

A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF WOMEN'S WORK WITH *KOLOA* IN THE  
TONGAN COMMUNITY

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## ABSTRACT

### A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF WOMEN’S WORK WITH *KOLOA* IN THE TONGAN COMMUNITY

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The San Francisco Bay Area is home to a Tongan community where the Tongan culture has been established. A major factor establishing Tongan culture is women’s work with *koloa*. *Koloa* are cultural materials used to fulfill customs and traditions specific to Tongan culture, which are under the control of women where they produce, possess, gift, as well as exchange *koloa*. Historically, women have governed the *koloa* tradition as guardians preserving their tradition. My thesis exploration focused on three main subjects—women, *koloa*, and feminism. The point of studying women from a feminist native perspective was to explore their work with *koloa* through shared lived experiences. Information about women’s work was developed from interviews, a survey, and observations. Methodologies such as a feminist native approach, feminist analysis, as well as autoethnography were imperative for developing an understanding of why women’s work is relevant as well as explaining that understanding by forming Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought. The knowledge I developed confronted aspects of previous research by moving away from producing knowledge overly focused on *koloa* as a form of wealth, the production of *koloa*, and overlooking women’s contributions through their work. Realizing women’s work is relevant because it is a resource that can

be used to develop cultural knowledge as well as establish culture was a vigilant discovery defending women as respectable, key members of society. Bringing awareness to their lasting work involved changing from conventional ways of doing research to incorporating new methods to produce information.

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## LIST OF TERMS

anga fakatonga—keeping with Tongan customs, traditions, mannerisms, norms; the Tongan way.

faka'ali'ali—display, exhibit, or advertisement.

fala—woven mat made from pandanus leaves.

falekautaha—a multipurpose facility in the form of an open plan house used for all kinds of village activities.

feta'aki—smaller sheets of tapa cloth used to piece together the *ngatu ngatu*.

hiapo—inner bark of the young paper mulberry tree.

ike—mallet made of wood.

kakala—garland made of flowers worn around the neck or waist.

kātoanga—festive event or celebration conducted in public, where the *koloa* are exchanged.

kautaha—organized group, referred to group of women making tapa cloth.

kie hingoa—fine mat known as a *kie* belonging solely to the monarchy because of the names they are given and the valuable history they hold from being passed down through the bloodline of previous kings.

kiekie—wraparound type *koloa* in the form of a belt adorned with long straps all made from the same materials, they can be made from natural or unnatural materials categorizing them as traditional or nontraditional pieces.

koka'anga—process of making ngatu or tapa cloth by women.

koloa—different types of cultural materials that are either traditional or nontraditional produced and governed by women. A form of wealth possessed by women.

kupesi—pattern.

mana—supernatural power.

me’a fakapālangi—Western or white culture goods made from Western materials.

mehikitanga—father’s sister.

monomono—machine sewn quilt made with distinct fabrics, patterns, and appliques.

ngatu ngatu—traditional tapa cloth made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree using traditional cultural practices with production in Tonga.

ngatu pepa—nontraditional marginalized copy of traditional tapa cloth that is made with unnatural materials such as Vylene and produced with nontraditional cultural practices in places outside of the Tonga Islands.

pālangi—white person.

tapu—taboo

tutu—process of beating the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree or *hiapo*.

tutua—long anvil made of wood.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

According to the *Tongan Dictionary* by C. Maxwell Churchward, *koloa* means “goods, wealth, riches, possessions; what one values” (1959, 270). Some of the most valued and powerful objects culturally in Tonga are pieces of *koloa* (Kaeppler 1999). The three main components of my thesis topic are women, *koloa*, and feminism. Despite *koloa* being primarily defined as a form of wealth, for me, the different types of *koloa* are more than that. As a Tongan woman born and growing up in the United States with a mother who possessed as well as used all types of *koloa* for responsibilities to the family, church, and community, different types of *koloa* were not just a form of wealth but had additional meaningful and valuable functions. *Koloa* in the form of a *ta’ovala*—a small personal sized woven mat worn around the waist by women, children, and men—was something that my mother made me wear to culture-specific events in the church, community, or held by family to show respect and my cultural identity as Tongan. *Koloa* was also something that my mother took care of diligently by storing them in the home and making sure they were kept in their best quality, not letting them get damaged or go to waste. *Koloa* in my home were all types and forms of cultural materials from *fala*—large woven mats made of pandanus leaves, *ngatu ngatu*—large pieces of traditionally made bark cloth from Tonga to nontraditional pieces referred to as *me’a fakapālangi*—Western or white culture goods made from Western materials, and one type known as a

*monomono*—a machine-sewn quilt made with distinct fabrics, patterns, and appliques. My mother used those types of *koloa* to fulfill customs with cultural events, gift giving, and exchange, which instilled in me the value of *koloa* and women's work to Tongan culture.

Currently, according to previous research on *koloa*, *koloa* are considered to be women's wealth where they control the production and use of *koloa* primarily for customs, traditions, and economic gain (Addo 2007, Bleakley 2002, Herda 1999, Kaepler 1999, Phillips 2007, Teilhet-Fisk 1991). However, even though research indicated women are the ones in power with *koloa*, there has not been enough discussion on the relevant role and work of women that has been maintained for decades. The research did not discuss the work that my mother did, and women in my community continue to do with their prized possessions that directly impacted their children, families, churches, communities, and womanhood. The larger and growing Tongan community, which holds several smaller growing communities in the San Francisco Bay Area, is home to a populous of women who possess all different types of *koloa* where their continued work, production, and use of *koloa* are directly related to the existence of Tongan culture in the Bay Area. Exploring Tongan culture in the Bay Area with a feminist perspective was my main initiative for this research because I wanted to focus on women and the invaluable work they do with *koloa* as a feminist native anthropologist.

At the base of my approach to this research was a feminist perspective and my objective for using a feminist perspective was to answer my main research questions by entrusting the participation of women I have known or now know personally that have

experience with *koloa*. By applying old methods in new ways to obtain descriptions of lived experiences and explanations of womanhood around the *koloa* tradition focusing on my three main subjects—women, *koloa*, and feminism, I wanted to first draw awareness to the possibilities of changes taking place in anthropological research. I wanted first to answer how as a feminist native anthropologist the methods and methodology used could be conducive to shedding light as well as providing deeper meanings for the value of women and their work.

Traditional methods such as interviews, surveys, and observations used in nontraditional ways with new methodologies such as autoethnography facilitate in-depth, personal discussions with people. I used this methodology to relate to the women in my community based on our similar cultures, the circle of people we travel in, and backgrounds. I did this with the hope of determining where and how women's work substantially factors into Tongan cultural values being preserved and highly regarded to the point that they run counter to dominant cultural values that support forms of oppression such as race, class, and gender, particularly with subforms of oppression such as assimilation, hegemony, and colonialism. I claim assimilation, hegemony, and colonialism are subforms of oppression not because they are less important, but because they fall under specific forms of oppression that exist within the dominant culture that women in my study constantly antagonized.

By using old methods in new ways locally as a member of the community equipped with a standpoint of drawing awareness to the contributions of women to society my last goal was to determine how to describe *koloa* as a tradition instead of what

has been typically known to academia as women's wealth, and in the process developing Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought. To understand the Tongan culture in the Bay Area around *koloa* and women I focused on studying womanhood as well as finding self-defined characteristics of their work expounding relevance, and the additional noneconomic values of *koloa*, on the different micro and macro levels of society such as the individual, interpersonal, communal, and institutional levels (Hill-Collins 2000).

Gathering data pertaining to the relevance of *koloa* and women's work on multiple levels encompassed a diverse field of research methods and methodologies. My primary pieces of data gathered were from personal one-on-one interviews with the women and demographic survey questionnaires. I also observed, participated in, and conducted events with women and *koloa*. The structured interview questions surveyed the women's lived experiences, knowledge, practices, values, and beliefs around *koloa*, which was where data with an added personal dimension were obtained. The survey questionnaire was necessary for obtaining basic demographic information about the women and their diverse backgrounds.

Feminist analysis of the diverse data relied tremendously upon information from the interviews to extract personal stories, definitions, explanations, and excerpts connoting womanhood or common themes illuminating the value in their work and position as women. For me as a feminist native anthropologist conducting autoethnography their information held significant worth where the familiarities we had were honed in on and added to the analysis of the information. The theoretical framework established for the analysis concentrated on the use of a list of feminist

theories from the literature review. The literature review centered on anthropological work on Tongan culture with an emphasis on women's work with *koloa* as well as cultural identity, but it also involved feminist literature, particularly anthropological feminism and feminism. The feminist literature review and framework established underlined grounding new theories about *koloa* and the work that women do dissimilar from the previous research to situate my exploration within the realm of Pacific Islander studies in feminist native anthropology.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

The considerable volume of literature on *koloa* and Tongan women exemplified how pertinent studying Tongan culture has been to researchers and scholars. The scope of literature available covered an extensive range of topics highlighting the significance of *koloa* to women, women's work, and culture. This review is focused on consigning material to the three main components of my thesis topic: women, *koloa*, and feminism. The inclusion of feminism was necessary for this review because feminism is a component of my thesis topic and it is a discipline in and of itself with an immense number of topics, theories, scholars, and history. The three overarching main points of the review consist of organized thematic material: Tongan diaspora, *koloa*, women's role with *koloa*, feminism in and out of anthropology, and Black feminist thought. The literature consulted to compile this review helped my research take a position that the breadth of research on *koloa*, women, as well as feminism, did not explore adequately. Researching women in the Bay Area has relevance because their work with *koloa* has historical significance originating in Tonga and eventually settling in places such as the Bay Area. The selection of literature reviewed was essentially a collection of scholarly reviewed books and articles.

## Tongan Diaspora

The literature on the Tongan diaspora considered factors determining the progress of cultural continuity overseas specifically related to cultural identity. Cultural identity defined by Helen Morton Lee in her book, *Tongans Overseas, Between Two Shores*, was “Tongans’ own understanding of what it is to be Tongan and how they evaluate one another according to those understandings” (2003, 5). Lee described listing and measuring all that involved defining a Tongan identity as futile because identity was constructed individually and definitions depended on life experiences. I disagree with Lee when she claimed that identity was constructed individually because there are multiple factors influencing a person’s choices concerning identity, and a person’s life experiences are shared, as well as affect other individuals or groups. However, she also related Tongan identity to Tonganness and *anga fakatonga* or the Tongan way because Lee claimed they promote a quality of being Tongan that people strived to live up to and continue (Lee 2003, 237). Lee claimed there was an “imagined norm of Tonganness” that people measured their cultural identity by and *anga fakatonga* was a cultural norm one must accept and intend to incorporate in one’s life if one wants to identify as Tongan (Lee 2003, 3). Her main concern was with the ways people subjectively created as well as experienced cultural and ethnic identity, which counted toward a person’s Tonganness.

Tonganness served as a substantial benchmark for defining cultural identity and developing ideals for a Tongan identity within a transnational setting. Lee argued people were agents creating their own definitions and experiences with cultural and ethnic

identities. However, she argued that ethnic and cultural identities were different because ethnic identity was socially constructed within the context of a transnational diaspora where identity consisted of outward markers shown publicly by food, language, music, dance, and clothing (Lee 2003, 5). Cultural identity, as Lee claimed, went beyond the fixed publicly shown identities of ethnicity where hybrid identities were formed. Lee claimed those identities defined Tongans culturally, for example, as coming from the bush or town (Lee 2003, 5). She did not agree with the idea that Tongans or any other immigrant group either practiced or had a homogenous cultural identity. My problem was with her definition of cultural identity. She claimed it was complex and went beyond identifying culture through outward markers such as food, language, music, dance, and clothing. Nevertheless, Lee did not give a complete explanation of the definition of cultural identity. I argue *koloa* could be considered an outward marker, which Lee described as a form of ethnic identity. Furthermore, cultural identity as opposed to ethnic identity involves the application and use of traditions such as *koloa* by Tongan people in diaspora communities to show one's Tongan identity. Tongan women used all types of *koloa* to display their Tonganness. They used *koloa* to distinguish themselves as Tongan by giving a *fala* or *ngatu* as a gift at their event, but this tradition also served people in general because *koloa* allowed people within the community to stay connected culturally. Fulfilling customs around or dependent on the use of *koloa* for giving to family, the church, community, or at events were cultural practices derived from Tonga and continued in places such as the Bay Area. Involving traditions such as *koloa* in a discussion on cultural identity is necessary to clearly describe the value in cultural

identity that can also be misinterpreted as ethnic identity. A definition of cultural identity that goes beyond the publicly displayed forms of ethnic identity that marginalizes and disempowers Tongans involves understanding how and why traditions maintained in Tonga are continued in foreign places. I argue studying women's work with *koloa* is one way of gaining that understanding.

In her article, "Commoner Tongan Women Authenticate 'Ngatu Pepa' in Auckland," Ping-Ann Addo defended her claim that *ngatu pepa* was authentic and ascribed *ngatu pepa* as indicative of Tongan identity in a transnational cultural location. *Ngatu pepa*—cloth type *koloa* made of paper, is a marginalized form of the traditional *koloa* type *ngatu ngatu*—traditional tapa cloth. She alleged that *ngatu pepa* was an example of an "aesthetic innovation" created by commoner women that typified *koloa* and their practicality for women using them for customs as well as traditions. *Ngatu pepa* was a socially accepted form of *koloa* rendering a woman's Tonganness and wealth. It was made of a product named Vylene, a fabric constructed of fused synthetic fibers. Vylene, commonly used for interfacing to stiffen collars and waistbands by tailors, was used by women in the New Zealand diaspora of Auckland to make *ngatu pepa*.

Addo described in detail her version of the production of *ngatu ngatu* where women collectively work in a *koka'anga*—women engaged in the making of tapa cloth (Churchward, 1959). These women can be referred to as *toulanganga*—women working together in a group making tapa cloth, or as *kautaha*—to be united in a group making tapa cloth (Churchward, 1959). Before the *koka'anga* began, women assembled with their beaten strips of tapa cloth (the beating of the *hiapo*—the inner bark of the paper

mulberry—was a part of production that Addo did not mention, but I believe was necessary to include to provide an extended version of production starting from the development of the beaten strips of cloth). The women sat along a long semicircular cylindrical worktable that was flat side faced down with the curved side faced up. The women faced each other on either side in pairs, first pasting together strips of the beaten tapa cloth into long layers. The layers were then pasted together to form one large piece. The worktable was low to where the women were sitting on the floor or close to the floor. A pattern known as a *kupesi* was a decorative design attached to the surface of the table, which left an impression of the pattern on the tapa cloth when the final, beaten layers were pasted together, and the reddish brown colored dye known as *koka* was rubbed against the surface of the cloth. The adhesive was made with flour and water by cooking the two together, which then formed a paste. This paste was first introduced in the mid-20th century. Women also used vegetables as an adhesive, but Addo did not specify what type. For *ngatu pepa*, women engaged in similar activities with production where they sat at a similar table with their cut pieces of Vylene.

My problem with Addo's research did not just stem from her choices in what to include or not to include to illustrate the process of making *ngatu ngatu*. My main concern was with the arguments and points she made to defend her claim that *ngatu pepa* was authentic. Her definition of *ngatu pepa* as made from the synthetic material Vylene was one factor contradicting its authenticity. *Ngatu ngatu*, or what one would classify as real or authentic tapa cloth, was made from young paper mulberry bark, using traditional cultural practices in Tonga. I do not agree with Addo's claim that *ngatu pepa* was an

authentic piece of *koloa* mainly because *ngatu pepa* is a copy of the original traditional form of the *koloa* type *ngatu ngatu*. However, I do agree with Addo's explanation that *ngatu pepa* was valued as a form of women's wealth and used in the same ways that authentic pieces of *ngatu ngatu* were used because women in the Bay Area possessed these types of *koloa* and found them valuable. Addo argued for the authenticity of *ngatu pepa* by reflecting on the pragmatic views of women in Auckland who produced and made use of this type of wealth.

There were benefits to the invention of *ngatu pepa*. It added to the already extensive variety of *koloa* existing for women to claim. *Ngatu pepa* was identical to *ngatu ngatu* in appearance, but there were clear distinctions with quality when judging material where *ngatu pepa* did not hold the same quality as cloth but instead had the quality of a paper product. Addo stated *ngatu pepa* was used for gift giving and it was considered to be a form of "ceremonial wealth." Addo indicated in her own words, "[n]gatu pepa is valued as gift, as commodity, as art (a specific embodiment of a given group's creativity and resourcefulness), and as a more general cultural symbol of women's industriousness" (Addo 2007, 68). However, Addo was also counterintuitive with her direction toward authenticating *ngatu pepa* when she discussed the value of *ngatu pepa* not being comparable to the value of *ngatu ngatu*. Addo admitted that *ngatu pepa* was lower in price and ranking compared to *ngatu ngatu*. This admission further justified my point that *ngatu pepa* is unauthentic because it is a copy of an original that cannot replace or exceed the value of real tapa cloth, which would thereby deem it authentic.

For me, the issue was not whether women could appropriate *ngatu pepa* to be used the same way they use *ngatu ngatu*, because *ngatu pepa* is the invention of women, to be used and applied to customs the same way that they use and apply all types of *koloa* in general. As Addo mentioned, women have authority with *koloa* in both exchange and production. However, Addo attributed the depleted values of *ngatu pepa* to the Tongan chiefly standards that commoners upheld. I argue the depleted values with *ngatu pepa* stem from the innovation and modernization involved with making this type of *koloa* that alienate traditional ways of making *ngatu ngatu*. Traditional practices with production are still highly valued and continued today. Since women have authority over defining specific types of *koloa*, they structure the values of their *koloa*. For example, the word *pālangi* derived from the word *papālangi* meaning European or Western, a person belonging to any white-skinned race (Churchward, 1959), was used to label specific types of *koloa*. The use of the word *pālangi* was to distinguish *koloa* that were unauthentic from *koloa* that were authentic as well as those that were acquired through Western inventions and the influence of westernization from those that were acquired from traditionally Tongan practices. While *ngatu pepa* was considered to be a form of *ngatu ngatu* and used the same way, *ngatu pepa* reflected the inventions of westernization thereby classifying its appraisal both culturally and economically the same as *pālangi* pieces of *koloa*. From a globalized neoliberal perspective, the depleted values placed on *ngatu pepa* by the women were valid because although women were still controlling the exchange and production of *koloa* the changes that occurred with the process of production with *ngatu pepa* were culture-specific to non-Tongan or Western practices

that infringed on the Tongan culture-specific practices traditionally employed to establish economic and hierarchical value for authentic *koloa* (Becker et al., 2013). Economic value for *koloa* were determined by women, and they were not regulated by the government. In Tonga and the United States pieces of *ngatu ngatu* were far more valued economically and culturally than *ngatu pepa* by women because they were made traditionally and they came from Tonga. I argue that women's appraisal of *pālangi* types of *koloa* as less valuable is valid because women are taking accountability for creating nontraditional types of *koloa* by being cognizant of the differences between traditional and nontraditional *ngatu ngatu*.

Addo viewed the invention of *ngatu pepa* as women challenging or decentering the Tongan nation as the authoritative site of authentic cultural production (Addo 2007, 69). She argued that Tongan chiefly standards originating in Tonga were what impeded authenticating *ngatu pepa*. Her arguments endorsed the dismissal of authenticity with *ngatu ngatu* and undervalued the long history of cultural practices with *ngatu* production, which were where the production practices for *ngatu pepa* were derived. Attempting to authenticate *ngatu pepa*, Addo supported the idea of women losing sight of traditional cultural materials and practices by accepting and replacing them with cultural materials and practices that have been westernized. Their acceptance of their role and dedication to their work historically for the *koloa* tradition gave women the authority to classify *ngatu pepa*. However, it was not about how authenticating *ngatu pepa* would give it a greater value to the women because they valued it anyway. The matter at hand involved understanding the ways women continued their control with *koloa*, what they created



over time as well as overseas, and how their work continued in transnational diaspora communities.

### *Koloa*

*Koloa* are what I consider to be a sociocultural phenomenon. Scholars and researchers studying *koloa* have also referred to them as a phenomenon (Addo 2007, Besnier 2004, Herda 1999). From my experience owning pieces of *koloa*, I have found them to be quiet extraordinary. They are beautiful, and they exude the artistry of Tongan women. However, production of *koloa* can be an arduous project as well as cultural practices involved with *koloa*. Researchers have undertaken studying the laborious stages of production, what women endured while they were making *koloa*, as well as the economic and political values of *koloa*. However, the literature precluded either subliminally or indifferently engagement in a discussion on how alluring the different types of *koloa* were to the women who were making as well as using them. One of my intentions for this thesis was to provide reasoning for why women were committed to the tradition of *koloa* and whether they viewed their position as sole producers, providers, and guardians as oppressive or unequal to men in some way.

In her article, “The Changing Texture of Textiles in Tonga,” Phyllis S. Herda presented her detailed depiction of *ngatu ngatu* making in Tonga, which was a reasonable example of what entailed making *ngatu ngatu*. Herda began her version of production with the process of preparing raw materials. Sections were cut from young paper mulberry trees and then set aside to age for several days, preparing them for the stripping. The bark was processed by stripping it from the sections, sun drying it, and then soaking it before it moved on to the next stage of beating the inner bark. During the beating

process, known as *tutu*, women beat the bark with a mallet made of wood called *ike*, on a long anvil made of wood called *tutua*. The inner bark of the young paper mulberry tree was beaten into sheets that were felted together making sheets of several layers. This was the beginning stage of forming the bark cloth. The sheets were then pasted together to form a large piece of bark cloth. Herda stated in the past layers were made of three or more sheets known as *feta'aki*, and conceded that current trends in *ngatu ngatu* making only involved the use of two. In the final stages of piecing together the sheets, a pattern called *kupesi* was imprinted onto the final pieced sheet of *ngatu ngatu*. When pasting the *feta'aki* together it was done on, what Herda called, a pasting board that had the *kupesi* attached to it. The *kupesi* was made from a coconut fiber block, and the pattern was transferred onto the *ngatu ngatu* by placing the piece onto the *kupesi* and rubbing the top. The final stage of *ngatu ngatu* making was done when the final piece had fully dried in the sun, and it was painted.

The process of *ngatu ngatu* making that Herda described thoughtfully was done completely by women. The process was meticulous, as Herda detailed, but what was not described in her account were the social and communal interactions taking place between women, men, and children, particularly what the women encountered outside the production process. Describing these encounters and interactions would have added information to the research that put into context women's role socioculturally with production within their communities. It would have provided an understanding of how the groups were structured. How many pieces were produced and whom the pieces went to? How did their work affect their community? Did community members help? How

did women with children participate in the production process? These questions would have provided answers that put into perspective the lived experiences of the women. They would shed light on the obstacles and benefits women were faced with as they maintained their part of culture. With my research I focused on socializing with the women to gain perspective on what their lives were like due to their responsibility with the *koloa* tradition. My main problem with Herda's detailed description of the *ngatu ngatu* making process was its point to inform others on processes and operations taking place with production that were necessary to note but also required discussing what women encountered when enabling them.

Adrienne L. Kaeppler's article, "Kie Hingoa: Mats of Power, Rank, Prestige, and History," was an account of what Kaeppler claimed were "the most important and powerful objects in Tonga," fine mats known as *kie hingoa* (Kaeppler 1999, 168). *Kie hingoa* were made from woven pandanus leaves by "unknown" hands from a time referred to as "long ago." *Kie hingoa* were a type of *koloa* worn only by members of the Tongan monarchy. They were heirlooms passed down from generation to generation, and the ancestry of the monarchy could be traced back to the God *Tangaloa* through the history of the variety of *kie hingoa*.

*Kie hingoa* were believed to hold the *mana* of ancestors and were only worn or used for momentous occasions such as weddings, funerals, investitures, and commemorative events. According to the *Tongan Dictionary*, *Mana* is defined as the "supernatural, superhuman, something miraculous; attended or accompanied by supernatural or apparently supernatural happenings" (Churchward 1959, 329-330). *Kie*

*hingoa*, were worn specifically by members of the monarchy to certain events because they embodied the supernatural spirit of the ancestors. Kaeppler claimed they were highly valuable because of their supernatural and spiritual qualities, which was the reason they were *tapu* or taboo and prohibited to commoner people. I argue they were *tapu* because they were possessions of the monarchy and they were special to them because they were worn by members of their family at meaningful points in their lives, cared for by women close to them, and crafted by women with whom the monarchy had a significant connectedness. They were believed to possess a reproductive power and have distinguished histories from being worn to weddings because they served two crucial purposes: they symbolized the occasion's importance with their presence, and they were a part of the garment or bedding of those marrying promising their fertility as well as the continuity of their bloodline. Kaeppler expressed that when *kie hingoa* were worn or presented they became objectified representing a history of who the monarchical class was because they were touched or worn by previous kings as well as queens and the *mana* of previous members transcended to those currently wearing them.

Kaeppler was admirable in accomplishing a consummated report on *kie hingoa* as well as documenting the prominent position of women controlling them. She indicated that women controlled the *kie hingoa* by looking after them, knowing their history and genealogy, as well as knowing when they should appear and who should wear them. Furthermore, women wove these fine mats, and their *mana* was captured within them. Her knowledge of *kie hingoa* illustrated the complexities with the *koloa* tradition because *kie hingoa* circumscribed their own criteria invoking peculiar practices, norms, and

standards for engagement. Similarly, *koloa* of different types circumscribed the same amount of care by women in general. What was ironic about my approach and Kaeppler's was our goal to not solely conceive of women's work producing and succeeding in maintaining *koloa* for the wherewithal of cultural traditions and customs succeeding too, but also to provide meaning to the dedication that women have put into governing their tradition historically. *Kie hingoa* were one type of an array of *koloa* that could be used to make a political statement. A point that I made with my own research was that women position themselves politically as well as economically by producing *koloa* as well as engaging in customs with *koloa*. My problem with Kaeppler's research was her focus on *kie hingoa* that highlighted the way that prized pieces of *koloa* were cared for by women within that realm. Kaeppler did not discuss who those women were, if they were commoner women or if commoner women positioned themselves politically and economically with their *koloa* in the same way that members of the monarchy did with theirs.

In Jehanne H. Teilhet-Fisk's article, "To Beat or Not to Beat, That Is the Question: A Study on Acculturation and Change in An Art-Making Process and Its Relation to Gender Structures," the discussion was fixated on one type of *koloa*—*ngatu ngatu*. While researching for this review, I discovered several scholars picking one type of *koloa* to explicate upon. That type was *ngatu ngatu*. Teilhet-Fisk's insight to *ngatu ngatu* focused on one aspect of production that was strenuous for women, which was a process known as *tutu*—the beating of the inner bark of the young paper mulberry tree. She opened a discussion on the beating activity that women engaged in as a response to a

bark-beating machine that she heard about from a local woman. She heard about the machine being used by women, and this provoked her search for women's opinions on the machine as well as her motivation to do the research.

Geoffrey Houghland invented the bark-beating machine after discovering the *ngatu ngatu* making process when he served as a volunteer for the Peace Corps in Tonga. Houghland expressed his disdain for the beating process by stating, “the beating of tapa was no longer a traditional act” and “[the] noisy process was the most time-consuming and physically demanding aspect of manufacturing tapa cloth” (Teilhet-Fisk 1991, 44). Upon his return to Tonga in the early 1980s, he brought with him a prototype of the bark-beating machine. The machine worked as a wringer or toothed mangle where strips of soaked bark were put through toothed rollers on a diagonal that broke down the fibers in the bark. This process was done several times where the pieces became wider, and they were folded to prevent them from becoming too weak. When they reached the preferred length, they were hung up to dry. The machine was simple to use and saved the women 20 to 35 minutes of beating time. Houghland claimed that the finished sheets of tapa cloth were no different from hand-beaten sheets or *feta'aki* once they were ironed or beaten with the soft side of a mallet. His machines sold for \$400.00 USD and despite the benefits Houghland professed the machines demonstrated, only a few were built and sold or even operated.

Teilhet-Fisk directed her analysis to the oppositions with acculturating traditional production practices with *ngatu ngatu* by incorporating the use of the bark-beating machine. She predicated that it was problematic for cultures such as Tongan culture to

assimilate gender-specific art technologies such as the bark-beating machine because Tonga had strict gender division of artistic labor. She constructed this division where women were associated with “soft materials that center[ed] on the home” (Teilhet-Fisk 1991, 47). Machinery such as the bark-beating machine was associated with the work of men that involved demanding physical labor. There were debates over the use of the machine where people were divided on its benefits. Some rationalized for the use of the machine because it gave women additional time to do other things. There was no research available to back up claims of community members who attributed the presence of arthritis in women to excessive beating. However, this was an argument supporting the use of the machine. Those protesting the machine disapproved of eliminating any element of traditional practices with production because it compromised culture-specific values.

A theory that I have developed from my own research was women acting as agents maintaining their domain defend having a culture-specific identity because *koloa* are at their highest value when they are traditionally produced, maintained, and applied culturally with specific practices. Women refused assimilation for several reasons, and they did this because they put their own culture at a higher value than other cultures such as Western culture or American culture. Teilhet-Fisk suggested the idea of acculturation with women and their production of *ngatu ngatu* whereas my intention was to ascertain how ideologies such as assimilation were deconstructed by women’s sense of womanhood and their role with *koloa* in the Bay Area.



### Women's Role With *Koloa*

The literature on Tongan women's role with *koloa* denoted that concepts of gender define women's responsibilities producing, exchanging, and gifting *koloa*. The contextual position of women economically and politically was also defined in the literature. The literature implied that women were benevolent assets within the Tongan social structure because of their wealth, and a large area of the study on *koloa* was dedicated to the role of women. My research devoted attention to the role of women with *koloa* but specifically dealt with women in the Bay Area Tongan communities and the variety of lived experiences as well as situations they encountered governing the tradition.

In Cathy A. Small's article, "The Birth and Growth of A Polynesian Women's Exchange Network," women from communities in Tonga and California participated in her study. Small's research was based on interviews with over 90 women where some of the women participated in *koloa* exchanges between the years 1920-1993. Small effectively covered *koloa* exchanges by starting with a history of exchanges that also incorporated a history of production. Learning this history was pertinent to my research because it provided understanding for the political and economic positions of women historically that are still maintained currently. Women's authority over *koloa* was documented as lasting for over 80 years (Small 1995), which signified the control woman had in society maintaining the tradition as well as other parts of culture that relied on the presence of *koloa* to be fulfilled.

Small construed historically inter-island exchanges of *koloa* were practices afforded and conducted by those with high ranking and authority. The exchanges were done through a network of kin where, at the time, practices were organized around affiliations with rank, kinship, tribute, and marriage. Commoner women were prohibited from practices managed by high-ranking women, but they did contribute to production. Commoner women produced *koloa* such as *ngatu ngatu* and *fala*, but high-ranking women oversaw their production controlling what was being produced as well as how the *koloa* was to be distributed. After the Constitution of 1875, the British began supporting the Tongan monarchy. Small claimed that high-ranking members of communities in the periphery began moving toward the capital of Tonga where the state bureaucracy of Tonga was located in Nuku'alofa. With high-ranking women spending less time in periphery locations commoner women started managing *koloa* production on their own. This gave commoner women the advantage to control production and distribution.

It was unclear from Small's account how control with production and distribution of *koloa* transitioned from the high-ranking class to commoners, but Small claimed that by the first decade of the 20th century a *koka'anga*—event where women engage in *ngatu ngatu* production—occurred on several occasions. Small interpreted *koka'anga* as “[an] occasion where a woman provided feast food for several women to come and put together her own tapa cloths from beaten sheets” (Small 1995, 236). The women then owned the *ngatu ngatu* and women who possessed this type of *koloa* were considered wealthy.

Small highlighted the progress with *koloa* production by introducing the *kautaha*—an organized group of women making tapa cloth. The *kautaha* was comprised of collective groups of women producing *ngatu ngatu*. These were groups of 20 to 30 women working together on their own without the supervision of a high-ranking authority woman. Small claimed that the appearance of the *kautaha* marked the end of the era where *koloa* production was controlled. By World War I, the growing presence of the *kautaha* in villages on the main island of Tongatapu was a sign that an increasing number of women were producing and owning *ngatu ngatu* as well as other types of *koloa* that they could exchange with other women.

Small explained that commoner gift exchanges were similar to the exchanges conducted by high-ranking women before the Constitution of 1875. In the initial stages of commoner gift exchange women were exchanging individually with relatives, but as the production of *koloa* began to grow from the prevalence of the *kautaha* so did the participation of women in inter-island gift exchanges. Small stated that there was evidence of this by the 1920s. *Kautaha* exchanges differed from individual exchanges in that *kautaha* exchanges were not a form of “kinship reciprocity.” Groups of women exchanged with other groups of women they were not related to and forming lasting networks with women was not the goal. Thus, after an exchange, it was not uncommon for groups to no longer communicate with each other. Small made it clear that the exchanges were done explicitly to accumulate all types of *koloa*.

Commoner gift exchanges were between groups of women from different islands. For example, women in Tongatapu (the main island) would exchange with women from

Ha'apai (the center cluster of islands within the group). Each group had a leader, and the leader would organize the exchange. They would decide who would sail to whom, what would be exchanged, and since women from certain islands specialized in producing specific types of *koloa*, they would exchange with groups that specialized in a type of *koloa* other than their own (Small 1995). The exchanges functioned as an occasion known as a *kātoanga*—a festive event or celebration conducted in public, where the *koloa* were exchanged. The *kātoanga* was a celebration where food, dancing, and speeches took place.

The inter-island exchange network spread in the 1930s to outer island groups such as Fiji and Samoa. Members of the high-ranking classes of these islands were partaking in exchanges with each other for centuries. The exchanges were the result of intermarriage between the high-ranking members' of society. Commoner gift exchanges were through *kautaha* groups and followed the same routes as the high-ranking members exchanges. The expansion of the exchange network added variety to the types of *koloa* circulating and this observation made by Small was what I perceived as an example of the marketability skills women had with *koloa* and exchange that has continued to expand their exchange network boundaries globally into places such as the Bay Area.

Women wanting to exercise the flexibility with forming networks to meet their needs for producing, exchanging, and accumulating *koloa* of several types was discovered early on historically. This was how women learned to manage the margins of their market. Historically, women have had the authority to manage all aspects of the *koloa* tradition, which was a way for women to position themselves politically and

economically within society as producers. Women were not just considered producers of offspring caring for the family; they were also considered strong contributors to the family unit. They were economic producers controlling their market with *koloa* by deciding whom they exchanged with, what they exchanged, and the value of their possessions. They were also in a strong position politically because the *koloa* tradition was a multifaceted tradition that facilitated fulfilling multiple customs and traditions structured around societal norms and ideals for the Tongan culture. I argue that because *koloa* was a way for women to advantageously exercise conditions of their role to build their image as respected contributors of society a deeper understanding of women's lived experiences, what they encountered on a personal level, was necessary for fully capturing what involved maintaining their position politically and economically over time.

## Feminism In and Out of Anthropology

Feminist literature was where I pulled from for theories to logically ground information from my research as well as to validate my reasoning that understanding *koloa* and women with a feminist lens was imperative to the possibility of developing a Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought. Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought as I applied it to the discipline of anthropology through my work identified what women do to counter forms of oppression. It analyzed the ways women resist inequalities with race, class, and gender as well as how they came to define themselves. For example, how were their definitions structured, in what form did agency take shape, and to what extent did internalizing their role with *koloa*, which were closely associated with the home, commissively factor into their capability to structure positive ideals around gender, cultural identity, social as well as hierarchical status, and womanhood?

Feminist literature offered a vast collection of theories giving meaning to what women's work with *koloa* was. In a paper titled, "Feminism," in the book, *Feminist Theory*, Paula Treichler and Cheri Kramarae shared definitions of feminism from a diverse group of feminists. A definition of feminism that stood out was by Bell Hooks. Bell Hooks declared that feminism "[was] a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels—sex, race, and class, to name a few—and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society, so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires" (Treichler & Kramarae 2010, 8). This glimpse into Hooks' definition of

feminism resonated with me in my search for Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought. I related to what Hooks was promoting because I made a commitment with my own study to search for ways that women challenge Western cultural ideals by preserving their tradition and placing Tongan ideals if not before, alongside, Western cultural ideals. My goal was to determine what was meaningful to women motivating them to keep with the *koloa* tradition and reject conforming to Western ideals.

The chapter “Epistemologies” in the book, *Feminist Theory*, edited by Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, discussed the epistemology of feminist theory, which was understood as focused on theories of knowledge and knowledge production (Kolmar and Bartkowski 2010). Special attention would be given to studying epistemologies because knowledge was a structured consciousness made up for society or culture and compiled of information, facts, as well as theories. The power of knowledge was its ability to influence what society and culture decided was true or important as well as useful to grasping an understanding of the world’s complexities (Kolmar and Bartkowski 2010). Feminist theory used for developing knowledge critically assessed privilege with epistemologies where women, people of color, people of diverse origins and class as well as sexuality were excluded from structuring the world’s consciousness. Epistemologies of that kind created a false reality of the world where women, in particular, were perceived as nonexistent and irrelevant. Their contributions, authority, and influential positions in society were undermined as well as overlooked.

A feminist epistemology discredits canons in literature that have created privilege and power for members of society based on their race, class, as well as gender. Canons

in anthropology that have supported white male privilege should be evaluated and challenged with feminist theories to restructure the knowledge being produced. Methods and methodologies are changing to mobilize a revamping of the discipline that shifts from its colonial origins to a discipline that values social justice by acknowledging the discipline's flaws while promoting change. In my research, I have committed to using a feminist approach because grounding my data in feminist theories facilitated giving a voice to the women I studied while subjectively using my own voice to create Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought.

In her book, *Inalienable Possessions*, anthropologist Annette B. Weiner argued that anthropological theories from the past concerning gender have been problematic because they were deeply biased. Theories on gift exchanges dating back centuries to the rise of capitalism were found to carry biases (Weiner 2003, 2). Theories on exchanges focused on the relevant work of men excluding and ignoring the work of women. Weiner referenced Bronislaw Malinowski's work in the Trobriands as an example of how women's work was ignored because he did not give attention to women's banana-leaf wealth. Weiner intended to deconstruct biases in studies by providing alternative methods for conducting research that advocated for including women while avoiding dichotomies such as nature/culture that portrayed women negatively by fixating on biological reproduction. Weiner's mission was to weaken canonized theories involving gender by citing their faults and introducing alternative perspectives for sketching out social structures where women's contributions were pronounced.



At the onset of her proposal for change Weiner informed that there were an immense number of societies throughout the world where women were producers of valued possessions and they either partially or wholly controlled these goods. Weiner characterized these possessions as a form of currency made from “cloth” (Weiner 1992, 3). These possessions were highly valuable to women because they had “intricate symbolic meanings semantically encod[ing] sexuality, biological reproduction, and nurturance so that such possessions, as they are exchanged between people, act as the material agents in the reproduction of social relations” (Weiner 1992, 3). I support Weiner in her mission to provide positive examples of women in anthropological studies, but I argue that Weiner overemphasized possessions warranting meaning rather than focusing on the progress of women.

She also stressed previous researchers have described possessions, women, and practices as holding cosmological values that ground their authority socially, and that these values have transcended overtime. However, this type of theory has not been significantly critiqued by academia. This was a theory that she tried to overcome, but instead hyperbolized by relating authority with individuals and groups that were linked to material resources as well as practices from the past attached to sacred and spiritual domains such as cosmology. Weiner’s overemphasis became obvious when she reiterated the prevailing powers exuding from valuable possessions facilitated by women’s significant presence, but did not provide a distinct explanation for this power that originated from sources not associated with spiritual or sacred forces. Weiner explained “so-called secondary domestic values” biological reproduction, nurturance,

responsibility with the home, along with supernatural values associated with cosmologies and gods accepted by women allowed yielding a political as well as economic presence (Weiner 2003, 4).

My research aspired to discover underlying values with *koloa* that have continued over time. As a tradition, *koloa* hinged on the work of women. The literature on *koloa* was consistent when assigning *koloa* the value of wealth, specifically women's wealth. However, my goal was to diverge the focus from *koloa* as wealth to the valuable work women do to keep the *koloa* tradition going. It was evident from the literature researchers concentrated on describing women as masters of their own wealth, discussing how their wealth was made, how women developed, structured, and managed their market. However, researchers fell short gaining insight to how women valued their variety of *koloa* pieces. Weiner claimed that possessions act as agents causing social relations to be reproduced. I argue that women were agents causing their role, work, and cultural materials to reproduce because they valued those aspects of their tradition as well as womanhood. Determining what incites women's mission to continue the tradition was effective information to obtain because it was fundamental to presenting reasons for why women's work was relevant.

## Black Feminist Thought

For this review, I chose to put Black feminism in a category of its own because this theoretical framework was what inspired me to envisage Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought. Remarkably, what appealed to me with Black feminism was the emphasis placed on subjectivity. Building on Weiner's objectives stressing change must come at the price of deconstructing sexist canonized theories and replacing them with new ones, I turned to Irma McClaurin's chapter titled, "Theorizing A Black Feminist Self in Anthropology, Toward an Autoethnographic Approach," in the book, *Black Feminist Anthropology, Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*. McClaurin defended utilizing the self and subjectivity when conducting research even if they were new forms of methodology that seemed unfamiliar and peculiar to anthropologists. A native anthropologist researching as a subject in the research field offered something new to the discipline where s/he could take a political standpoint defending the views of other subjects in the field. McClaurin argued that Black women scholars employed issues with the self and subjectivity because they involved relevant matters that guided their scholarship and influenced the content developed as well as how the content was analyzed. She found significant value in subjectivity despite criticism for being essentialist and argued subjectivity supported a strategic essentialism where Black women represented diverse, political, and non-anthropological perspectives such as a feminist or native perspective.

In the chapter, “A Homegirl Goes Home, Black Feminism and the Lure of Native Anthropology,” in the book, *Black Feminist Anthropology, Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*, Cheryl Rodriguez explained native anthropology as anthropological studies conducted at home rather than in foreign, far away societies. The area of study with native anthropology did not seem as exotic or adventurous as anthropology conducted abroad, but the benefits with anthropology at home were with the familiarities the researcher had with her/his environment or field. Studying environments at home such as communities the researcher lived in or people s/he identified with on multiple levels that allowed room for dimension from where s/he could gaze deeper into her/his research field by challenging her/himself to look beyond what was familiar. At the same time, the researcher also became a student learning about her/his own communities and was awakened, as Rodriguez stated, appreciating the realities of those s/he was studying as well as discovering the “creativity, resiliency, and diversity of our communities” (Rodriguez 2001, 244).

Rodriguez affirmed the importance of understanding the struggles of Black women intellectuals within a historical and contemporary context was at the core of the work native anthropologists did. Rodriguez explained the purpose of this understanding was for the researcher to be ready and able to reverse the influence of colonialism. Rodriguez argued native anthropologists must be able to restructure areas of the discipline where their own theories could be implemented, and the voice of silenced groups as well as communities could be heard giving them empowerment. Their

empowerment stemmed from the researcher acknowledging that marginalized groups such as women of color were present and their presence was valued.

In her book, *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill-Collins ensured, “when Black women’s very survival is at stake, creating independent self-definitions becomes essential to that survival” (Hill-Collins 2000, 112). Hill-Collins stated that Black women have emphasized how important self-definition was to the journey from victimization to a free mind in their blues (Hill-Collins 2000, 112). In my research, I addressed how self-definitions were structured. Self-definition was influential not only on an individual level but as Hill-Collins described the self was found within the “context of family and community” (Hill-Collins 2000, 113). Adding to the context Hill-Collins defined, women in my study defined the self within the context of the *koloa* tradition, in the home, specific places, within their diaspora, and within their circles, all of which were within the women’s domain.

I respected Hill-Collins argument that being accountable for others allowed African-American women to fully develop as humans and less as the objectified self. Taking accountability with others acknowledged there was a larger self that was present so that women could move past focusing on their personal selves. Hill-Collins pointed out Sonia Sanchez’s version of self, which asserted, knowing this larger self meant knowing there was a self of Black people (Hill-Collins 2000, 113). The significance here was that, instead of defining themselves in opposition to each other, Black women found a connectedness that gave women a deeper and meaningful self-definition.

Self-definition had political value as well. Hill-Collins explained that identity was not necessarily the goal, but rather a point of departure. She pointed to Mary Helen Washington who explained that women who struggle with finding an identity that was larger than the self society put upon them, were aware and conscious of that, and that consciousness had effectiveness (Hill-Collins 2000, 113-114). This type of thinking related to my research in that self-identity served as a point of departure from assimilating to westernization and discontinuing the possession of women's wealth. Hill-Collins explained that the point of departure was women journeying toward developing an understanding that their personal lives were shaped by intersecting systems of oppressions such as race, gender, sexuality, and class (Hill-Collins 2000). With my study, the point of departure where women became conscious of the influence Western culture had on their lives was when women made choices based on their lived experiences in the Bay Area. It involved a journey toward understanding what the women chose to do because of the ways systems of oppression shaped their experiences. Did they conform to Western culture? If they did, what were the reasons behind that, moreover what were their reasons for not conforming to Western culture and instead keeping with the *koloa* tradition?

Hill-Collins argued the journey toward self-definition was a powerful expression that challenged what was externally defined about African-American women by society. For example, controlling images of African-American women (Hill-Collins 2000). If the controlling images of African-American women were not acknowledged as negative stereotypes, then the purpose of understanding the negative images in order to replace

them with positive ones was difficult to achieve. Negative images served the purpose of dehumanizing groups and controlling them. Negative views of the Tongan Fresh Off the Boat (FOB) served the same purpose as the negative images Hill-Collins discussed. Images of the Tongan FOB factored into the oppression women were exposed to that shaped the way they defined themselves. Western ideological images of what defined a woman such as being American, knowledgeable on Western culture, dressing and presenting oneself as American overtime overpowered what defined a Tongan woman if she was not conscious of the negativity with the Tongan FOB image that intended to control how she perceived as well as represented herself. In my study, I focused on how Tongan women working with their tradition manifested positive images of women. I was especially fascinated with women defining the self based on their experiences with *koloa* that countered Western ideological images of women.

Hill-Collins discussed the functionality of social spaces where Black women openly expressed themselves. Hill-Collins stated that even though domination was an unavoidable social fact, it was less likely to become a hegemonic ideal within social spaces where Black women spoke freely (Hill-Collins 2000). It was within these social spaces that Black women felt less objectified by the larger culture and were able to exercise resistance by applying what they knew or learned in these safe spaces to what they experienced from the larger culture. They understood what were inappropriate models for them within the larger culture and worked toward modeling themselves after images of prevalent historical female role models in their communities (Hill-Collins 2000, 101). Spaces such as extended families, churches, and African-American

community organizations were considered to be social spaces. These spaces necessitated the possibility for safe discourses to take place. Hill-Collins shared a quote by Sondra O'Neale capturing the functioning of safe spaces "beyond the mask, in the ghetto of the black women's community, in her family, and, more important, in her psyche, is and has always been another world, a world in which she functions-sometimes in sorrow but more often in genuine joy...by doing the things that 'normal' black women do" (Hill-Collins 2000, 101). The concept of a social space was vital in knowing because Tongan women established spaces, which they used as a platform to exercise their authority with responsibilities they had around the *koloa* tradition. It was where, as Hill-Collins explained, women freely expressed themselves and particularly with Tongan women it was where they expressed their Tongan womanhood.

The literature chosen for this review covered components of my thesis topic: women, *koloa*, and feminism. They presented a discourse from which I situated my research in the subject category feminist native anthropological study on Tongan culture, women, and *koloa*. Feminist native anthropological studies are a reasonably new body of work my research intended to contribute to.



## METHODS

I used several types of research methods to draw out data from the women as well as recorded and documented information from their personal memories of *koloa* through interviews, observations, and participant observations. I used methodologies such as autoethnography, a reflexive approach, feminist approach, feminist analysis, snowball and volunteer sampling, as well as maximum variation sampling to accomplish my goal of placing myself subjectively within the field of study focusing on gathering data that was applicable to capturing a feminist interpretation. The population of women I chose to research were members of the community in which I grew up. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB #: IRB 16-017) on October 7, 2016, and expiring August 28, 2017, I set out to survey my community by concentrating on women. The bulk of my data was obtained from information the women gave me from interviews, questionnaires, pictures, and my own personal experiences as a member of the community.

## Interviews

### Developing Group Of Participants

To develop a group of diverse participants for the study, I went out into my community attending events I was accustomed to attending such as church, community, and social events where I asked women personally if they would be interested in letting me interview them. I also contacted women through social media sites such as Facebook, called and emailed women I knew, as well as asked women I interviewed if they could put me into contact with other women who would be interested in participating. Building a diverse group of women to pull information from involved the use of the maximum variation sampling method (Seale 2012) where I tried to include women who were born in Tonga, born in the United States, were experienced with *koloa*, had little experience, as well as a wide age range of women. This was to produce a diverse set of data to use for descriptions. The interviews were strictly on a voluntary basis and no compensation was given for participating.

### Conducting Interviews

All of the interviews were one-on-one. They were conducted in several locations. For all of the interviews, arrangements were made to meet the women at a specific time, in a private or public location with which they were comfortable. The interviews took place in the homes of some of the women, in my home, at church, in coffee shops, restaurants, parks, and libraries. The interviews took at the least 45 minutes, and the longest interview I conducted lasted nearly three hours. On average, the interviews lasted

one hour. They were all recorded using an audio recording device. Before recording the interviews a consent form was given to gain consent from the women permitting my use of their information, informing them of what I would be using the information for and the conditions of their participation. They were also given a hardcopy demographic survey questionnaire before the interview to be filled out obtaining basic information such as age, where they were born, worked, and if they had children.

### Transcribing

I decided to transcribe all of the interviews for the research. I was only able to transcribe 12 of the 20 I conducted. I did not use any software for transcribing them. I simply used a pair of earphones and my laptop. I also received assistance from one woman to transcribe a portion of them.

## Observations

### Observation of Events

I was able to attend five events in the Bay Area. For the events, I obtained consent from those hosting the event before making my observations. I attended the events as a guest. Pictures were taken at the events as well as notes. These events took place in the Bay Area at churches, a home, and a hall.

### Participant Observation

I participated in two events that I observed. During these events, I took mental notes as well as pictures and then documented my experience in notes after the event took place. These events took place in a church hall and a home.

## Methodologies

### Feminist Approach

I used a feminist approach to this research by choosing only to include the participation of women. The criteria for participants were they had to be Tongan and women. Their level of expertise with *koloa* was not my main concern since I wanted a diverse group of women. However, the women were required to have some knowledge of *koloa*. My interview questions were structured to obtain information from the women about how their womanhood was defined by *koloa* as well as how they valued *koloa*. The questions were directed toward the women to initiate answers that led into stories of experience, how the experiences influenced them, how they felt about *koloa*, and how much their feelings reflected their relationship as women in their families as well as the community. The questions also touched on topics around gender, identity, their roles as women, and the work that they did.

### Reflexive Approach

The reflexive approach I used complimented the autoethnography. The point of using this approach was to state my close involvement in the research genuinely. As a Tongan woman, it was important for me to be honest about the connection I have with my subject matter. As a subject myself, I was able to make observations and gather data that were not only meaningful to my participants but also meaningful to me, even before analysis. Placing myself beside my participants allowed for theorizing about the women from a place where we had a similar social and cultural history, lived experiences, and

similar social constructions of our womanhood (Bolles 2001, 35). By using this approach my ambition was to reconstruct theories about what to study with *koloa* and women so that information being obtained would reflect the multiple interrelated oppressions that women face, how they combat them, how these actions were a part of their role as women, and to bring awareness to the presence of women as well as their *koloa* in the community and their valued work (McClaurin 2001, 62). The reflexive approach had pragmatic qualities that I wanted to utilize as a subject where I took advantage of my position politically as a feminist activist challenging as well as altering common traditional practices with research methods used in the field (McClaurin 2001, 62).

### Autoethnography

The use of autoethnography provided me with an instrument to stylistically textualize the experiences of my subjects and served as a theoretical lens through which I could interpret our experiences as a group (McClaurin 2001, 64). Autoethnography allowed me to have a “transformative ethnographic knowledge production” that countered the sometimes “frozen/static ethnographic representations” of culture and society that were still valued because of their holistic nature and attention to detail, even though they were found to have flaws (McClaurin 2001). The benefit to autoethnography for me was that I could attempt to fully interpret as well as theorize about myself, the women, the community, and *koloa* based on how I engaged as a feminist native anthropologist. Autoethnography was, as McClaurin described, “blending the grounded, detailed descriptions that come from ethnography with the poetics of autobiography to create autoethnography,” which offered anthropologists like myself the opportunity to

express ourselves and our experiences as natives in the field that was our community (McClaurin 2001, 71).

### Feminist Analysis

A feminist analysis was employed for this research because grounding descriptions in feminist theories was necessary for grasping a true understanding of the values with *koloa* that went beyond values with wealth. Feminist theories such as gender, self-definition, globalization, Black feminist thought, and postmodernism were some of the theories utilized in the analysis. The feminist analysis was directed toward covering issues with womanhood that allowed the development of Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought. All aspects of obtaining information from the women and the information acquired from the literature review were carefully evaluated to locate areas where relevant contributions were made addressing or relating to subjects such as womanhood, culture, *koloa*, customs, tradition, and men. This information was then used to ground them in feminist, feminist anthropological, as well as anthropological theories. The literature review was an extensive process that involved identifying pertinent literature to base the research on as well as identify theories in which to ground the descriptions.

### Sampling

The two sampling methods I used were “snowballing and volunteer,” and “maximum variation sampling” (Seale 2012, 145). The snowballing and volunteer method I used by asking women I already interviewed if they knew of any other women who would be interested in participating in the research. Participants also voluntarily

suggested other women to interview. This method was not effective for gaining participants. Asking women at events to participate in the study was more effective. There were typically larger crowds of people at an event and I was able to get several women to participate attending an event by informing them about the study, requesting their participation, and if accepted, getting their contact information to set up an interview at a later date.

The maximum variation sampling method was used because I planned to have a small sample size of women, but I wanted a diverse group. I tried including extremes in my study such as older women over the age of 70, but that was not possible. I attributed that to the lack of women older in age in the community well enough to participate as well as their caretakers not being able to accommodate conditions for the interview such as the time it involved and availability. Instead, I had extremes where women were born in Tonga as well as born in the United States. The women were from various religious backgrounds and cities. I also tried to find women with varying levels of experience with *koloa*.



## RESULTS

The data gathered from interviews, observations, participant observations, and survey questionnaires were presented in this chapter starting with an explanation of the results from the demographic survey questionnaire. Results from the demographic survey questionnaire were presented by using a map and a variety of different types of charts. The interviews provided insight into the women's lived experiences involving *koloa*. The data gathered and presented from them were a compilation of memories, stories, accounts, and views the women had around *koloa* where themes were developed to introduce the information. The themes were divided into three sections: cultural identity, values with *koloa*, and women's role and work. The sections included a mixture of results from interviews, observations, and participant observations.



years. The women mostly identified with being Methodist, having some college education, and working as caregivers. While a majority of the women represented particular demographics, information from the interviews did not solely come from those women. It was necessary to show a full representation of the women's demographics in charts.

Figure 2 presents data obtained from the women based on their age, how long they have lived in the United States and how long in the Bay Area. The figure was divided into two groups. There was information on women born in Tonga and women born in the United States. There were 14 women from Tonga in the study and six women from the United States. There were 20 women total. The average age of women from Tonga was 47 years old, and for United States women, it was 33 years old. The average time for women to be in the United States from Tonga was 25 years, and for women from the United States, it was 33 years. The average time in the Bay Area for women from Tonga was 24 years, and for women from the United States, it was 31 years.

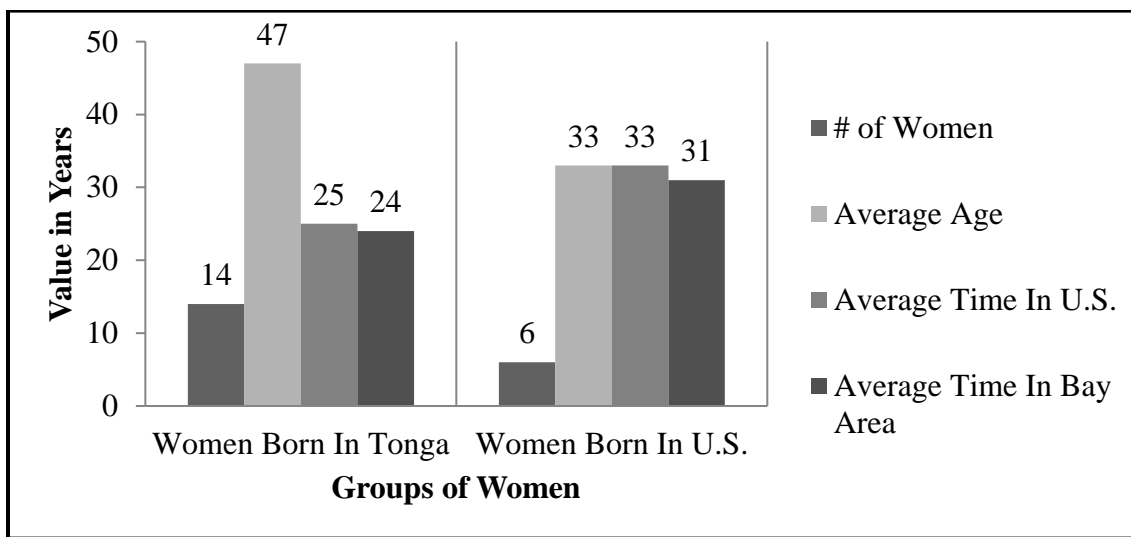
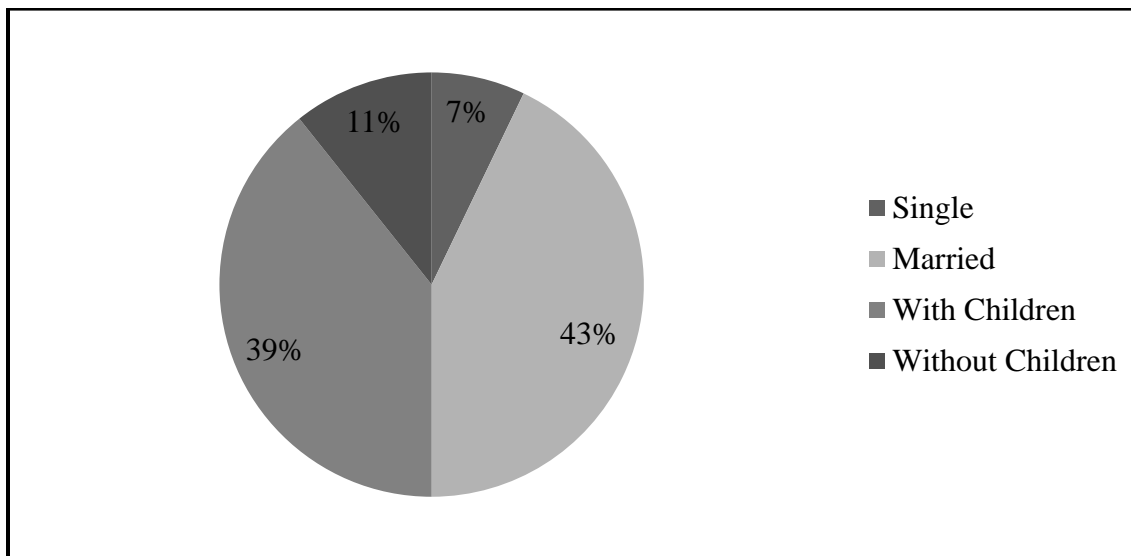


Figure 2. Data on age, time in United States and time in Bay Area.

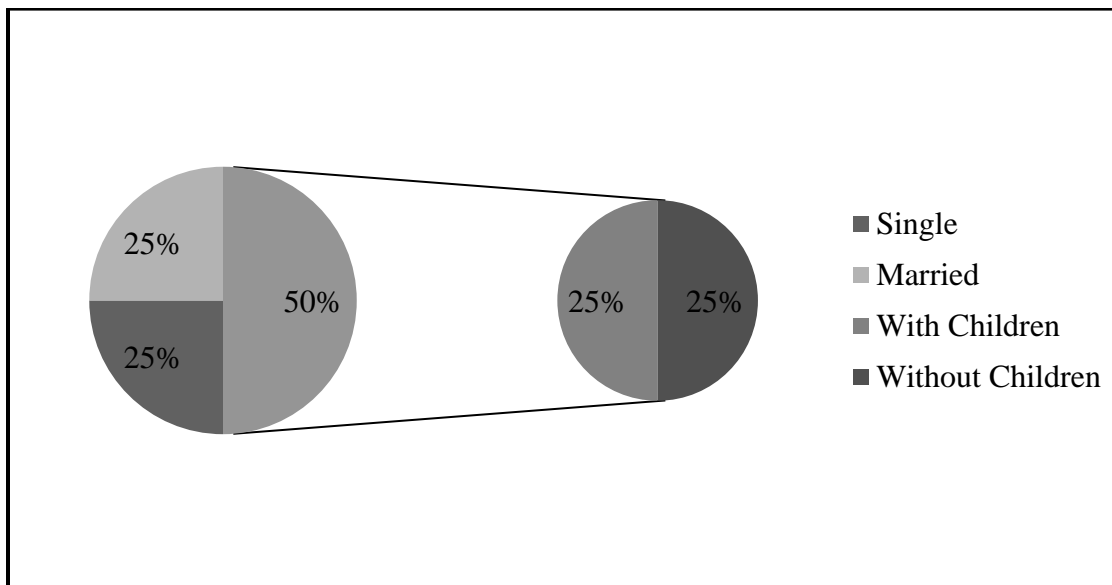
On average, the women from Tonga were older than the women from the United States, but women from the United States spent more time in the Bay Area and United States compared to women from Tonga. There were a higher number of women from Tonga who participated in the study, and I noticed when gathering participants for the study there was a greater investment of interest in the study by women from Tonga. It was also easier to set up interviews with women from Tonga where they were committed to meeting and sharing as much information as possible about their experiences. Some of the longest interviews I had were with women from Tonga.

Figure 3 is a pie chart showing percentages specifically for women born in Tonga on their marital status and whether they had children. Seven percent of the women were single, 43% were married, 39% had children, and 11% had no children.



*Figure 3.* Data on marital status and children for women born in Tonga.

Figure 4 is a pie chart presenting percentages for women born in the United States based on their marital status and whether they had children. Twenty-five percent of the women were single, 25% were married, 25% had children, and 25% did not have children. Based on the data from both charts more women were married with children than single without children.



*Figure 4.* Data on marital status and children for women born in the United States.

Figure 5 is a donut chart showing percentages for the education level of women from Tonga and the United States. Percentages for women from Tonga were presented in the inner donut. Women from Tonga had the higher percentage of those having some college education at 36%. Twenty-nine percent of women from Tonga had a high school level education, 7% had an associate's degree, 7% had a bachelor's degree, and 21% had a master's degree.

Percentages for education level for women from the United States were presented in the exploded donut. Women born in the United States had the highest percentage with a bachelor's degree at 33%. Seventeen percent had a high school level education, 0% had an associate's degree, 17% had a master's degree, and 33% received some college education.

Based on these percentages it appeared more women born in Tonga received an education beyond high school involving some form of a college or higher education.

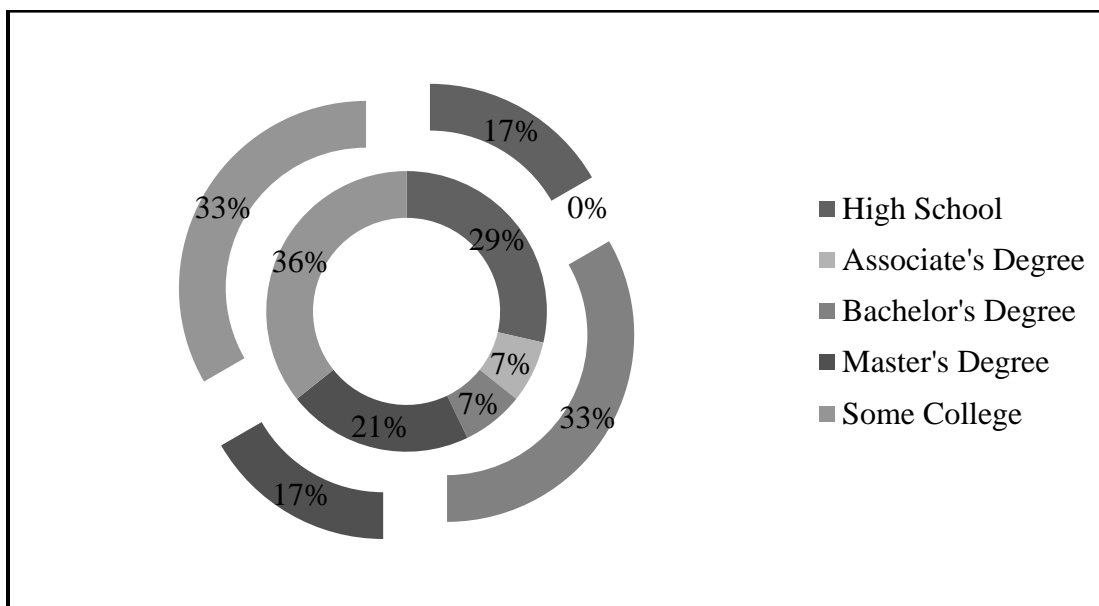


Figure 5. Data on the education level of women. *Note.* Tonga is on the inner circle and the United States is on the exploded circle.

Figure 6 is a stacked line chart showing data concerning women from Tonga and the United States based on the type of work they do. None of the women born in Tonga were students, nine were caregivers, two did office work, one was a manager, and two worked either in a government agency, for the county, or for an education agency. For women born in the United States, one woman was a student, one was a caregiver, one did office work, one was a manager, and two worked in a government agency, either for the county or for an education agency. Based on the data there were an overly high number of women who worked as caregivers. I have worked as a caregiver as well as several women in my family and women I knew in the community. It was common for women

to work as caregivers in the Tongan community.

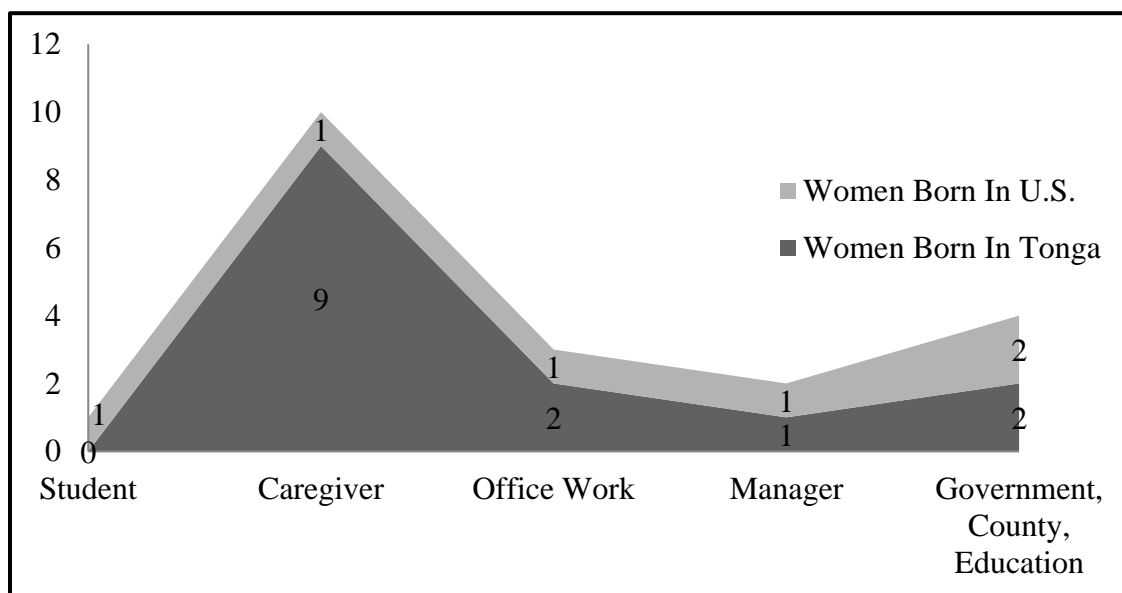


Figure 6. Data on type of work women do.

Figure 7 is a line chart on church affiliation for women born in Tonga and the United States. For women born in Tonga there were five women who identified as Christian, one was Free Wesleyan, one was Latter Day Saints, and seven were Methodist. For women born in the United States none of the women identified as Christian or Free Wesleyan, two were Latter Day Saints, and four were Methodist. In the Bay Area, the three main churches affiliated with by community members were Methodist, Latter Day Saints, and Catholic.



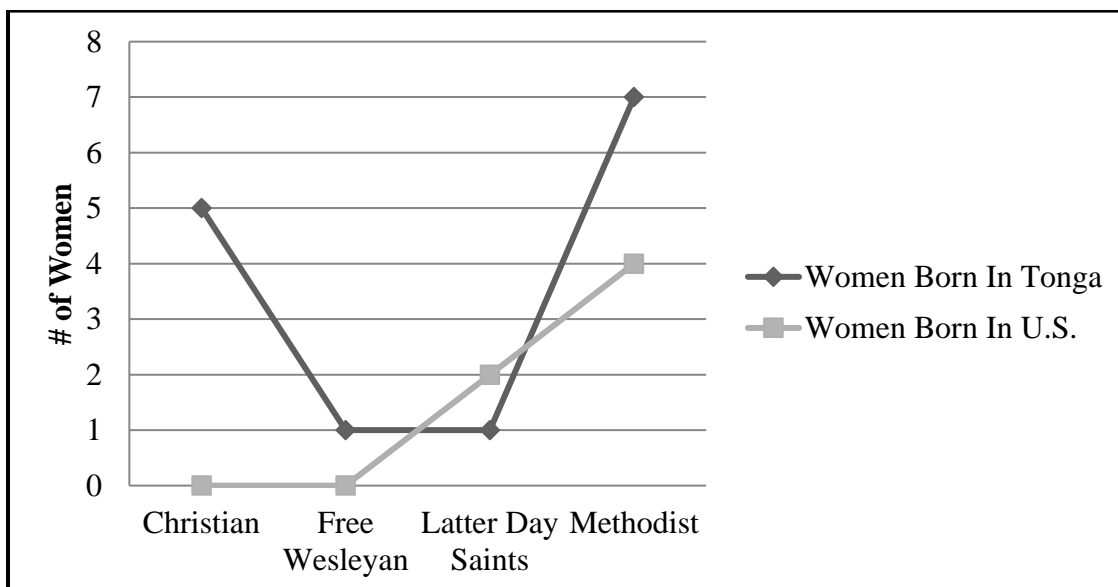


Figure 7. Data on church affiliation.

Figure 8 is a bar chart showing responses based on a point scale system from one to ten where women were asked how important *koloa* is to keeping with Tongan tradition. The number one represents “not important,” five represents “moderately important,” and ten represents “extremely important.” Based on responses, women born in Tonga “extremely” valued *koloa* for keeping with traditions compared to women born in the United States who found *koloa* to be “important” to keeping with traditions.

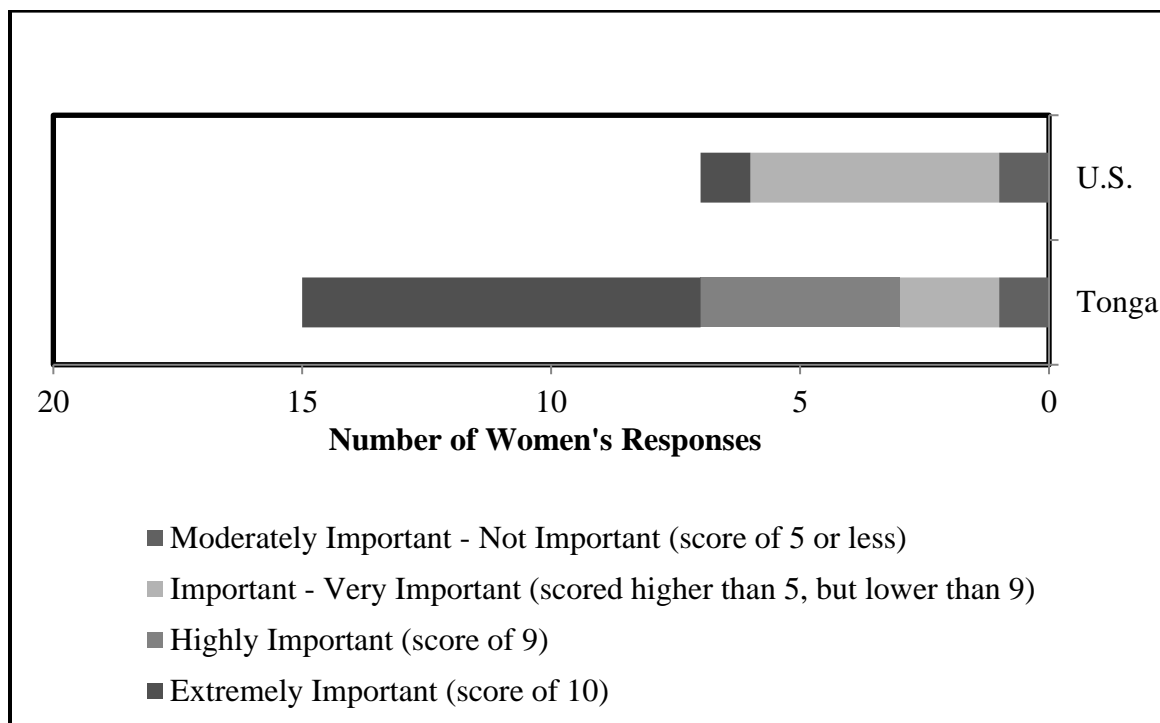


Figure 8. Comparison between women born in Tonga vs. United States: How important is *koloa* to keeping with tradition? A bar chart of responses from point scale.

Dividing the data into two groups was necessary to visualize the difference in responses between the participants. This was done because based on where the women were born their lived experiences were different. Women born in Tonga had something in common with each other due to where they grew up, and women born in the United States similarly had something in common with each other. Nation of origin factored into how the women answered questions from the interviews, how they engaged or interacted with the community, and how they were raised. Their difference in nation of origin was something to be noted when explaining whether they valued *koloa* as a tradition, how they valued it, and why they did or did not value *koloa*.

## Interviews and Observations

The information from interviews and observations presented in this section were from participants and community members whose identities were kept confidential by mutual agreement. Any names used in this section to identify women or community members were aliases.

### Cultural Identity

*Koloa* of different types could be used to show one's cultural identity. From the interviews, I found women to have strong feelings about *koloa* being necessary for showing a person was Tongan, and differentiating a Tongan event from an American event. However, based on responses from the interviews, what I observed at events I attended as well as what I witnessed growing up in my home and community was having a Tongan cultural identity using *koloa* to represent one's self, one's community, or one's event required a lot of work. There were various factors influencing how the women identified culturally using *koloa*.

When I asked the women in my study why they thought *koloa* was still a strong part of the Tongan culture in the Bay Area I received responses that firmly tied *koloa* to cultural identity. One woman born in Tonga responded by stating, "people still want to do that is [*sic*] to have that identity." This woman, whom I will refer to as Leti, stressed that people still want to preserve the tradition even though they have moved away from Tonga and into foreign places such as the United States. One comment that Leti made

that I heard repeated in other responses from several of the women participating was, “they want to know who they are.”

An aspect of living in the United States members of Tongan communities engaged in was identifying culturally as Tongan. There were different ways that people identified with being Tongan. There were women who advocated using different types of *koloa* to express whom they are as Tongans when hosting an event or celebration as well as using it as a part of their attire to complete their look as a Tongan. One woman explained that using different types of *koloa* for her celebration was her way of saying, “I’m Tongan; this is who I am.” Another woman explained she would not be Tongan if there were no *koloa*. There was a clear understanding among the women that *koloa* represented Tongan culture, but what was valuable in noting was the women used *koloa* specifically because of that reason and because Tongan culture represents or was the epitome of who they are.

Tongan culture could be divided into different sectors where language, food, dance, and music could be identifiable as Tongan. As a Tongan I knew that *koloa* was a vital part of the culture and I understood from my own experience growing up around *koloa* of all types in my home and my community *koloa* had a special place. I asked the women where they would put *koloa* as a part of Tongan culture and why. I posed this question to gain their perspectives on how they would place *koloa* in culture since *koloa* were a powerful way for people to identify with being Tongan and the Tongan culture. One woman from the study, I will refer to as Mele, placed *koloa* equally with the other sectors. Mele explained that there were traditional elements to the different sectors that

must be conducted properly for a Tongan event or celebration to be complete and truly representative of Tongan culture. There were traditional ways of speaking, there were traditional ways of preparing food, and there were traditional ways of conducting customs that solely relied on *koloa* such as decorating the event with various *koloa* pieces, giving *koloa* as gifts, and wearing certain types of *koloa* as part of one's Tongan attire.

One woman explained, at an event where there was dancing, food, and people giving speeches, the *koloa* would complete the event symbolizing it was a Tongan event. This woman, whom I will refer to as 'Ana, argued if an event had no *koloa* to show for it then the event meant nothing. She stated, "[*koloa*] represents what the event is all about." *Koloa* shows how important the event was. 'Ana pointed out that an event could have all the finest American products and amenities, but those material things were not as important as having *koloa* of different types. Another woman, whom I will refer to as Sia, had the same view as 'Ana where she claimed that *koloa* were not used in vain; they were used to fulfill significant traditions at special occasions. At a wedding, *koloa* were an extremely vital part of the bride's marital bedding where she had special bedding comprised of *koloa* for her to take with her for her first night as a married woman. Two women from the study explained that events held in the community without the use of *koloa* were considered atypical. One woman described it as weird and the other woman described it as not showing well. There were claims made by the women where if there was knowledge of an event having no *koloa* presented or a part of the event guests would

not attend. Women considered *koloa* to be the highlight of certain events such as a wedding, birthday, or funeral.

Figures 9, 10, 11, and 12 are images of women I observed in my community using *koloa* of different types to show who they are, show their culture as Tongan, and show how important to them the event was by using a mixture of traditional and nontraditional pieces of *koloa*. Figure 9 is an example of how *koloa* can be used for a birthday to decorate the area where the honored guest resides, how gifts are laid out on the floor in preparation for giving, as well as how *koloa* such as a *ta'ovala* was worn as a part of her Tongan attire. Figure 10 shows how a cake was properly given as part of the gift giving ceremony to an honored guest. The cake was placed on a piece of *kie tonga*—type of fine mat. Figure 11 shows how a cake was properly displayed with *koloa* where the cake was placed on top of purposely stacked pieces of *koloa*. Figure 12 shows how *koloa* of several types were used to decorate the alter of a church for a special day marking the church's annual church offering event known as a *Misinale*. All of these figures show elements of a Tongan culture-specific event.



Figure 9. Woman sitting with a mixture of traditional and nontraditional *koloa*.



*Figure 10.* An example of how cake is presented traditionally.





*Figure 11. Cake displayed traditionally with different pieces of koloa.*



Figure 12. Various traditional *koloa* pieces decorating a church altar.

### Values with *Koloa*

From my own experience growing up with a mother who deeply valued *koloa* and being around as well as knowing of *koloa* from a young age, there were times in my life, particularly when I was young, where I did not fully internalize *koloa* for their cultural as well as womanly values that went beyond just values with wealth. There was always the dominant culture to come to terms with living biculturally. I grappled with figuring out what community I was a part of, what group I was going to fit into or identify with, as well as the values I was taught either directly or indirectly in my home and community with which I had to contend. *Koloa* was a staple in my home and in the community in

which I grew up. I was able to embrace this part of culture because *koloa* was something my mother valued and carried with her from Tonga to share with my sisters and me.

The women born in Tonga shared stories about growing up with *koloa* on all levels of society. *Koloa* was an intricate aspect of their lives where they saw *koloa* everyday and used different types of *koloa* on a regular and consistent basis. They shared stories of when they were younger watching women making different types of *koloa*. They watched their grandmothers, mothers, and aunts making *koloa*. Some of the women shared stories about when they migrated to the United States bringing their *koloa* with them because they were that valuable to them. They brought their *koloa* with them because they were a part of them they did not want to lose, but want to pass on to their children and continue in their new community by establishing the tradition there.

When I asked the women to tell me about when they first learned or discovered *koloa*, how old they were, and what their experience was like, the women shared they were young when they first realized the importance of *koloa*. Leti shared that she grew up seeing *koloa* in her home and was around five years old when she first learned of *koloa*. She explained, going into primary school, she saw *koloa* here and there. This was when she realized the prominence of *koloa* within her community.

Sia shared she first discovered *koloa* when she was dressed up with a *ta'ovala* for church. When she was little she wore a type of *ta'ovala* called a *kiekie*—a wraparound type of *koloa* in the form of a belt adorned with long straps all made from the same materials; they can be made from natural or unnatural materials depending on whether they are traditional or nontraditional pieces.



Figures 13 and 14 show a variety of the *ta'ovala* type *kiekie*. Figure 13 is an example of a traditional *kiekie* that was made out of natural materials in Tonga and then exported to this woman in the United States. They are also sold in the local economy. This piece was made from coconut fibers. Figure 14 shows a woman wearing an example of a nontraditional *kiekie* that was made from unnatural materials in the United States.



Figure 13. Traditional *ta'ovala* type *kiekie* imported from Tonga.



Figure 14. Woman wearing nontraditional *kieke* made in the United States.

A woman, whom I will refer to as Keleni, shared her experience first learning about *koloa* when she was living with her grandmother. Her grandmother was the lady in waiting for the late King Tupou Taufaha'u the fourth, and when Keleni was young, she wore a *kiekie* whenever she was around the king's household because it was a tradition to wear a *ta'ovala* of some type around the king's household out of respect. She grew up hearing her grandmother and women talking about the *koloa* kept at the palace.

Women, either born in Tonga or in the United States learned, about *koloa* in the home. 'Ana shared she learned about *koloa* from her mother when her mother would dress her up with different pieces of *koloa*. She also learned about *koloa* from her grandmother who led groups in making the *koloa* type *ngatu ngatu* in her village. 'Ana explained days when the women came together to make the *ngatu ngatu* were significant community events. These were big days for community members because they involved multiple activities outside of just making the *ngatu ngatu*.

'Ana told in detail her memories of those days. Her grandmother was the leader of the *koka'anga*. Women gathered in her grandmother's village at the *falekautaha*—a multipurpose facility in the form of an open plan house used for all kinds of village activities. The men cooked food of all kinds, even a pig, which was a traditional food type prepared to mark a significant event or day. The women dressed up in their Tongan attire with their *kakala*—flower garlands worn around the waist or as a necklace. Her grandmother wore a *ta'ovala*. The women were there with their children, and it was a major festive event. The women were singing while they were making the *ngatu ngatu*, the children were running around playing, and the men were cooking the food. There

were even local announcements given throughout the village where someone would go around with a megaphone voicing upcoming events and the *koka'anga* was an event that was broadcast. Passerby would stop and join in the festivities by watching the women as they made the *ngatu ngatu* and pulling out all their finished pieces in the middle of the village where there was an open space.

She also told of how she would help her grandmother with planting materials such as the *hiapo*—the Tongan name for the young paper mulberry tree used for its inner bark to make the sheets of *feta'aki* used for piecing together the *ngatu ngatu*. Those were times she cherished growing up that involved her first experiences learning about *koloa*.

A woman born in the United States shared her first experiences discovering *koloa* with her mother when her mother would dress her up for White Sunday or *Fakame* known in Tongan. This woman, whom I will refer to as Velonika, remembered having mixed feelings about *koloa*. Her mother prepared the *koloa* type *ta'ovala* for her to wear to *Fakame*. She explained that her mother went out of her way to get certain types of *ta'ovala* for her to wear. Velonika felt at times that *koloa* was a hassle and was even overwhelmed by what was involved in preparing for a special day such as *Fakame*, but she also felt amazed and proud of what the *koloa* represented. Velonika explained that when her mother dressed her up with a *ta'ovala*, she enjoyed it and appreciated it because *koloa* showed she was a Tongan and showed from where she came.

*Fakame* was a special day for children in the church where they were recognized, and they were the honored members of the church on that day. Their membership was



celebrated and as a tradition, children were dressed in white with their traditional Tongan attire that included wearing a *ta'ovala*.

Figures 15 and 16 are members of the youth and Sunday school for a local Bay Area church dressed in white with their Tongan attire including *ta'ovala* of different types. These were traditional *ta'ovala* pieces.



*Figure 15. Youth dressed in a ta'ovala for Fakame.*





*Figure 16. Sunday school child dressed in a ta'ovala.*

Another woman born in the United States, whom I will refer to as Leka, also developed mixed feelings about *koloa* from her first experiences learning about the tradition. At a young age, Leka saw women fighting over *koloa*. She described *koloa* as a “blessing and a devil in disguise.” Leka explained that she had conflicting feelings

about *koloa* because she felt proud of *koloa* because they represented her culture, but she also believed *koloa* was a problem because she could not understand why people were fighting over them. As an adult Leka believed the tradition was necessary for wearing a *ta'ovala* to a funeral because that was how people showed respect, but she did not value *koloa* as a tradition for giving as gifts. Leka felt strongly that families should not need to give each other *koloa* as a sign of respect and she believed the tradition should change.

Funerals were events where people typically wore a *ta'ovala* out of respect for those who were mourning and due to the significance of the occasion where someone had died. Figures 17, 18, and 19 were all examples of a *ta'ovala* a person should wear to show he or she was mourning or going to a funeral. In Figure 17, two women were wearing the *ta'ovala* type *liongi* worn at a funeral. The women in Figure 18 were wearing *ta'ovala* appropriate for the funeral they were attending. Figure 19 shows a couple wearing *ta'ovala* representing they were in mourning at church.



Figure 17. Woman wearing *liongi* type funeral *ta'ovala*.



*Figure 18.* Women at a funeral.





*Figure 19. A couple wearing funeral type ta'ovala.*

A woman born in the United States, whom I will refer to as Nia, shared about when she first learned about *koloa*, which was different from when she first discovered

*koloa*. Nia explained that she discovered *koloa* by seeing *koloa* often starting at a young age. She saw *koloa* frequently in Sunday school at church for occasions such as *Fakame*, but she did not learn the importance of *koloa* until she was in high school. Nia shared she learned the importance of *koloa* when she turned 16 and her mother prepared *koloa* for her *mehikitanga*—father’s sister, as tradition celebrating her sixteenth birthday. She explained she learned the importance from her mother when her mother gave her best *koloa* to the *mehikitanga* for the gift giving ceremony.

*Koloa* was established in the Bay Area because women from Tonga valued their *koloa* and they valued their *koloa* to the point their *koloa* became a part of them they kept close to their hearts. *Koloa* kept them connected to their upbringings, what they were taught growing up in Tonga, which they wanted to continue with their own families and in their communities in the Bay Area. The stories shared so far explain how valuing *koloa* was instilled in the women starting at a young age. However, there were also the different types of *koloa* to be considered, which the women valued in different ways.

A woman born in the United States, whom I will refer to as Lovi, shared how the different ways of giving during the gift giving ceremony contained significant meaning. She shared a conversation she had with her mother discussing when Lovi gets married in the future. Lovi shared the conversation with her mother put pressure on her and weighed heavily on her mind. Lovi’s mother told Lovi she only planned to give money as gifts not *koloa* when Lovi gets married. Lovi felt troubled by this because of the way her mother chose to do her wedding, which she believed represented her as much as her

mother. Lovi explained giving money as a gift was easy, but when women give different types of *koloa*, it meant they cared. Lovi described it as putting in “work.”

Leti shared an important point about “doing” *koloa* to carry out the tradition of gift giving. Several of the women described working with *koloa* as “doing” *koloa*. Leti stressed women could not celebrate an event traditionally without the use of *koloa*. *Koloa* of different types were used to give to guests in a specific way. There was a structure to giving where certain guests would receive certain gifts and in certain quantities based on who they were in relation to the guest of honor. The gift giving was done ceremoniously where the guest with the highest honor was given to first, and mannerisms, as well as etiquette, were practiced involving the way the gifts were presented. All of these practices required a significant amount of work, knowledge, and dedication by the women to uphold the tradition.

Replacing money with *koloa* pieces was an alternative to traditional practices, but a majority of the women preferred using traditional pieces from Tonga, which required the women to applying what they learned about *koloa*. Sia shared about her experiences learning in school how to make *koloa* as well as the practices involving *koloa*. Sia went to Queen Salote College in Tonga, which is an all-girls high school in Tonga affiliated with the Methodist church. There, Sia explained she learned how to make *koloa* such as *kiekie*, *ngatu ngatu*, *fala*, and traditional baskets. She also learned how to conduct a wedding traditionally doing *koloa*.

Another woman, whom I will refer to as Fa, also went to Queen Salote College where she learned the same things. Fa explained there was a specific class given to

students about *koloa* and Tongan traditions. In that class, Fa learned what the different types of *koloa* were, how to count them, how to fold them, what pieces to give, and to whom certain pieces should be given. Counting *koloa* was an effective and useful skill to have because there were specific lengths with *koloa* that determined their value and there were specific ways of presenting these lengths publicly. There were terms referring to measurements women used talking among each other, and there were terms used to refer to measurements specifically for the gift giving ceremony. Women who were caught using the wrong terms during the gift giving ceremony were considered uneducated about *koloa*. There were specific ways of folding *koloa* for presentations when giving. Women who were doing *koloa*, but inexperienced with folding were criticized by other women in private with rumors.

From my experience growing up, I noticed women being extremely dedicated to their work with *koloa* where they were extremely experienced and knowledgeable when it came to doing *koloa*. I asked the women what they thought were the good things that women could get from knowing about *koloa* and what were the bad things women could get from *koloa*. The responses from the women greatly involved good things being associated with knowledge and at the same time bad things associated with knowledge.

The good things to know about *koloa* associated with knowledge the women shared about involved having skills and experience. Women in the community who conducted large events traditionally and properly where gifts of the appropriate type were given and presented appropriately were considered role models when it came to a Tongan woman fulfilling her responsibilities with and around the tradition of *koloa*. This

involved the woman giving traditional pieces of *koloa* such as *fala*, and *ngatu ngatu* as opposed to *me'a fakapālangi* such as the *monomono*, *ngatu pepa*, Korean mink blankets, *niti*, fabrics, comforters, or money. The *me'a fakapālangi* pieces were still useful and commonly used as *koloa* for gift giving and gift exchange, but they were not as valuable as the traditional *koloa* pieces.

The bad things to know about *koloa* associated with knowledge the women shared about involved women using their knowledge in a negative way. Women were known to attend an event because they were knowledgeable and they knew there would be *koloa* of all types presented. They attended these events to watch the presentation closely judging how it was conducted rather than being there solely to celebrate. Some women were known to take notes of what was given, and to whom those gifts were given. There was also criticism of the way the *koloa* were folded, if they were presented using the right terms for the different types and measurements, as well as whether the right amount or right pieces were given to the right people. There was also criticism given for presenting *me'a fakapālangi* pieces of *koloa* rather than traditional pieces.

When I asked Sia whether she thought *koloa* was valuable enough to labor over to maintain the Tongan culture, since *koloa* pieces could be quite large, take a long time to produce, cost a lot of money to make, and take up a lot of time and energy storing, pulling out for events, and using for special occasions, she explained that *koloa* were worth it. Sia claimed even though there were different types of nontraditional pieces of *koloa* being made such as the *ngatu pepa* she still valued traditional pieces. She stated, “instead of using the traditional trees; nowadays, they are using things from the store as a



part of [the] layer for the tapa. Before it was both [*sic*] just from the tree. Now it's like part material and part tapa. It's easier, but to me, it's not that valuable." Sia explained that *ngatu pepa* served the same purposes that *ngatu ngatu* served for occasions and events, but she still valued the *ngatu ngatu* traditional pieces more. I asked Sia why she valued them more and she responded by telling me:

I think it's some kind of inner value as a Tongan thing [*sic*]. I guess when you are looking at the original ones it's more valuable to me. It's like looking at an antique thing. You look at it and then look at all the new ones that they are making and it might look better or whatever, look at that chest [*sic*] over there it might be old or whatever, but it has more value. That's how I feel about it. Even though we have new things now to me those look like as if they are important, but I still like the traditional one. I rather prefer that one even though I don't mind using the new one to serve a purpose for whatever we are using it for.

Nia explained traditional *koloa* were celebrated in the United States. Women celebrated *koloa* on a higher level because they were able to bring the tradition from Tonga. She explained it is "nice to have something of yourself" to observe at an event. She stressed there was a different feeling when there were traditional *koloa* presented and being used. She described it as feeling Tongan where even though she was in the United States she could go to an event where there were traditional *koloa* pieces being used that made her feel connected to her Tongan culture and Tongan roots.

### Women's Role and Work

From my experience as an American in the United States, I had always witnessed women, like my mother, doing *koloa*, never the men. If my siblings and I needed *koloa* of any type for anything our mother supplied it because it was something she kept and managed in our home. If *koloa* was presented or used in any way, it was the women who handled it, not the men. I respected women for taking on this responsibility, but because I witnessed a lack of men involved in doing *koloa* growing up, I wanted to know if women believed Tongan men should be more involved with *koloa* activities?

There was a division among the women when it came to men being more involved. Some of the women thought men should be more involved and some of them thought men should not. The reasons for letting men be more involved were to take some of the labor out of the work women did and giving it to the men, but also for men to respect as well as appreciate the work women did.

A woman, whom I will refer to as 'Inga, stressed men should be involved because *koloa* were not used for women only; they were used to fulfill responsibilities for the entire family. 'Inga pointed out when her husband's side of the family had a funeral she had to put together *koloa* to take to his family to fulfill their responsibilities for the deceased. She explained men needed *koloa* too. 'Inga explained the men should help care for the *koloa*, and make the *koloa* since these things all require a lot of work.

Keleni argued men should be knowledgeable on how to make the *koloa* as well as what the different types were because it would show they appreciate the work women did and what was involved. For example, the funeral was an occasion where men took the

position of a talking chief known as a *matāpule* in Tongan. The *matāpule* presented the gifts given from their family or group to the family of the deceased. However, Keleni argued the men did not know what the different pieces were and she thought they should so the *koloa* could be presented in greater detail rather than the traditional way of acknowledging those items as gifts by saying “*fakafeta’i ma’u koloa*,” which puts all the different types of *koloa* into one bunch without specifying what types or their measurements.

Sia claimed men should “pay attention to it” because *koloa* involved responsibilities to their family as well. She stated typically men who wanted to get involved by asking about women’s responsibilities could be shunned by women where women claimed their domain by saying, “Oh this is for women only.” However, Sia stated things should change to involve men with the planning. For example, involving them in what was going on with the *koloa*, what was needed, and sitting down with the women to discuss these issues.

On the opposite side of the debate, women thought it was unconventional for men to be involved with *koloa*, and even to the point the idea seemed strange to them. Nia stated seeing men do *koloa* “would be funny to see.” She explained all her life she had known women to employ *koloa* not men. Nia claimed there was a stereotype about men doing anything associated with *koloa* where it was embarrassing for them to take on any roles with *koloa* since those were roles belonging to women.

A woman born in Tonga, whom I will refer to as Line, did not think men should be involved with *koloa* activities because they would make things worst. Line stated that

men did not know enough about *koloa* to help the women. Their lack of knowledge “knowing how to read” the *koloa*, would make it difficult for women and they did not have the experience to make things easier. Reading and counting *koloa* involved knowing the measurements, the different types, and the hierarchy with the different pieces. There was a hierarchy with *koloa* that structured, what pieces should go to whom, what order the gifts were given in, and the measurements certain gifts should be.

Another woman born in Tonga, whom I will refer to as Moala, felt the same way as Line. Moala did not think men should be involved with *koloa* because not only did they know nothing about *koloa*, all they did was complain about *koloa*. Moala shared her husband complained about *koloa* being a waste of money. However, when the responsibilities with *koloa* were fulfilled, her husband reaped the benefits of Moala’s work. Moala stated her husband also felt proud because she kept with the tradition and the culture.

Growing up, I always witnessed traditional as well as nontraditional *koloa* being cared for by my mother. I learned at a young age *koloa* of certain types were to be kept under your bed to keep them smooth and safe. If *koloa* was needed for an event in the family, at church or in the community my mother had the resources to provide for those situations. She had a designated place where she stored her *koloa*. When she needed pieces from her collection to fulfill responsibilities using her *koloa* she went to where she stored them and took what she needed. However, my mother kept the *koloa* as a part of her household because that was how she was raised. Her mother and her mother’s

mother kept *koloa* in designated places as a resource for fulfilling their responsibilities as women, as a woman of the house, a woman in the church, and in the community.

When I asked the women born in Tonga specifically if they considered themselves or women, in general, the main reason why Tongans were able to uphold Tongan culture, to be Tongans, and to continue these values in the United States and in Tonga, their responses were mainly yes. They felt confident that women were the main reason for continuing the Tongan culture in the Bay Area. One of the main arguments presented for this reasoning was women were in the home taking care of the children where traditions, culture, and knowledge about *koloa* were transferred as well as taught to the children.

Keleni stated, “95% is probably because of the Tongan the [*sic*] women.” She stressed that it was always the mother who transferred knowledge to the children. She explained that men did not undertake *koloa* responsibilities.

One of the women, I will refer to as Liva, explained women play a significant role in continuing culture because they teach their children about *koloa*. Liva explained that those responsibilities were the “mother’s role, the women’s role.”

‘Ana discussed the Tongan proverb *koe ‘api ‘a fafine*, which translates to the responsibilities with the home are with the woman. The standards of being a good woman rely on her responsibilities within the home for her family as a mother, and wife. Fa and Moala also referred to the proverb *koe ‘api ‘a fafine* to explain how significant *koloa* was to a woman’s role and work. Fa explained that women wanting to live up to the standards of being a good woman within the home, take care of their responsibilities

to the best of their capabilities. She stressed every Tongan woman should have *koloa* because those possessions were hers, they belonged to her, and she should keep them. *Koloa* are a responsibility within the home that a woman looking up to the standards of a Tongan woman should take on.

*Koloa* was one of the responsibilities of the home related to fulfilling responsibilities with the family. For example, a woman, whom I will refer to as Teise, shared her experience when she got married in the United States. She had a traditional Tongan wedding, which required the use of *koloa* to complete her celebration. Teise's mother was in charge of preparing the *koloa* for the wedding, but also for giving to highly honored members of the family, church, and community. The *koloa* was prepared because that was her mother's responsibility to her family on behalf of her daughter.

When I asked the women what they wanted to see happen with their *koloa* in the future when they were no longer able to care for their *koloa* or do *koloa*, there were a high number of women who wanted to pass their *koloa* down to their daughters. Leti explained she wanted to pass her *koloa* on to her daughter because that was what women did. She explained she and her sister had inherited *koloa* going all the way back to their grandmother. This was a tradition she also wanted to pass down to her daughter as her grandmother did in the past. She also stressed that the *koloa* held her family history. She would not pass *koloa* on to her boys because, assuming they married Tongan women, their wives would have their own *koloa* they came with from their families when they got married.

Line stressed she would pass her *koloa* on to her children even though they did not value *koloa* the same way she did. She claimed her children would probably sell her *koloa* for money, but she did not have any bad feelings toward her children for potentially doing this. Line explained she wanted her children to inherit something from her.

Possessing *koloa* in the Bay Area was not only possible through inheritance or women bringing their collections from Tonga. There was a demand for traditional *koloa* in the Bay Area where a global, as well as local, economy was developed. The demand stems from women valuing the continuance of the tradition in their Bay Area communities where they have established their families, churches, networks, and circles in which they interact. Within their communities, women have developed ways to stock their collections of *koloa*. The women understand when obligations with the family, church, or community arise they must have their supply of various *koloa* to draw from to fulfill their responsibilities as women within the Tongan culture.

As a Tongan woman in a Bay Area Tongan community active in continuing culture, I have witnessed not only my mother but also women in the community consistently carrying on the tradition. Their ability to carry on this tradition relied on how well stocked their collections were. Did they have enough *koloa* to complete their occasions with *koloa*? Did they have *koloa* to give to church members for church gatherings as well as functions? These were the questions women were faced with continually that factor into how much they could give, what they were willing to give, and what they needed to accumulate.

It was common for women in the Bay Area to arrange a gift exchange between a group they had developed and a group of women from Tonga. The women from Tonga provided traditional pieces of *koloa* to the women in the United States by negotiating a price for the goods to be exchanged. The women agreed on an amount of how much *koloa* would be provided for a certain amount of money. Traditionally, the women from the United States went to the women in Tonga to conduct a *kātoanga*—festive event or celebration conducted in public, where the *koloa* are exchanged. It was proper and expected there would be more gifts exchanged by both parties than what was initially negotiated. Women from the United States shipped a box filled with Western goods such as blankets, clothes, food, tools, toiletries, and kitchen supplies to give as an additional gift. Women in Tonga gave more *koloa* than what was negotiated. The events were festive with food, ceremonies, dancing, and speeches.

When I was in middle school, one of my first experiences learning about the practices around the tradition of gift exchange was when my mother negotiated an exchange between a group of women she developed and a group of women in the village Longomapu on the island of Vava'u. Vava'u was the group of islands located in the Northern region of the group of islands making up the Tonga islands. Figure 20 shows a map of the Tonga islands, which is comprised of different island groups. Tongatapu is the main island where the capital Nuku'alofa is located.





Figure 20. Map of the Tonga Islands.

This was a beautiful event where my mother's group all attended the *kātoanga* put on by both groups of women to showcase the beautiful pieces of *koloa* being exchanged. The traditions behind negotiated gift exchanges deeply embedded in Tongan culture were not practical for women living in the Bay Area to consistently collect *koloa*. Women wanting small quantities of different types in a short amount of time have accommodations established in the Bay Area for doing that.

Women have several options for accumulating *koloa* to keep their stockpiles replenished. They could buy from vendors on the Internet on social media networks such as Facebook. They could call and arrange with people they knew in Tonga. They could buy from the local economy, or they could accumulate *koloa* based on their engagement with the community where they have circles of women and groups in which they travel. The local economy was a way women sold goods they wanted to make a profit from as well as buy goods they wanted right away.

‘Ana shared she had sold pieces of her collection to make money to provide for her children’s college tuition. Another woman, whom I will refer to as Sita, also sold pieces of *koloa* she owned to pay for her children’s college fees. Moala explained she sold her *koloa* at times for the sake of her family’s living in the Bay Area. There were also women in the business of selling on a larger scale where they sold to women on a regular basis and even offered payment plans to their customers to pay off items they were buying over a short period of time. However, there were women who preferred not to buy or sell *koloa*. They preferred to inherit their *koloa* or accumulate through gifting and giving.

There were also vendors coming from Tonga to sell *koloa* locally. I had the opportunity to work with a woman representing a group from Tonga. She and I organized an event where she sold *koloa* products she brought from Tonga acquired through a group of women specializing in weaving and producing different types of *koloa*. The *koloa* were sold at a church hall we used to facilitate the event. This was a new way of selling *koloa* locally in the Bay Area.

Figures 21 and 22 show the different types of *koloa* sold at the *faka'ali'ali*—display or advertisement event.



*Figure 21. Ta'ovala and kiekie for sale.*



*Figure 22. Kiekie and fine mats such as kie tonga for sale.*

The ways in which women chose to fulfill their responsibilities as women were done individually where they had the choice to decide what they would do. Doing *koloa* was a choice for women living in the United States because they have to contend with two cultures. When I asked the women if they thought a woman who neglected her

responsibilities with *koloa* would suffer, or her family would suffer serious consequences or the Tongan culture in the Bay Area would suffer dire consequences without women working with *koloa*, there were a high number of women who thought the woman would not suffer. Women had the Tongan culture, which identified their roots, where their ancestors came from, and their heritage, but they also were subjected to the influence of American culture living in the Bay Area. *Koloa* were a strong part of Tongan culture and they were the products, makings, and responsibilities of women who had the choice to take on those responsibilities or not. Establishing Tongan culture in the Bay Area required a great deal of work. The work women did and the role they upheld in the family, church, and community in all the ways mentioned by the women and presented in this section contributed to establishing a culture highly valued by women in the Bay Area.



## DISCUSSION

It was evident from the shared stories, thoughts, feelings, values, and beliefs of the women that they tremendously valued the *koloa* tradition. The women took seriously their responsibilities taking care of their families, churches, and communities around *koloa*. They felt a strong connectedness to their role as Tongan women preserving the tradition. They believed *koloa* represented who they are as Tongans and they were proud of how *koloa* represented their culture. Despite the responsibility that came with maintaining *koloa* women willingly continued to endure their position as guardians.

Previous researchers have made a point to reveal *koloa* as a form of wealth and the possession of women rather than focus on the work that women did to preserve *koloa*. They were concerned with the economic values of *koloa* and how those values were produced. There was an emphasis on the way women produced *koloa* that added to the economic as well as traditional value as a form of wealth, and something of which women were in control. There was focus placed on the way women engaged in production, gift giving, and gift exchange to educate about the roles of women, shedding light on their responsibilities. However, there has been less attention paid to the valuable work women did, responsible for the tradition being preserved, from the perspective of women and the ways they value their work and *koloa*, which caused the tradition to continue. Their perspective was needed to understand what values, beyond economic values, factor into the continued presence of *koloa* embedded in Tongan culture.

With my exploration, I was focused on my subjective immersion in the research field resulting in an epistemology of the lasting effects of women's work. As a Tongan woman from the United States growing up with *koloa* as a staple in my home, I already had an idea of the economic as well as cultural values and worth of *koloa* that previous researchers were focused on discussing with their studies. Diverging from the path paved by previous researchers my goal was to discuss the value women from my community have for their work that has been instilled in them and generations of other women successively over time. Instilling values around *koloa* successively has caused both traditional as well as nontraditional *koloa* to exist, but moreover, the effect of having this tradition on society has also withstood the effects of time.

*Koloa* has been valued by generations of women for an immense number of reasons. For example, Nia valued *koloa* because they made her feel Tongan when she was around them. They made her feel connected to the country of her ancestors even in foreign places such as the Bay Area where American culture was unavoidable. Tongan culture was established in the Bay Area through values Tongans have accepted.

Tongan society has accepted women as guardians of *koloa* because they have been capable of meeting the perceived ideal of how a tradition should define Tongan culture. Because *koloa* defines Tongan culture, *koloa* tradition is measurable in multiple facets of society because *koloa* are necessary for completing complex occasions in Tongan society. The basis of Tongan culture in the Bay Area as well as in Tonga are customs that members of society carry out as traditions being upheld and maintained over time. Occasions of different types, from birthdays to school reunions, consist of customs

and traditions ceremoniously carried out to complete the events as specific to Tongan cultural values that structure society. What makes *koloa* have great value is not primarily economic value. After all, to Tongan people it is no mystery that *koloa* of all types carry some form of economic value. *Koloa* carries significant value because they are a tradition that is perceptible by society as symbolic of culture. *Koloa* are used to carry out other traditions because *koloa* are valued as a necessity to other traditions being fulfilled. The provability of *koloa* for representing what epitomizes Tonga are what makes it a benchmark for keeping with the complexities of Tongan culture guarding customs and traditions. Women's work with *koloa* is relevant because of the cultural values that revolve around the *koloa* tradition as well as the impact of the tradition on society.

Having knowledge of one's cultural identity tracing back to one's indigenous homeland is a powerful piece of information to have. It gives people a sense of where their roots are, where they came from, and who they are. *Koloa* has the capability to give people a traceable cultural identity. The way people in Tongan communities set themselves apart, not only from other Pacific islanders but also American culture, is with their use of *koloa* to represent Tongan culture. People can wear a type of *koloa* known as a *ta'ovala*, they can choose to have a traditional Tongan birthday using *koloa*, and they can fulfill customs in the church such as the *Fakame* or *Misinale*, all of which symbolize Tongan culture.

Establishing Tongan culture in places such as the Bay Area requires encompassing strong values for what the Tongan culture should be, but particularly what it should be in the diaspora, foreign lands, or any place other than Tonga. Similar to



other migrant cultures, Tongan culture thrives in places such as the Bay Area because people are capable of establishing foundations of their national culture in their new transnational homes. The foundations of a culture are the perceptible ideals societies have for how their traditions should define the culture that society accepts and works toward carrying out as well as perpetuating. Some cultural identities are defined by food where traditions with food tracing back to nations of origin are judged by society and become standards for a definition of culture. The traditions around food such as regions where particular dishes come from, ingredients used, histories of their origin or particular foods served for specific occasions migrate with the groups they belong to, whom then establish those traditions in foreign lands. How these traditions successively continue over land and time depends on how guardians of the traditions value their work and value it to the point it becomes necessary for culture to exist.

As guardians of *koloa*, women endure a substantial number of responsibilities. Researchers have made clear women are producers of *koloa* as well as those in control. They also inherit, buy, sell, possess, gift, and exchange *koloa*. All of these responsibilities require a considerable amount of work. Producing *koloa* can take years, counting the amount of time it takes to grow crops from which the raw materials come from, to make traditional *koloa* or it could take days if one is going to the local fabric or craft store to buy unnatural materials such as fabrics to make nontraditional pieces. Controlling *koloa* involves knowledge with maintenance, storage, transporting, producing, and when to apply *koloa* to responsibilities fulfilling customs. Inheriting *koloa* requires knowing what to do with the *koloa*, and if keeping the *koloa* is an option,

tending to those pieces making sure to keep them safe from theft, damage, or loss.

Buying and selling *koloa* calls for knowing the market, who is selling or buying, who has what types, and who is a reliable source for buying *koloa* from as well as selling *koloa* to. Women taking on these responsibilities know they involve laborious work, money, time, and patience. These are the organizational conditions of *koloa* that women encounter regularly.

*Koloa* are carriers of culture. They are what women use, and people look to for applying Tongan culture to new places overseas far away from Tonga. Women such as ‘Ana discussed how *koloa* have been essential to an event conducted with Tongan tradition. At an event, there is food, music, dance, and there are *koloa*. The women discussed how fundamental *koloa* are to preserving Tongan culture with customs such as wearing a *ta’ovala* for *Fakame*, using them for customs related to responsibilities with the family such as giving to the *mehikitanga*—the father’s sister, for significant occasions such as a birthday or wedding. *Koloa* are used to decorate with at events giving facilities a cultural trait. *Koloa* embodies all the principles of culture enjoining a link back to the Tonga islands where the tradition, and to a greater degree the culture, were established.

The women value *koloa* in the same ways members of the community value *koloa*. *Koloa*, as a tradition, are an intricate part of Tongan communities in the Bay Area actively engaged in continuing culture outside of Tonga. Communities resist conforming to dominant culture by supporting their cultural identity as Tongans with customs and traditions such as *koloa*, which are vital for establishing Tongan culture locally in the Bay Area.

The underpinnings of the *koloa* tradition were founded within the woman's domain where women have been capable of keeping the tradition going. Women have formulated fluid boundaries for their domain that can span areas beyond the home such as the circles women network in working together to conduct an event, selling *koloa* to each other, buying *koloa* from one another, exchanging with each other, or gifting each other *koloa*. A feature of the woman's domain with *koloa* is its capacity to move outside of the home where the tradition becomes perceptible publicly by people in society as an ideal for how customs and traditions should be carried out defining culture on multiple levels. For example, the *Misinale*, which is a significant celebration held by Methodist churches, involves customs and traditions to conduct even in the Bay Area. For these events, there are customs that must be fulfilled that require the use of *koloa*. The customs and traditions around the *Misinale* were established in Tonga and have been brought to the Bay Area and established there. The guest of honor at a *Misinale*, known as the *sea*, has customs and traditions they must fulfill for the church and honored church members such as the *faifekau*—church pastor. *Koloa* are a necessary feature for these events. Women from the family of the *sea* such as the wife, daughters, granddaughters, sisters, aunts, or nieces decorate with *koloa* and give *koloa* as gifts to prominent guests at these events. The responsibilities with customs and traditions involving *koloa* at events such as the *Misinale* that women work toward fulfilling are major undertakings, but the women value their positions as guardians of *koloa*. When an occasion such as the *Misinale* occurs, women know their position within the family, as well as their responsibilities to family members and they take on these responsibilities willingly because they value them.

The places women conduct their work, for instance, places in the church where a *Misinale* takes place, becomes their domain. Within these places, women have full power and control over how things should be done, what will be done, and these responsibilities are completely fulfilled by women. This is accepted common sense knowledge within the community. Distinct boundaries are drawn for a women's domain when fulfilling their responsibilities.

Patricia Hill-Collins discussed "safe spaces" as places in which Black women feel safe. They are places they feel free in expressing themselves. Women work toward modeling positive female role models from their communities in these safe spaces (Hill-Collins 2000, 101). Tongan women also feel safe within their domain. Their domain is a place where they have the freedom to carry out their responsibilities with the *koloa* tradition. Tongan women working within their domain resist conforming to dominant culture because dominant culture has no use or value for *koloa*. Women working within these domains continually situate themselves in opposition to dominant culture resisting assimilation because Tongan women value perceptible ideals of the Tongan woman and work toward living up to those ideals.

'Ana, Fa, and Moala discussed the Tongan proverb *koe 'api 'a fafine*, which translates to the responsibilities with the home are with the woman. The meaning of this proverb defines standards women have for fulfilling their responsibilities. It outlines the perceptible ideals of a Tongan woman such as a woman takes care of the family and cares for the family according to Tongan cultural values, customs, and traditions. One responsibility is specifically fulfilling Tongan cultural values using *koloa*. Several

women in the study felt similarly to Fa. They felt strongly a woman should have *koloa* to be able to fulfill her responsibilities as a Tongan woman.

However, to have *koloa* or not to have *koloa* was a woman's choice. The women described the extreme purposefulness of *koloa* for keeping the Tongan culture going, but they also believed despite Tongan customs and traditions depending on *koloa* to be fulfilled it was a woman's choice to keep those traditions going or not. 'Ana explained it was not mandatory for a woman to have *koloa* or use *koloa* for her responsibilities, but over time women have developed effective values around their guardianship of *koloa* that they live by and with which they keep the tradition going.

As guardians of *koloa* women do everything. They encounter the organizational conditions that come with choosing to take on *koloa* such as storing *koloa*, maintaining the quality of their *koloa*, or buying *koloa*. Women apply *koloa* to their responsibilities for the family because they value the Tongan culture. The women value what they were taught about *koloa* or what they learned from their experiences with *koloa* growing up and hope to pass it on to the next generation of women. The values instilled in women regarding *koloa* were developed as well as structured by women, and women have had the capacity to pass on their values too.

The role of a mother in the family was vital particularly with her work fulfilling responsibilities with *koloa*. Mothers had the power to govern *koloa* in the home while directly or indirectly instilling Tongan cultural values in their family members. They could teach their children to be proud of whom they are and give them a connection to their ancestral heritage by dressing them with *koloa*. They could teach their families

valuable customs and traditions specific to Tongan culture by using *koloa*. These are all lessons women were taught by other women, and this practice has been maintained over time. The mother and daughter relationship was a major factor contributing to keeping the tradition going because daughters learned the worth of *koloa* from their mothers as well as what could be lost without maintaining *koloa*.

Mothers resisting dominant cultural values by keeping with Tongan cultural values contribute tremendously to establishing Tongan culture in the Bay Area Tongan community. One way they do this is with their work with *koloa*. The criticalness of *koloa* to Tongan people developing a strong sense of identity as Tongans includes valuing *koloa*. However, developing this strong connection to one's cultural heritage, ancestry, and the foundation Tongan culture was built on requires valuing the work women do contributing to establishing as well as maintaining customs and traditions.

People in Tongan society advocate women's work is valuable by accepting the *koloa* tradition and adhering to the pattern of teachings passed down from generation to generation. Tongan women like myself who value *koloa* commit in one way or another to take on the responsibility of being guardians for *koloa*. Women possess *koloa* by keeping it in their homes and making sure their supply is stocked to fulfill their part as members of the family, church, and community. They teach their daughters to value *koloa* by teaching them to value their cultural heritage as Tongans and their position as women maintaining that part of culture. Learning how to maintain the *koloa* tradition involves becoming knowledgeable about customs and traditions, what the different types of *koloa* are, what they are used for, how to use them as well as how to make *koloa*.

Women guard their domain by upholding exclusivity. They value their gendered role with *koloa* by keeping it under their control because they appreciate their ability to contribute to society by fulfilling their part within the culture. Losing the responsibilities that come with the tradition would impact the position of women as benefactors because they give substantially due to being guardians of *koloa*. In the Tongan Bay Area community, in general, people have *koloa* as a resource they can access through women closely related to them to uphold their ties to Tongan culture regardless of whether dominant culture envelops Tongan culture.

Women understand fully how they can give with their position as guardians and work toward prospering within their domain either in the privacy of their homes or in the eye of the public. Within the home, women care for their *koloa* to make sure they can care for their families, churches, and community. In the home, they transfer their knowledge about *koloa* as well as how it relates to other customs and traditions to their children directly or indirectly. In public, women have the same effect on people. Women transfer their knowledge to people exposed to their responsibilities. They show others what customs and traditions consist of as well as what the *koloa* tradition consists of when they conduct gift giving ceremonies, and they embody the perceptible ideal of what it means to be Tongan as well as how to show a person is Tongan. These are underlying principles for establishing the Tongan culture particularly in the Bay Area.

From my life experiences as a Tongan woman with an upbringing dense with Tongan cultural values I learned at a young age *koloa* was a resource for keeping my Tongan identity. Born in the United States to Tongan parents does not automatically

make me know everything about Tongan culture, but having a Tongan mother who values her role deeply and works with *koloa* has made me appreciate as well as learn about my Tongan cultural heritage even in places far removed from the Tonga islands such as the Bay Area. Tongan women choosing to take on responsibilities specific to them with *koloa* contribute indispensably to establishing a culture. The effect of women's work with *koloa* on Tongan society is considerable because of the values their work introduces as well as transfers to people in general. Their work is relevant because it promotes resistance to the oppressions developed from the dominant culture. People are taught to resist assimilation by embracing the culture of their country of origin or their parents' and grandparents' country of origin. They learn that cultural resources and values are accessible through women. Despite the rising economic value of *koloa* women are willing to pay the cost of these items because they are essential for completing their responsibilities, but they also help women financially in Tonga make a living to support their families as well as women locally in the Bay Area as a supplementary income used to pay bills and support their children. Understanding how the work of women with *koloa* disseminates Tongan cultural knowledge over time is vital for respecting women, appreciating the work they do, and acknowledging their successive efforts to provide others with meaning for the places as well as the culture from which they originated. These vigilantly developed reasons pointing to the relevance of women's work draw awareness to the undeniable leading position women have as key members of Tongan society.



## CONCLUSION

Choosing to research as a native feminist anthropologist for my thesis was eye-opening. I was familiar with the lived experiences of the women I was studying because their lived experiences were my lived experiences, my mother's lived experiences, and my grandmother's lived experiences. Utilizing this perspective and supporting change from the colonial racist past of anthropology to a discipline that makes available information helping to draw awareness to the valuable work people do or encouraging their growth were skills that proved to be beneficial to my work. I used unconventional methodologies such as a feminist approach, native approach, and autoethnography because they were essential for developing knowledge drawing awareness to the caliber of women's work over time. These methodologies were used skillfully when administering conventional methods for obtaining data such as surveys, interviews, and observations.

I deviated from the path of previous researchers with my research of *koloa* and women in the Tongan culture by taking the focus away from the economic values of *koloa* crediting the gendered work of women with strong values, and giving valid reasons for the division in society between men and women due to the tradition. Unlike previous researchers, my focus was on the lived experiences of women contributing to their families, churches, and communities through their work with *koloa* that also establishes Tongan culture for community members to engage in as well as identify with.

Developing Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought was possible because I put my focus on finding out where women's work formulated knowledge either in the home or in public as well as between women. Understanding where their knowledge originated from and how they continued to distribute their knowledge to society as a resource for people to find ways to decolonize their minds by resisting assimilation, as well as building their identities represented the validity found within feminist theorization. Moreover, it represented how changing the empirical foundations of anthropology to suit one's own needs for presenting information was possible and that deviation was needed to open possibilities for future anthropological research work.

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## APPENDIX A

## Informed Consent Form

Tongan Women and *Koloa* Research Study Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study on *Koloa* and the role of Tongan women with their *koloa*. I am asking you to take part because you have expertise and knowledge with *koloa*, you are holding an event where *koloa* activities will take place, or you have taken an interest in my website promoting the sales of *koloa*. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this study is to understand how the Tongan culture is maintained in the Bay Area and how women have the role as cultural providers with their use of *koloa*. I am exploring their experiences with *koloa* through their education, life experiences, family, community, and culture from stories they will tell me.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview, and survey questionnaire with you. The interview will include questions about your experiences with *koloa* such as, how you learned about it, at what age, where you learned about it, do you know how to make *koloa*, how much do you know about *koloa*, and what do you know about the financial benefits of *koloa*? The interview will take about one to two hours to complete. With your permission, we would also like to record the interview. With your permission we would also like to take pictures of your *koloa*.

The questionnaire will involve questions about your *koloa* items and will be provided in a hard-copy format for you to fill out and return to the researcher.

**What we will be asking to observe:** At any social or cultural gatherings, such as church events, parties, or katoangas (any Tongan cultural event) that I am invited to or a guest at I will be observing women and people as they engage in activities with the *koloa*. I will be taking notes on the activities, taking photos, and video recording parts of the event.

Your identities will be concealed and the researcher will do her best to ensure your confidentiality is maintained. I will ask for a verbal agreement from the hosts of the events as well as the participants involved in the *koloa* activities.

**Risks and benefits:**

There is the risk that you may find some of the questions to be sensitive. In the event that this occurs, please let me know what you would like to do from that point on. Questions can be modified or omitted and the interview can come to a halt whenever you feel that you cannot proceed.

The only benefit to you is access to the website as a resource for selling or buying *koloa* as well as your vital input on describing the Tongan culture in the Bay Area as well as the activities involved with women and *koloa*.

**Compensation:** There will be no compensation for participating in this research study, but your participation will be much appreciated by the researcher.

**Your answers will be confidential.** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file and only the

researcher will have access to the records. If we record the interview, we will destroy the record after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of recording. All pictures taken will only be used for the research and they will be destroyed after the research. All pictures will be kept locked with other research records in a locked file.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect you in any way. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw from the research at any time.

**If you have questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Mele'ana Kehaulani 'Akolo, the daughter of Rev. Afuhia 'Akolo and Salote 'Akolo. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Mele'ana by email at [mka217@humboldt.edu](mailto:mka217@humboldt.edu) or by cell phone at (925) 405-2735. You can also contact Professor Rebecca Robertson by email at [rer3@humboldt.edu](mailto:rer3@humboldt.edu) or by phone at (707) 826-4342 with any questions about the research study.

If you have any concerns with this study, contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dr. Ethan Gahtan, at [eg51@humboldt.edu](mailto:eg51@humboldt.edu) or (707) 826-4545.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, report them to the Humboldt State University Dean of Research, Mr. Steve Karp, at [karp@humboldt.edu](mailto:karp@humboldt.edu) or (707) 826-4190.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. Please give your consent to take part in the study by signing the consent form and checking the box below.

Please check the box if you agree to participate in the study as well as signing below.

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.*

“A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF WOMEN’S WORK WITH *KOLOA* IN THE  
TONGAN COMMUNITY”



## APPENDIX B

## Demographic Survey Questionnaire

**DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE** – Name:

1. HOW OLD ARE YOU?
2. WHERE WERE YOU BORN?
3. WHAT IS YOUR MARITAL STATUS?
4. DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN?
5. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN THE UNITED STATES?
6. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN THE BAY AREA?
7. WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF EDUCATION?
8. WHAT IS YOUR RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND?
9. WHERE ARE YOU FROM IN THE BAY AREA OR WHERE DO YOU CALL HOME?
10. WHAT DO YOU DO FOR A LIVING?
11. WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL?
12. DID YOU LEARN ABOUT *KOLOA* IN *SCHOOL*? (SKIP IF PARTICIPANT **ONLY** WENT TO SCHOOL IN THE UNITED STATES)
13. ON A SCALE FROM 1 TO 10, 1 BEING NOT IMPORTANT TO KEEPING WITH TONGAN TRADITION AND 10 BEING EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO KEEPING WITH TONGAN TRADITION, WHAT NUMBER SCORE WOULD YOU GIVE

*KOLOA* WITH REFERENCE TO IMPORTANCE WHEN KEEPING WITH TONGAN  
TRADITION?

CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER:

- 1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9  
10

## APPENDIX C

## Structured Interview Questions

## STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## INTRODUCTION QUESTION:

WHEN WE, AND I MEAN YOU AND I AND OUR COMMUNITY, LOOK TO USING *KOLOA* FOR CULTURAL EVENTS OR SOCIAL EVENTS OR WEARING FOR A SPECIAL OCCASION OR FINDING SOMEONE TO BUY OR MAKE A SPECIFIC TYPE OF *KOLOA*, WOULD YOU AGREE THAT TONGAN WOMEN ARE THE ONES WE CAN TURN TO FOR THESE CULTURAL NEEDS?

1. AS A YOUNG GIRL I GREW UP WITH *KOLOA* IN MY HOME AND MY MOM WOULD ALWAYS DRESS US UP WITH *KOLOA* FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS. I LEARNED ABOUT *KOLOA* WHEN I WAS STILL IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WHEN MY MOM MADE ME A TAU'OLUNGA OR DANCING COSTUME. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT WHEN YOU FIRST LEARNED OR DISCOVERED *KOLOA*: HOW OLD WERE YOU AND WHAT WAS THAT EXPERIENCE LIKE FOR YOU?
2. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR SCHOOLING: WHERE YOU WENT TO HIGH SCHOOL AND IF THEY ENFORCED LEARNING ABOUT *KOLOA* IN SCHOOL?
3. WITH CULTURE WE CAN DIVIDE IT INTO DIFFERENT CATEGORIES SUCH AS LANGUAGE AS A PART OF CULTURE, FOOD AS A PART OF

CULTURE, DANCE AS A PART OF CULTURE: WHERE DO YOU PUT *KOLOA* AS A PART OF TONGAN CULTURE AND WHY?

4. *KOLOA* IS A VITAL PART OF TONGAN CULTURE AND IT IS THE FOCAL POINT OF EVENTS WHEN CARRYING OUT CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, GIVING AS GIFTS AS WELL AS SOMETHING THAT WOMEN HAVE A GREAT TALENT FOR AND HAVE COMPLETE AUTHORITY OVER, WHY DO YOU THINK THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAINTAINING *KOLOA* AND THIS PART OF CULTURE WAS GIVEN TO WOMEN?

5. TELL ME ABOUT WHETHER YOU THINK THAT *KOLOA* IS VALUABLE ENOUGH TO LABOR OVER IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE TONGAN CULTURE, SINCE *KOLOA* PIECES CAN BE QUITE LARGE, TAKE A LONG TIME TO PRODUCE, COST A LOT OF MONEY TO MAKE, AND TAKE UP A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY STORING, PULLING OUT FOR EVENTS, AND USING FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS?

6. WE ALL START TO COLLECT OUR OWN PIECES OF *KOLOA* WHETHER SOMEONE GIVES US A PIECE OR WE BUY ONE, TELL ME ABOUT HOW YOU CAME TO COLLECT, USE, SELL, OR BUY *KOLOA*?

7. AS MEMBERS OF A TONGAN COMMUNITY WE ENCOUNTER SITUATIONS THAT CALL ON THE USE OF *KOLOA*, HOW DO YOU CONTINUE TO COLLECT, BUY, SELL OR USE *KOLOA* WHILE LIVING HERE IN THE UNITED STATES?

8. WOMEN HAVE A SPECIFIC PLACE IN TONGAN SOCIETY WHERE THEY ARE EXPECTED TO DO CERTAIN THINGS AND MEN ARE EXPECTED TO DO CERTAIN THINGS ALSO, DO YOU THINK THAT TONGAN WOMEN ARE RESPECTED BECAUSE OF THEIR WORK WITH *KOLOA* OR ARE THEY RESPECTED MORE FOR OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES THEY ARE EXPECTED TO DO?

9. WHEN DOES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TAKING CARE OF *KOLOA* BECOME A BURDEN TO YOU OR WEIGHT ON YOUR SHOULDERS?

10. WE KNOW THAT *KOLOA* IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF WOMEN, BUT NOW IN THE YEAR 2016 DO YOU THINK THAT TONGAN MEN SHOULD BE MORE INVOLVED WITH *KOLOA* ACTIVITIES? WHY OR WHY NOT?

11. SINCE TAKING CARE OF *KOLOA* IS A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR WOMEN, DO YOU THINK THAT MEN HAVE AN EASIER LIFE BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF *KOLOA*? WHY OR WHY NOT?

12. WOMEN CAN BE EXTREMELY DEDICATED TO WORK WITH *KOLOA*, SOME ARE MORE EXPERIENCED OR KNOWLEDGEABLE WHEN IT COMES TO *KOLOA*, WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE GOOD THINGS THAT WOMEN CAN GET FROM KNOWING ABOUT *KOLOA* AND WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BAD THINGS THAT WOMEN CAN GET FROM *KOLOA*?

13. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE HAPPEN WITH YOUR *KOLOA* IN THE FUTURE WHEN YOU ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO CARE FOR YOUR *KOLOA* OR DO *KOLOA* ACTIVITIES?

14. IN THE TONGAN COMMUNITY AT CULTURAL AS WELL AS SOCIAL EVENTS THERE IS FREQUENT USE OF *KOLOA* AND IN LARGE QUANTITIES, WHY DO YOU THINK THAT *KOLOA* IS STILL A STRONG PART OF TONGAN CULTURE IN THE BAY AREA?

15. DO YOU THINK THAT IF A WOMAN WERE TO NEGLECT HER RESPONSIBILITIES WITH *KOLOA* THAT SHE AND HER FAMILY COULD SUFFER SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES OR THAT THE TONGAN CULTURE IN THE BAY AREA COULD SUFFER SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES WITHOUT WOMEN WORKING WITH *KOLOA*? HOW WOULD FAMILIES AND THE TONGAN COMMUNITY SUFFER?

## APPENDIX D

Questions For Women Born In The United States

**QUESTIONS FOR WOMEN BORN IN THE UNITED STATES**

1. DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT KOLOA AND IF NOT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW MORE?
2. WHAT DO YOU LIKE OR DISLIKE ABOUT *KOLOA*, TONGAN TRADITIONS, AND WOMEN BEING IN CHARGE OF THIS PART OF CULTURE?
3. IF THERE WERE WORKSHOPS, CLASSES, SPECIALISTS, AND MENTORS AVAILABLE FOR LEARNING ABOUT *KOLOA* HERE IN THE BAY AREA, WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN ACCESSING ANY OF THESE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES?
4. DO YOU THINK THAT A PANEL DISCUSSION WITH LEADERS IN THE *KOLOA* INDUSTRY AS SPEAKERS ADDRESSING ISSUES WITH *KOLOA* IN THE BAY AREA IS A USEFUL WAY TO REACH OUT TO THE FEMALE YOUTH IN THE COMMUNITY, TO EDUCATE THEM OR DISCUSS WITH THEM *KOLOA*?
5. DO YOU SEE THE TONGAN CULTURE THRIVING IN THE BAY AREA IN THE NEXT GENERATIONS TO COME AND DO YOU THINK THAT YOU WILL BE A CONTRIBUTOR OF THIS CULTURAL CONTINUITY, IF SO HOW?

## APPENDIX E

Questions For Women Born In Tonga

**QUESTIONS FOR WOMEN BORN IN TONGA**

1. HOW IS DEALING WITH *KOLOA* DIFFERENT FOR YOU LIVING IN THE BAY AREA COMPARED TO WHEN YOU WERE LIVING IN TONGA, TELL ME ABOUT THE DIFFERENCES?
2. FOR THE YOUTH GROWING UP IN THE BAY AREA THERE IS A LOT THAT THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT *KOLOA*, HOW DO YOU THINK THEY SHOULD LEARN ABOUT *KOLOA*?
3. DO YOU THINK THERE SHOULD BE WORKSHOPS, CLASSES, LECTURES, EVENTS, OR SPECIALISTS AVAILABLE FOR AMERICAN-BORN YOUNG TONGAN GIRLS TO LEARN ABOUT *KOLOA* AS GIRLS ARE TAUGHT IN TONGA?
4. DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF OR WOMEN THE MAIN REASON WHY TONGANS ARE ABLE TO UPHOLD TONGAN CULTURE, TO BE TONGANS, AND TO CONTINUE THESE VALUES HERE IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN TONGA?
5. IF YOU HAVE DAUGHTERS, DO YOU THINK THAT THEY WILL COLLECT *KOLOA* AND USE THEM TO KEEP THE TONGAN TRADITION GOING, TELL ME ABOUT THIS?