

**McDonald's and Samoan Youth:
A Case Study of Globalization**

**Anna "Moana" Schechter
School for International Training
Jackie Fa'asisila
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Abstract

The topics of change, development and globalization are extremely pertinent to modern-day Samoa. The past ten years have led to a vast increase in the inter-connectedness of Samoa to the world economically, socially, and culturally. This paper uses McDonald's as a representation of the globalization occurring in Samoa in order to better understand the real impacts of these abstract terms. Samoan youth act as a medium in which to explore this topic. They are often the most attune to the impacts of globalization and perhaps even act as a catalyst for change. Thus this paper explores, specifically, the relationship between McDonald's in Apia and Samoan youth. As a basis for further analysis this paper attempts to first define McDonald's role within the community, place as a status symbol, who their most frequent customers are and reasons behind choosing McDonald's. Once a foundation is provided, the interplay between McDonald's culture (as a loose representation of western culture) will be explored in relation to Samoan culture. Eventually, the paper will inconclusively pose possible ways in which globalization will impact culture in Apia, Samoa and the entire world.

Contacts

Afamasaga Toleafoa
pacific@ipasifika.net

Maria Kerslake
Professor of Sociology at NUS
m.kerslake@nus.edu.ws

Christine Quested
Principal Nutritionist at the National Hospital
21212 ex: 223

Merrill Pereyra
Regional Manager – Pacific Islands
(612) 9875 6662
mpereyra@mcdonalds.com.au

Ronald McDonald

McDonald's Employee

Dedication

**To all those I love.
And to those who help me see.
Each day.
Everyday.
All day.**

Without your insights, beauty, and laughter – I'd be "So lonely."

Everyday

Is the same.

We go through the same motions. The same emotions. Nothing changes.
Nothing.

But Tupu says things do. Things change she says. They do. I say they'd don't.
She says they do.

I say tell me one thing that has changed in Malaefou since yesterday?
One thing. And don't say Lole's unbaptized baby who died because death is the same.
It doesn't matter who dies. Whether it was a man or a woman. An old man or an old woman. A girl. A
dog. An unbaptized baby. Because death is permanent. A permanent cycle that goes round and
round like Alison's hula hoop. Like Filemoni's record player. Things don't change I said. They don't.

But Tupu says things do.
So persistent she is.
She just wants to win I said.

But then she said something that took me completely by surprise.
Completely.

Look at the waves she said. They were blue yesterday. They were green this morning. But now they're black. Same as the sky. The sun. The moon. It's always changing Ana. Always.

And I felt a sudden breeze pass us. Circling our skinny legs. Sitting there on the steps of the church. Watching clouds wander the sky. Like women eating mangoes.

-Sia Figiel

Acknowledgments: Those Behind the Grill

**Mom. Dad. Ben.
Bella the dog. Boo Radley the cat.
Jackie. Suzie. Leslie. Melissa. Rhapsody.
Steve. Kati. Tepi. Julie. Brika. Amy. Amelia.
Jamie. Laura. Ronald McDonald. Dan. Hamburgeler.
Afamasaga Toleafoa. Maria Kerslake. Christine Qusted. Rudy Bartley.
Merrill Pereyra. Kim Talava. Carol Sootaga. Halo Tavana.
My Saving Grace – Maila. Samu Feilo. Sia Figiel. Princess Tiger.
To all the employees at McDonald's – my new home – for welcoming a
palagi vegetarian into your life. And to all the customers who were willing
to discuss their lunch with a complete stranger. And of course - the kids.
Stray Dogs. Tropical Fanta. The Juice of Life. 80s Pop.
Mangoes. Cheesy Bread. Samoan club remixes. Jelly Pasta.
Mosquitoes. Blackouts. Pastel Buses. Scoops. Usher.
Pacific Stars. Outdoor Fales. And Full Moons.
No animals were harmed in the creation of this**

Thanks Burger. No Laughing, I serious.

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Introduction: Welcome to McDonald’s

“So just like the sun will rise tomorrow, there will be change...”¹

While meandering down the busy streets of Apia, one can not help but notice signs of development and change. Apia, Samoa’s capital and harbor city, is currently undergoing a process of political, social, and physical change. Blinking traffic lights dot the roads, cars speed by and Samoan teenagers swagger in their imported Nike’s while overhead the golden arches of McDonald’s fast food restaurant light up the sky.

Although traditional *puletafi* still line local shop windows and the smell of fresh fish and newly cooked taro lay stagnant in the air, the presence of McDonald’s, a multi-billion dollar corporation, on the streets of Apia, is representative of changing times. Change affects people of all ages; however, it is the Samoan youth who often act as a driving force or perhaps the group most completely affected. For these reasons Samoan youth provide the perfect medium to study change. The restaurant beneath the bright yellow arches and blinding red roof can be used as a case study for examining the role and span of globalization in Apia and all of Samoa, specifically, in relation to Samoan youth.

¹ Toleafoa, Afamasaga. Personal interview. 19 Nov. 2004.

By exploring McDonald's as a microcosm of change and its relationship with Samoan youth, one is better able to comprehend the direct effects of the often overused and abstract term – globalization. Definitions of globalization are rarely consistent with one another and are frequently used interchangeably with words such as development and change. Therefore, it is important to make distinctions and clarifications early on. According to Afamasaga Toleafoa, globalization is “A blurring of national boundaries and moving towards one global economy.” Culturally it is “a blurring of distinctions...between people and cultures and the development of commonly shared values.”² Social change is often a direct effect of globalization, whereas development can be viewed as either the catalyst of or response to globalization.

The impact of both cultural and economic globalization is prevalent throughout the world. Samoa, previously referred to as Western Samoa, is a collection of nine islands in the South Pacific with a land mass totaling a mere 1240 square miles.³ Samoa being both isolated and small has historically been viewed as a country with minimal involvement with the economic or greater social world.⁴ The once slow pace of development in Samoa has radically quickened throughout the past ten years with the government's deliberate removal of trade tariffs and increased access to the World Wide Web.⁵ Now in Samoa's capital city you can drink Cappuccino in small Parisian style cafes, bank at an international bank, go shopping for Levi jeans and even grab the quintessential American meal – Big Mac, large coke and fries.

² Toleafoa, Afamasaga.

³ Merlin, Mark. Lecture. 1 Aug. 2004.

⁴ Toleafoa, Afamasaga. Personal interview. 19 Nov. 2004.

⁵ Kerslake, Maria. Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2004.

The infamous golden arches of McDonald's prominently located in Apia represent far more than a multi-billion dollar company or its 300,000 worldwide restaurants.⁶ Maria Kerslake, a sociology professor at the National University of Samoa stated succinctly, "McDonald's is probably the most visual aspect of globalization." McDonald's currently holds the title for the most widely recognizable brand in the world, passing even Coca Cola and Nike.⁷ Today, McDonald's restaurants are located in 120 countries worldwide serving almost identical food, at almost identical counters, from employees wearing almost identical uniforms. Eric Schlosser author of *Fast Food Nation* writes disgruntled, "The values, tastes, and industrial practices of the American fast food industry are being exported to every corner of the globe, helping to create a homogenized international culture." One such corner of the world is Samoa.

Seas of school uniforms color the inside of McDonald's in Apia after schooldays filling the restaurant with high pitched exclamations and giggles. Carol Sootaga, McDonald's Store Manager, describes the typical customer to be a Samoan youth.⁸ Although the definitions for Samoan youth vary, this paper broadly defines youth to include those aged 10 through 29. Making up over 50% of the population in urban Apia in 2000, Samoan youth comprise one of the largest groups of consumers in Samoa⁹. Viewing Samoan youth as consumers reinforces their pivotal role in globalization as both a targeted group and catalyst for change. Kerslake describes Samoan youth "They are consumers. They consume a lot of western food. Western products and commodities."

⁶ *McDonald's Corporation*. Brainy Encyclopedia.

⁷ Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. p. 229.

⁸ The Samoan government defines a "young person" as someone between the ages of 14-21. However, the *Samoa National Youth Policy 2001-2010* defines youth as someone between the ages of 12-29 inclusive (p.3).

⁹ *Samoa National Youth Policy 2001-2010*. Government of Samoa. p.10.

Exploring Samoan youth's attraction to western food, products, and commodities, specifically McDonald's, allows for a case study of the impact and extent of change and globalization in Samoa.

Methodology: Startin' Up the Grill

“One of the glories of New York is its ethnic food, and only McDonald's and Burger King equalize us all.”¹⁰

Having been a vegetarian and passionate animal activist for twenty-one years, involvement with McDonald's prior to Samoa consisted of nothing except the occasional consumption of a greasy French frie or McFlurry. After spending less than one week in Samoa came the realization that McDonald's, like so much else, held a far different place in Samoan society than in America, particularly in relation to Samoan youth. Rather than viewing McDonald's as a cheap, quick eat, youth appeared to choose McDonald's because it was “cool.” Inspired by a new culture's interaction and view of a name, flavor and corporation already familiar this independent study topic was chosen.

The initial research objectives were to explore the role McDonald's in Apia plays in the lives of Samoans, tourists from overseas, and specifically – Samoan youth. Topics to consider included frequency of its customers, comparing the frequency with which

¹⁰ Corry, John. Brainy Quote. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/john_corry.html

Samoan youth go to McDonald's as opposed to other restaurants, and the reasons behind their choice of McDonald's. McDonald's aims and community involvement would also be explored. Underlying all of my research was an exploration of McDonald's as a physical representation of the globalization occurring in Samoa. The overarching research question was: What is the role of McDonald's in lives of Samoan youth and what is the role of Samoan youth in the McDonald's corporation? Seven mini-research questions targeted at Samoan youth were to be answered:

1. How was the introduction of McDonald's into Apia contested or supported?
2. What was the goal behind the introduction of McDonald's to Apia?
3. Who eats at McDonald's?
4. Why do people eat at McDonald's?

5. What is the extent of McDonald's community involvement and what are the objectives behind this involvement?
6. How do McDonald's customers view McDonald's?
7. How does McDonald's influence nearby restaurants and how do local restaurants view McDonald's?

Employing a variety of sources and methods allowed for a more thorough understanding of McDonald's, globalization, Samoan youth, and the ways in which they connect, impact, or re-define one another. The majority of the research was conducted the 4th – 25th of November, 2004, making use of both primary and secondary sources of information.

Emphasis was placed on primary resource due to limited access of the increasing popular documentaries and exposé's on McDonald's. Secondary research, consisting of mostly internet websites and articles, is in and of itself a sign of globalization. Old magazine and newspaper articles from 1996-1997 gave insight into health conscientiousness and reactions to the arrival of McDonald's in March of 1996.

Additionally, papers written by local professors and regional experts gave be a solid background in youth in Samoa, *fa'asamoa* or 'the Samoan way', globalization, and social change. Secondary resources provided a strong framework in which to interpret primary research.

The collection of primary research via surveys, interviews, and observations was always an exciting process. A 13-question bilingual survey was completed by a total of 20 people in Lotofaga Aleipata and Apia (Appendix A.) A simplistic five question baseline survey was administered to 100 random passer-by's in Apia providing a sample representation of the frequency people eat out or get take-away and favorite restaurants (Appendix B.) Two rounds were administered ensuring a greater variety of people. A third survey was administered to 100 McDonald's customers within the confines of the fence, consisting of 5 quick questions regarding frequency and reasons to visit McDonald's (Appendix B.) A final survey was directed at McDonald's employees to get their perception of frequent customers and the influence of McDonald's within Samoa (Appendix C.) Twelve surveys were administered but employee interviews yielded far better results.

Throughout the research process 16 people were interviewed: five managers of McDonald's, five customers, two employees, one McDonald's share owner, one sociology professor, one expert in globalization, and one nutritionist. The interviews varied in length, but averaged around an hour each, ranging from ten minutes (customers) to over an hour and a half. Five of the 16 interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The remaining 11 interviews were documented with extensive notes. During the past five months a daily average of 5 hours was spent observing at

McDonald's or its general vicinity. Three hours were spent noting each person that entered McDonald's, recording the following information for 202 customers: age, sex, *palagi* or Samoan, if they used the bathroom, if they used the bathroom without purchasing food, and if they bought only ice cream. These observations although based on assumptions were an effective way of getting bulk statistics for a basis of knowledge. The safety of familiar surroundings has allowed for much life in Apia to be seen.

Researching within another country is not without biases. Interaction and observations are colored by *palagi* skin, American roots, previous life experiences, familial upbringing and even one's most recent meal. One can not take oneself and ideas out of the process, they are inseparable. Researching McDonald's resulted in a conflict of roles deriving from close friendship with employees on duty. Such relationships allowed access to a wealth of insider information, a friendly environment, and an abundance of welcoming smiles but the presence of dual roles may have tainted results causing employees to give answers they think are desired of them. People are often more apt to tell you what you want to hear when conducting an interview. Sample surveys also come with their own set of biases. The 232 surveys administered are only representative of the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of a small sample of people. Although they give good insight into general trends, they do not speak for the entire population of Samoa.

Research, like culture, is constantly in a state of flux. Each day a new conversation, survey result, no-show interview, or late bus would influence the research, directing future research. Seeking answers to the original seven sub-research questions allowed for a broad basis of knowledge. Themes slowly began to emerge while Samoan

youth became a medium in which to understand McDonald's as a microcosm of globalization and change in Samoa.

Findings: The Meat

“The Smile Known Around The World; Ronald McDonald, In Any Language means Fun!”¹¹

McDonald's Comes to Apia

McDonald's in Apia is prominently situated on a busy intersection where buses zoom by and many people frequent on their way to a nearby business office, internet café or shop. With a bright red roof and flashy neon sign, McDonald's is hardly discrete. Author Eric Schlosser argues, “In order to succeed, fast food restaurants must be seen.”¹² Kerslake agrees, “The red vibrant colors that stand out miles and miles. So if you go to

¹¹ www.mcdonaldsnymetro.com/html/body_ronald_in_

¹² Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. p. 66.

the government building and look out the McDonald's colors stand out...it does hit you."¹³

Although containing twenty-five Formica tables, seven cash registers, two bulletin boards, and three trashcans McDonald's appears spacious and methodical (Appendix E.) The pale blue walls and neutral beige tiles help give the illusion of more space. A kid's corner, frequently roped off, used for McDonald's birthday parties and an employee refuge is decorated with a McDonald character banner featuring such familiar faces as Ronald McDonald, Mayor McCheese, Birdie, Hamburger, and Grimace. Ronald McDonald, a clown with red hair, a white face, enormous lips, and giant shoes, has been the mascot for McDonald's since 1965 and has now become a face widely recognized by children across the world.¹⁴

The play area or *Playland*, featuring a plastic clown, is a big draw for Samoan kids. Halo Tavana says, "There aren't many other playgrounds, some private schools have playgrounds, other schools don't have the kinds of facilities that we have and there are no other *Playland's* in Samoa" (12 Nov 2004.) Children play energetically running in and out of plastic tunnels as though McDonald's has forever had a natural place in Samoa, however, it was less than ten years ago when McDonald's first found Apia.

McDonald's opened in Apia on March 2nd, 1996. Merrill Pereyra, Regional Manager for the McDonald's of the Pacific Islands, recalls a burning desire to build in the once vacant parking lot.¹⁵ Hans Joe Keil, the current Minister of Tourism for Samoa and owner of McDonald's was always keen on bringing something "big" into Samoa.¹⁶ A

¹³ Kerslake, Maria. Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2004.

¹⁴ Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. p. 41.

¹⁵ Pereyra, Merill. Personal interview. 12 Nov. 2004.

¹⁶ Pereyra, Merrill.

McDonald's franchise had opened two years prior in New Caledonia therefore great success was anticipated in Samoa.

Winnie David, a previous general manager of the McDonald's in Apia recalls, however, prior to the arrival "McDonald's USA did not know where Western Samoa was."¹⁷ Plans for McDonald's evoked a variety of emotions from locals including: strong resistance, enthusiastic support, and blatant indifference. Local nutritionists were unenthused about the arrival of a fast food chain whose cuisine was both high in fat and popularity. Christine Quested, the principal nutritionist at the National Hospital recalls feeling unhappy upon hearing the news and other nutritionists including Brenda Sio, former chief nutritionist for the Department of Health wrote editorials to the *Samoan Observer*. Quested challenged McDonald's morals wondering, "We know that we have a huge problem here in terms of obesity. And so what social stance does McDonald's take when they come into this country" (4 Nov 2004.)¹⁸ One health official reported, "a Big Mac diet won't improve Samoa's mortality figures."¹⁹ The somber concerns of nutritionists were not unfounded especially with new fatty food on the horizon and a huge brand name to ensure sales.

While local nutritionists challenged the nutritional impact of Big Macs, the local press vocalized their concern yet others remained silent in their opposition. Regional Manager, Pereyra, regarded the animosity as natural, routine, and expected attributing it "the price you pay for being number one." (12 Nov 2004.) He estimates that about 80 % of the Samoan population were keen on the arrival of McDonald's. However, his

¹⁷ *The Year of the Big Mac*. Islands Business.

¹⁸ Statistics from 1991 record an 11 % rise from the proceeding five years in the number of people categorized as obese. As of 1991 Samoa's population was 80 % obese. *The Growth of Obesity*. www.alternative-healthzine.com

¹⁹ *Why Stop at Big Mac?* Islands Business.

estimates appear to exclude those who were unaware or indifferent about McDonald's arrival. Approximately a year after the arrival of McDonald's the local newspaper, *Samoa Observer*, featured numerous articles pertaining to nutrition, obesity, and fast food: *Lifestyle Diseases are a Serious Problem*, *Fat Worries Clinton* and *For Most Americans, Eating is a Fast Food*.²⁰ Despite rising health consciousness in Samoa, no references or complaints were made. McDonald's seemed to be well on their way to one of their goals "Making customers happy is what our business is all about."²¹ McDonald's currently serves approximately 1000 to 1200 customers a day via drive-thru and counter sales. Kim Talava concludes, "no more criticism...it's part of Samoa now." (18 Nov. 2004.)

When questioned about McDonald's goals, Carol Sootaga paused momentarily and then ran to collect her McDonald's Operation Manual nicknamed 'the bible' by many McDonald's employees worldwide.²² As of 2004 McDonald's goal internationally was to "To be our customer's favorite place and way to eat."²³ On a local level, select managers, employees and Joe Keil – the owner, joined forces to develop a specific goal for the Apia franchise: "Together everyone can achieve more. To set new standards in excellence with outstanding customer/people experience, quality food, and great value." In an interview on November 12, 2004, Regional Manger Pereyra explained his goal to target local customers. "Because if there's a cyclone tomorrow, or an airline strike tomorrow...the planes stop coming in, the tourists stop coming. So you've got to rely on

²⁰ For Most Americans, Eating is a Fast Food. *Samoa Observer*. 5 March 1997. p. 15.
Lifestyle Diseases are a Serious Problem. *Samoa Observer*. 6 March 1997. p. 8.
Fat Worries Clinton. *Samoa Observer*. 18 March 1997. p.10.

²¹ www.mcdonalds.com

²² Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. p.69.

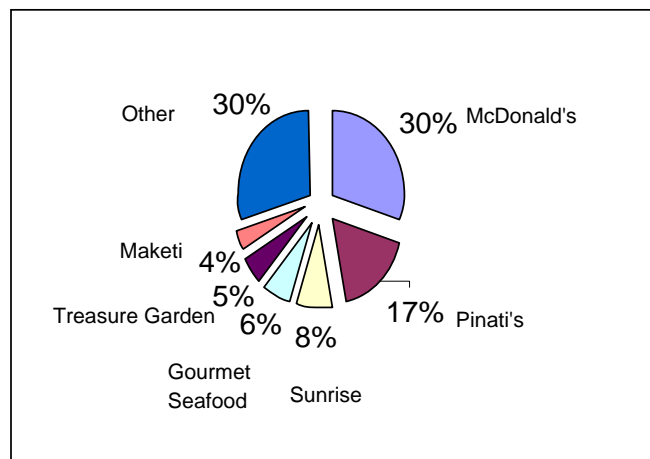
²³ Sootaga, Carol. Personal Interview. 19 Nov. 2004.

the locals” (12 Nov. 2004.) Pereyra referred to tourists as merely “icing on the cake.” Through written and spoken words McDonald’s goals, it is far more difficult to access how successful they have been.

Who’s Eating The Big Mac’s?

McDonald’s is a popular restaurant, proven by the number of customers served daily.²⁴ These customers include a plethora of professionals attired in three piece suits and *puleyasi*, a variety of school children, government employees, tourists and families. In a baseline survey 30 out of 100 respondents name McDonald’s as their favorite restaurant. Out of those 30 responses all but 2 were between the ages of 15 and 21. Only 11 out of the 100 did not live in Samoa (Figure 1.) The average age of those surveyed was 20.9. Thus the baseline was most representative of the Samoan youth’s favorite restaurants.

Figure 1. Baseline Survey Results: Favorite Restaurant



²⁴ Sootaga, Carol.

This statistic combines both register and drive-thru customers but fails to include others who come to McDonald’s for other miscellaneous reasons: restrooms, the plays cape, or an escape from bad weather.

Results pointing to McDonald’s popularity with Samoan youth do not necessarily mean they are the most frequent customers. Twelve employees were asked: Who comes to McDonald’s the most. Half (6) of them said 15-29 year’s old, one-third (4) said 0-14 year’s old, 1 said 30-44 and 1 said 45-59. Both the 0-14 and the 15-29 age brackets fall under the broadened definition of youth, so, according to 10 out of 12 employees the most frequent customers at McDonald’s are youth. Manager, Carol Sootaga agreed that the most frequent customers were “mainly youth.”²⁵

During a three hour observation period on Wednesday, October 13, 2004, 202 people entered McDonald’s; 137 of them appeared²⁶ to be between the ages of 0-29 (Figure 3.) Twenty-three of them were *palagi* and 179 of them appeared to be Samoan (Figure 2.) A variety of observations, surveys, and interviews indicate that McDonald’s most frequent customers appear to be Samoan youth.

Figure 2.
Observation Results: *Palagi* vs. Samoan

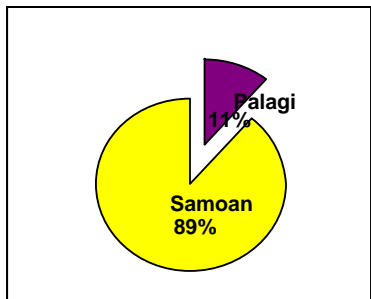
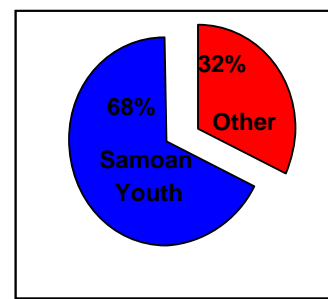


Figure 3.
Observation Results: Age



The Appeal

The popularity of McDonald’s is undeniable; there is a constant flow of people both in and out of the restaurant, and as one palagi visiting from the States put it “I just love McDonald’s. I can’t stay away.” What is it about McDonald’s that allures its

²⁵ Sootaga, Carol. Personal interview. 19 Nov. 2004.

²⁶ Categorizations were based solely on physical characteristics and therefore can not be considered hard fact.

customers? Why do Samoan youth visit a McDonald's restaurant? After observing behavior patterns, interviewing, and surveying customers, it is evident customers come for many reasons. The decision to go to McDonald's may be influenced by a number of factors including age, socio-economic status, nutritional upbringing, individual notions of cool, a lack of time or a desire for greasy food. Reasons may differ but several trends have emerged within groups, Samoan youth.

Those far from home often long for the familiar. Samoa's traditional cuisine of taro, breadfruit, coconut cream, and the great delicacy – palolo worms, often comes as a shock to many tourists and temporary residents of Apia²⁷. An advertisement found in *Islands*, Air Pacific's in-flight magazine, reads, "Taste a bit of home in Paradise" featuring a Big Mac suspended over water (Appendix D).²⁸ Although this marketing ploy appeals to everyone's longing for home, it is often youth, specifically adolescents out traveling the world, feeling lost and without place in society.²⁹ The familiarity offered in this advertisement may be of particular interest to them. One young tourist from Holland spoke succinctly "A Big Mac's a Big Mac." Of the 100 customer surveys, 16 checked familiarity as one of their pulls to McDonald's earlier that day, Samoans included. Thirty-three of the surveys were completed by non-locals and 1/3 (11) of them ticked familiarity as one of their reasons for choosing McDonald's. Whereas, tourists are often enticed by McDonald's familiarity, a few locals explain their attraction to McDonald's as simply a novelty.³⁰

²⁷ Holmes, D. Lowell & Ellen Rhoads Holmes. *Samoan Village Then and Now*. p.133.

²⁸ *Islands*. Taste a bit of home in paradise. p. 35.

²⁹ Nagler, Steve. *Coming of Age in Samoa...in 1997*. p.551.

³⁰ Talava, Kim. Personal interview. 18 Nov. 2004.

The use of McDonald's as a restroom destination also appears to be a commonplace phenomenon. Twenty-two out of 100 administered surveys admitted that the use of the restroom was the reason he or she came to McDonald's and in many cases the only reason. The toilets are made of white ceramic; there is always an abundance of toilet paper, a clean mirror and a sink, the McDonald's Store Manager gleamed, "I get a lot of comments about the bathrooms; they say it's better than the bathrooms overseas."³¹

Youth constantly define and redefine what is "cool" and hip within their generation. Notions of cool often depend on outside influence. Twenty people out of the 20 preliminary surveys answered "Yes" to Is McDonald's Cool? One fourth of those whom completed the formal customer survey checked cool as one of their reasons for coming to McDonald's. A young Samoan female in her early twenties, admitted to bringing a plate of food from Pinati's, a local restaurant, and eating it at McDonald's. Being seen at McDonald's would be seen as "cool."

In addition to having a "cool" status, McDonald's has also become a status symbol. The drive-thru window accounts for an average 55 % of McDonald's sales and number of customers per day.³² Cars indicate socio-economic level as does the price of the food one can afford. Maria Kerslake, a sociologist, shared stories of village neighbor's unspoken status competition using McDonald's as a marker. She recalls, "some people tell me they just buy the tala ice cream and go sit in the air-conditioning... Because their neighbor's children went their yesterday to buy their burger so 'we'll just go buy the tala ice cream and let the children play there so they can see us playing there too.'" Kerslake explains, "It's a natural part of human's to want to belong. And you

³¹ Sootaga, Carol. Personal interview. 19 Nov. 2004.

³² Sootaga, Carol.

want to belong to the best group.” This refers to Samoans who exhibit their wealth by purchasing meals at McDonald’s, driving their new cars up to the drive-thru windows, and letting their children play on the plays cape, often only available for privately school children.³³ Rudy Bartley of McDonald’s advertising, claims a “direct relationship with the size of the toy and the number” of Happy Meals sold.³⁴ Although Happy Meals may bring in the most money, in terms of products sold, an average 1000 – 1,200 vanilla ice cream cones are sold daily. Attributing to the high number of ice cream sales are many of the after school children whom come to McDonald’s to eat ice cream cone after ice cream cone. Almost 40 % of customers surveyed responded that they came to McDonald’s for ice cream. Thirty-four of 100 surveyed said they came for air-conditioning, yet another attractive quality when it’s hot. Samoa’s average temperature is between 22 and 30 degrees Celsius (72 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit) all year long, a statistic which acts as validation for a multiple of reasons why people would choose McDonald’s.³⁵ Samoan youth and tourists choose McDonald’s for many of the varied reasons cited above.

Community Interaction

McDonald’s as an international corporation which places great emphasis on community involvement. Community involvement guidelines and suggestions are developed for each franchise but ultimately the local partner in coordination with the store manager decide what activities each restaurant chooses to sponsor.³⁶ Joe Keil, the

³³ Tavana, Halo. Personal interview. 22 Nov. 2004.

³⁴ Bartley, Rudolf. Personal interview. 18 Nov. 2004.

³⁵ *Atlapedia Online: Countries A to Z*. <http://www.atlapedia.com/online/countries/westsamo.htm>

³⁶ Pereyra, Merrill. Personal interview. 12 Nov. 2004.

current owner of McDonald's, is responsible for McDonald's involvement within Apia and all of Samoa.

Pereyra, the Pacific Regional Manager clarifies McDonald's reasons for community involvement:

It's just the philosophy of giving back. And you want to try to build some sort of loyalty and it doesn't have to be loyalty about customers coming to the restaurant. It can be loyalty with just people. You know, McDonald's is here to help out. Not just one of these big companies that's going to come out here and take profits out of the country (12 Nov. 2004.)

Merrill's desire is for his restaurants in the Pacific region, including Samoa is to "return the favor" to locals who have made McDonald's a profitable investment. Regardless of the exact intention behind McDonald's involvement with local communities it is a founding doctrine which deeply impacts the way people view McDonald's.

The brand name McDonald's and its golden insignia can be found far beyond the confines of downtown Apia. Bumper stickers reading "I'm lovin' it" can be seen in both 'Upolu and Savai'i, Samoa's largest island, often garnishing rusty taxis. McDonald's t-shirts and toys can also be found even in the most remote villages. In Lotofaga, a village located on the southern side of 'Upolu (an hour bus ride from Apia) small children playfully squirt sea cucumbers, have seaside games of Rugby and play joyously with Happy Meal toys. In a preliminary survey conducted in Lotofaga, six out of ten surveyed reported having a McDonald's toy in their families possession. Eight out of those 10 were Samoan youth. These results indicate McDonald's relationships with villages as further reaching than simply Apia.

On Saturday, October 30, 2004 McDonald's held its annual Halloween Party for kids, transforming its normal bright décor to that of a spooky haunted house.

McDonald's was in complete chaos with children at every turn, costumed in everything from eye patches, face paint, devil horns, princess tiara's and ordinary street cloths. Almost every seat on the premise was taken. Pereyra described the popularity of the event within Samoa, "You have nearly every kid in the store." Employees handed out glow products, McDonald's balloons and lollipops out of brown paper bags, while managers judged the costume contest. A raffle was drawn for two bikes and twenty DVD prizes were presented to the prettiest, freakiest, and scariest costumes. One prize winner, a fair skinned Samoan girl of about 8 years old, smiled with complete joy as she held up her prize – Country Bears DVD.

Much like the Halloween Party, McDonald's local involvement is focused primarily on children and Samoan youth. On a worldwide level McDonald's has developed the Ronald McDonald House Charities which develop programs in which each local franchise can enact in order to benefit a youth organization in the area. McDonald's in Apia helped sponsor a worldwide weeklong promotion of World's Children's Day – November 21, 2004. Two mini-promotions led up to that day. One involved the donation of one tala into a wooden box, in return for brightly colored hand paint to make a handprint on the wall. The handprints decorating the wall are to inspire others to donate for a good cause, as well as the beautification of the building. Both the money from "Please lend a hand" and 25 % of the money spent on the special – Pie a la Mode, went to the development of sports in Samoa. Specifically, the money sponsored a junior tennis competition in the Apia area.

McDonald's managers were involved in the award ceremony celebrating youth in sports. However, most of McDonald's employees could be classified as youth

themselves. When McDonald's arrived in 1996, 150 jobs were created: including crew, managers, construction workers, advertising agents, and others. Today, very few employees are above 25, Carol Sootaga explains, "People who apply right now are school leavers or part-time – the ones at University and high school. So hardly no older people come here and ask to fill out application forms." Out of the 12 employee surveys administered at McDonald's 6 employees referred to McDonald's role as providing jobs to the greater Samoan community.

Customer's Perception

When speaking with Samoan youth, in particular Samoan school children, it is readily apparent McDonald's is viewed as an expensive restaurant. Excluding the one tala ice cream and perhaps the spring water, McDonald's prices are extremely high relative to average salaries and minimum wage. Pereyra made no excuses, "Out here, we are expensive. I'm not gonna lie. But the thing is nothing is local. You know...so we've tried to keep ourselves in the 10 to 15 tala bracket. But it's hard...it is hard. When your importing everything from overseas." Due to corporately mandated food safety standards no local materials except soda can be sold at the McDonald's in Apia. Sixteen out of 20 people surveyed in my preparatory survey checked "yes" when asked whether McDonald's was expensive. Although some perceive McDonald's as an icon of America, a status symbol or part of a corporation ruining the world, the most widely vocalized perception of McDonald's is its great expense.

Local Restaurants

McDonald's is surrounded by an abundance of eateries, cafes, and take-out counters. A well-known Samoan restaurant, Pinati's, is located across from McDonald's

and referred by some as “McPeanuts.” Pinati’s serves traditional Samoan cuisine and has a constant stream of Samoan customers despite a complete lack of advertising. Lonely Travel Guide describes Pinati’s as “...always full of Samoan workers at lunchtime, serves up huge meals, including chow mein, and chop suey and curry...”³⁷ In a baseline survey conducted, 17 out of 100 surveyed referred to Pinati’s as their favorite restaurant (Figure 1.) This was the second most popular restaurant, following only McDonald’s with 30. Of the 17 who chose Pinati’s as their favorite eatery, only 3 of them were above the cutoff for Samoan youth. Therefore, Pinati’s appears to attract a variety of ages including, youth. The biggest draw of Pinati’s according to many customers is the cheap price and large quantity of food – two comments never heard in relation to McDonald’s.

Sunrise, a fast food Chinese take-out restaurant located just beyond Gourmet Seafood, ranked the third most popular place to eat or get take-away from during a baseline survey. Out of 100 surveyed, 8 people’s favorite restaurant was Sunrise. Amani’s Restaurant, now in its third location since its opening ten years ago is located just past Mr. Lavalava heading away from the wharf. Owner, Henry Hunkin, a pleasant older man described his relationship with McDonald’s as fairly non-existent, “McDonald’s has not been a threat so far...we have our fair share of business.” Amani’s employees ten people, serving on average 150 customers a day, and advertises by radio. Hunkin explained his typical customer as a Samoan local; however, he hopes to attract new customers with this new location. Plush booths make seating comfortable inside and patio tables and chairs provide seating outside. Three out of 100 people surveyed described Amani’s as their favorite restaurant. McDonald’s close in proximity, appears to attract either different clientele than the other favorite restaurants, or perhaps

³⁷ Lonely Planet: Samoan Islands. p. 87.

overlapping clientele for differing reasons, making outward customer competition and hostility almost nonexistent.

Analysis: Globalization and Ketchin' Up

“It was not her sex appeal but the obvious relish with which she devoured the hamburger that made my pulse begin to hammer with excitement” -Ray Kroc, McDonalds founder

Investigating the inner workings of McDonald's in Apia and its relationship with youth over the past month has allowed for a merging of old and new, comfortable with foreign – the exploration of a familiar franchise in an unfamiliar place, old research methods with new people. The research began by seeking answers to seven questions, and developed into an exploration of the interplay between a western culture and more traditional culture: a case study for globalization in Samoa and the rest of the world.

McDonald's in Apia is experiencing a complex interaction of cultures and ways of life – McDonald's culture and Samoan culture. This interplay is slowly influencing and shaping both parties involved. The practices and values that occur within McDonald's in Apia are shaped by the area in which it is located, the people who work there and those who eat there. McDonald's as a culture, to some extent, is being

infiltrated by and mixing with the strong culture of Samoa. One can not examine McDonald's culture in Apia without considering the impact and importance of environment and people on the regimented franchise.

McDonald's has fifty-six years of history³⁸ and a long genealogy tree. McDonald's has its own norms and set of beliefs, its own food, its own music, its own slang, and its own patterns of dress. McDonald's even has its own religious doctrine, founding democratic principles, and hierarchical governance system. For all intents and purposes, McDonald's has its own culture. Within this culture, a strict set of values are enforced. These values include efficiency, precision, speed, a focus on children, a focus on the future, an emphasis on a market economy and a emphasis on English use and proficiency. These McDonald's values can be experienced in any of the 30,000 restaurants worldwide. Similarities exist between various franchises but the following examples of universal McDonald's values are from Apia, Samoa.

McDonald's culture places high value on efficiency, speed, and precision. The first restaurant opened by the founding McDonald brothers, Ray and Mac, was closed due to their desire to:

...increase the speed, lower prices, and raise the volume of sales. The brothers eliminated almost two-thirds of the items on their old menu. The only sandwiches now sold were hamburgers or cheeseburgers... They divided the food preparation into separate tasks performed by different workers.³⁹

The brothers desired a highly mechanized kitchen, specialized labor, limited options, and great speed in order to increase sales. Although McDonald's as a corporation has undergone much change, its core tenants still remain the same – proof of an enduring and

³⁸ The first McDonald's opened on December 12, 1948. *McDonald's History*. www.media.mcdonalds.com

³⁹ Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. p. 20.

resistant culture. Resistance to change at a high level does not imply the same for each local franchise.

In Apia, Halo Tavana, one of the restaurant managers described a new policy set in action early November. McDonald's is altering the way each crew employee learns. Previously each employee would try a few weeks at each work station including the counter, drive-thru, dressing table, grill, and PFN (pies, fries, and nuggets.) According to one manager, McDonald's is "Tightening rules so that crew is trained to do the best they can for a specific area."⁴⁰ In an effort to increase precision, speed, and efficiency, McDonald's has increased workforce specialization.

McDonald's is for the kids. Targeting kid customers and advertising to entice them to the golden arches. Rudy Bartley, advertising consultant for McDonald's, explains kid marketing, "the happy meal advertisements get the kids." Combining imaginative commercials and fantasylands with McDonald's food products is the perfect advertising ploy for *kids*. In *Fast Food Nation*, Schlosser writes:

McDonald's soon loomed large in the imagination of toddlers, the intended audience for the ads. The restaurant chain evoked a series of pleasing images in a youngster's mind: bright colors, a playground, a toy, a clown, a drink with a straw, little pieces of food wrapped up like a present.⁴¹

McDonald's community involvement within Samoa is almost entirely directed towards children –the Halloween Party, Jr. Tennis Tournament, Teuila Festival⁴², World Children's Day, and Christmas floats. McDonald's emphasis on kids corresponds with their focus on the future. "Eight-year-olds are considered ideal customers; they have

⁴⁰ Tavana, Halo.

⁴¹ Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. p. 42.

⁴² The Teuila Festival is an annual celebration of South Pacific Island culture, specifically Samoa.

about sixty-five years of purchasing in front of them.”⁴³ The young customers of today will develop a life-long taste for McDonald’s cuisine and potentially get their own children hooked one day.

McDonald’s focus on children and youth and the role in which they play in McDonald’s culture is very distinct from the role children play in Samoan culture. Children in Samoa are taught to respect their elders and are lead by the guiding principal service leads to authority. They are not catered to and pampered as in the McDonald’s culture. However, as demonstrated by findings, Samoan youth are an integral part of the success of McDonald’s in Apia. Samoan families visiting McDonald’s often explain, “We’re here for the kids” demonstrating perhaps a slight emphasis shift in some Samoan families.

Deeply ingrained in McDonald culture is an emphasis placed on rules. Over a business lunch Rudy Bartley and Dorothy Hunter both employees from Samoa Broadcasting Company discussed McDonald’s strict dedication to rules. Dorothy passionately inquired about the heaps of leftover food she had seen being thrown in the dumpsters out back. McDonald’s employees had deposited the food while hungry children looked on longingly. Rudy rebutted, “It’s all about following rules.” This simplistic answer, acts as an explanation for many questions pertaining to McDonald’s choices. Merrill Pereyra speaks of the effects of worldwide food and safety standards in Samoa, “...none of the produce could be got locally...your... beef, your patties, chicken, your fillet, your buns, everything’s got to come from overseas.” Specifics regulations and restrictions are written in the employee handbook, in English. Commonly referred to

⁴³ Schlosser, Eric. p.42.

as “The Bible,” the language in which the manual is written demonstrates the way in which the McDonald’s corporation stresses the English language.⁴⁴

Although at a corporation level, English is the language of choice, many employees and customers regardless of the shop, restaurant, or workplace speak in Samoan. Samoan is the native tongue of Samoa. English is an important skill in modern day Apia, it is taught in school but typically as a Samoans second language. Because McDonald’s in Apia is often a popular spot for tourists, English is viewed as a necessary skill in the hiring process. Despite the corporate push for English language, it appears as though the Samoan language is gradually “Samoanizing”⁴⁵ or infiltrating McDonald’s native tongue.

McDonald’s culture requires a particular style of dress. As of early November McDonald’s employees were required to wear uniforms imported from overseas, which for men consisted of thick navy trousers with the McDonald’s arch sewn onto the right-hand back pocket, a button down white or navy McDonald’s shirt (with a tie for managers,) and closed-toe shoes. The uniforms were hot and unsuitable for Samoa. Mid-November the uniforms changed. Now McDonald’s crew members wear locally made tops of bright green *elei* pattern. Managers are required to wear these Samoan influenced shirts twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays when government employees are required to wear an *elei* print with the embroidered “Samoa” on the pocket.⁴⁶ Halo Tavana, remarked “We’re trying to have our own local uniform...Samoa is very hot...wearing the tie is really hot...we are trying to wear something that relates to

⁴⁴ Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. p.

⁴⁵ “Samoanizing” is used to explain the cultural phenomenon of incorporating something foreign into one’s own. For instance: Samoans are often cited as “Samoanizing Christianity” when the missionaries came in the 1800s.

⁴⁶ Tavana, Halo. Personal interview. 22 Nov. 2004.

Samoa.” Overall, employees have been excited about a new uniform which bring an aspect of Samoan culture into McDonald’s on a visual level, makes use of local resources, unify McDonald’s employees with Samoan government employees and resist the homogenizing force of McDonald’s.

When walking through the McDonald’s doorway you are not only greeted by a bright green Samoan uniform, you are greeted with a friendly smile and “Hello.” When ordering a meal which requires cooking time, employees often hand deliver trays to their seated customers. Both of these practices are uncommon in other McDonald’s worldwide and represent, on a very local scale, the infiltration of Samoan culture into traditional McDonald’s practices. Hospitality is an integral part of Samoan culture because it signifies respect for another person.

McDonald’s culture acts as an all encompassing force which shapes employee behavior, menu options, and customer satisfaction, however, like all cultures it is a dynamic force subject to change. Cultures are constantly evolving, influenced by one’s environment and those within the environment.⁴⁷ The inter-play of McDonald’s culture and Samoan culture raises awareness of the impacts one has on the other, as well as demonstrates the strength of Samoan culture in its ability to “Samoanize” some of the practices of a multi-billion dollar corporation.

⁴⁷ Hau’ofa, Epli. *The Future of Our Past*. p.152

Conclusion: The Future – Milkshake or Sundae?

“Emancipation from the fast-food nation and an end to da racist exploitation, been da same shit thru da ages, black men made to work for slave wages” – McDonalds International Liberation Front, in store graffiti

McDonald’s culture is representative but not a replication of many western values, traditions, and customs. The corporation stands as an emblem of new technology and ideas infiltrating Samoa and creating change. Afamasaga Toleafoa explains the root of globalization “...comes through not so much McDonald’s but through the films, the videos, the dancing, the music, the clubs, the rap, all those things.”⁴⁸ There is not just one medium in which globalization or change occurs; rather it is the combination of many outside influences on a culture.

Most susceptible or perhaps most attune to aspects of western popular culture such as films, videos, and dancing are the Samoan youth. They are the ones who frequent McDonald’s the most, who buy the imposter Nikes at the supermarkets, and who blast American rap music from their cars. The youth are the most vulnerable to globalization because often times they are at the forefront of change living a life already

⁴⁸ Toleafoa, Afamasaga. Personal Interview. 19 Nov. 2004.

very different from their parents. Although it is too early to predict Samoa's future – it is readily apparent that Samoan youth will have a large degree of input.

Samoa culture has thrived for thousands of years, thus it is ludicrous to suggest that the entrance of a Big Mac will change traditional Samoa. However, using McDonald's as a microcosm for globalization in Samoa, it is apparent that changes are slowly beginning to occur. On a national scale the impact of globalization is just starting to surface in regards to increased health concerns for the Samoan population,⁴⁹ greater access to communication, and changing notions of a sense of self and place in society. Whether or not one views McDonald's and globalization as a homogenization of the world, an inevitable and natural occurrence or a sign of progress and development adaptations are occurring.

The question remains in what path will globalization within McDonald's, Samoa and the world take? Will cultures eventually all blend into one, homogenized Vanilla milkshake? Or rather will globalization take the form of a sundae? Each sundae ingredient remains distinct, but like the "Samoanization" of McDonald's, the ice cream will make the hot fudge its own while simultaneously the fudge will begin to seep in, altering the texture of the ice cream. At this great cusp of change it is impossible to conclude what McDonald's, Samoa and the world will have for dessert. As Afamasaga said, "I think we're only just beginning to see globalization here. It's only just the beginning."

⁴⁹ Holmes, L. Lowell & Ellen Rhoads Holmes. *Samoa Village: Then and Now*. p.133

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Glossary

1. puletasi..... *Traditional Clothing worn by Samoan women*
2. fa'asamoa..... *The Samoan Way*
3. palagi *White Person*
4. fale..... *Traditional Samoan dwelling*
5. tala..... *Samoan currency*
6. 'aiga..... *Nuclear and Extended family*
7. elei..... *Traditional Samoan print*

Appendix A

1. E fa'afia e te alu ai i Apia? (How often do you come to Apia?)

_____ seasea (seldom) _____ fa'atasi i le vaiaso (1x a week)
_____ fa'atasi i le masina (1x a month) _____ asouma (everyday)

2. Sa e alu muamua i le McDonald's i Apia? (Have you been to the McDonald's in Apia?)

_____ ioe (yes) leai (no)

3. Afai e ioe, e fa'afai? (If yes, how often?)

_____ seasea (seldom) _____ fa'atasi i le vaiaso (1x a week)
_____ fa'atasi i le masina (1x a month) _____ asouma (everyday)

4. Sa fa'ataua e se isi se McDonald's mo'oe?

_____ ioe (yes) leai (no)

5. Sa e matamata i se fa'asalalauga? (Have you ever seen a McDonald's commercial?)

_____ ioe (yes) leai (no)

6. E te manatu e manaia le McDonald's? (Do you think McDonald's is nice / "cool"?)

_____ ioe (yes) leai (no)

7. Afai e iaia sau fanau e fiafia iai latou? (If you have children, do they like McDonald's?)

_____ ioe (yes) leai (no)

8. O le a le mea'ai e te fiafia iai i le McDonald's? (What is your favorite food at McDonald's?)

_____ hamburger _____ fries/chips
_____ aisikulimi (ice cream) _____ leai mea'ai (no food)
_____ mea inu (drinks)

9. E taugata mo'oe le McDonald's? (Is McDonald's expensive?)

_____ ioe (yes) leai (no)

10. E te fiafia e ai so'o i le McDonald's? (Would you like to eat at McDonald's more?)

_____ ioe (yes) leai (no)

11. Aisea e te alu ai i le McDonald's? (Why do you come to McDonald's?)

_____ mania mea'ai (good food) _____ fetau i ma uo (meet friends)
_____ e lelei le tau (good price) _____ isi mea - - fa'amatala (to be seen)

12. E iai ni McDonald's i lou 'aiga? (Do you have any of these in your family?)

_____ bumper stickers _____ mitiafu (t.shirts)
_____ meata'alo (toys) _____ leasi se mea (nothing)

Appendix B

Baseline Survey (administered verbally)

1. Male/Female
2. Village
3. What is the number of times you go out to eat (eating at the restaurant, taking away, and B-B-Q's)?
4. What number of time times you eat out are during lunch
5. Favorite place to eat out or get take-away

Customer Survey

Age:

Are you:

local or tourist

Are you:

- Samoan
 Palagi (white)
 Afa Kasi (half-caste)
 Other _____

Why did you come to McDonald's today? (check all that apply)

- the food ice cream
 to meet friends familiarity
 air-conditioning convenience

- the bathroom it is “cool”
- other _____

How often do you come to McDonald’s in Apia?

_____ times in a

- week
- month
- year

Appendix C

Employee Survey

Name:

Age:

Male/Female:

What is your job at McDonald’s?

How long have you worked at McDonald’s?

What do you like and dislike about working at McDonald’s?

Who comes to McDonald’s the most? (check one from each column)

- 0-14 years old Samoan
- 15-29 years old Palagi
- 30-44 years old Other _____
- 45-59 years old
- 60 and up

Of the palagi that come to McDonald’s are more of them local or tourists?

- Local Tourists

How does McDonald's advertise and who is the advertising targeted at?

Why do you think Samoan youth (15-29 years old) come to McDonald's?
(check all that apply)

- the food
- to meet friends
- the ice cream
- to use the bathroom
- air conditioning
- because it is "cool"
- don't know

How does McDonald's assist or influence Samoa?

Appendix D

McDonald's advertisement featured in *Islands*, a in-flight magazine

Appendix E

Appendix E

Appendix E

