and tapa (p. 18).

Oftentimes, funerals can leave families without resources for basic needs. Lio says that the concept of life insurance is a 'foreign language' to Tongans coming from small islands such as Vava'u and Ha'apai; however, "when you talk about it, really explain it to them, this is life insurance and this is what it means, this is going to help you…so I'm saying, we need leaders" (Lio, March 20, 2015). Obtaining insurance is only one aspect of "coming out of their coconut shells" that Lio and Lavinia refer to. They speak about new immigrants' inability to manage finances, help their children succeed in school, and take advantage of new opportunities. For example, Lio further discusses the community's inability to adapt when he says,

> Some people can't figure out the difference between living in Tonga and living here. Living in Tonga, you don't pay rent, you don't pay mortgage. So whatever small money you get you can give to the church, and grow your own plantation and go fishing. A lot of people grow their own vegetables, so you don't buy a lot. Here, you pay for everything. And then you give so much money to the church where it's not necessary, do all of this feasting where its not necessary. That's a lot of money wasted. And at the end of the day, you still have to pay all of these bills, you can't skip them. So in a way, people can't figure out how to budget. They work in the bush in Vava'u, get off the place, come here and don't know how to budget. So there is a lot of learning (Lio, March 20, 2015).

With one foot in the *palangi* community and one foot in the Tongan community, Lio and Lavinia have perspective on what its like to be a new immigrant from Tonga, as well as the depth of the issues that their community faces. Critical of many of the decisions made in the community, they advocate for adequate leadership, as well as practicing as a community. Lavinia stresses that the community needs to form a reliable network, with community members filling in the gaps where others are lacking. "If we work as a network, we will be able to do a lot of stuff. You know, we can move mountains, just working together" (Lavinia, March 20, 2015). Lavinia is referring to the importance of a closed social network, and the potential that this powerful tool can have for overcoming these challenges.

Chapter Six: Community Structure

6.1 Forming a Collective Identity

Given the background on modes of cultural transmission and socialization discussed in chapter five, how is a collective identity then formed in the Tongan community? The word community has particular meaning in the Tongan context – it is family and support system, no matter how large. There is a sense of responsibility for everyone in the community, both financially and psychologically. Ailine described her home growing up when she said,

> You don't just grow up in your home with your nuclear family. I grew up in a home where there were at least 25 young adults that ranged from kindergarten all the way to working professionals. A lot of my relatives sent their kids to live with my parents because they knew my parents were huge advocates for education, and really emphasized and supported education" (Ailine, February 26, 2015).

Ailine's experience of growing up in a home with an extended familial network is not unique to her family alone; The English words for family members – brother and sister, for example- denote a sense of individualism; Tongan culture is instead an extremely collective society. Social customs are based on group interests. The terms that closely refer to male vs. female in Tongan society are *tuonga'ne* (all brothers or male cousins/community members of a female) and t*uofefine* (all sisters and female cousins/community members of a male). All kinship terms in Tongan refer to groups that embrace members of a family (Helu, 1995, p. 191) rather than individuals within the nuclear family, and this remains true today; Ailine described child rearing in the Tongan community as "we all raise these kids together" (Ailine, February 26, 2015). Helu emphasized this on his work about gender and familial relations in ancient and modern Tonga; he wrote,

> The building block of society [in Tonga] was the *kainga*, the extended family or clan. The nuclear family…was never society. Even today a sense of the nuclear family being outside society i.e. as not material to the sort of interactions regarded by Tongans as part of social action, still remains (1995, p. 192).

The idea that the community is also an extended familial network plays out at church; church has already been described as an important place for socialization, but its important to emphasize the role that church plays in the Tongan community. It is the stronghold and the focal point of the extended web. Church plays a much larger role than just a religious institution in the Tongan community in Los Angeles. It is a physical gathering place for the micro-community that many Tongans feel is their support system in the larger Los Angeles world. Ailine described this when she refers to church as

> The village structure of existence…it's the only time and the only place where you get to see each other, together as a community. Because once you leave church, you are part of this overall bigger community where you don't see people like you (Ailine, February 26, 2015).

Ailine does perfect justice to the importance of church when she describes it as the "village structure of existence." Not only are members expected to support the institution financially, but also each other. For example, when a member of the church dies, the entire community contributes to the funeral and ceremonies that go along with it. When someone from the church is in need, it is expected that the entire community will provide physical assistance, whether its money, food or even shelter. This is the Tongan value of *kavenga*, or a responsibility to your family and community. Maintaining these values and the tradition of communalism – both at church and in the family network – help maintain a sense of community between Tongan Americans. While micro-communities do form, for example between peer and social groups, many Tongan Americans define their

community as the safety net of the church and family, further proving the importance of communalism and the potential for social capital.

6.2 Participating in Community: Negotiating Meaning Together

When migration from Tonga began to happen at a rapid pace, a linguistic term was developed for the Diaspora community. *Anga fakatonga*, or 'the Tongan way', refers to what extent a Tongan person upholds their traditional values and culture in their new context. Tongans in the United States began to measure themselves as more or less Tongan than their neighbors or family; however, what constitutes someone's level of Tonganness remains dubious. Taking Ailine as an example, she felt "very much more Tongan" than her American-raised cousins, because culture was reinforced at home. On the other hand, Pacific Islander students called her "whitewashed" because she didn't associate primarily with other Tongans. Determining someone's level of *anga fakatonga* is therefore not black and white, giving the term ambiguous meaning. Morton (1998) wrote, "because *anga fakatonga* is such a broad concept, there is a 'Tongan Way' to do almost anything, from the simplest ordinary activities to the most elaborate ceremonial events. Thus, within each immigrant household, choices are continually made about the extent to which members will follow *anga fakatonga*" (p. 13). Much like identity, acting the Tongan Way doesn't mean just one thing.

For many Tongan-Americans, identity can be complicated. Sela, like almost every member of the community that I spoke with, used the terms "Hawaiian" and "Samoan" to define herself to others, indicative of her deeper feelings of marginalization. As Wenger (1998) noted about identity, "building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experiences of membership in social communities" (p. 145). Identity is an

intersection of the social and the individual; thus, identifying oneself as a member of different communities or ethnic groups does not serve justice to the lived experience of one's identity. In a sense, the constant comparison or reference of Hawaiian and Samoan serves as the opposite of empowerment. This is evident when, as Ailine explains, "a lot of the clubs at high schools are called Polynesian clubs, even if it's all Tongan. Because I think Polynesian just sounds more appealing! Everybody knows what a Polynesian is, even if you don't know what a Tongan is" (Ailine, February 26, 2015). Ailine views these clubs as a form of cultural appropriation and perpetuation of muddled identities and stereotypes. These stereotypes have a tendency to dictate the narrative of what it means to be Tongan. Sela calls her generation of American-born Tongans "The Lost Generation." She says about The Lost Generation that

> I totally feel like they internalize some of these stereotypes and that there are so many things out there to explore…people like me, and other community leaders, we work so hard to fight those stereotypes off (Sela, March 5, 2015).

Sela believes that her generation is "lost" because they use stereotypes to shape identity. She remembers that growing up, "it was difficult to define who I was" (Sela, March 5, 2015). As such, she spoke of the disconnect between her and her parents' generations, and her lack of cultural knowledge. As Wenger noted, "the encounter between generations is much more complex than the mere transmission of heritage. It is an interlocking of identities, with all the conflicts and mutual dependencies this entails" (1998, p. 157). Coming to terms with generational disconnect has been part of Sela's process of both identity formation and community cohesion. Attempting to understand where she comes from, as well as what makes her Tongan in the American context, has been part of the socialization into the Tongan American community. Part of this battle

that Sela talks about, and many Tongan Americans face, is also the conflict between American and Tongan values. Fina was faced with this conflict when she moved to Los Angeles and began to meet people from other cultures, sometimes preferring their values or traditions to Tongan ones. While Fina is heavily involved in the Tongan church and other Tongan community initiatives as a leader, she also identifies as an undocumented student. She explained, "for me specifically, I don't click with the Tongans out here. At school I don't hang out with Tongans. Because I feel like, I'm an undocumented student and when I'm with them, they are spoiled citizens and I'm over here struggling" (Fina, January 30, 2015). As a result, Fina's exposure to different cultures and cultural values forces her to pit them against her own value system. This is especially true in her relationship with her boyfriend, who is not Tongan. She says that

> Sometimes I just forget, I can't do this or I can't do that, because I'm like, there are no other Tongans around, so I'm not Tongan right now…because I'm learning so much interesting stuff so I'm like, oh my, I can't believe I believed that! There's so much better stuff out there in the world! Especially relationships in American culture. You know, you guys move in together. I had a really hard time with my boyfriend because I was going back and forth. Should I do it? I really love this guy, I really wanna move in with him, but just thinking about, no, you're the oldest daughter, you can't do this. Our culture does not accept this. That's really important for my family, so I couldn't do it (Fina, January 30, 2015).

Fina finds herself questioning her own value system when provided with options of "better stuff out there." She believes that because she was raised in Tonga, she feels more compelled to choose the Tongan Way; she noted that "I see a lot of people out here, and I envy them. Sometimes, I wish I grew up here" (Fina, January 30, 2015). Fina laments what she refers to as the "burdens" of her culture, but her desire for "better stuff" contributes to the formation of her identity as a Tongan American. Despite exposure to new value systems, she willingly chooses the Tongan Way, and continues to be a leader

and advocate for social change for the community. In a way, for Fina, getting lost in the Americanness of things enhances commitment to her own community; she feels a sense of responsibility to her traditions and to the community in which she was raised in Tonga.

Despite Fina's envy and idea that they lack this conflict, American-born Tongans feel a similar struggle between American and Tongan values. Sela finds herself at odds with fitting Tongan values into her American context. She explained that coming to terms with her identity as an American Tongan was often difficult; for example, reconciling gender inequality in the Tongan context with her own American value system was difficult to balance. However, learning to come to terms with multiple value systems helped her to form her cultural identity. Sela worked hard to determine what was important, and why. She spoke to family and community members, elders and friends in an attempt to reconcile her various values. The ability to negotiate these meanings and engage in action with her community is a key piece to increasing a community's cultural wealth: communally negotiated meanings and mutual reconciliation of varying value systems. Sela, like Fina, found power and comfort in finding meaning in her Tongan values. For example, Sela said that after speaking with her parents and elders about their values,

> Some of them still didn't make sense to me at the time, but now that I'm older they make total sense. Like the value of love and respect. I feel like it's hard to explain it in English because there's a type of love and respect in the Tongan context that's just worldly, and a lot of people don't understand it. But there's something so rich and beautiful about the culture (Sela, March 5, 2015).

When faced with multiple identities, many Tongan Americans find their Tongan identity as the most prevalent, or more meaningful of their identities. This is particularly true for the Tongan language. Many American-born Tongans speak some level of Tongan,

though many claim that they are "not even confident enough to speak to an elder" (Sela, March 5, 2015). Even if they only speak a low level of the language, many Tongan Americans are in agreement that a sentence is more meaningful in their traditional language. As Fina explained,

> When you say something in Tongan it comes off to you like really, 'aw shit, I need to do this!' Like, damn! It hits you harder! But in English, it just sounds so easy. Like lecturing and stuff, when you say it in English its meaningless. But when they say it in Tongan, it hits you hard! (Fina, January 30, 2015)

Fina finds that language, particularly discipline, has more meaning in Tongan than English; she noted that her cousins, who speak minimal Tongan, understand that a situation is truly serious when their parents switch to Tongan. Mutual understandings of when, how and where to use certain codes play a central role in forming the identity of that community.

Feeling connected through language also assists in strengthening the bond of the family, and willingness to maintain familial roles and values. Familial roles are some of the more outward ways that Tongan Americans define themselves as distinct within the American context. The value of respect between siblings and the hierarchical nature of Tongan society is unique, and provides a sense of community between those who share these values. As Ailine noted, she defines feeling Tongan by "the use of language and knowing how to treat elders, and certain ways you speak to certain people and knowing different roles in the family, how those things are observed…" (Ailine, February 26, 2015). Participating in these traditions creates a sense of consistency and unity between Tongan Americans. In speaking about the value of respect between brothers and sisters, for instance, Sela said spoke about respect between siblings in her home, and how that tradition was "just normal growing up. I knew it meant something because my parents

were strict about it, but as I got older I began to understand the importance of that and how it definitely strengthens the bond of the family" (Sela, March 5, 2015). Respect, or *faka'apa'apa* is a central value to *anga fakatonga* (Morton, 1998, p. 14), and was stressed in almost every interview I conducted. Sela recognizes the importance of this value, and the bond that she speaks of transcends her familial unity; Sela feels she can connect to anyone in her Tongan community based on these values. As such, the values practiced everyday at home are more important than just preservation of traditional culture; they create a community with an effectively closed network. The outcome of the formation of a viable community provides the backbone for an empowered community, able to resist the structured forms of marginalization in American society. Sela discusses the strength and wisdom of her culture in her work in obesity prevention. In mentioning ways that Tongan Americans can make small changes in their diet, she said,

> My mom is starting to use coconut oil for cooking instead of all that bad oil. And you know what's funny? This is stuff that we've been doing. This is stuff that our ancestors did, our grandparents and great-grandparents. When it comes to food, I guess Western influence has definitely had a role in the contribution of obesity in our health. So we're just trying to take it back to basics (Sela, March 5, 2015).

Community leaders like Sela and Ailine refer back to their ancestors often in trying to empower their community. By encouraging the strength of a unified community and their traditional customs and "reminding them that they come from a culture of warriors" (Ailine, February 26, 2015), they believe that they can provide their community with the strength to survive and thrive together. As Ailine poses to her community "What are you learning about yourself? What are you exploring for opportunities? Because now that you know who you are, you can explore why things are the way they are" (Ailine, February

26, 2015). By forming an individual identity in line with that of the community, Tongan Americans can have the strength to create social change from within.

Chapter Seven: Language as a Tool for Empowerment

7.1 Constructing Norms Through Code Switching

The following analysis will survey the language ideologies of Tongan community members, and the important role that language plays in creating a cohesive community. Members of the Tongan community demonstrate a degree of metalinguistic awareness – the ability to speak about their relationship with language, code switching, and ideology. While learning to communicate is an experience that almost everyone has, learning to talk about communication is a unique skill. According to Jaworski, Coupland and Galasinkski (2004), there are many factors that influence children's development of the ability to reflect on language. One of the major factors is a child's experience learning two languages simultaneously in a bilingual environment (p. 3). Speakers of multiple languages have the ability to "decontextualize their language and realize that they speak two distinct languages…[and] exhibit a variety of metalinguistic behaviors, for example, they begin to translate spontaneously and ask for translations, use tag constructions according to their linguistic affiliation, and sharply reduce mixing of the two codes" (Jaworski et al, 2004, p. 4). Bilingual speakers of English and Tongan display the ability to differentiate between the two codes - when and how to use them, as well as the sociocultural norms and constructions that are attached to those codes. This is evidence of a distinct speech community, in which a group of speakers "share a set of norms for the interpretation of language, as reflected in their treatment of linguistic variables: patterns of social stratification, style shifting, and subjective evaluations" (Labov, 1989, p. 2). One important way to demonstrate membership in a speech community is through code switching (Lo, 1999, p. 462), which involves the sharing of norms.

Fina bemoaned the fact that her American-raised cousins were not able to speak Tongan fluently, but she lauded their ability to code-switch, and the central role that the language plays in their lives. As is evident in the transcription below, Fina believes that an utterance in Tongan can have a very different meaning than the same utterance in English.

Fina: Um, sometimes in Tongan? I feel like the language is more (1.5) when you say something in Tongan it's it comes off to you:: like really:: (.5) like aw shit I need to do this then ***like*** you know its like ***damn***. It like hits you harder like ***damn***, ok, I'm gunna listen to you. But *(hh)* when it comes off in like English, it just sounds so easy, like, oh~whatever.

Alex: Yeah::
[
Fina: Yeah *(hhhhhhhh)* like lecturing and stuff like that? When they say it in English its like, meaningless. But when *(hhhh)* they *(hhhh)* say *(hhhh)* it in Tongan, it hits *(hh)* you hard, its like ok *(hhh)* I'm gunna change my ways.

Fina provided an example of both English and Tongan as part of the community linguistic repertoire (Blom & Gumperz, 2000, p. 113), or all of the linguistic resources that speakers employ in significant social interactions. Speakers employ situational switching, in which speakers select between the two languages as the social situation demands. In Fina's example, it is not the situation that dictates language choice as much as the speaker's choice to produce a particular situation or meaning through code switching. By switching to Tongan when disciplining, parents use the Tongan language as part of an agentive act to make a situation more serious. It is mutually understood within the community that Tongan is the language of discipline. This mutual understanding is what makes the Tongan language – and the ability to code-switch – an

essential characteristic of the speech community. The use of code switching to change the meaning of a situation is an example of the shared worldviews, tacit practice and underlying assumptions that form the glue of the Tongan community, demonstrating the importance of not only language, but bilingualism, to the network.

7.2 Negotiating Meaning Through Speech

The idea that the Tongan language projects distinct social realities was further discussed by Malohi. When asked what he thinks is the best place for Tongan children in the Diaspora to learn the Tongan language, he responded:

15 Church…you know when you're there, you are not just there by
16 yourself = you're there with other kids. You're just conversating::
17 you know back and forth. Especially with the older people. You
18 know the way when they tell us to do certain things, its always in
19 our language. Cuz you know:: they can say it in our language and it
20 comes with a cursing word right after that you know like ***get it done***
21 And you're like (hhhh) ***alright***. (1) Yeah that's how we learn our
22 language. Church would be a good place.

Malohi emphasized utterances representing other speakers (the elders) by stressing their words in lines 20 and 21; the emphasis, represented by bold italics, is proof of the seriousness of a statement spoken in Tongan. Malohi demonstrated here linguistic markedness, which "posits that speakers are rational actors who use the linguistic form that is indexical of the social role they wish to present in a particular interaction" (Hall & Nilep, 2015, p. 602). There is an assumption within the community of locally shared understandings of the link between specific languages and social meanings. All members of this speech community share the understanding of the function of each language. As such, speakers are producing intentional meanings by choosing a certain language. According to Galambos and Goldin-Meadow (1990), "each choice of a linguistic form or

language variety is strategic, i.e. it is part of the speaker's communicative competence, and his/her sense of how each utterance fits in their linguistic universe and what it can achieve for them" (p. 27). As Malohi says, "you know (line 19)" that when elders speak in Tongan, it "comes with a curse word (line 20)," meaning that the situation becomes more serious. Switching codes relies on the "speaker's internalized knowledge of other linguistic forms, and that their choices are always 'meta' choices as they copy, approximate or contrast with other language forms" (Galambos & Goldin-Meadow, 1990, p. 27). When the elders switch from English to Tongan, they contrast the two languages, creating a sense of seriousness in the Tongan code that doesn't exist in English. As such, being a member of a speech community does not just mean knowing how to speak a language, but also knowing how to say things with sure knowledge of their appropriateness (Dorian, 1982, p. 31) in particular social interactions.

7.3 "It's Only Funny In Your Language"

The conscious choice to use a specific linguistic code in the community is not tied to discipline alone; there are varying ways that members of the community make meaning through code choice. Karen speaks about her relationship to the Tongan language, her shifting ideologies and the way that the language contributes to her identity construction.

23 Um when I was younger? they would say:: speak Tongan at home,
24 and speak English at school = so we don't lose our language, and I
25 would always get mad, like, what do we have to speak Tongan for
26 = we're not there, You know = You don't need to communicate
27 with people here in Tongan. It's you know, everything is English.
28 So:: I wouldn't speak Tongan, like I understood it:: I wouldn't
29 speak it:: = And then probably around like (.5) little bit after high
30 school I started speaking you know like ***fluently***. I always (did)
31 knew how but I never ***wanted*** to communicate in Tongan. It almost
32 felt weird listening to myself carry on a conversation in my own
33 language because we are in America you know

There are varying degrees of Karen's awareness of language ideologies here; she understand why members of her community might have an aversion to the Tongan language in line 25-27, yet she is also conscious of the role that the language plays in the development of her Tongan identity. Language in this case serves as a joint enterprise for Karen and her peers. According to Wenger, "in some communities, disagreement can be viewed as a productive part of the enterprise. The enterprise is joint not in that everybody believes the same thing or agrees with everything, but in that it is communally negotiated" (1998, p. 78). The pursuit of this joint enterprise contributes to a closed social network, in which cohesiveness of the community is further gained. As a young child, Karen disagreed with the importance of the language, which led to the communal negotiation of how, when and why the language is important. She goes on to explain,

34 but (.5) its funny because (1)(?) me and some other girls would um
35 (1) kinda like a leadership role at church? where we would do
36 activities for the youth and stuff, so:: one of the questions um that
37 they ***ask***ed us that was funny was:: um how come you don't teach
38 them Tongan? You know and we said, that's not our:: duty~that
39 starts at home wich your parents. And then, we would um laugh and
40 joke in our language, and they wouldn't understand it you know but
41 those stories or those jokes that you translate English and you're
42 like, that's not funny at all you know it's only funny in your
43 language. And um, they would say what are you guys talking about
44 or:: I don't get why that's funny or:: you know stuff like that and
45 we would say well:: you need to learn your language.

As she grew older, Karen developed a sense of connectedness with her community and her identity through the use of the Tongan language. By negotiating language ideologies, mutual accountability of all involved is produced. This is demonstrated when somebody asks Karen "how come you don't teach them Tongan? (Lines 37-38)" It is recognized that Tongan language serves a particular purpose in this community, and that everyone

involved in the community is mutually accountable for the production of the practice. Karen's story about the youth in her church group not understanding her jokes in lines 39-42 demonstrates her dissatisfaction with English as a medium of expression, and is an example of "the sense that speakers have of how two or more codes at their disposal are to be deployed, under what circumstances, and to what end" (Garrett, 2005, p. 334). Karen is expressing her language ideology that is rooted in the idea that certain sentiments and experiences may seem forced, artificial or inauthentic in English (Garrett, 2005, p. 334). As Kroskrity (2010) explains, "language users' ideologies bridge their sociocultural experience and their linguistic and discursive resources by constituting those linguistic and discursive forms as indexically tied to features of their sociocultural experience" (p. 200). Karen is effectively displaying the influence of her consciousness of the selection of code and systems it constructs (Kroskrity, 2010, p. 200). As an agent, Karen understands the value of knowing her heritage language and the different levels of meaning it can convey, and she uses this knowledge to create different meanings. She continued to explain that as a result of being able to joke in Tongan,

46 And I was ***thankful*** that I was able to speak my language because (1) I
47 can communicate with my own people:: ***in public***, without nobody?
48 knowing what we're saying? nothing to be :: rude:: or anything, but.
49 You know its just um a difference (?) of connection. We can talk about
50 the same thing in English:: but you say it in Tongan:: it just I'd say it's
51 more meaningful. You feel more connected.

Karen became thankful (line 46) that she could speak her language because she could communicate with members of her own speech community (line 47) in a more

meaningful way. Language became the resource through which Karen and her peers make meaning together as a closed network and speech community.

The way that Karen and other members of the Tongan community view the Tongan language, and their use of different codes to convey different meanings, creates not only individual identities, but also a collective identity that will hold the community together. According to Garrett (2005), certain codes lack the attention and immediacy that others have; "in addition to impediments such as lexical gaps (real or perceived), there is a deeply felt sense that the insult would not be as cutting, the gossip not as juicy, the scold not responded to with sufficient alacrity; that the joke would fall flat, or that uttering the curse would be, at best, less than satisfying" (p. 334). This is evident in Fina, Malohi and Karen's statements about the Tongan language: choosing one code over another adds force to a statement, as if an imaginary actor is propelling a statement to be funnier, angrier, and more meaningful.

7.4 Tongan Language and Community Cultural Wealth

While language use and language ideologies have the power to create and maintain a cohesive social network, there are many challenges that the Tongan community in Los Angeles face in identity formation through language. For example, Lio and Lavinia discussed raising Tongan children in the United States.

Alex: And what language do you speak with them at home?

Lavinia: Unfortunately we speak English (*hh*). Both of us, we speak ***Tongan***.

[

Lio: We do both::, but like she said, we need to really -

[

Lavinia: Yeah we need to work on that. There are times you know I said = go get the blanket we say it in Tongan. They turn (*hh*) around and say ***what (hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh) what***

[

Lio: We use to tell them in Tongan, go get that! And we don't get it -

Alex: (*hhh*) So can I ask why um was that like a conscious decision that you made to speak English at home? Or did it just happen that way?

Lavinia: It just happened, um I spend most of my time speaking English because I work here, and the kids they go to school, they speak English so obviously (*hhhhh*) we yeah we tend to just do that. Um -

[

Lio: yeah, it was unconscious -

Lavinia: ***It was an unconscious thing***, but that's why we are planning on one (1) one summer time, which is next year. We are planning for next year to take them to Tonga for the whole summer. So that they will:: It's faster when you go to Tonga, and people:: you have no choice but speak Tongan, right? (*hhhhh*)

Lio: Like I said it comes with priorities. For us um you know for us just coming from Tonga fresh off the boat:: all you wanna do first you know is try to survive. Right? We didn't come with money from Tonga, right? So we need to::

[

Lavinia: Yeah::

Lio: learn to survive = so instead of trying to teach our kids to:: you know speak in Tongan, we try to get some ***bread***.

[

Lavinia: (*hhhhhhhh*)

[

Lio: The language will come later. We try to get something for them to eat first.

Lio and Lavinia are demonstrating the most crucial challenge for the Tongan language in California – economic injustice. The couple makes it clear that the Tongan language is associated as a low-prestige language; knowing it won't contribute to the success or ability to thrive in American society. As Dorian (1998) explains,

> Parents in these circumstances will make a conscious or unconscious decision not to transmit the ancestral language to their children, and yet another language will be lost. The power of social forces involved is evidently considerable, since under better circumstances attachment to an ancestral mother tongue is usually strong (p. 3).

Lio is more concerned with getting bread on the table (line 94) than transmitting the Tongan language; he makes it especially clear that providing economically is his priority with the word bread (line 94), changing the pitch of his voice to emphasize the importance of this concept.

Though both parents speak Tongan natively, they choose to speak English in an effort to survive. Lio refers to his Tongan community members as lacking the mentality to survive and thrive in the United States due to a tendency to maintain traditional ways when he says, "unfortunately, they live in a big environment but they still have this coconut shell mentality. They need to wake up in order to have the opportunities" (Lio & Lavinia, March 20, 2015). Lio and Lavinia are proponents of adjusting one's priorities, and the Tongan language falls below income generation and education for them. In a sense, Lio and Lavinia are a case of prestige transfer (Dorian, 1998), in which those who don't have the physical resources of prestige (money, for example) attempt to gain other attributes that are easier to acquire or imitate, such a language. Language serves as an impediment in the eyes of Lio and Lavinia to the success and accessibility to prestige that they want for themselves and their family.

According to Dorian, “material well-being has been intimately linked to the adoption of dominant languages for a very long time, and the reality of that linkage is undeniable” (1998, p. 20). While there is clearly an institutional obstacle to Tongan language maintenance, Fina, Malohi and Karen demonstrated above that the decision to use a specific language is incredibly agentive; speakers make conscious decisions when and how to use certain codes. Acceptance or rejection of the Tongan language is a process that must come from within the social web of the community. The community must also negotiate together as agents to determine how and when Tongan should be used. Lio and Lavinia make it clear that they want their children to speak English in order to ensure their success; English as a lingua franca in the globalized world should not be overlooked. Instead of avoiding it, the community should maintain coexistence between the two codes. As such, it is necessary to develop strategies that prevent English from invading the domains of Tongan. This may be achieved by strict compartmentalization – differentiating the roles of the two languages so they are reserved for different functions that don’t overlap (Otsuka, 2007, p. 462). Karen, Malohi and Fina all demonstrate the ability to compartmentalize, as well as the ability to view Tongan as having an important social function. The decision to use certain codes is not the only place where agency is necessary in preserving the use of the Tongan language in a language community; it is also the role that language can play in the success of the community. When acceptance of the language comes from within, the ideologies of the language and what it can provide can be seen as a partner to prosperity. Lio and Lavinia believe that the use of the Tongan language before English is a perpetuation of the “coconut shell mindset” that prohibits success for Tongan Americans. This concept is further explained by Kroskrity (2010),

who explained, “many children learn to see deficiency in their language skills and view the linguistic feat of their code-switching as nothing more than a crutch-like compensation for their imperfect command of either language” (Kroskrity, p. 204).

Instead of viewing the Tongan language as a potential deficiency or setback, community members should view their ability to code-switch as a positive attribute, or part of their community cultural wealth. The development of bilingual skills is a unique and inherent attribute for Tongan Americans, and one that should not be overlooked in seeking sources of community empowerment. Lio and Lavinia are proof that language maintenance can be a socioeconomic issue; they prioritize economic and educational success as separate from and more important than Tongan language acquisition (lines 89-99). However, prioritizing English over Tongan can prove to have a negative effect on members of the community. According to Sela, in her work as a health advocate in the Tongan community,

> I wish I was a little bit more invested in it growing up, because now it definitely has a downfall; I’m not fluent in the language and I wish I was. I’m not even confident enough to speak to an elder in Tongan, because of the insecurity I have of not saying things in the way that they are supposed to be said, especially when you’re speaking to an elder. Or pronouncing something wrong, or you might say something offensive. It’s a downfall now because I’m working directly with the Tongan community…it’s something that I struggle with, because part of my Tongan identity is the language (Sela, March 5, 2015).

As a result of her inability to communicate with members of her community, both Sela and the members are negatively affected. Sela is not able to perform her job to the best of her ability, and the community loses valuable information on health that Sela could have potentially provided. Language is much more than part of Sela’s individual identity; it is also the key to empowerment and increasing the cultural wealth of the social network. In order to ensure the maintenance of the language for American-born generations, the

community must create a cohesive means of practice. As Dorian pointed out, "a linguistically distinctive population which has come to have poor standing needs to discover or develop some basis for increased self regard in order to withstand pressures for ancestral-language abandonment and shift to a dominant-group language" (1998, p. 14). One of the sources of self-regard is identified as increasing economic success. Prosperity can boost social self-confidence while also providing the resources for institutional language-maintenance efforts that might otherwise seem prohibitively expensive (Dorian, 1998, p. 14). An ideological perspective that sheds a positive light on learning the Tongan language, its social indexicality and the importance of bilingualism will contribute to a cohesive language community and the potential for empowerment from within.

7.5 Conclusion

While there are many factors that contribute to the maintenance of a closed social network, language is an important piece of community cohesion. In the Tongan community in Los Angeles, community cohesion is particularly important; through language community, members can work together towards cultural empowerment, thus overcoming many of the social and economic obstacles that they currently face. Members of the Tongan language community often display metalinguistic awareness; by speaking about their experience with language practices and ideologies, they recognize the role that language plays in the creation of identity and the making of social meaning. Speakers are agents in the production of certain situations, and give meaning to their worlds based on their ability to code-switch. By code switching, speakers are making strategic choices

in the meaning they wish to convey, which relies on mutual understanding and negotiation between other members of the community. Through these implicit understandings, speakers are participating in the language community and a collective identity is formed. With this cohesion, members are better prepared as a collective unit to conceive of their bilingualism as a positive attribute; with positive language ideologies, self-confidence is raised and the potential for increased community cultural wealth is possible.

Chapter Eight: Peer Leadership

8.1 A Focused Group: The Pacific Islander Student Alliance

In chapter two, I reflected if a focus group with different voices could be seen as a single unit of analysis. For the purpose of this chapter, I view the group as very much a single unit. While the group is comprised of seven distinct voices with varying opinions and identities, they reflect the characteristics of a closed social network that practices as a community. Through mutual engagement, a shared ideology and a common enterprise, the group is a strong unified force to be reckoned with. In this chapter, I use the group as an example of a cohesive community; by nature of this claim, I have analyzed their discussion as a single unit, rather than attempting to pick out individual ideologies.

Of the seven girls who made up the Tongan contingent of the Pacific Islander Student Alliance at a University of California campus, only a few had been to Tonga. Their experiences as Tongan-American university students provide a shared ideology that reflects a closed social network. Thus, the social capital of the group is strong, particularly during the time of year when they are working together to produce an annual cultural show. Their pursuit of a shared enterprise – the cultural show – helps the group work as a community, in sync about what needs to be done and the best routes to complete it.

On a warm Monday evening, the group gathered in United Methodist Grace Church – a Vietnamese church near campus that lends its space for the group to practice for the cultural show. Salote, who I was referred to through Ailine, is balancing a few boxes of Dominoes' Pizza and bags of Cheetos as she walks into the room, placing the

food on a table with other snacks contributed by two other girls who have already arrived. As we wait for the other members of the group, I speak with Emily, a senior member. She is telling me about this year's show; each member is assigned a country in Poly, Micro and Melanesia, and has to research a current indigenous movement in that country. They will integrate their research into the songs and dances at this year's show. Emily is researching Hawaii, and tells me about the telescopes being placed on the slopes of Mauna Kea, and the student movement to protect the sacred site. Emily speaks about the importance of adding critical consciousness to the show.

"We wanted to make it more than just a luau this year. It was Salote's idea." The critical consciousness aspect of the show was clearly of great importance to the girls; as I sat down with them for a mostly unstructured group discussion, the conversation focused on identity, what it means to be Tongan in the American context, and how that shapes community. Each group member spoke at length, often responding to comments made by their peers. We sat in a circle, some on couches or chairs, others on the floor. The girls spoke about components of their lives that helped shape their identities, whether it was church, school or peer groups. Their discussion reflected much of what I had observed in previous observations and interviews, namely the community's ability to practice together in the most effective way that I had witnessed it play out – in peer-led environments (Observation, April 27, 2015).

8.2 Peer-led Learning for Higher Competencies

Some of the more effective spaces for pedagogy happen in peer-led, non-formal learning environments. According to Topping (2005), "peer learning can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among

status equals or matched companions. It involves people from similar social groupings helping each other to learn and learning themselves by doing so" (p. 631). There has been much written on the positive impact of peer learning spaces, often referred to as cooperative learning (CL). "The research evidence is clear that both peer tutoring and cooperative learning can yield significant gains in academic achievement in the targeted curriculum area. In the case of CL, this can be for all members of the group" (Topping, 2005, p. 635). In the Tongan context, these are networks of learning that take place without the supervision of teachers or adults. This is a stray from provisionism – the idea that all education must be mediated and regulated by a higher power. CL spaces have specific organizational dimensions, including role continuity, volunteerism, objectives, time and place. They function as highly organized systems in which student and teacher have the opportunity to learn from one another, as they are all in the same or similar peer group, or micro-community. Furthermore, peer learning has been noted to be among the most cost-effective learning strategies, an important characteristic for the Tongan community in particular. The following is a discussion of three peer-led spaces in which pedagogical practice is structured and successful in the Tongan community.

8.3 Peer-Led Experiences

I had been to the Lennox church a few times, and noticed that different people upheld different responsibilities each week. This Sunday, a teenage girl in a patterned dress stood at the podium and spoke in fluid Tongan. An older man was standing on the ground below her facing the pews filled with youth. He spoke to them in a thick accent.

"See how fluent she is in Tongan? Who here can speak like that?"

He smiled and scanned the rows for someone to volunteer. A few grumbles pervaded the audience, some uncomfortable shifting, but nobody raised their hand. The man spoke again.

"What about tomorrow? There is no school tomorrow, how will you spend your holiday?" He continued to speak to the youth, darting between Tongan and English. He was encouraging the young people to learn their language, to participate.

The young woman who had been praised for her Tongan remained at the altar, smiling shyly. When the man was finished speaking and took a seat, she began the week's sermon. She started in Tongan, but began to weave between both languages. Often, she would speak in Tongan and immediately translate what she had said. She had the youth's attention – one of their peers, guiding them through the week's religious and cultural traditions (Observation, February 8, 2015).

In my interview with Fina, she had explained that different people are expected to uphold different responsibilities in the church each week. The ability to carry through this tradition as a young adult is a result of participation in youth group activities, in which younger group members see their older peers and siblings in leadership positions. Their own desire to be in these positions will be attained within a few short years.

In this section, I will provide examples of three effective peer-led spaces that I observed during my research with the Tongan community. Two of the examples – preparation for the *fakame'* and the Pacific Islander Student Alliance (PISA) group – are micro-communities working towards a shared enterprise. The final example – *Ta'ahine*

'o Moana – details a group of women with a shared ideology. In each case, peer-leadership serves as an effective way of increasing the community's cultural wealth.

8.3.1 Preparation for the *fakame'*

Religious, cultural and youth group activities are often seen as informal learning; in the Tongan community, the integration of youth groups into cultural and religious life is highly structured, and allows for the cohesion of the community. For example, Salote, a focus group participant who was raised as a member of the Lennox church, said that

> At church, we are more traditional. We hold our culture very strongly. We have youth days where we learn, where each girl learn the proper way to *tau'olunga*. You have to wear *kiekies* to church, and *ta'ovalas*. Also on *fakame'*, White Sunday, we have to read things and do things in Tongan. So that kind of honed in my skills of speaking Tongan, going to church and having to go to Sunday school in all Tongan. Being Methodist has given me a lot of my identity as a Tongan (Salote, April 27, 2015).

Reflective of Tongan cultural values, adults do not participate in youth groups. In the Lennox church, for example, students of the same peer-group work together all year to prepare for the annual *fakame'*, or White Sunday. The *fakame'* is one of the largest cultural events of the year, in which the community celebrates the youth. As part of the ceremony, children are responsible for leading the entire Sunday service, memorizing and reciting biblical passages in Tongan, performing dances and songs, and showcasing their cultural and religious knowledge.

During the most recent *fakame'* celebration in Los Angeles, I was seated in the front row. The community was excited for the ceremony and the feast that would follow. Children were dressed in all white, with *ta'ovalas* wrapped around their waists. During

the religious service, the youth had given sermons and sang as a choir. Now was the cultural component of the day, and all of the children were divided into four age groups. An older youth made an announcement about how hard they had worked to put together the event. They thanked the younger children for their cooperation and effort. The eldest age group, composed of high school students and older siblings of the younger groups, had choreographed songs and dances. Each age group presented a song, a dance, and a series of hymnal or biblical recitations in Tongan. The older youth stood by the younger ones throughout, encouraging them, providing assistance and overseeing. There were no adult facilitators (Observation, May 3, 2015).

Learning Tongan language, understanding cultural traditions, wearing traditional clothing and the ability to perform dances are all essential components of being a member of the Tongan community. In the case of the *fakame'*, younger and older members of the youth work together to perform an important task. In preparation, heavy demands upon the communication skills of both the student and peer-leader are made, thus developing those skills. For example, a participant might never have truly grasped a concept until having to explain it to another, embodying and crystallizing thought into language. As Topping noted, "listening, explaining, questioning, summarizing, speculating, and hypothesizing are all valuable skills which should be transferable" (2005, p. 637). All of these skills are necessary to prepare for and execute the *fakame'*. Furthermore, preparing for this event drives a cultural norm of helping, collaboration, caring about others' successes and failures, accountability, and creates a cohesive community. Through the production of the *fakame'*, it is clear that "CL can simultaneously yield gains in transferable social and communication skills and in affective functioning. Although these

are more elusive to measure and are not found as reliably as academic gains, they represent considerable added value for no more input" (Topping, 2005, p. 635). CL in this case prepares scaffolding for students, as they become more competent and manage more activities as they grow from the youngest to the eldest of the youth, from students to peer-leaders and teachers. The *fakame'* is an example of a peer-led activity that is a successful, organized form of education. The pursuit of a shared goal – the execution of the *fakame'* – is reflective of a cohesive community. Furthermore, there is mutual engagement; each member participates and contributes in order to negotiate meaning together. The church community is also an example of an effective closed network, according to Coleman's (1988) definitions. With a set of norms and shared expectations (how to dress, what language to speak in, what dances must be performed, which passages must be recited), the youth group resists outside influence to successfully build social capital and work as a community.

8.3.2 A Campus Student Group

The PISA group is an example of a peer-led space in which the cycle of church youth group is restarted; freshmen and sophomores become the participants, and older students serve as the peer-leaders or teachers in organized learning spaces. Each year, the group puts on a cultural show. Much like the *fakame'*, the annual show requires collaboration of the group and is the pinnacle of the group's year together. As Topping points out, CL is more than just working together – it has been described as 'structuring positive interdependence' in pursuit of a specific shared goal or output. (2005, p. 631). In this case, Salote serves as the facilitator who guides the interactive process. Salote was raised in a primarily Tongan context in the Lennox area; she spoke mainly Tongan with

her family and peers, and became a full member of her community through her involvement in the Lennox church. As such, Salote's role as a leader during the *fakame'* provided scaffolding for her role as leader in her campus association.

The addition of critical information to the cultural show may have been Salote's idea, as Emily suggested above, but the implementation of the idea is carried out by all senior members of the group; furthermore, the cooperation of the freshmen members makes the implementation possible. As Topping notes, "The helper's modeling of enthusiasm, competence, and the possibility of success can influence the self-confidence of the helped, while a sense of loyalty and accountability to each other might help to keep the pair motivated and on task" (2005, p. 637). All members of the group are peers, within four years of age. Age proximity allows for not only professional relationships, but also intimate friendships. As Emily recounted,

> [Before college] I knew I was Tongan and I knew I was proud of it, but I didn't know what it meant to be Tongan…and then, coming into college I wasn't really looking for a community. I was like, if I see any Polynesians, that's cool, but it wasn't my main priority. But once I started hanging out with all Polynesians and becoming immersed back in the culture, I learned a lot. And I feel like I've become more aware of my culture through these girls [PISA], because they all teach me everything that I know now. (Emily, April 27, 2015).

Emily is a product of the incredibly dialogical nature of the campus group, as well as their ability to negotiate meaning together. Students with varied identities and backgrounds learn from and with each other to develop both an individual and collective identity. Each is the student and the teacher simultaneously. The subject of the education is cultural in nature – cultural traditions, histories, as well as the issues facing Pacific Islander communities in the US. However, there are higher levels of learning being

achieved. Leadership and communication skills, accountability, and time management are examples of competencies achieved through participation in the group. Through structured meetings and practices for specific events, the learning relationship develops. As such, "both helper and helped should become more consciously aware of what is happening in their learning interaction, and more able to monitor and regulate the effectiveness of their own learning strategies in different contexts" (Topping, 2005, p. 638). This promotes effective learning in the future, and increases the community cultural wealth of their communities. The participants are confident in what they can achieve, and that success can be the result of your own efforts.

8.3.3 *Ta'ahine 'o Moana*

A third example that I came across in my research with the Tongan community was *Ta'ahine 'o Moana*, or Girls of the Ocean, an informal women's empowerment group started by Ailine. Ailine sensed a lack of culturally relevant modes of passing on traditions in the Tongan Diaspora; she particularly felt that the female members of her network suffered in this way. According to Ailine,

> Women play such a key role in Tongan culture, and we felt like a lot of those teachings are lost because mothers are busy. It's not their fault really, they're busy working. We have a lot of nieces, and we saw that our nieces weren't getting taught what it means to be a Tongan woman (Ailine, February 26, 2015).

In response, Ailine started an empowerment group for the girls in her network, "because we felt like we knew how to share that information in a way that was going to make it important for them to learn…because it's just so easy to get lost in the Americanness of things and not remember that there is high regard for Tongan women in our society" (Ailine, February 26, 2015). Ailine suggested that the women in her community create a

sense of "sisterhood," as opposed to competing against each other in a negative way. *Ta'ahine 'o Moana* is an example of a purely peer-led space in which members supported each other, contributed ideas and activities, and worked towards shared goals. The members' involvement was volunteer in nature, creating an organizational dimension (Topping, 2005, p. 635) to the informal group.

Fina spoke at length about the group and how it impacted her life. After her visa expired, Fina explained to me that she stayed home for five years "doing nothing all day." When she met Ailine, she joined the group and was surprised at how much she was exposed to. "She exposed us to a lot of stuff, and I'm not just saying random stuff. There were voter registrations, we would volunteer at Pacific Islander festivals, educational workshops…" (Fina, January 30, 2015). After reading author Marian Williamson and feeling inspired by her, the group translated her book into Tongan and presented it to her. The group petitioned for bills to be passed and participated in phone banking. Fina zealously expressed how much the group's activities together influenced the decisions she began to make about her life. As she described, "I was just going for the heck of it because I didn't do anything at home. But I got motivation from it and I was like, man, I have to do something about my life, I can't just sit around and wait for someone to marry me" (Fina, January 30, 2015). After participating in the group's activities, Fina began to intern at various Pacific Islander organizations, went on legislative visits, sat on panels, and became "the only Pacific Islander undocumented student that's like, out there" (Fina, January 30, 2015). Her work allowed her to save enough money to go back to school and motivated her to continue working for her community. Fina is an excellent example of how a small peer-led group contributed to the social capital of a larger network. Not only

do those directly involved with the group benefit, but also the community they are dedicated and motivated to work for.

Salote, the informal leader of the campus student group detailed above, was also a member of *Ta'ahine 'o Moana*. During our focused group discussion, she was quick to bring up her experiences with the group and how it impacted her identity. She explained that through this group,

> It was a safe space between Tongan girls and we identified ourselves as Tongan American, not really knowing our culture. So Ailine took us through this program, not program, that's too formal. It was just a kickback group, we all kicked it together. But through that group we were able to ask questions, things like, what is a proper Tongan wedding? What are our *mehikitangas*, our *fahus*? What is proper protocol when you go to a funeral or wedding? I was able to question that through *Ta'ahine 'o Moana*, and be able to find out through self-discovery. Ailine giving us original documents of what a traditional wedding is, little things like that formed my identity (Salote, April 27, 2015).

Salote explained that in her home, like many Tongan households, it is seen as disrespectful to ask questions, or question the meaning or reason behind traditions. But *Ta'ahine 'o Moana* provided "another space separate from home and church, where I was able to learn things through questioning, things I didn't really understand and things that my parents wouldn't answer at home" (Salote, April 27, 2015). Though Ailine is a peer to Salote, she was raised in Tonga and is fluent in its language and traditions. The transfer of knowledge to other members of her network is an example of how social capital works in increasing community cultural wealth; by having Ailine in their network, Salote and Fina gained knowledge, identity formation and motivation.

8.4 Conclusion

It is clear that these peer-led spaces are highly successful practices and are an effective way for Tongan community members to become functional members of society.

According to the OECD's Executive Summary of the Definition and Selection of Key Competencies, a competency "involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context" (2005, p. 4). The DeSeCo Project defines competencies in three broad categories: using tools interactively, interacting in heterogeneous groups, and acting autonomously. They define what a member of society needs in order to function well in society, but also to help shape the world (2005, p. 6). These competencies relate to the individual, as opposed to the group. Though peer-led spaces in the Tongan community are functions of communities, they help develop the individual skills necessary to increase the capital of a particular social group. Skills such as planning, time management, financial budgeting, identity formation, teamwork, and respect are all developed through interactions with peer-led groups – both as the participant and the leader. For example, Emily said that she "didn't know what it meant to be Tongan," but through her association with the campus group, she was able to form a unique identity, as well as learn about her own cultural background. In this way, the group served as a form of cultural empowerment for Emily; through recognition of her cultural identity and her ability to connect with others, she became a peer-leader in the group, forming skills that she can take with her beyond university.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

9.1 Addressing the Research Objectives

This research has demonstrated the current structure of a Tongan Diaspora community, how to participate in and strengthen that structure despite challenges, and the importance of community and cohesion in the pursuit of empowerment.

Members of the Tongan Diaspora community cited several challenges to community cohesion that they face. Importantly, economic injustice affects the way that members' view their own self-worth. Members settle for low-wage jobs instead of advancing their education because of the immediate need for money. Money continues to be remitted back to Tonga or put towards expensive cultural events despite lack of funds. Gang violence begets new stereotypes about Tongan-Americans, which are in turn internalized. Gang violence also impedes community initiatives established by local leaders. Negotiating multiple identities hinders the community's ability to form a collective identity, as well as reconciling opposing value systems. Oftentimes, the Tongan value system seems to be at odds with the American one, and can work against the success of community members.

The concept of communalism is an important aspect of the Tongan value system; kin and church are two important networks that form the structure of Tongan community outside of Tonga. By participating in these networks and negotiating sociocultural realities, members are contributing to the closed nature of the social network, and thus the capital that that network can provide. There are various ways that members participate in their community and contribute to its closure. Language is identified as the most central way to participate. Through code switching, members are making meaning together by

constructing specific social situations. Through participating in a speech community and employing the tacit and implicit rules, members are contributing to the closed nature of their network and thus increasing their social capital.

By employing *anga fakatonga* and various aspects of the Tongan value system, members form a common ground with which to base membership in the community. Thus, the importance of passing on cultural traditions serves a larger purpose than simply maintaining culture; it also creates a boundary for a closed network, and can be used as a form of capital or funds.

The purpose of this research is not only to address community structure and cohesion, but how that existing structure can serve as a form of empowerment for the community. In a sense, community – an already important component of being Tongan in the Diaspora – is a fund of knowledge, and members must find ways to turn that knowledge into actual capital. There are several examples in which community members employ peer-led or cooperative learning as a tactic in the pursuit of an enterprise. This tactic has proven to be successful, and can serve as a starting point for future programs. The strength of community is reflective of social capital, which can in turn increase a community's cultural wealth. By viewing already existing structures in the community as empowering, as opposed to deficit, members can tap into their funds of knowledge to turn this research into practice, rather than just theory.

9.2 Suggestions for Future Research

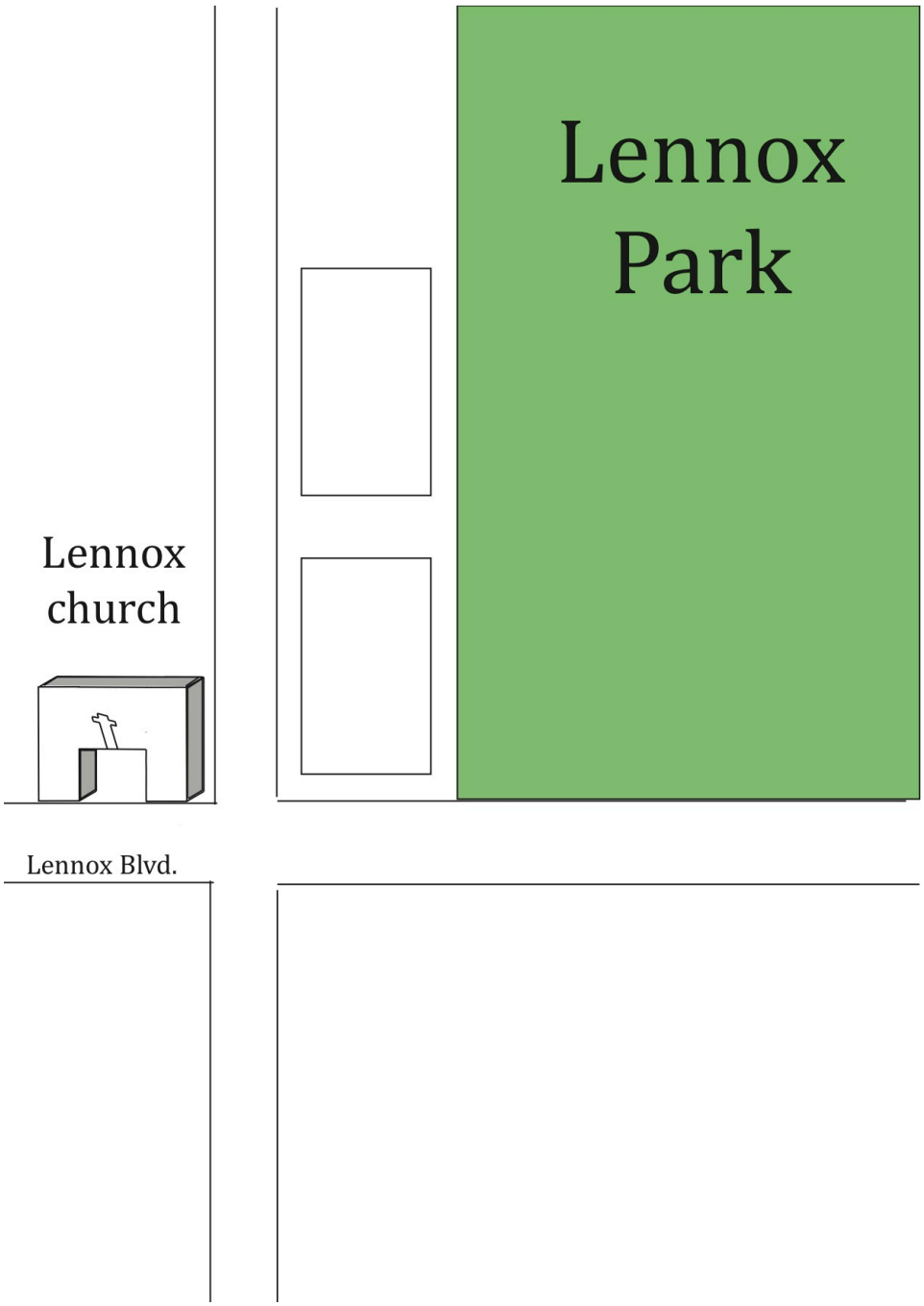
It is my hope that this research can create a foundation for future research on experiences of marginalized Diaspora communities, particularly the Tongan experience.

An important piece of the research that I did not address in this thesis is the connection between the Diaspora community and those who remain in Tonga. To what affect does one affect the other? How does the population who remain in Tonga contribute to the challenges that the Diaspora community faces, or help maintain cohesion? The connection between Tongans in and out of Tonga is distinct, and deserves further analysis.

While I found cooperative learning to be an important resource for community empowerment, further research should be done to establish more existing resources and funds of knowledge within the community. My position as a non-Tongan researcher prohibits understanding the experience of growing up in the community and the various funds of knowledge that exist in this experience. Furthermore, fluency in the Tongan language would allow access to a multi-generational study, in which a more in-depth analysis of those born in Tonga and those born in the Diaspora would be possible.

During my analysis, I became interested in the four core values of the Tongan value system: respect, reciprocity, humility and loyalty. Using these as a framework, further research could be conducted on their role in community and their potential as funds of knowledge.

Appendix A: Visual of Lennox Church and Park Area



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