

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SEXUALITY AND IDENTITY ACROSS THE PACIFIC

Navigating traditional and contemporary
meanings and practices

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Introduction

I have always felt that I was different. Different in the way I connected with self and others. I remember as a young child feeling out of place when interacting with others my age and gender. But I remember feeling a sense of empathy for those who, like me, were treated differently for being different. It was through this shared experience that I wanted to use my own differences to make a difference, while trying to make sense of how such differences can be meaningfully included.

As the child of an Anglo Australian mother and an iTaukei (Indigenous) Fijian father, I grew up being reminded of being different on a daily basis. Different because of my skin color. Different because of my afro hair. Different because I lived in public housing. Different because I acted effeminate. Different because I had a strong sense of spirituality. Different because of my physical size. But as I got older, I saw that such differences could, and can, be used to provide other people who are different with a voice and an ability to contribute across society. These differences can help shape societies to become a space and place in which cultural diversity can be nurtured and fostered. If we are celebrated for being different, then such differences would not be seen as unusual and unhelpful, but rather a source of strength, purpose, and resilience.

It is through this sense of resilience that I am positioned. As an individual, I am still working through my own personal and shared identity as a bisexual person alongside my own male privilege and its impacts on others around me. I continue to endeavor and learn to be an ally with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, while reconciling the realities of living on stolen Aboriginal land in Australia where their sovereignty was never ceded. I strive to understand and enact the importance of privileging Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies across modern Western spaces and places. This includes personally learning and upholding my own Pacific-Indigenous views while promoting the meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practices and perspectives as a social work academic and practitioner. Similarly, I am conscious of the struggle to deconstruct dominant discourses that create societal tensions and discords.

I am not against the ability to live within the grays that occur within such societal binaries, but rather I am averse to the notion that it is one way or the other – that you have to be straight or gay, poor or rich, secular or religious, male or female, able-bodied or disabled, Black or white, and the list goes on. It is through these binaries that we create an us and them, a good and bad, a right and wrong. We then get stuck in this cycle of creating social structures, norms, values, and cultures within these binaries, and expect people to fit in or fail. We educate our children to accept the status quo and not question the possibility that what we are doing to each other through the way we view and interact with others may create more problems rather than promote robust, well-rounded communities. We have trained each other to be individually focused and obsessed with self, without understanding our own personal contribution to others. Our individual views are reinforced by the notion that we don't have to justify self to anyone else except self, that it is my way or the highway, and that the individual pursuit toward personal happiness is clouded by consumerism, corporatism, and capitalism.

But there is hope. Hope that comes from highlighting that differences do exist. Hope that comes from meaningfully including these differences in the transformation of the cultures in which we exist and operate. Hope that comes from understanding the role we all play in supporting each other. And, I genuinely believe global Indigenous norms and values are well positioned to greatly contribute to this change and transformation. As we may know, Indigenous cultures globally are all unique in their own ways of knowing, doing, being, and becoming. However, they do generally share one common theme – the significance placed on self and others. On reciprocity. On living with the notion that my own existence is to support others, not just myself. That we all have a role to play; individually and communally. It is within this context, position, and foundation that I believe we can collectively as a global community utilize Indigenous epistemologies to help support the inclusion of differences beyond the binary. Through this shared approach, we can learn to support the role of diverse sexualities to be accepted and celebrated within the mainstream and beyond.

Pacific Peoples and communities across Oceania

Across the chapter, I will be using the term Pacific Peoples and Pacific communities to include those that have an ethnic heritage from the geographical region of the South Pacific. Pacific-Indigenous Peoples continue to occupy and belong to the lands and waters within Oceania, and include iTaukei Fijian, Samoans, Tongans, Tahitians, Kanaka Maoli Hawaiian, Cook Islander Māori, New Caledonian Kanak, Papua New Guinean Wantok, Ni-Vanuatuan, and New Zealand Māori. I acknowledge the rich and diverse cultural differences that exist across the islands and waterways, ranging from language to familial and community practices. Pacific Peoples and Pacific communities are not a homogenized group but rather share a common connection through our locality in Oceania. Collectivist values resonate across Pacific Peoples and place an importance on our connection with family, spirituality and faith, food, recreation and sport, and the visual and performing arts. These continue to provide a shared platform for Pacific Peoples to communally celebrate this connection to each other within a wider geographical space and place (Ravulo, Mafile'o, & Yeates, 2019).

The examples that underpin my exploration of Pacific sexualities are based on these various shared Pacific cultural views and have been influenced by my own lived experience and professional connections. Colonialism is another shared experience among Pacific-Indigenous Peoples and communities that has an ongoing impact on our ability to meaningfully integrate our collectivist perspectives in modern contexts. Conversely, we celebrate the resilience shown in

our desires to maintain, sustain, promote, provoke, and provide Pacific-Indigenous approaches within Western modernity across Oceania and beyond.

Understanding sexuality in the context of resilience

Sexualities in the Pacific region were historically fluid rather than fixed and bound by morality and labels (McCubbin & Marcus, 2017). The introduction of Western perspectives, through colonization and its pervasive binary influences (Hite, 2017), led to our own Pacific perspectives being deemed archaic, savage, and immoral (Chang Hall & Kauanui, 1994). It is through this judgmental, contemporary lens that our own ability to see sexualities as a rite of passage and as a means to connect collectively with self and others has been greatly diminished (Stewart, 2014). In this chapter, I explore the resurgence, reclaiming, and resilience of Pacific LGBT+ communities in our homelands and the broader diaspora. Within each of these three areas I explore the past, present, and future of Pacific sexualities as a means to acknowledge, advocate, and applaud the strength we can glean from seeing our differences as part of a broader quest to promote social inclusion within contemporary contexts. As noted earlier, it is through our Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, being, and becoming that more fair and just societies can be achieved. It is through the meaningful inclusion of our traditional and evolving views as Indigenous people that colonized spaces can be disrupted and those individuals who have been relegated to the margins can be provided opportunities to contribute without fear of retribution, shame, and discrimination. We can establish a broader platform for many voices to shape and share socio-cultural spaces in which we meaningfully create as individuals who make up families, communities, and broader societies. It is through such micro, meso, and macro perspectives that solutions can emerge and people are afforded opportunities to contribute.

Instead of seeing sexuality as a tangible entity that manifests through sexualized behaviors, we need to approach it from a more holistic lens, where other forms of diversity meaningfully intersect, including spirituality, gender, class, language, and religion. I believe it is possible to create physical, liminal, and fluid spaces, perspectives, and practices that are then nuanced and meaningfully shaped by an array of intersecting identities, rather than the one already perceived and judged as negative and irrelevant. Our individual identities are made up of many different identifiers and shaped by the collective context in which we operate. I am not just my identity based on a sexual orientation but also have other identifiers that contribute to how I make sense and meaning of the world. These diverse characteristics can inform and provide a connecting point toward sustainable change. For example, it is possible to bring my Pacific-Indigenous views into my identity within the LGBT+ community while promoting such diverse perspective with non-Indigenous people to consider and incorporate these views within and beyond. Similarly, I can utilize my identity within the LGBT+ community to assist in shaping evolving Pacific-Indigenous perspectives on sexuality alongside my other identities based on class, gender, and religion.

Making sense of it all, and advocating for change

Queer theory and Indigenous theory

Globally, Queer theory has provided a platform for sexualities to be critically understood and approached. It has been a much-welcomed avenue for queer people to find and validate a voice that has existed but was striving to be included. By definition, Queer theory challenges the status quo of how we view sexuality beyond the prescribed notions of heterosexuality and its

accompanying heteronormativity. The socialization of intersecting gender norms provides the platform to further critique the role and performance of our sexual desires and attractions. It provides a platform for resistance against hegemonic and dominant discourses that deter social inclusion (Miller, 2019).

Queer theory has evolved since its development by acclaimed scholars in the 1990s (Comstock, 2020), and it continues to emerge as a means to support the deconstruction, diversification, and expression of sexualities to include sociological, psychological, physical, and embodied expressions. It is a transformational construct that allows individuals, families, groups, and communities to question the perceived norm, and allows other diverse perspectives to be acknowledged.

Like any theory, there are limitations to its broader application. Some of these include the over sexualization of behaviors and using predominately Westernized/Global North, white, middle-class viewpoints to describe other forms of queerness among those in the Global South. It has created almost a one-size-fits-all approach to the way in which LGBT+ communities may strive for societal inclusion and justice. In some circumstances, it has also created a self-imposed marginality within that has led to negative views on its own existence, rather than celebrate its own queerness as a source of strength and solitude (Moore, 2018; Morrissey, 2019).

Interestingly, I believe there is a synergy between Queer theory and Indigenous theory. Both were founded in the desire to be understood and included. Both were established from a grounded approach. Additionally, both theories continue to support the need to deconstruct and disrupt the status quo, the perceived normalcy of Western modernity (Hames-Garcia, 2013). It is within this shared relationship that I believe Indigenous theory can contribute to Queer theory, with acceptance and inclusion, reciprocity and holistic wellbeing rooted in its common cause and foundation.

With collectivism embedded in its core, the evolving nature of *solesolevaki* (from Fiji – meaning reciprocal living), *fa'a'samoa* (from Samoa – meaning the Samoan way), and *fetokoni'aki* (from Tonga – meaning mutual helpfulness) utilizes an understanding of traditional practices, but as they merge across the decades from colonization and migration, they are influenced by space and place. That is, these concepts can still effectively incorporate the importance of collectivism while promoting fair and just approaches underpinned by reciprocal living and wellbeing. Each of these specific Pacific concepts strives to impart the importance of *vā*, a relational space that exists between us all (Mila-Schaaf, 2006). The disruption of this sacred space can create issues for our wellbeing, and perpetuate insecurities and isolation. As individuals committed to nurturing the *vā* between self and others, we are inextricably bound and connected to use our own strengths, resources, and purpose to support the collective. This includes supporting those in need, and ensuring everyone is able to play their broader role. Here is where the concept of *vā* shines; **everyone** has a role to play in the broader collective. Everyone is valued and matters. Everyone is part of the common unity that defines who we are as a community. Failure to include others in our own practice and nurturing of *vā* compromises this sacred bond, and deters the existence of harmony.

I believe that it is possible to enable a whole-of-community approach, to apply such Pacific-Indigenous concepts into Western practice through the ongoing decolonization of social systems to be more intentional in promoting collective approaches, rather than implementing societal structures that are obsessed with the sole commodification of an individual's labor and consumption. I believe it is possible to utilize and integrate Pacific-Indigenous concepts into Queer theory and provide a platform for diverse sexualities to be seen as part of the *vā* (sacred space) we hold with self and others that then contributes to the fabric of society we are placed within.

Looking back, exploring the now, and the possibilities

In the following section, I provide historical context on perceptions of Pacific sexuality. This is followed by examining the resurgence, reclaiming, and resilience of Pacific sexualities in contemporary times and identifying possibilities for the future. I encourage a more holistic view of how identities were formed and are understood, and provide critical views on the way in which other intersecting norms, values, and views – including Pacific cultural contexts – also pervade, shape, and influence.

My hope is not to romanticize the utility of Pacific-Indigenous epistemologies, but to provide possible threads to the ways in which these perspectives and practices still inform our understanding of where we have come from, where we are today, and where we are headed in the future. Various resources are used to support this critique, including the use of what is academically perceived as gray literature: web-based media articles from blogs, social media, and news outlets. The information from the gray literature contributes to the larger narrative of inclusivity by incorporating sources not traditionally valued. Additionally, these sources provide a space for LGBT+ communities and Pacific Peoples to have a voice, to share their views, and to support a critical consciousness that is generally missing from the dominant discourse.

Past: looking back

Historical accounts of same-sex behavior in the Pacific operated from a morally conservative view of sexuality, using a Western lens that problematized such behaviors. Most of these perspectives have been conveyed by Western scholars within their Western contexts to further understand and provide context for sexualities across the Oceania region. Only a handful of published works have been written by Pacific Peoples themselves, and these provide a more nuanced connection to the way in which our own sexualities are understood and practiced (Chang Hall & Kauanui, 1994; Mokuau, 1986; Teaiwa, 2014; Tupuola, 2000, 2004). In saying that, I acknowledge my own privileged position; I, too, am writing this chapter from a Westernized space and place, working from an academic institution in Australia and placing a critical gaze from my Westernized context. However, my examination of the historical literature that deals with Pacific sexualities is one whereby I account for the ways that Pacific epistemologies meaningfully interact with such Westernized accounts. Rather than view these accounts from a post-colonial gaze, I am striving to make sense of these narratives in the context of *vā*, and the role of reciprocal living nuanced by the concepts of *solesolevaki* (from Fiji – reciprocal living) and *veiqaravi* (also from Fiji – to serve others), and to implicitly serve self and others in collective reciprocity. I am striving to make sense of these historical accounts from my own identity as someone from a lived Pacific-Indigenous heritage.

Masculinities

As European empires extended their colonial conquests across the Pacific, the notion of hegemonic masculinities was utilized to frame how Pacific men and women, their family structures, and broader societies were viewed, compared, and contrasted to the dominant discourse occurring within Western societies of the time (Alexeyeff, 2008; Alexeyeff & Besnier, 2014; Elliston, 2014; Masterson, 2018; Wallace, 2003c). Within European societies, masculinities were generally linear in nature, and were inextricably bound to physical strength and capabilities

that would then parallel their tangible contribution to the commodification of labor during the emerging industrialization period. Females were considered physically inferior to men, and because of that, women were relegated to maternal duties while men were seen as the providers for their family unit (Chen, 2014). Nuclear families were restricted to functional roles of paternalism with a singular mother and father figure, and children were empowered to nurture individualistic desires beyond their own family settings and structures. It is within these ongoing binaries that Western paternalism still occurs across the region, and pervades the way that Pacific Peoples are seen, heard, included, and involved.

In contrast, Pacific families were broad and complex in their structure, with multiple parental figures beyond the mother and father figure (Manuela & Sibley, 2014). Pacific women in various islands and territories are perceived as being emotionally and spiritually superior in familial and social structures, and utilize these giftings to support the bigger collective that includes everyone in their immediate and broader context by default (George, 2010; Stege, Metala, Naupa, Simo, & Huffer, 2008). Gifts, whether individual physical strengths or local resources grown or sourced from the lands and their accompanying waters, belong to everyone. Alongside other global Indigenous cultures, Pacific children are seen as assets and provide a meaningful role to contribute to the wellbeing of others. Elders are placed as the source of *mana*, or knowledge that permeates how a collectivist approach is maintained. This may manifest through resilient oral narratives passed down and accompanied by various forms of visual and performance expressions (Ravulo, 2016).

If we deconstruct the way that sexualities were known and understood via Pacific-Indigenous epistemologies, they would be viewed as being part of the broader, holistic connection to self and others. Many Western historical accounts witnessed Pacific men being affectionate and participating in sexualized behavior and activities with other men (Wallace, 2003a). From a Western perspective, this was judged as being counterproductive and counterintuitive to the function of society. Christian ideals and morality promote a belief that sexual activity must be between one man and one woman. For those who professed a functionalist/Calvinist perspective, sex was for procreation alone (Wallace, 2003b). However, sexuality and its many forms and expressions in various parts of the Pacific was a rite of passage and moved beyond the Westernized perspective of the sexualization of such behavior:

In the Pacific Islands, this must also be understood in relation to the cultural constructions of self which often differ greatly from their Western equivalents. It is gender, rather than sexual identity, that is given ontological priority in the wider Pacific region, and gender liminal identities, as with all other social identities, are mainly defined with respect to their role in social life and centred on their expected contribution to collective life as opposed to inner, personal desires.

(Preterudstuen, 2019, p. 166)

This may then suggest that for Pacific Peoples, their obligation and desire to uphold the sacred space, or *vā* continues in spite of demoralization of their sexual expressions, as their individual roles are still part of contributing to the collective. Where our identities are bound to the broader role of self and others, the priority to maintain a close connection regardless of gender roles or norms further contrasts with the individualistic manner in which Western views were introduced. In challenging these gender roles, colonizers in effect disregarded this sacred space bound by a holistic view of self to a context of morality and function.

Sexualization of Pacific appearances and behavior

Another key trend of the colonization of the Pacific region was the oversexualization of certain appearances and behaviors. Due to the morality imposed on Pacific Peoples by a conservative religious agenda brought from the West, predominately from the Catholic and Protestant persuasion, nudity is seen as abominable and savage in nature (Alexeyeff & Besnier, 2014; Chang Hall & Kauanui, 1994). Nudity was seen to be a source of provocation and sexual desire; to be naked was a sexual expression in and of itself. From a Westernized gaze, individuals were held account for not promoting such imagery, as it prompted a lewd and sexualized sense of self. This was not something to be embraced beyond the confines of a mutually consenting relationship that may involve forms of sexual expression and activity.

Over time, Pacific Peoples learned to see their naked bodies as a source of shame, to be covered and not exposed. An eminent Pacific scholar of his time, Ravuvu (1983) noted how nakedness among young children was acceptable within Fijian village life up until the age of 3 or 4. Ravuvu (1983) also made a contrast to the 1950s when it was previously acceptable for them to go about village life naked up until the age of 8. He notes though, at the time of writing, that “young adolescent girls and old women of the village sometimes leave their breasts exposed in public settings, usually when they are among themselves working” (p. 111). Over time, this became completely frowned upon within modern contexts due to the ongoing sexualization of such appearances.

The semi-naked body is welcomed as a source of beauty and strength, and not seen as oversexualized, tantalizing, or homoerotic. Various forms of partial nudity were practiced (e.g., shirtless men, women wearing flowing skirts to accentuate their hips through cultural dance.) From a Pacific Peoples perspective, this can be seen as part of the overall collective expression of the performance, where the body is used as a meaningful instrument to convey a narrative intertwined with a rich sense of self and others. Lyrics are sung and proclaimed to portray a vivid image of connecting to space and place, and to celebrate the *va* we all share as unique and nuanced Pacific cultures across the region. Pacific dances are performed with poetic grace and stature, which are alluring to the senses and evoke a sense of sexualization, but can be embraced as being natural and as a part of how we celebrate a connection, once again, to self and others, without stigma or shame. Regardless of how colonial pressures pervaded Pacific perspectives, maintaining such practices is a form of resilience, and continues to show the importance Pacific Peoples placed on maintaining our own forms of expression.

Present: exploring the now

From our past as Pacific Peoples comes a broader legacy that has shaped the way we view ourselves sexually. In this next section, I explore how modern movements around sexual diversity continue to evolve, with a view to reclaim our own Pacific perspectives in our sexual expressions and interactions. This includes understanding and unpacking dominant views of sexuality, and the resurgence occurring across Pacific communities to celebrate our own sexual identities.

Making sense and having purpose

The way members of the LGBT+ community are perceived and understood is inextricably bound to the terminology and phrasing used to describe them. Over time, words like *queer* have been reclaimed by the community itself, and evoke pride in standing with others who identify with the term in a positive way, rather than as a slur intended to demean. Certain reclaimed

labels have provided a platform for solidarity among the LGBT+ community and facilitate a broader sense of normalcy to create a space and place within society. Labels have also been used to create a sense of purpose of what it means to be part of this group in society. Such words provide a way to connect with self and others, and to promote value toward an individual and collective purpose. Inclusive terms enable dominant discourses to be challenged and disrupted so that they encompass something more than the societal center, and to be reminded that life and its accompanying structures, systems, perspectives, and practices go beyond the binary.

Similarly, the use of specific Pacific language terms for sexuality has created a sense of meaning and purpose, but has included negative associations with its related sexual expressions and created further problematization in supporting fair and just perspectives (Dvorak, 2014). Certain negative terms have been utilized to vilify the LGBT+ community across Oceania and have been informed by an underlying morality that pervades Pacific societies. That is, strong religious views perpetuated by a close social affinity with church-based faiths, predominately Christian in nature, inextricably shape the social and cultural landscape of many Pacific families. Despite the rich and nuanced role Pacific sexualities had in being more fluid in their practices and approaches, the *vā* (sacred space) accepted between men who have sex with men is now *tabu* or taboo. The way in which various Pacific cultures utilized certain physical acts as a rite of passage within the same gender (Stewart, 2014) has been labeled by Christian views as being gravely unacceptable, inappropriate, and unhelpful to our morality, and devalues the functional Western perspective of sexuality in modern, colonized Pacific societies.

However, there is a resurgence occurring among many Pacific Peoples across Oceania to reclaim and profile the resilience of Pacific sexualities. This is evident in the way Pacific individuals have started to call out the moral biases and binaries our own Pacific Peoples have internalized from colonization. Pacific Peoples are creating social movements via social media and are using other forms of media including print and radio to call out the negative use of judgmental and divisive labels and stereotypes among our own Pacific Peoples.

Andre Afamasaga is of Samoan heritage, born in New Zealand, and has worked extensively in Christian ministry across the southwestern Sydney region of Australia. In December 2019, he publicly came out as gay through an opinion piece published in one of Australia's most well-known newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Titled "Gay, Christian and a former preacher, I'm coming out to help anyone hurt by Folau," the article directly positions itself to challenge the "homophobia deeply rooted in religious beliefs and cultural values" where it "can be ultimately traced back to our colonial history, our leaders have ensured that discrimination against LGBT+ people remains entrenched" (Afamasaga, 2019, n.p). This article was in response to social media posts made by Israel Folau, an International Rugby Union player of Tongan heritage, which contained negative religious stances on being homosexual. Subsequently, Folau's employment contract was terminated by Rugby Australia, leading to him suing them and settling out of court with a large amount of money awarded as compensation, alongside a large following of conservative Christians supporting his cause, including fellow Pacific Peoples. However, it is within such spaces that Afamasaga continues to challenge Folau to further reflect on such actions and has continued to undertake interviews across other areas of the media to profile this alternative discourse. On a national TV program, Afamasaga encouraged Folau to consider the following question: "Do you understand that the words that you say have impact and makes it harder for those who are Pacific?" (Insight SBS, 2020, at 46:42). He goes onto acknowledge that:

the churches got to accept that they are causing harm. Faith systems have got to understand that they are contributing to this harm. And they have got to do something

about it. They just can't continue to say all this stuff and not be accountable for what they are saying.

(50:26)

In a follow-up radio interview, Afamasaga provides a poignant encouragement for Pacific Peoples to embrace their sexualities, and to "share your story and don't be ashamed; you will help others make it much more acceptable for them to come out, as well" (Tiperio Lafoa'i, 2020, at 15:30).

Kristian Fanene Schmidt is a media personality, with previous experience as an MTV Australia host, and continues to work in Los Angeles across various media outlets and roles. He is accomplished within academic contexts and his alma mater Auckland University, and he is a Fulbright scholar. Born and raised in Porirua, New Zealand and of Samoan heritage, he openly came out as gay through a blog piece written and co-published by The Coconet TV titled "Mothers Day" (Schmidt, 2018). Through this raw, personal account of his journey in dealing with his own sexuality against a backdrop of pain and shame, he aptly notes, "We're not the default and so we're not normal and if you're Samoan you can just about forget it cuz our culture in its current state is intrinsically tied to Christianity and, in turn, sin and all that rhetoric." However, through his own ability to accept and love self, he is able to connect and share this with others in a way that empowers and provokes a more positive association to sexuality. He continues to call out homophobia across our own Pacific communities and beyond via his social media channels @whatwouldkritdo, and he further profiles his position via provocative blogs on <https://whatwouldkritdo.com/>. In one piece, titled "Pride," he notes the need to challenge self to counteract unhelpful narratives which in turn supports a healthier perspective on sex and sexuality:

All the myths and programming are so entrenched. It's hard to undo it all but it's possible. Deprogramming the lies to get to what's real takes being brutally honest with ourselves [another huge struggle for me] but it actually comes more naturally than holding on to those programmed lies.

(Schmidt, 2019)

Such views are continuing to support the broader conversation among Pacific individuals to further unpack the contemporary way we view our connection to sexuality while incorporating diverse perspectives in and across our communities.

Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network (PSGDN) was launched in 2007, and has a very active Facebook page that lists the following mission:

a regional network of Pacific MSM [Men who have Sex with Men] and Transgender organisations whose mission is to strengthen community leadership, mobilisation and advocacy in the areas of sexuality and gender identities with respect to sexual health including STIs [Sexually Transmitted Infections] and HIV and AIDS, wellbeing and Human Rights.

(Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network, n.d.)

A wide range of postings are profiled on their timeline, ranging from critical comments on topics related to Pacific sexuality and gender, to reposting a broad scope of web-based articles outlining various successes and challenges from the queer community across the globe. The PSGDN oversees a private Facebook group titled LGBT Pacific. This provides a culturally

safe space and platform for more nuanced discussions on LGBT+ matters occurring across the Pacific region. As a member, I continue to be inspired by the solidarity shown among Pacific Peoples in sharing their personal stories, insights, and realities. I am conscious that this continues to provide Pacific Peoples across the many islands and their diaspora globally with an opportunity to reclaim spaces that previously were hard to navigate due to the post-colonial moral view of sexuality. Such virtual platforms assist in celebrating the resilience that comes from being a proud Pacific person regardless of the contemporary challenges we are still working through collectively.

Nurturing my own vā and connection to self and others

On further personal reflection, my own coming out to my parents in my early twenties was an opportunity to re-establish and nurture the *vā* that was previously marred with my father. Admittedly, I was very reluctant to share that I had same-sex attraction due to my conservative Christian upbringing and its accompanying perspectives. But it was through my ability to openly share this part of my identity with my father that our relationship rapidly changed for the better.

As acknowledged in my introduction, I was considered effeminate in my late childhood and early adolescence. I was somewhat aware of this, but felt it more through my perceived lack of a loving connection with my father. He tried to build this through my involvement in the local soccer team from the ages of 8 and 9, and then the local Rugby Union team from the ages of 11 and 12. He tried to connect by getting me to attend his own sporting activities and events. Throughout this period, I feigned interest and went along out of sheer obligation and expectations to comply with fatherly instructions. Our relationship did not improve over my teenage years, and I started adulthood without feeling loved by him until he verbally told me he did at the age of 21. This did help somewhat, but it was not until shortly after, when I was 23, that he became aware of my sexuality. And it was almost instantly, through me sharing this part of my identity, that my father felt a connection, or an opportunity to build a bond with me. It was, I believe, the ability for me to be real with him, rather than hide and feel ashamed, that a genuine connection was established and reclaimed. As a result, the *vā* between us was restored, and our relationship has soared ever since. I now have a great relationship with my father, and we are able to speak intimately together without the fear of judgment and hurt I felt growing up. I now seek and cherish opportunities to share all areas of my life with him. I believe it is through our Pacific approach to enact *solesolevaki* – a commitment to love and serve self and others – that has nurtured our relationship, and is reflected in our ability to journey together.

Future: the possibilities

What would it look like to effectively integrate Pacific epistemologies of collectivism within gender and sexuality across modernity, in Oceania and beyond? How can we forge ahead in celebrating and reclaiming the diverse ways that Pacific sexualities were positioned prior to colonization, now and into the future? In essence, I believe this can be achieved, and I would like to propose three practical recommendations on how we might be able to achieve this goal of inclusion. First, we need to support the creation of specific Pacific education programs on the resurgence of Pacific-Indigenous values and sexuality, helping people to decrease internal and external judgment and labels. Second, we need to challenge the pervasive and persuasive nature of whiteness within the broader LGBT+ community itself. Third, we need to continue to

share diverse stories and narratives to profile resilience and celebrate differences. This supports recommendations one and two, leading to holding and nurturing *vā* and promoting societies grounded in concepts like *solesolevaki* (reciprocal living). I will further unpack these recommendations in what follows.

Through the creation of specific Pacific education material and/or resources on our Indigenous values and sexuality, we provide the opportunity to see the synergies that existed prior to colonization whereby people were valued and were connected to self and others. Due to various religious-based views outlined in this chapter, I believe it would be empowering to remind our church elders, leaders, and broader congregants to enrich their *love your neighbor as yourself* teaching through Pacific cultural perspectives like *vā* and *veiqaravi* – serving others. It's about encouraging individuals to adopt a more collaborative and cooperative approach to ensure that those generally in the margins are considered and cared for.

The need to promote diverse and eclectic ways of representing the LGBT+ perspective is imperative. We need to move beyond universalizing a white, Westernized view of queerness to ensure diverse experiences of sexuality shaped by other realms of cultural diversity are included. Thankfully, many countries globally have benefited from the protests across Western spaces that have lobbied for equal rights across many areas of society; however, certain intersectional identities are still missing. This may mean that individuals are dealing with discrimination on multiple levels beyond their sexuality. For Pacific Peoples, this could include being a person of color, of a religious faith/spirituality, living in low socio-economic contexts, having English as a second language, and negotiating migrant status. This may all occur alongside health and wellbeing concerns impacting ability, educational engagement, and employment. The ideal look and narrative to be individually liberated beyond the shackles of the family may exist within Western narratives of queerness, but we need to nuance how this may look for individuals within collectivist cultures wanting to still inextricably connect to Indigenous cultural practices and perspectives. Rather than enacting a hegemonic, homogenized, and static approach to being queer, we need to embrace the broader concept of fluidity that is often celebrated and cherished as part of the sacred spaces in which LGBT+ communities traverse.

The three examples outlined in this chapter – Andre Afamasaga, Kristian Fanene Schmidt, and the Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network (PSGDN) – are all about sharing stories from a Pacific perspective on Pacific sexualities. Encouraging opportunities to create, curate, collate, and capture Pacific stories on how people experience their wellbeing against the backdrop of their sexualities alongside other intersecting identities propels diversity as a norm. It can greatly encourage, empower, enhance, and embrace others to consider their own personal positionality when striving to make sense of how to connect to such stories. Imagining the possibilities to support the growing movement to incorporate Indigenous perspectives can be achieved through a shared commitment and collective approach.

Conclusion

From writing this chapter, I have personally learned so much from understanding our varied and collective past, present, and future, and how this can shape, deconstruct, and disrupt the way sexuality is understood and explored. The need to share this knowledge as presented across the chapter is part of a growing movement to ensure that Pacific voices are included and can inform the way mainstream societies are challenged to be better. Actions toward the resurgence, reclaiming, and resilience of Pacific LGBT+ were profiled to further provoke possible opportunities from within the Pacific community itself, and beyond.

I've experienced this from my own learning: to embrace the way in which Pacific sexualities have been defined by ourselves previously, and how this can continue to be shaped by us, through us, for us. I believe it is through this collective approach that others are encouraged to come into the broader Pacific LGBT+ community, as they learn to embrace diversity in an inclusive manner, rather than perceive such characteristics as barriers and irrelevant to self and others.

I genuinely believe it is possible to meaningfully integrate Pacific-Indigenous epistemologies alongside other global Indigenous concepts of collectivism into the evolving nature and concept of Queer theory. I am aspirational that non-Indigenous communities can integrate Indigenous perspectives into the ways they interact, perceive, and understand sexualities and diversity, as the need to support self and others should be the norm, not the exception. If these perspectives are successfully integrated, people would not sit in moral judgment and problematize the ways people interact sexually. Rather, people would see that the societies they belong to are formed based on the innate responsibility to nurture the *ua* we collectively create, while holding each other accountable to ensure that diversity is celebrated and acknowledged as part of the interwoven *ibe* (mat) we sit on and share.

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