

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Returning to the Ahtanook: Reigniting the Ancestral Memory  
of Kumeyaay Women through Participatory Action Research

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Alexandria Hunter

Committee in charge:

University of California San Diego

Carolyn Hofstetter, Chair  
Theresa Ambo, Co-Chair

California State University, San Marcos

Manuel Vargas

2022

Copyright

Alexandria Hunter, 2022  
All rights reserved.

The dissertation of Alexandria Hunter is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego  
California State University, San Marcos

2022

## DEDICATION

In the words of Snoop Dog, “*I would like to thank me for never quitting.*”

It’s hard to name all the people, ancestors and spirits that helped me with all of this. I say *Thank you* to all of them. Thank you to my family for undoubtedly supporting me and to the women who showed up.

This is dedicated to the women who are willing to walk with me and the women who will walk a little easier after us.

To the heshla, enya, kweshlop, yna pume maat. Enya yeechesh eeyay ahun.

(To the moon, the sun, the stars, and the earth. In my chest, my heart feels good.)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
PREFACE .....	viii
VITA .....	xi
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION .....	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of Problem .....	2
Purpose of Study and Research Questions .....	3
Scope of Study and Methodology .....	4
The Gap in Research .....	5
Background and Positionality of Researcher .....	6
Overview of Dissertation .....	7
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	9
Key Terminology .....	9
Cosmology .....	10
Pre-Invasion—See Her .....	11
Ahwalth Kanop—Drawings on the Face Tell the Story .....	14
Myhashaan—Creator Sits with Me (Ceremony) .....	16
Making the Choice .....	17
The Ahtanook .....	18
The Role the Ceremony Played in the Community .....	20
Components of Puberty Ceremonies .....	20
Songs Are the Driver .....	21
The Role of Menstruation .....	22
Reasons for Decimation .....	24
Mission System .....	24
Reservations and Boarding Schools .....	26
Suppressive Religious Laws .....	28
Forced Sterilization .....	29
Revitalization .....	30
Theoretical Framework .....	32
Heart Knowledge .....	33
Summary of Research .....	34
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	36
Research Question and Design .....	36

Framework and Methodology .....	37
Workshop .....	40
How the Workshop Came to Be .....	41
Workshop Participants and Purposive Sampling .....	44
Data Collection .....	45
Document Collection .....	45
Surveys.....	46
Debrief and Sharing Circle Interview .....	46
Confidentiality & Ethical Considerations .....	47
Limitations .....	48
Data Analysis .....	48
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....	49
Q1: Spiritual, Emotional, & Physical Experiences .....	50
Spiritual.....	51
Emotional.....	54
Physical.....	57
Q2: Intimate Experiences—Self-Efficacy, Inner Strength, & Empowerment.....	60
Menstruation .....	61
Newfound Optimism.....	63
Desire for More.....	63
Belonging.....	64
Interpersonal Bonds .....	64
Inner Strength.....	65
Q3: Impacts on Self-Concept and Self-Empowerment.....	66
Self-Empowerment .....	66
Identity .....	67
Blood Memory .....	68
Summary .....	69
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	70
Revisiting the Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, and Methodology .....	70
Summary of Findings.....	71
Impacts on Emotions.....	72
Impacts on Inner Qualities .....	74
Impacts on Views of Self.....	76
Implications and Recommendations for the Future .....	77
Recommendations for Research .....	78
Recommendations for Community .....	80
Conclusion .....	80
APPENDIX A: AGENDA.....	82
APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS.....	83
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	84

APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY .....	85
REFERENCES .....	86

## PREFACE

Yeechesh Cha'alk (A Woman's Heart)

Written by

Alexandria Hunter (Jamul Indian Village) & Eva Trujillo (Took-ah-Mook, Mesa Grande)

We were born of her yas, created from the lands that intersect with her deep haslith. Sacred are the ha from where we came. We were drawn from the haslith, beyond to her mountains and deserts that always uusáwa our nya'warr spirits. Sacred is the mut here, from where we came. She calls to me from the ewik; her voice is the wild eeyipe that brushes past my maat and whips my Helmu naap around. Sacred are the eeyipe. I will wamp the same path to her, for my feet and maathow know the way, just as the ancestors before me. Sacred are the kwamayheeye. When I find her in the wii uuha, she will speak of the strength and uuyaw kwa'taay for myhashaan, and I will descend into the kwellhup, for I am not alone there. 'Tikuuych apesiw are our myhashaan.

My ahwat is sacred. The shla newh shows me my power and knows it is time to honor my space. 'Ehmaat is sacred, just as the land. I wear the wreaths the ancestors wore around my head, shally and mil, to guide me through. My maathow burns bright and strong. 'Ehchaa. The sacred sand paintings kahnop.

I can hear the cha'alk singing and moving like the beautiful ashaa, the sacred humpachoka and mesh ha leeapa, their melodies of flutter wail for me down there. 'Tikuuych apesiw are our songs; they have healed many. I can smell the sweet pelye and topsch burning over the wii 'iipat, glowing under the moonlight covered in my rabbit-skin blanket. With sweat at my brow, I will lay in the kwelhup and malay there. Sacred is her medicine. I gaze up at the kwashlop as they are our watchers. I am honored by their wisdom. When I emerge, the 'elmu is



left behind, and the new one shall lead, for I now have the marks of a cha'alk on my chin and body. 'Iikuuych apesiw are our cha'alk.

She is kwahmay; she is 'elmum, she is 'eshashches, viewed in all forms, from the beginning of time. Great-grandmother Sinyahow, hear me chio to you, fill my lungs just as you did for my ancestors. Great-grandmother Sinyahow, see me eema for you, bless the earth below my feet, for they have danced here before. Sacred is the land, one of the first ancestors. Great-grandmother Sinyahow, know that this is done in your honor, for I haven't forgotten you.

May your sunshine down upon my skin, for it is good medicine. May I harvest plants under your full moon in an ahun way, they remember the gathering songs as I do. With great care, I place my hand and forehead on the halasii. I ask permission to take for my sheyouth; her maathow is within it.

I'm guided by the sacred presence of ahwat and nyilth' and the awii who helped us all. The hasilth draws me in as the eshpunk sing their song in greeting with a graceful display of eema. I gather here just as the cha'alk did before me. I koolasow my yeechesh, maat and maathow dipped in her ha as my wet hilltah shines in the warm enya. My maat is adorned with hayak, beads and sacred ack; gifts from the hasilth and the old ones.

I raise my arms with offerings to you, my tumuul filled with sacred ha and the wild oop, for I know to give back to you. Sacred is the ha, my nyapume kwi. I sing to the land as she restores my weary maat, tired mind and dim spirit. Again, I will stand supur and think quick as my ah-ow burns bright inside, overflowing with uuway. I know now. Myha always reminds me of the journeys my people wamp and root the cha'alk songs in my memory, for they show us the direction. I remember. Enya yeechesh eeyay ahun, as peace washes over me. To be a wah I choose freely. To be a cha'alk, I choose me. Please watch over me as I bow my shamoo in honor

and eeyay ahun. Myha watches over all. Blessings to the hechane sin, the el mum sin, the cha'alk, she is all of us.

## **VITA**

### **EDUCATION**

- 1995            Orange Glen High School  
                    Escondido, CA
- 2005            Bachelor of Science, Communication  
                    California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA
- 2022            Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership  
                    University of California San Diego, San Diego, CA  
                    California State University, San Marcos; San Marcos, CA

### **WORK EXPERIENCE**

- 2015            Kumeyaay Community College (KCC), Board Member, Jamul Indian Village  
                    Delegate, El Cajon, CA

### **FIELDS OF STUDY**

Major Field: Educational Leadership

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Returning to the Ahtanook: Reigniting the Ancestral Memory  
of Kumeyaay Women through Participatory Action Research

by

Alexandria Hunter

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2022  
California State University, San Marcos, 2022

Professor Carolyn Hofstetter, Chair

Professor Theresa Ambo, Co-Chair

The following dissertation explores the history of Kumeyaay women, providing a taste of what their lives were like pre-colonization. The role of the Ahtanook—the Kumeyaay women’s coming-of-age ceremony—is explored, focusing on the crucial role of how it fosters the relationship of a woman’s positive cultural identity, foundational belief systems, and the cosmological connection to the feminine force in the universe. Many Native Nations across the

United States have a ritual connected to celebrating a woman at the time of her first menstrual cycle. A transitional life phase occurs when this life-giving force makes its presence known. The Ahwot (blood) connects her to the spiritual realm and is considered a sacred time for a woman. Some tribes have continually practiced their ceremonies, while others have diminished due to the forced invasion of European, Spanish, and American influences. Grave effects to ceremonies, such as government-forced boarding schools, religious suppression laws, and sequestering of Native peoples onto reservations, are discussed—specifically the effects these policies and institutions had on Kumeyaay women. Those who do not have their cultural rituals to call upon when they need help in their lives may replace ceremony with self-destructive behaviors such as drug abuse, domestic violence, and incarceration. This study is to help Kumeyaay women reconnect to their foundational cultural beliefs through the use of ceremonial elements of the Ahtanook. It is my hope by doing so, ancestral memory and feelings of self-efficacy will arise within women. Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK) is used as the theoretical framework, and Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the methodological approach. PAR is a qualitative research methodology that uses self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake. Using these frameworks and methodology, I hope the stories from Kumeyaay women who experience Ahtanook elements will help themselves and future generations of Native American women reclaim Indigenous coming-of-age ceremonies.

*Keywords:* Kumeyaay women, Ahtanook, reclaiming Indigenous ceremonies, coming-of-age ceremonies

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

What is it like to know yourself? Fully and truly? Historically, Kumeyaay women held powerful belief systems that nurtured every aspect of their lives. Their practices, lifeways, cultural rituals, and belief systems are all connected to balancing their mind, body, and spirit. The Kumeyaay women's coming-of-age ceremony, known as the *Ahtanook*, celebrated a girl's first menstruation; a transitional life phase occurs when the life-giving force of her *ah-whot* makes its presence known. Viewed as a sacred time, it connects women to the spiritual realm.

Numerous rituals within Indigenous communities cater to developing women during significant life stages such as birth, adolescence, marriage, and death. The most prevalent practices are coming-of-age ceremonies held for young men and women at prepubescent ages (Markstrom, 2008). There are approximately 574 federally recognized Native Nations within the United States (National Congress of American Indians, 2020), each with various ceremonial practices. Indigenous women have practiced coming-of-age ceremonies for over a millennia. For many Native American societies, it is the intricate parts, such as making a scratching stick, singing to the land, or running at dawn that is done before and within a ceremony that hold significant healing properties and educational transmission for those who take part in them (Irwin, 1997). Ceremony plays an essential role for women. It fosters the continuous development of a woman's positive cultural identity, foundational belief systems, and the cosmological connection to the feminine force in the universe.

Many Native Nations have continually practiced their ceremonies, while others have diminished due to the forced invasion and colonization by British, French, Russian, Spanish, and American powers. Euro-American colonization has been especially detrimental to the loss of women's rituals and ceremonies as it changed the role and belief systems among Indigenous

women—particularly Kumeyaay women—for many generations. This dissertation examines the process of and participation in elements of the Ahtanook ceremony through narratives of Kumeyaay women. By centering the voices of Kumeyaay women at the heart of this research, this study addresses multiple issues Kumeyaay women face. One such issue is Indigenous women’s forced ceremonial loss. Spanish invasion violently shattered ceremonial processes Native women created and honed over millennia to ensure transmission of culture because Spaniards viewed Native people as sub-humans without souls (Shipek, 1985).

To conduct this research, we must consider the history of Kumeyaay women in their cultural matrimonial roles, pre-invasion life roles, and their current living context. It is important to note that Kumeyaay women’s belief systems are not gone but dormant. In the following section, I will discuss the difference in values and issues related to ceremonial loss.

### **Statement of Problem**

Native American people hold specific traditional values that differ from the dominant culture. Lack of cultural identity, permanent role models, and loss of ancestral tribal structures for some have played a part in diminishing their significance (Delaney, 1995). Those who do not have their cultural rituals and ceremonies to call upon when they need help in their lives may find themselves involved with issues like teenage pregnancy, gang violence and incarceration, and domestic violence (Markstrom, 2008). As such, ceremonies that support the well-being of Native Americans, when not practiced, may be replaced with self-destructive behaviors. Research suggests Native American peoples suffer the highest rate of suicide, alcohol, drug use, dropout rates, and under-employment than any other group in the U.S. (Akee et al., 2014). Horse (2005) adds that Indigenous people struggle to maintain their identities among the pressures of

continually adapting to living in a white-dominated society. History has shown colonialism is a long-term, affecting force that has altered Native American cultures in many ways.

The forced influence of patriarchal gender norms, religious oppression, boarding schools, insidious government policies, and American armies has resulted in many Native American women's disconnection from their inner spirit, traditional belief systems, and cultural lifeways. Euro-American colonization forcibly took Kumeyaay women's ceremonies and rituals. The loss of women's ceremonies and rituals has resulted in many Indigenous women being unable to call upon these practices to aid in their development through their adolescent stages and as a person growing through life's circumstances. It has resulted in prolonged intergenerational trauma and changed the role and belief systems of many Native American women across many generations. The prolonged effects of trauma and present-day situations Kumeyaay women face have led to the purpose of re-connecting a woman to her identity.

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to re-connect Kumeyaay women to their foundational cultural beliefs through experiential learning by re-experiencing elements of the Ahtanook. This research awakened dormant ancestral knowledge and promoted well-being and self-confidence within Indigenous women. Participatory Action Research (PAR) seeks to change dominant viewpoints through collective and self-inquiry from empowered participation through experiential learning. Experiential learning utilizes sensitizing agents, which stimulate a person within, such as sights, sounds, smells, or feelings. The purpose of using elements of the ceremony is to ignite dormant self-reliant factors within a woman. Ojumu (2016) explains self-confidence, independence, and persistence—the ability to do something despite challenges and difficulties in life—are some of the indicators of self-reliance.



This study examined the positive changes within Kumeyaay women after experiencing ancestral practices that have been dormant for over eighty years. These changes showed positive results in releasing intergenerational trauma brought on by the genocidal intentions of colonization. As such, the proposed study answered the following questions:

1. What spiritual, emotional, and physical experiences will Kumeyaay women have due to participating in the elements of the Ahtanook?
2. In what ways, if any, will intimate experiences—such as self-efficacy, inner strength, or empowerment—be felt by Kumeyaay women who re-live their cultural rituals?
3. How does, if at all, experiencing elements of the Ahtanook impact the self-concept and self-empowerment of Kumeyaay women?

### **Scope of Study and Methodology**

*Participatory Action Research* (PAR) is a methodology that seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it through the voices of underrepresented groups. *PAR* uses reflective processes that inspire participants to take empowered action, such as positive life choices, in their lives (Baum et al., 2006). Kumeyaay women are an underrepresented group heavily impacted by many historical factors, including forced colonization, intergenerational trauma, and violence against women. This qualitative study emphasized the narrative tradition used among the Kumeyaay and *PAR*'s methodological tools to analyze findings. I selected *PAR* because its tools—such as surveys, focus groups, informal discussions, and interviews—emphasize experiential learning, self-reflective inquiry, and voluntary actions from participants (Baum et al., 2006). Additionally, they provide a way for people to express themselves freely through stories of their experiences.

This study consisted of a one-day workshop with twenty-three Kumeyaay women who physically experienced traditional methods (e.g., oral narratives) and elements (e.g., the sights, sounds, and smells of the ceremony) of the Ahtanook; with the addition of learning more about the history of Kumeyaay women. Through PAR and the use of Kumeyaays women’s narratives of their experiences with ceremony elements, this study cleared the way for *heart knowledge* to emerge within a person. Mithlo (2011) defines *heart knowledge* as memory remembered through the land, body, and lineage of a person. Allowing heart knowledge to emerge within a woman helped unravel elements of forced colonization and historical and intergenerational trauma. Using PAR, I developed a culturally relevant research model that addressed issues of injustice, inequality, and exploitation of Kumeyaay women by igniting self-empowerment within them through ceremonial elements.

### **The Gap in Research**

Currently, there is limited research on Kumeyaay women, their roles, and ceremonies. This study is the first time ceremonial elements of the Ahtanook have been examined in academic research and practiced in over eighty years. This dissertation identifies a need for research on women who re-live the experience of feeling, hearing, and smelling ceremony elements. In terms of women’s rituals, ceremonies, and songs, there is a critical lack of practicing these components among the Kumeyaay as they are scantily known. Overall, there is limited research on the positive effects of coming-of-age ceremonies for Indigenous women. To my knowledge, there is little research on how single elements of the ceremony—when practiced—can positively affect a person. There is also scant research on what ceremony processes and their components can positively do for Indigenous women.

### **Significance of Study**

Genocidal intentions toward Kumeyaay peoples imprisoned and shamed many ancestors into disbelief of who they were and impeded the cultural transmission of traditional knowledge. This study must take place because many Kumeyaay women are still inundated with the effects of forced colonization. Andrea Smith (2015) explains that Native people have become disconnected from their identity because of these effects and can internalize forced colonization through self-destructive behaviors such as intimate partner violence, low self-esteem, drug abuse, and poor life choices. Prioritizing an individual's relationship with the process of Kumeyaay ceremonies may offer significant potential for addressing the complex emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual needs of Kumeyaay women who may still be suffering from historical and intergenerational trauma. Horse (2005) explains traditional rites are vital in helping Native women re-connect themselves to their identity. For some, the response to cultural change has been a deliberate return to traditional tribal knowledge, language, and practices. The women who participated in this study had dormant ancestral knowledge awakened within them. It happened in various forms, such as inner knowings, memories, and songs, which helped the women re-connect to themselves and their community with a lessened burden of colonization.

### **Background and Positionality of Researcher**

This research began with an intent to answer questions I have had since I was very young. A desire to know more about who I am. There has always been a yearning to understand more about the women who came before me. What were my ancestors like? What did a woman's life look and feel like before the invasion? How did strength look and feel to them? What did they value, and how does it translate through me now? My father was my first language teacher. He taught my brothers and I words in Kumeyaay by naming things around our house, including our dog named *howka* (hello). In 2012, I began taking Kumeyaay language classes. After taking

my first class, my interest and vocabulary grew. It also created more questions about culture, especially about women. I wanted to know how to say specific women's words, such as bleeding, or what to say when a woman was on her menstruation. I also noticed other women who attended language class also had the same questions about words women would use.

These experiences have led me to find the answers I seek about the Ahtanook. As a tribal member from Jamul Indian Village—a part of the Kumeyaay Nation—and a descendant of the Rincon Luiseño people, it is essential to share cultural knowledge and research about my ancestors and cultural teachings with my community. When first considering the topic of this dissertation, I wanted to explore both Tribal Nations' ceremonies as I come from two peoples. I quickly saw that it would be a mountain of work that would take longer than expected.

For now, I am focusing on the Kumeyaay and honor space for more research to be done later on with Payómkawichum women. As a Kumeyaay researcher, my conviction is led by the respect and honor I hope to convey through stories of myself and women who have chosen to experience this journey with me. The story of the first woman in the Kumeyaay creation story, Sinyahow, guides me to understand more about the women I come from as “she is the mother of our people, her blood is our blood, we come from her” (Cuero, personal communication, 2020).

### **Overview of Dissertation**

This study helped fill a gap in the existing literature on the relationality of Native American women. Through the role of Kumeyaay women and their identities, they have the power to re-claim by remembering cultural practices in creating the conditions that will allow them to thrive. Chapter two provides an overview of relevant literature to situate readers within the historical and sociopolitical context of Kumeyaay women and their rituals and a discussion of

methodologies that framed this study: re-claiming the identity of Kumeyaay women. Chapter three describes the study in greater detail.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I discuss the different terms used to describe the Kumeyaay people and the scope of how I examined the historical groups that make up the Kumeyaay. After that, I discuss cosmological beliefs and what a Kumeyaay woman's life was like before the Euro-American invasion. Next, I discuss what traditional markings on a woman's face can mean and what choosing to participate in a ceremony means for a Kumeyaay girl. Afterward, I discuss the *Ahtanook*—the Kumeyaay women's coming-of-age ceremony—and the role this recognition plays in the community, and some of its components to be noted. Following this, I will discuss the roles of menstruation and ceremony regarding Kumeyaay women and the historical trauma of Native American women, and its connection to how this trauma affects their lives today. Although this study may be perceived as not connected to the field of education, I believe that the transmission of Indigenous knowledge, the literal practice of and their description due to colonialism, reflects Indigenous education and the implications of colonial education. As such, throughout this section, I gesture to how each topical area connects or relates to education.

### Key Terminology

The Tipai/Ipai people, also known as Kumeyaay, are the original inhabitants of vast lands stretching Southern California into Northern Baja California—encompassing varied environmental landscapes such as oceans, valleys, mountains, deserts, and rivers. Kumeyaay ancestral ties are marked throughout the land north of Oceanside, California, to 150 miles south of Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico (Miskwish, 2007). Footprints of the people also extend from the Pacific Ocean eastward, across valleys and mountains, through the desert to the Colorado River. Throughout this dissertation, the terms Kumeyaay, Tipai, Ipai, Kamia, Diegueño, Yuma, and Yuman are used interchangeably to refer to the same group of people. It is

a priority of colonized researchers to label separatism among many Native Nations (L. T. Smith, 2012). Before the colonial classifications of the people who lived—and continue to live—in this traditional territory, large amounts of trade and intermarriage took place, and clans already knew of and interacted with one another (Miskwish, 2007). This research has included looking at all Yuman groups such as Kumeyaay, Paipai, Kiliwa, Cocopah, Mohave, Maricopa, Quechan, Yavapai Havasupai, and Hualapai people. We are connected through traditions, creation stories, and songs that speak of our journeys and wars together and our cremation ceremonies.

### **Cosmology**

I begin with Kumeyaay cosmology because the stars, planets, and night sky intertwine with traditional belief systems. The sky provides an instructional record of essential lessons passed on to young people and used in coming-of-age ceremonies as instructional tools (Miskwish, 2016). For some storytellers, the beginning of the Kumeyaay creation story begins with a reference to the sky and stars. The sky and stars are also where Sinyahow—the first woman—appeared. First, a breath was heard, then a sound, then a song, and then Sinyahow appeared (Du Bois, 1908). Cycles of celestial bodies are referenced in many songs and ceremonies among the Kumeyaay. An Indigenous epistemology where Native people educate one another through cycles of the Kumeyaay universe's planets, stars, and colors.

Within Kumeyaay cosmology, red and black snakes represent the male and female energies of the universe. Both snakes are always drawn equally and are visible within Kumeyaay life, such as markings on bodies, petroglyphs, and sand paintings. This sacred identifier references constellations, parts of the Kumeyaay creation story, and coming-of-age ceremonies. The vital aspect of equal energy among men and women is explored by Miskwish (2016). Equal energy was the belief system among the Kumeyaay people before the Spaniards and Catholic

missionaries forcibly colonized them. Constellations and stars serve many purposes in the night sky; they are called *watchers*. From them, we draw lessons of life and conduct. The red and black snakes remind us of the masculine and feminine forces in the world and the need for balance (Miskwish, 2016). The Kumeyaay view of spirituality is supported through balance and individual inter-connection. Wright (2003) discusses spirituality as personal or individual, whereas religion is a social exercise. Wilson (2008) further supports that spirituality is one's internal sense of connection to the universe.

### **Pre-Invasion—See Her**

Before the invasion of colonial violence, forced religious oppression, American armies, and European patriarchal gender norms, Native American women held powerful belief systems that catered positively to every aspect of life. Body image, menstruation, and women's roles within some Native Nations were held as equal parts among the community (Markstrom, 2008). It was women who had command of the economy, the pedagogy of the young, and the governance of the relationships among their people (Maracle, 2006). Densmore (1932) witnessed Yuman education as a means of starting children early in their education before they were able to talk. Densmore's observations exemplify how Indigenous people always had a form of education that is related to traditional knowledge transmission. It was gradually and purposefully planned, so the child's understanding of their culture and place in the village came slowly. By the time they were seven or eight years old, Native youth had their teachings firmly in mind. When a child was old enough, they would use their judgment in applying cultural teachings to their lives. By gradually re-introducing elements of women's ceremony, the women will have their identification with cultural knowledge.



Native women had cultural practices, belief systems, and rituals before colonization that allowed them to see their bodies as beautiful and whole (Potter, 2006). Their rituals and ceremonies supported non-patriarchal gender norms among community members. Maintaining formal cultural practices is also true of those who did not conform to only male and female identities. *Shla* (meaning of the moon) is a term used to refer to a person who identifies as what some may call *two-spirit*. Forde (1931) explains their presence, both male and female, *shla* were recognized without complaint or fear within the community. They also were called different names, such as *Kwe'rhame* or *shla*. They were considered to have more power than the average person and were thought to have a peaceful influence on the tribe. It is forced religious oppression that has worked to erase their presence and roles among Indigenous communities.

Kumeyaay women had a large amount of freedom in their lives. In both family and community, women enjoyed a considerable measure of freedom, respect, and independence (Castillo, 1994). Many *cha'alk* (women) were active in tribal ceremonies and mourning rituals in Southern California societies. Before invasion, Kumeyaay women had a large amount of freedom in their lives and an equal division of labor among men and women (Castillo, 1991). Luomala (1978) explains that Kumeyaay men were keenly aware of women's remarkable powers of dreaming and curing. Kumeyaay beauty standards were based on utilitarian and spiritual beliefs. For example, in a personal communication about Kumeyaay women, Martha Rodriguez (2020)—from the Mot Parhow reservation in Baja California—remarked, “We had all different shapes of bodies, but that wasn't what it was about. It was the woman who could do what was necessary to live a good life.” Ideas around nudity were incomparable to standards today as there was no shame associated with the naked human body. Densmore (1932) described the Yuman as *good-looking* due to their fine physical development.

Clothing and other tangible possessions were minimal. Women today continue to wear *she-yoolth*—bark skirts made most commonly from the willow or oak tree. They were either one-piece worn in front or two pieces worn to cover the back and front of a woman, extending from the waist to the middle of the thigh or knee (Luomala, 1978). The bark used from the willow, pounded into a soft cloth, was also used to absorb a woman's *ah-whot* during menstruation (Shipek, 1982). These skirts are a common sight among many California Native women. With bare chests, Kumeyaay women were adorned with *ah-nuck* (necklaces) of abalone, pine nuts, or other sacred materials. For a necklace to bring good luck, women often threaded teeth from a coyote or other sacred animals or red rock from the Salton Sea into their chains with sinew (Luomala, 1978). Trade was common among women looking for different materials to adorn themselves. Depending on where you came from in Kumeyaay territory, visitors would see women wearing blue stones, clay beads, or pinon nuts on a necklace. Whalebones were worn through pierced ears or noses to receive knowledge from the *esh-punk* (whale).

I begin here because an argument usually is written beginning with stating the problem. I've started with the view of a Kumeyaay woman pre-colonization to focus on their strength and resiliency and to remind the many cha'alk that they are much more than victimized child laborers. Research shows that dominating colonized perspectives about Native American women in negative connotations, such as colonized literature, is a part of the problem that has led many to continue devaluing Indigenous women (Weaver, 2009). The problem has never been with *her*—Indigenous women. Instead, the forced factors that settlers assigned to *her* resulted in Indigenous women believing a culturally invasive dominant point of view.

### **Ahwalth Kanop—Drawings on the Face Tell the Story**

Kumeyaay women adorned themselves with markings and tattoos made from plants and minerals, such as the mesquite tree and clay elements used to make red ochre. Various colors—including red, white, and black—adorned their faces, bodies, and hair (Shipek, 1985). Both men and women used various forms of powdered minerals and charcoal on their faces and bodies, which kept them free of sores and insects (Shipek, 1985). Depending on the mode of life you were in (e.g., marriage, death, or puberty), the tattoos, colors, or markings on a woman's body told a story of the life stage or clan she was from (Luomala, 1978). If compelled to do so, a woman would change the markings on her face every day and sometimes throughout the day to represent her spiritual connection (Densmore, 1932). Spiers (1925) wrote about Kumeyaay women painting long black stripes from their eyelids to their temples to protect their eyes. For example, when discussing Kumeyaay women, Ila Arrowweed—Kamia Elder of the Quechan reservation—remarked, “If you look at the mesquite tree, it has many uses, there's black sap that the women used for a kind of eyeliner” (I. Arrowweed, personal communication, January 28, 2021). Markings were tattooed or drawn on a woman's chin for different explanations. One such meaning was to signify passage through the girl's coming-of-age ceremony. Other beliefs about chin markings include tattoos given at a certain point in your life, such as reaching the status of an Elder or being recognized as a warrior who fought in battle. Other beliefs around chin markings are tied together with spiritual beliefs. When worn on the chin, women would be recognized by the Creator when they passed over, or the markings were to help her go straight to the spirit land when she dies—without them, her spirit was to wander the earth (Densmore, 1932).

Depending on the age of a woman, *nah-pool* (basket hats) were commonly worn for spiritual belief and practical uses. These were used as protectants from the hot sun or ensured a snug fit for a woman's carrying net to be wrapped around her head as she walked or gathered. Often, women with infants could be seen with a cradleboard strapped to their backs, a child peering out from their mother's back as she gathered plant medicine or whatever was needed for her home. For example, Martha Rodriguez (personal communication, September 2020) remarked, "We covered our heads as a way of protection for your hair. Your hair is connected to your soul, you. Your head, your brain is also where your dreams come through; this is why it is important to protect your head." Many *cha'alk* catered to taking care of their hair through the use of plant oils or clay. Densmore (1932) witnessed many women caring for their hair by placing wet clay on their hair at night and removing it in the morning as they sat on the edges of the river, greeting the morning sun. Herbs to soothe sores or cure sicknesses, basketry to hold water or acorns for the season, pottery, making clay rattles, and songs were all skills women had without regard to gender.

In times of war, everyone fought. For the warriors—women or men—it was a personal decision to join the fight (Shipek, 1982). After Kumeyaay warriors killed their enemies, the women would dance on the bodies of the dead. Or, if they were wounded, they would finish killing them off by jumping on their necks. This motion is still visible in Kumeyaay women's dancing style when they perform alongside songs known as the *sha-look* (lightning) song cycle. Many early anthropologists translated the Kumeyaay word *koo-see-eye* to mean "medicine person." In the Kumeyaay language, *koo-see-eye* means "the expert at it" or "the person who is really good at something." The Kumeyaay valued differences among each other. Your unique contribution to the community is what was valued.

### **Myhashaan—Creator Sits with Me (Ceremony)**

While each Native Nation is unique, many may attribute the creation of a ceremony to a dream, vision, or visit from a sacred spirit recognized in their own culture. Many Native Nations in North America hold beliefs that honor a correlation between women and the sacred. This understanding of women's connection to the sacred is visible through rituals conducted in women's coming-of-age ceremonies. Some refer to a female form that shows presence in multiple identities in their rituals. Some Native Nations have accounts related to the creation of their ceremonies. People, such as the Lakota, attribute the creation of their pipe ceremony to White Buffalo Calf Woman, a female form who came from the stars to give them sacred knowledge (Markstrom, 2008). The Yurok creation story discusses why women bleed, stating that women gave of themselves for all the blood taken by humankind; it is repayment for everything appropriated by humans. This *repayment* is why the Yurok created their women's coming-of-age ceremony to keep honoring the agreement (Rojas, 2003).

The Mescalero Apache, located in South Central New Mexico, holds a connection to White Painted Woman, a female force considered a cultural heroine (Markstrom, 2008). In Northeast Arizona, the Hopi people attribute corn to a female essence, where corn plants are referred to in songs as *manatu*—unmarried girls or maidens (Black, 1984). Women play an essential part in the creation of life. Native American people recognize this through their belief systems, where many demonstrate a connection to a female form or essence concerning the creation of the world or people. An example is Changing Woman, a Navajo deity—a complex, multi-faceted figure who encompasses multiple purposes, including her role as a mother who ultimately rids the world of monsters or evil (Markstrom, 2008). Ceremonies are a cyclical *oonyow* (way) of Indigenous teaching, passing knowledge through sacred songs, traditions, and

land use. Cajete (1994) explains Indigenous teaching—its elements, activities, and knowledge bases of teaching and learning—radiate in concentric rings of process and relationship. The Kumeyaay have ceremonies dedicated to the passage of puberty for both girls and boys, birth, marriage, and the acknowledging of identity.

### **Making the Choice**

During the coming-of-age ceremony, a girl undergoes arduous tasks that stretch the physical, mental, and spiritual body. To take part is a conscious and individual choice. A girl chooses this ceremony to let go of what she thinks she has learned in her life so far and participates in the Ahtanook to go beyond her ego and transcend into her identity to find her true inner knowing (Luomala, 1978). Participating in the ceremony is geared toward healing the woman's physical, spiritual, and emotional parts. There is a distinction to be made here about the definition of healing. The Kumeyaay people view healing as balancing oneself when a person is unbalanced with an illness or physical or emotional pain. Jeanne Smith (1991) describes transpersonal selfhood as going beyond cultural boundaries; there is no need for human reference and connection. In this space of non-conformity, people find their true identity.

This need for balance and transpersonal selfhood is why strenuous elements in extensive rituals, such as singing for multiple days, running races at sunrise, fasting, and intense heat, help transition a woman into her next life phase. Conducting the ceremony in this way forecasts good health, a long life, and secure positive outcomes in the lives of girls who participate (Wright, 2003). For the Kumeyaay, once a girl begins her first menstrual cycle and decides to go through the coming-of-age ceremony, her family and community are notified, and the process begins.

Before contact with Europeans, puberty was generally between ages twelve to fourteen. In today's culture, adolescence has become a broader spectrum of ages. There are new cognitive

abilities that come with puberty, and adolescents can think more about the world around them and their roles in life. During this time, the origin and meaning of life become particularly relevant (Takahashi, 1998). Ceremonies build the foundation of belief systems within a person spiritually and physically. Enactments of meaningful rituals serve to reinforce oral traditions, expected task performance, and personal responsibility. The pubertal rite of passage is significant as a culminating event that augments lessons and tasks taught in childhood (Markstrom, 2008).

Some women's coming-of-age observances are community events where gathering rituals are first conducted to collect all materials needed. A community is required to gather with the girls who are going through this ritual, and it is women who will help sing them through their transition into womanhood. Land, people, environment, and spirit are all used to teach through community and individual experiences. Women's coming-of-age ceremonies instill pride in partakers, but girls also build cultural foundational belief systems that are intrinsically tied to the spiritual and physical realms. Whatever a woman does in her life is considered the same treatment to spirits and ancestors who watch over and work with her (Castillo, 1991). Traditional rites are vital in helping Native women re-connect themselves to their identity.

### **The Ahtanook**

Southern California Indians practiced puberty ceremonies for millennia. Before European and missionary invasions, these rituals were recognized as community events that lasted for days, sometimes weeks, to honor the transitional life phase for pre-adolescent boys and girls into adulthood. The most widespread ritual all over California and western North America is the girl's adolescence rite held at the onset of a girl's first menstruation (Luomala, 1978).

The *Ahtanook* was one of the most important and widely practiced rituals among the Kumeyaay for entry into adulthood (Miskwish, 2006). It has been over eighty years since the last

Ahtanook ceremony was held on the Campo Indian reservation in eastern San Diego County. This ritual celebrated a girl's first menstruation, unique gifts, and how her role as a woman helped tie her community together (Rust, 1906). Multiple days of singing, tattooing, piercing, and dancing were sacred parts of the ceremony that marked the path through this ritual. A girl's behavior during the process determines future health and fortune. How she relates and treats herself through the ceremony process will create the next phase of her life. Nervous girls will be apprehensive all their lives (Rust, 1906). If a girl is lazy and complaining, she will be lazy for the rest of her life (Luomala, 1978). If she is happy and works to endure during the process, she will view life this way. Girls must also be mindful of their body during the ritual, primarily how they treat their body, which is now a transmitter of the sacred; the vessel that helps bring them through transition should be treated respectfully and with kindness. It is the process of ceremony that helps build her cultural foundational belief system and belief in herself.

This process also gave girls power as they transitioned into womanhood. Describing the Ahtanook, H.P. Cuero, from the Campo reservation in Southeastern San Diego, remarked,

Part of the initiation was to give you protection. There were certain dances a woman couldn't do unless you went through it because it gives you power to protect yourself from bad spirits or from bad people. That was part of the initiation, to give you that sense of power that you could do certain things that other people couldn't do without going through the process of it (H.P. Cuero, personal communication, July 14, 2021).

The *kwellhup* (earthen dug pit) used in the Ahtanook also had multiple uses. It was dug deep and wide, enough for numerous girls or women to lay in and be covered with plant medicine. It was used for childbirth and healing the body after pregnancy. Kroeber (1925) witnessed many women after childbirth spending time over multiple days and nights lying on beds of white sage, herbs, and flowers over a bed of hot rocks. It was a common sight to see a *kwellhup* in each village.



## **The Role the Ceremony Played in the Community**

During Ahtanook, not only was the woman learning, but the whole community was learning along with her. The process of the ceremony is a community transmission of knowledge. The decision to participate affects everyone involved. It requires assistance to collect plants and herbs the women may need, an *ah-wa* (lodge) may need building, and ritual baths may need preparation for some ceremonies. In addition, those with traditional food knowledge might be called upon to end a girl's fasting to provide a closing feast for all who helped and participated. The coming-of-age ceremony accomplishes much more than bringing together biological elements; it orders life and shows the importance of interconnectivity (Mahdi et al., 1987). This ceremony not only helps to heal a person's physical, spiritual, and mental aspects but the harvesting of plants is also needed to conduct the ritual that heals the land around it (Wilken-Robertson, 2018). A human-in-ecosystem shows the mutual influence of social and ecological processes of the Kumeyaay people and how their cultural knowledge of plant harvesting, ritual food sharing, and the symbolic significance of plants used in a ceremony can be transmitted over many generations (Wilken-Robertson, 2018). Ceremonies are a form of knowledge transmission between generations. They teach us not just about beliefs, practices, and protocols but also about the purposes of the world around us. They are also an individual and communal educational opportunity.

### **Components of Puberty Ceremonies**

The following section will discuss how research shows the structure of these rituals caters to nurturing a person's physical, biological, and neurological aspects during adolescence and can produce positive changes within them. Common ceremonial components such as traditional songs sung in Native languages, drumming, rattling, and heat from a fire may play a role in

reorganizing the brain's neural structures. The timing of this structural re-formation during adolescence—a time when youth discover who they are—may optimize the corresponding neurological changes that accompany puberty to enhance cognitive and emotional development (Takahashi, 1998).

Long before the formation of the United States (U.S.) and before contact with Europeans, puberty was estimated to be between twelve to fourteen years of age. This age range has now expanded from twelve to over twenty years of age. Takahashi (1998) explains adolescence has become a broader spectrum of years due to the increasing colonial educational requirements of an involved technological society and the prolonged economic dependency of youths on their guardians. The ritual processes within rites of passage are argued to be the critical element that links to the psychosocial conception of identity formation. It is the movement and repetition of some rituals that occur throughout the coming-of-age ceremony which produces an outcome of optimal identity development (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003).

### **Songs Are the Driver**

A common component to highlight is the importance of songs in rituals. An essential aspect of Native American ceremonies and life, songs are used in the everyday expression and all parts of living. Lullabies for children, women's plant gathering songs, marriage, or hand game songs assist you through various life events or situations. For the Kumeyaay, songs are believed to hold energy. H.P. Cuero remarks, "when a song comes to you, you are to sing it; this is the song speaking to you giving the knowledge or healing properties it contains" (H.P. Cuero, personal communication, July 15, 2021). Songs speak of the spirit's journey after death, the rules of conduct for men and women, and stories of creation, war, betrayal, love, and commitment. Songs are the encyclopedia and the social guides for Kumeyaay society. They can be very

personal and often acquired after extended fasting and meditation. They were sometimes traded at communal events or given as gifts to cement bonds with allies. Most often accompanied by gourd or clay rattles and other musical instruments, including deer hoof jinglers, rasping baskets, and bullroarers (Miskwish, 2006). Each contains a melodic tone different from one another. Rattles and musical instruments assist you through the process, which is vital during ritual as a person goes through a transpersonal period.

A girl may be lying on a bed of herbs and hot rocks, sitting in a sweat lodge, or running as people sing to her. She is receiving information, transforming, and developing her identity. Without songs, ceremonies—and the people partaking in them—would not last. Like tones and sounds produced in music, songs can have certain pitches and timbres. The syllables and pronunciation of words can create different sensations or impressions (Kicking Woman, 2013), helping nurture a person's physical and neurological aspects. It is the feelings or energy received from the songs a person relies on to move through the arduous components of ceremony.

### **The Role of Menstruation**

*Shla-newh* (moon sickness) or *ah-whot* (blood) are some of the words a Kumeyaay woman may use to refer to her menstruation time. For example, in a recorded interview with Jane Dumas from Jamul Indian Village, Dumas (2005) stated,

When women are on their moon, they are powerful. They are cleansing. They should not work or do housework; the male partner should. People think women who are on their moon are kept away from gatherings out of discrimination, but traditionally it's because they're powerful.

Before forced colonization and implementation of patriarchal gender norms, a woman's body was seen as a tie to the spiritual and physical world. She is a portal that connects both aspects during her menstrual cycle. Blood was believed to contain a being's life or spirit and demanded respectful treatment through ritual care (Wright, 2003). These were sacred aspects of

a woman and were seen as powerful (Potter, 2006). There is also a distinction to be noted in using the word power. White Eurocentrism defines power as a person using force or might to take over something. Power regarding Native American spirituality, for some tribes, is the belief in yourself, knowing you have the power within you to create what you desire. For Kumeyaay women, their power—a strong belief system in their identities and relationship with the spirits—is integrated into their daily lives and ceremonial presence as women.

Numerous Native Nations believe women during their menstruation times are powerful creators because of their connection to other worlds. The blood that came from them was proof the Creator was speaking through them, and the life-giving force they possess should be recognized (Wright, 2003). Dumas (2005) further explains that “The woman’s body is being naturally cleansed internally. There are certain times that you aren’t supposed to eat fried or fatty foods. It’s when a woman is on her moon and certain ceremonies.”

Beliefs in Native American societies did not hold negative inclinations toward female bleeding, menstrual cycles, or human bodies. Not only was the menstruating woman powerful to others, but also to the environment and herself (Wright, 2003). European and Spanish ideals, written and forced by the ideas of men, forcibly changed this perception. The forced introduction of Christian ideologies and patriarchal gender norms, including the notion that women were the cause of original sin and should be subordinate to men, gravely shifted Indigenous community beliefs and practices around menstruation (Alberts, 2018). This shift in perceptions is one of many reasons Indigenous women’s menstruating bodies have been incorrectly recorded in historical texts by missionaries or soldiers as dirty or unhealthy. Potter (2006) explains that this ideal had to be reinterpreted by Indigenous people. The supernatural power that most North American Indigenous cultures connect to menstruating women became subsumed by European

ideologies of patriarchy and Christianity (Potter, 2006), resulting in the menstruating body becoming viewed as unclean, unhealthy, and shrouded in euphemism (Potter, 2006).

### **Reasons for Decimation**

Impacts of forced colonization over 500 years within the United States gravely threatened and discontinued some ceremonies among Native Nations. For the Kumeyaay, the invasion began when the Spanish and Catholic missionaries set foot on the shores of what is now known as San Diego (Akins & Bauer, 2021). This first contact led to one of the most prolonged and invasive attempts to wipe out a group of people. In 1769, Spanish missionaries, soldiers, and so-called explorers invaded San Diego. They began by attempting to seize some parts of Kumeyaay territory with their animals and obtrusively making camps without permission on traditional homelands. The Spanish allowed their horses, cattle, hogs, and sheep—which were foreign to the area—to devour Native food supplies (Castillo, 1991).

### **Mission System**

Following the Spanish invasion came the establishment of the mission system that aggressively forced religious and gender patriarchal norms onto California Indian people. The mission system contributed to the loss of ceremony and prolonged violent abuse of Kumeyaay women. The male-dominated Catholic religion enforced the concept of female inferiority through their patriarchal views of religion. Fathers of the church argued scriptural passages, such as those relating to Eve's creation and her part in Adam's fall, to justify the inadequacies of Native women and the superiority of men (Brandt, 2014). Du Bois (1908) shares that Sinyahow—the first woman in the Kumeyaay creation story—was viewed by the Native people to hold vast power. Sinyahow became identified with the Virgin Mary by Kumeyaay, who were

compulsorily baptized through forced religious oppression. Herringer (2013) shared that priests ensured Mary was viewed as a woman without power and prominence.

When priests established missions in California, they didn't realize the tremendous amount of rape and brutal behavior toward women would result. Men and children also suffered sexual assaults from Spanish soldiers (Castillo, 1991). Although they were religious missions, they were dangerous frontier outposts during this time. As early as 1772, Father Luis Jayme complained that some soldiers deserved to be hanged for "continuous outrages" on the Kumeyaay women near Mission San Diego. "Many times," he asserted, the Indians were on the verge of attacking the mission because soldiers went there to rape women. The situation was so bad that the Indians fled from the priests, even risking hunger so soldiers would not rape their women as they had done many times (Hurtado, 1999).

As a result of the amount of abuse against Native women during this period, many Kumeyaay women and other Native women—such as the Tongva and Kumivit in missions to the north—were faced with unwanted pregnancies after experiencing rape by Spanish soldiers and settlers. Many Native women worked to abort their children so Spaniards would not continue to live. Mission priests reported that Native women who buried their Spanish children were forced to kneel in church while holding a doll representing their child (Castillo, 1991). If a mother in the mission had a child, they were only allowed to see them from afar while locked in jail in the courtyard; a practice intended to break the bond between mother and child (Lumsden, 2016).

Torture devices, such as the *corma*, were often used on women. A visitor to the missions thought the *corma* especially appropriate to chastise Indian women found guilty of adultery or other serious faults because it forced the wearer to keep their legs together for as long as the priests felt appropriate (Miranda, 2012). The ever-present military threat that used weapons—

which Kumeyaay people had never come in contact with before—and the amount of disease unleashed among the Native population forced a divide among many starving people.

Kumeyaay labor was also used to build the missions forcibly. Women, children, and Elders made clay tiles for walls and half conical shaped clay tiles for roofs. They held the clay over their legs to make the half-circle shape until their legs bled, receiving whippings if they complained of the pain (Shipek, 1985). They told of great-grandmothers and children being whipped if they dallied or were too slow for the foreman in charge (Shipek, 1985). According to testimony, survivors who fled the mission were found with leather collars on their necks.

Kumeyaay people had to pull plows with their necks since there were not enough oxen available and were severely whipped to pull the plows faster. Others talked about Kumeyaay escaping with metal collars after receiving whippings at the mission (Shipek, 1985). During the mid-nineteen century, Anglos in San Diego County relied on the work of Native women and girls; a well-placed system of finding child workers and sex slaves, especially young girls, was already established by then. San Diegans helped procure Indian children for their friends and associates, some of whom lived as far away as San Francisco (Ciani, 2007).

### **Reservations and Boarding Schools**

Increasing outside settlement and warfare forced the creation of the reservation system, forcing Native Americans onto isolated lands. The establishment of reservations cut off communal ways of living such as gathering practices, hunting, and fishing. Laws and policies were put in place by the U.S. government to actively repress language and culture to terminate tribes and assimilate Indigenous people into the dominant society. One of the most destructive and genocidal federal Indian policies was the creation of Indian boarding schools (Adams, 1995; Child, 2018; DeJong, 1993; Lomawaima, 1993, 1994, 1999; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006;

Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Starting in 1879, Indian boarding schools operated under the philosophy, “kill the Indian, save the man” (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The dominant patriarchal view of the U.S. government was that boarding schools were necessary to impede cultural transmission. It was built on an epistemology of racism and marginalized Native people.

For nearly one hundred years in these institutions, Native children experienced emotional, spiritual, physical, and sexual abuse. Native children as young as six years old were stolen from their families; some never returned, and others didn’t see their families again until they were 18 years of age (Lomawaima, 1993, 1994, 1999). The first boarding school for Native American students, located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, imprisoned students from tribal communities throughout the United States. In California, Kumeyaay children were forcefully taken from their families and villages by missionaries and boarding school representatives (Miskwish, 2007). Children were forcibly removed from their homes under the belief that they could easily assimilate into the customs of “civilized life” (Fischer & Stoddard, 2013). The purpose was to insert patriarchy into tribal communities and socialize children to believe in patriarchal gender norms (Ramirez, 2007). Girls who were beginning to learn traditional customs from their mothers were violently taken from home and placed into institutional settings. Because traditional roles and other aspects of tribal gender relations, including sexuality, incited substantial negative controversy, religious reformers and policymakers believed education in the “correct” sexual division of labor and instruction on how to be subservient women were essential to boarding school life (Child, 1993).

Once in the boarding schools, girls were forced to learn how to be maids and nannies for white women. Religious missionaries noted the role women played in tribal societies and felt it



would further their cause of distinguishing the Indian's belief systems if the future mothers of tribal nations were kept in boarding schools (Devens, 1992). As of this writing, over 1,500 bodies of Indigenous children, and counting, have been found in unmarked graves in various boarding schools in Canada (Weisberger, 2021). The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, now headed by a Native American woman, has launched an investigation across all boarding schools in the United States. There were over 365 boarding schools in the United States (Evans, 2021). These discoveries are proof the effects of these insidious institutions still cause trauma among Native people. These institutions are one of the many reasons historical traumas still plague Native American people 152 years after implementing these schools.

### **Suppressive Religious Laws**

Spiritual oppression was a crucial part of the government's attempt to wipe out Native American culture. Across the United States, settlers and authorities enacted suppressive religious laws to prevent Native Americans from practicing ceremonies on their lands. The *Indian Religious Crimes Code* laws were first developed in 1883 by Secretary of the Interior, Henry Teller, to prohibit Native American ceremonial activity. If found with any involvement, it would mean inadvertent imprisonment (Irwin, 1997). Indian agents targeted dances and feasts as the main components to dismantle, which were prime ceremonial elements of some puberty rituals, forcing many Indigenous people to take ceremonies underground and practice their belief systems in secret.

The onset of forced religious coercion, violent female abuse, and destruction of Native women's traditional roles dismantled women's self-identity, sacred rituals, and belief systems. Ceremonial and spiritual life for Native American women has long been an area of ontological displacement in the history and comparative studies of religions (Rojas, 2003). The federal

government continued to wipe out Native Americans with physical warfare until 1934. Native spirituality was openly illegal until a series of legislations would bring about the *American Indian Religious Freedom Act* (AIRFA), passed on August 11, 1978. AIRFA allowed Native Americans to practice their culture in public and within tribal lands and ensured the freedom to worship through ceremonies and traditional rites (Sewell,1983). While the government passed AIRFA, the U.S. government's damage was already done; many ceremonies practiced gravely endured the consequences of forced colonization and religious oppression.

### **Forced Sterilization**

The long list of abusive federal policies, distrust of the government, and its so-called programs also targeted Native women's reproductive rights. Native women, in particular, have a long history of wariness toward federal agencies' programs and policies (Bubar & Thurman, 2004). The history of Indian Health Services (IHS) hosts a grave systemic process of devaluing women's bodies and forcing low birth rates through tactics such as misinformation and forced sterilization. During the 1970s, Native women seeking treatment in IHS clinics with contracted physicians were not allowed the fundamental right of informed consent before sterilization or the right to refuse the operation (Ralstin-Lewis, 2005). From 1970 to 1980, the birth rate for Native women fell to a rate seven times greater than that of white people (Ralstin-Lewis, 2005). A. Smith (2015) explains that as a consequence of colonization and abuse of their bodies, Native people learned to internalize self-hatred because body image is integrally related to self-esteem. When one's body is not respected, one begins to hate oneself.

The deliberate attempt to suppress Native culture and forced assimilation by violence is believed to affect Native peoples' psychological makeup even today (Bubar & Thurman, 2004). Lack of cultural identity, permanent role models, and loss of ancestral tribal structures for some

have played a part in diminishing their significance (Delaney, 1995). Those who do not have their cultural rituals and ceremonies to call upon when they need help in their lives may find themselves involved with issues like teenage pregnancy, gang violence, and incarceration (Markstrom, 2008). When not used, ceremonies that support the well-being of Native Americans may be replaced with self-destructive behaviors. While not the cause alone, this phenomenon is often reflected in national statistics where Native Americans have the highest rate of suicide, alcohol, drug use, dropout rates, and underemployment than any other group in the U.S. (Akee et al., 2014).

Other challenges plaguing Native women are historical and present-day trauma, which may put women at risk of being victims of violence at the hands of Native and non-Native men (Bubar and Thurman, 2004). For women, intergenerational trauma and prolonged violence against women have also led to 84.3% of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women (more than 4 in 5) experiencing intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or stalking in their lifetimes. Additionally, 56.1% of AI/AN women have experienced sexual violence. Furthermore, 96% of female AI/AN sexual violence victims experience violence at the hands of a non-Native perpetrator. On some reservations, Native women are murdered at more than ten times the national average (Rosay, 2016).

### **Revitalization**

There is scant literature on women's coming-of-age ceremonies and the positive contributions they can give to Native American girls and women. Many Native Nations across North America hold a recognition ceremony for pre-adolescent girls. Some tribes currently practice this acknowledgment while others are working to revitalize theirs. The Apache and Navajo people have girls' puberty ceremonies which can last anywhere from two to eight days or

more. The Mescalero Apache girl's initiation ceremony, also known as the *Sunrise Dance*, takes over four days. During the ceremony, young girls transition from the physical to the spiritual world to become the female deity, whom the Mescalero call White Painted Woman, and then return to the natural world (Markstrom, 2008). It involves strenuous activities such as running, dancing for hours, ritual singing, and fasting. In the Navajo *Kinaalda*, girls are sung a series of songs for multiple days. The painting of initiates using white clay is believed to minimize physical signs of aging and increase their height. Corn grinding tests their endurance, and ritual racing two or three times a day makes them stronger and prepares them for long lives (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003).

Within the past twenty years, tribes across North America have revitalized their ceremonies, reclaimed sacred sites, and acquired traditional lands for Native people. In Northern California, there has been a significant effort to revitalize ceremonies, specifically women's coming-of-age rites. The Hupa people in Northwestern California revived their women's coming-of-age ceremony, known as the *Flower Dance*, with the start of twelve women fifteen years ago. Continuing research shows Native American cultural practices and community support are positive indicators that can help address issues concerning self-esteem, school performance, and resilient adaptation to adverse situations (Baldy, 2018). The Karuk tribe revitalized their women's ceremony known as the *Ihuk* (ee-hook) in 1996. Anishinaabe people—also known as Ojibwe, whose traditional territory stretches across multiple states in the U.S. and Canada—have also worked to revitalize their women's coming-of-age ceremony, known as the *Berry Fast*. For a year, the women fast—refraining from eating different types of berries core to the Anishinaabe diet. During this time, girls receive teachings from other women on how to honor their beliefs about being a woman. Wabie (2011) shares how the Berry Fast experience has

helped change their community's negative colonial attitudes about menstruation. It's been forty years since Native Americans have been able to practice their traditions without legal impairment or desecration of sacred sites.

This effort of revitalization contributes to Native American women reclaiming their identities and cultural rituals. Imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to tribal people, disconnecting them from their histories, landscapes, languages, social relations, and own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world (L. T. Smith, 2012). Colonialism impacted Indigenous education; in this case, it severely fractured a matriarchal epistemology—the transmission of how women learned and taught their young and themselves how to perceive themselves through an Indigenous lens.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In research, a theoretical framework is an underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of your study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study uses *Indigenous Ways of Knowing* (IWOK) as its framework. This compository of Indigenous beliefs comes from the fundamental understanding that knowledge is relational and interconnected with all creation (L. T. Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). It is a paradigm that is a viable and practical avenue to achieving balance, harmony, and sustainability in an individual's personal life and producing a positive impact on the lives of others (Grayshield & Mihecoby, 2010). This framework is compository to alleviate historical trauma from Kumeyaay women. Heart & DeBruyn (1998) define historical trauma as unresolved suffering resulting in grief that continues to impact the lives of survivors and subsequent generations. Scholars have suggested the effects of historically traumatic events are intergenerationally transmitted as descendants continue to identify emotionally with ancestral suffering. Although the events involved may have occurred over many years and generations,

they continue to have clear impacts on contemporary individual and familial physical and mental health and identity (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

This theoretical framework is appropriate for Native women because it is holistic, and its foundational belief is that all life is interconnected. Recognizing the legacy of accumulation of traumatic events stemming from the Native American holocaust, the mass destruction of entire communities of Indigenous people across the U.S. reverberates today (Palacios & Portillo, 2009). This framework will help me to explain how an individual's connection to their participation in ceremonies and traditional knowledge can address historical trauma. By instilling natural healing practices using women's rituals, Native American women will have the resolve to withstand colonization, marginalization, and other attributes brought on by genocidal violence.

### **Heart Knowledge**

A reclaimed aspect of IWOK is acknowledging and articulating *heart knowledge*. IWOK and heart knowledge are the theoretical frameworks that will guide this study's conceptualization and analysis. Many Indigenous peoples use the terms *heart knowledge*, *ancestral memory*, and *blood memory*. These terms variably reference the connection of the body to land, memory, and lineage within a person as to how Native American people remember. Mithlo (2011) explains that blood relationships reference the common understanding of biological heritage or race and, in an expanded sense, the internalized memories of communal history, knowledge, and wisdom Native American memories held in the body.

Holmes (2000) explains that when knowledge surpasses the intellectual realm and places itself in the emotional realm, which is what ceremony does, it is known as heart knowledge. It should also be noted the definition of knowledge is fluid among many Native Nations and not to be confused with conventional systemic knowledge. Instead, it is a force that flows through the

bodies of successive generations (Holmes, 2000) and should not be confused with the government's description of blood quantum. This colonial construct continues its genocidal effects on Native American peoples. I have chosen to use the term *heart knowledge* to mean for my hopeful findings in this dissertation. For Kumeyaay, anything you do should be done with a good heart. It is done from your heart so that it can be done in a good way. When you act with your heart, that's where the answers lie (Cuero, personal communication, July 14, 2021). I hope this research will help heart knowledge emerge within a woman after experiencing elements of the Ahtanook. I hope the collective knowledge of the ancestors, the land, and the body will come through each woman in a different form of knowledge.

IWOK and heart knowledge are guiding frameworks I will use to identify and explain the participants' experiences. Heart knowledge will help explain the aspects that sometimes don't have words, such as strong feelings, premonitions, or dreams. IWOK will be used to describe Kumeyaay beliefs and how they relate to the process of the ceremony.

### **Summary of Research**

Religious oppression, boarding schools, negative beliefs around menstruation, loss of ceremony and land, forced sterilization, prolonged sexual violence, and male dominance are some of the waves of abuse that have caused historical trauma. This trauma still lingers physically and mentally in the hearts, minds, and bodies of Kumeyaay women. Memories, both positive and negative, are transmitted generationally. Using Indigenous Ways of Knowledge to allow heart knowledge to emerge shows the re-calling of ancestral memory can be achieved through ceremony and the processes entailed within these rites. Rituals guide and create foundational belief systems within women, an inner knowing that guides and helps them make positive life decisions. The ceremony process transmits cultural knowledge that helps develop

strong ties to an individual's Native culture. Conducting and participating in different ceremonies has proven beneficial in maintaining this balance for thousands of years in tribal communities. This is a paradigm that teaches all forms of life are interconnected. This literature review has shown what problems Kumeyaay women face, and it has now made way to transition into the next section of methods and methodology of my research.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will discuss the various components of the research study, including the methodological design and use of tools to examine the data collected. First, I state my research questions. Next, I describe Participatory Action Research (PAR) and why I chose to use it as my methodology and methodological tools. Afterward, I describe the background of the workshop conducted for this study and the story of how this experiential discussion came to be. I also discuss the setup of the teaching space and the workshop's agenda. Subsequently, I will discuss the sample size, potential participants, and sampling invitations. The following sections describe data collection processes, including document collection, surveys, questions, types of interviews utilized, group and follow-up interviews, and interview questions. Finally, I will explain confidentiality and ethical considerations, data analysis, and study limitations.

### **Research Question and Design**

This study aimed to reconnect Kumeyaay women to their foundational cultural beliefs through experiential learning by re-experiencing elements of the Ahtanook. It is to promote well-being and self-confidence within a woman. This study answers the following questions:

1. What spiritual, emotional, and physical experiences will Kumeyaay women have due to participating in the elements of the Ahtanook?
2. In what ways, if any, will intimate experiences—such as self-efficacy, inner strength, or empowerment—be felt by Kumeyaay women who re-live their cultural rituals?
3. How does, if at all, experiencing elements of the Ahtanook impact the self-concept and self-empowerment of Kumeyaay women?

These research questions were answered through the research. As such, the findings showed how the study contributed to self-efficacy, inner strength, and Kumeyaay female empowerment by

accessing ancestral belief systems through elements of ceremonial processes, history, and shared experiences. Kumeyaay women were aided by providing agency and emancipatory life components such as the ability to formulate their cultural values and strengths. Furthermore, this research helped Kumeyaay women to feel and interpret their foundational cultural values, which for some led to better life choices, inner strength, and wisdom. This study showed how relationships could be healed and balanced among Indigenous women. Lumsden (2016) explains that ceremonies held on traditional lands also reproduce Native people's relationships with one another and enhance social cohesion.

### **Framework and Methodology**

The theoretical framework, Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK), and Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodological approach guided this study. IWOK is a paradigm that comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational and interconnected with all creation (Kovach, 2010). Holmes (2000) explains that Indigenous ways of knowing are not based on the limits of one's physical senses and may include prayer, knowing something before it takes place, dreams, and messages from the ancestors. Grayshield and Mihecoby (2010) further share that IWOK is a viable and practical paradigm for achieving balance, harmony, and sustainability in an individual's personal life and can positively impact the lives of others.

Indigenous methodologies come from tribal knowledge, and while they are allied with several western qualitative approaches, there are vital distinctions (Kovach, 2010). These distinctions have to do with different belief systems instilled in Native Nations, such as incorporating cosmology to tell the connection of a ceremony to a person or translating Native language to incorporate into a study. Combining western and Indigenous thought through research, such as writing an academic paper on ceremony, is an example of this. Kovach (2009)

explains that introducing Indigenous knowledge into any form or structure must ethically include the true history of colonial relationships. Doing so presents a decolonial perspective to a critical paradigm; thus, I have included Kumeyaay women's history in this research.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a qualitative research methodology that uses self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake. The reflective process is directly linked to empowered action, influenced by understanding history, culture, and local context embedded in social relationships (Baum et al., 2006). This methodology was engaged using an Indigenous lens, specifically through a Kumeyaay viewpoint. PAR conveyed the answers to this study through women's narratives. I also developed a culturally relevant research model with PAR that addressed the issues of injustice, inequality, and exploitation of Kumeyaay women by igniting self-empowerment within them through ceremonial elements. Their stories and experiences were used for liberation from oppressive thinking, feelings, and actions through their participatory action in the workshop described below.

PAR was chosen as a methodology because its tools, such as surveys, focus groups, informal discussions, and interviews, focus on experiential learning, self-reflective inquiry, and voluntary actions from participants (Baum et al., 2006). An example of this can be seen through research from Baum, MacDougall, and Smith (2006), where PAR was used within an Aboriginal Australian community to aid a men's self-help group to examine issues affecting their lives, such as endemic alcohol use, lack of employment opportunities, drug abuse, violence, and high suicide rates. Participants incorporated cultural resources available to them, engaged in positive discussions and group activities, and held space for the men to voluntarily share their stories, resulting in increased awareness and self-confidence for group participants. The applications of the PAR process used were reflections, action, and in-depth interviews (Tsey et al., 2002).

PAR is a research methodology that seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it through the voices of underrepresented groups, thus an appropriate methodology for this study. Wilson (2008) further iterates PAR fits well with an Indigenous paradigm because of the focus on personal and interpersonal relationships and experiential education, which are vital components in Indigenous learning. Through debate and reflection, the men developed a consensus of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that lead to empowered thinking (Tsey et al., 2002). Indigenous knowledge emerges from the symbiotic relationship of Native people and their relationship with the world they live in (Kovach, 2010).

Moreover, PAR allowed for the use of decolonial praxis. PARs methodological tools—such as informal discussion, shared narratives, and self-inquiry—align with Indigenous practices by combining traditional methods (e.g., storytelling) and incurring elements of the Ahtanook (e.g., sights, sounds, and smells of ceremony) with the addition of the history of Kumeyaay women. This praxis cleared the way for heart knowledge to emerge within the women. Holmes (2000) explains when knowledge surpasses the intellectual realm and places itself in the emotional realm; it becomes heart knowledge. For Kumeyaay people, anything you do, you do it from your heart because it is doing things in a good way, and it is where answers a person seeks lie. Doing things in a good way allows the answers you seek to come from your heart. It is a force that flows through the bodies of successive generations (Holmes, 2000).

Allowing heart knowledge to emerge within a woman may help unravel elements of colonization and historical trauma within her. Linklater (2014) further iterates that it is essential for Indigenous people to move forward in healing from colonization through cultural approaches. Over 500 years of contact between the original people of the Americas and settler nations has produced extensive displacement and disconnection in the mind, body, and spirit. Using the tools

of PAR aligned with Indigenous practices has shown cultural transmission is a healthy and sustainable method for providing a positive impact on a person's life, as it allows for a healing process that treats the mind, body, and spirit.

### **Workshop**

This study examined the benefits, challenges, and contributions of the ceremony process for Kumeyaay women through a one-day workshop. This study showed the importance of women journeying through a shared experience and the power of experiencing ceremonial elements to bring innate heart knowledge forward within them. There is limited research on Kumeyaay women's rituals and ceremonies and the practice of coming-of-age ceremonies among Kumeyaay women, which has been dormant for over eighty years. The last recorded Ahtanook took place on the Campo Indian Reservation, located on the southeast side of San Diego County, in 1970. In its original form, the Ahtanook is a community event where women from within and surrounding villages celebrate and assist with plant gathering, build *ah-wa*'s (lodges), and give life instructions to the women. This ceremony is a prime example of the cyclical *oonyow* (way) of Indigenous ways of teaching and knowing. Because this ceremony has been dormant for decades due to colonization, its revitalization and return will take time.

As such, I am beginning the project of reclaiming the ceremony by starting with using small parts of it in a workshop setting. I believe that experiencing any element of this community event has the potential to be transformative for a Kumeyaay woman of any age. I contend that prioritizing an individual's relationship with the process of Kumeyaay ceremony may offer significant potential for addressing the complex emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual needs of *cha'alk toe-mimp* (a lot of women) who may still suffer from historical trauma. This study demonstrated that positive social change and elements of historical trauma were released within

these women and showed a shift towards positive thinking trends among the women who partook in the workshop. This study examined the relationality between a woman and her inner knowing and connecting her to foundational cultural beliefs.

By igniting the senses with elements of women's ceremony, this workshop utilized the components of *neuro-decolonization*. Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird (2012) describe neuro-decolonization as an approach to liberating the mind of oppressive thinking and feeling by partaking in ceremonial activities. For many Native women, the effects of trauma, whether historical or present-day, can linger heavily within the mind, body, and *Mot-how* (spirit). Neuro-decolonization can transform one's mind and brain functions to open to engagement in optimistic thinking to cultivate creativity, openness, and positive thinking in their life. By using such ceremonial elements, we also remember closeness to the ancestors. Fals-Borda & Rahmen (1991) expand on this concept by explaining that this type of participation is altruistic and a formative experience that leads to an authentic and intimate experience for those who participate.

### **How the Workshop Came to Be**

During my time as a graduate student, significant instances have helped formulate the workshop described below. With scant literature on Kumeyaay women and their ceremonies, I wasn't sure what I would find. More than two years of research have brought more knowledge and feelings of fulfillment within me, which I didn't expect while researching. With this knowledge, I knew I had to share what I had learned. I was also fortunate to have other Kumeyaay people gift me books, journal articles, and recordings they had stored away in the back of their closets. A cultural leader gave me a CD of an old recording of an interview with an elder. Recorded in 1940, she was asked about the women's puberty ceremony. She shared details

and, best of all, sang four songs. As I listened, tears came; this was the first time I heard the sound of the *Ahtanook*.

Another instance occurred as I described what kinds of flowers were used during the ceremony to a friend. Eva simply replied, “can you imagine how beautiful that would smell!” This moment was the first time I smelled our ceremony. I was also honored by the active presence of my co-chair, who lovingly encouraged me through this process. Another instance was when Dr. Theresa Ambo sent me a picture of a ceremonial element drawn long ago. This drawing was the first time I saw the women’s *myhashaan* (ceremony). I share this information about how the workshop came to be for other researchers who come after me so they might identify the gifts they may receive in their lives, work, and research. Several instances about the topic itself and its gifts came to me as I was doing research. Many Indigenous people are reclaiming their ceremony processes, some through written records, others may only have a single story or song. The following sections outline critical elements of the workshop.

### ***Teachings Space***

Taking place on Kumeyaay territory, the *Cha’alk Maatayoom* (women’s gathering) was held in a conference room at the Sycuan Golf Resort for a full day. The conference rooms are big and spacious, providing audio-visual equipment such as television monitors, projector screens, and audio equipment offering adequate space for interaction and movement. A large projector screen was placed in the center of the room to display slide presentations and videos. Audio-visual equipment was used to share audio of historical recordings. Tables with chairs were encircled around the projector screen for participants to sit. It was essential for the workshop to be held on Kumeyaay land and to acknowledge the technological elements that supported conveying lessons to participants.

## *Agenda*

The following section outlines the agenda for the workshop. The workshop began in the morning, with participants being greeted outside of the conference room by two volunteers as they arrived. Participants were asked to fill out a survey (to be described later) about their knowledge regarding the Ahtanook, Kumeyaay women's beliefs, and rituals. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the complete agenda provided to participants.

- **Arrival**
  - Participants selected their seats, got food and drinks, and had an opportunity to connect with other participants.
- **Introductions**
  - Facilitators introduced themselves, provided background on the research and the Joint Degree Program in Educational Leadership at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) and California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM), and were given the rationale for conducting this study.
  - Participants introduced themselves.
- **History of Kumeyaay Women**
  - The facilitator provided an overview of the lives of Kumeyaay women before the settler invasion and stories of their lives at the missions, their subjugation to missionaries, and various acts of violence towards women.
- **Break for Lunch**
- **Closed session**



- For reasons of cultural respect and sacredness, this closed section of the workshop has not been written about in detail. General details, however, included talking about Kumeyaay women's culture and activities within.
- **15 Minute Break**
- **Sharing Circle**
  - Women gathered in a circle to share their thoughts and experiences of the workshop. This was a voluntary group interview and was recorded.
- **Thank you & Closing**
  - Small gifts were given to participants, with an explanation about a follow-up call, and the workshop ended.

### **Workshop Participants and Purposive Sampling**

Using purposive sampling, I identified fifteen Kumeyaay women to participate in the *Cha'alk Maatayoom*. After seeing a lot of interest in the workshop, I began inviting participants and elected double the number to thirty women. The age ranges of the participants varied from eighteen years of age and up to show a representative sample. These women also represented eleven of the different Kumeyaay reservations in San Diego County. Individuals with the spiritual possession of feminine energies were also included among the selected participants. *Shla* (person of the moon), sometimes known as two-spirit people, falls under this category. Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016) explain that purposive sampling is a researcher's deliberate participant choice due to specific qualities possessed by a particular individual. Purposive sampling is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants and is typically used in qualitative research to identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resources. All the participants I've chosen

are information-rich because they are familiar with Kumeyaay culture or have had some experience with cultural teachings. This was an invitational workshop; however, no one was turned away. Thirty women were invited to participate, with twenty-three women choosing to attend the workshop. Additionally, I purposefully sampled women who participated in the workshop for semi-structured interviews.

### ***Selection Criteria & Invitations***

Participants invited to attend the *Cha'alk Maatayoom* were selected based on the following criteria:

1. One person from Kumeyaay communities which include: Jamul, Campo, Manzanita, La Posta, Viejas, Sycuan, Santa Ysabel, Barona, San Pasqual, Mesa Grande
2. 18 years or older.
3. Must be a woman or identify with feminine energy.

Each participant received a personal invitation from me by phone. The general details of the workshop were explained, as well as the requirement to participate all day were presented.

### **Data Collection**

The following section discusses how data was collected from participants and the questions asked in the survey and interviews. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained throughout the data collection and writing of the study results.

### **Document Collection**

For this study, I examined any written documents, books, or journal articles I could find that talked about Kumeyaay women or the Ahtanook. Documents, recordings, and talks with culture leaders and elders served as the primary source of my research. These items provided much of the content and knowledge for the workshop and its agenda.

## **Surveys**

At check-in, all workshop participants were given a survey. The survey consisted of questions assessing participants about knowledge of Kumeyaay history, women's ceremonies, songs or rituals, and the Ahtanook. The surveys were used to compare with interviews taken at the end of the workshop. The surveys helped the researcher identify changes that occurred due to participating in the workshop. For a list of the survey questions, see Appendix B.

## **Debrief and Sharing Circle Interview**

At the end of the workshop, participants were invited to a group debriefing and sharing circle interview. This debriefing informed participants about their choice of sharing their experiences and thoughts about the workshop, how the researcher would keep all identities confidential, and what potential this research could do for Kumeyaay communities. Once the facilitator received consent from the participants, a sharing circle interview occurred. A recorder with a microphone attachment was used when doing the group interview. Sharing circles (i.e., group interviews) is an open structured conversational style process that models Native American storytelling circles (Kovach, 2010). Using a sharing circle helped ensure the participants felt more at ease in their traditional sharing style. During this time, participants who chose to participate shared their experiences, thoughts, and feelings from the workshop. All participants shared their experiences in the group interview. This number of interviews ensured enough data was collected to show themes when coding. No names were used, and all markers that identified participants were removed.

The group interview utilized semi-structured interviews. This interview style was chosen because the interviewer did not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. Instead, more open-ended questions were used, allowing for a discussion with participants rather than a

straightforward question and answer format. Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world uniquely (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This interview structure allows researchers to probe more deeply to understand experiences and perceptions and may permit themes and patterns to emerge on topics the researcher may not have considered.

### ***Follow-up One-on-one Interviews***

Ranging from three days and two weeks following the workshop, each participant was called to see if they wanted to share any additional thoughts or feelings about their experience. After an initial check-in with the participant, we conducted an unstructured interview. A semi-structured interview uses flexibly worded questions, and there is no predetermined wording or order for these questions. Using a semi-structured interview style will lead to an open conversation with participants. This type of interview is held this way to open to any new ideas or views the participant may have (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The follow-up interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded with permission from the participant. Semi-structured questions developed for follow-up interviews with participants can be viewed in Appendix C.

### **Confidentiality & Ethical Considerations**

Given the size of the community and specificity around targeting women and identifying participants, I am committed to ensuring that participants are provided with the appropriate protections associated with qualitative research studies. As such, the list of participants was kept private for all interviews. Identity markers were wiped from all transcripts, surveys, and interviews in Non-Identifying Participant Data Forms, so real names were never recorded or used. The participants were fully informed of the workshop's purpose, activities, and research timeline. When interpreting data, codes used in the study, and numbers were assigned to participants.

## **Limitations**

It is essential to recognize that all studies have limitations, including this one. One potential limitation is the small sample size. Another limitation is the generalizability of this research, which was geared towards Kumeyaay women. Another is the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a fear the pandemic would stop some women from attending the workshop; however, all participants showed up and remained during the duration of the workshop.

## **Data Analysis**

All of the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using Rev.com. Next, using open coding, survey responses and interview transcripts were reviewed to find dominant themes. Open coding is a process by which researchers review transcribed narratives to look for themes and are open to identifying any segment of data that might be useful (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transcripts from the group interviews were first, open coded. Next, one-on-one interviews were reviewed for themes. The open coding process helped to determine the dominant themes from the workshop and formulate the codebook. Once the final codebook was established all transcripts were coded in a second round of coding. A constant comparative analysis was undertaken to identify the strongest themes and their alignment with each research question. To explicate these findings, I selected the quotes that best represented the findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This Participatory Action Research (PAR) study examined the experiences of twenty-three Kumeyaay women who participated in a one-day women's gathering—*Mot-ya-yoom*—and focused on the impact of re-experiencing the ceremonial elements of the Kumeyaay girls' puberty ceremony—*Ahtanook*. The purpose of the *Mot-ya-yoom* was to understand what would happen to Kumeyaay women who experienced dormant cultural aspects for the first time in over 80 years. Moreover, this study addresses an unexplored area of scholarship on California Indian puberty ceremonies—precisely those of the Kumeyaay. Participants' voices were gathered through a group interview immediately following the workshop and individual interviews approximately three days to two weeks following the workshop. Each participant shared in great detail: their experiences during and the impact following the *Mot-ya-yoom*, including changes to their physical selves, self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, and interpersonal relationships. All women expressed a degree of change, which this chapter discusses at greater length.

The following sections center on the voices of Kumeyaay women and *shla* (people of the moon) participants, elaborating on their spiritual, emotional, and physical experiences, internal or intimate changes, and the impact of participating in the *Mot-ya-yoom* had on their lives. I deliberately highlight the interactions and voices of participants who experienced ceremonial elements for the first time. The quotes used are the best representation of multiple respondents. Specifically, the following provides findings related to my research questions and draws from observations and group and individual interviews with participants. It is worth noting that all findings presented, whether quotes from a woman or *shla* participant, are identified with female gender pronouns to provide a layer of protection to workshop participants. I conclude this chapter with a summary of my findings.

The workshop began in the morning around 10am, many participants arrived earlier than expected. Upon arrival, each woman was greeted by two volunteers who prompted them to sign in and they were given a folder with all necessary IRB documents to sign. As the women entered the conference room at the Sycuan Golf Resort, they were greeted with a breakfast buffet and hot coffee. As the facilitator, I also greeted the women as they entered and answered questions, I motioned them to sit at a table of their choosing. Each woman signed and turned in their documents to me. As I looked around the room, I could see eagerness in their faces which told me it was time to begin. For this dissertation, details within the workshop will not be shared to protect the integrity of the Ahtanook.

### **Q1: Spiritual, Emotional, & Physical Experiences**

As discussed in chapter three, following the colonization of California, Kumeyaay women suffered immense mental, spiritual, and physical abuse over several hundreds of years. Ongoing colonialism created abusive and hostile environments characterized by gender violence and cultural disruption. Such traumas continue to be experienced and are passed down generationally between women (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). In response, I was curious to understand the spiritual, emotional, and physical responses of Kumeyaay women who participated in a one-day workshop focused on the Kumeyaay girl's puberty ceremony.

The following section answers the following research question:

- What spiritual, emotional, and physical experiences will Kumeyaay women have due to participating in the elements of the Ahtanook?

Specifically, I found that participants experienced a spiritual remembrance and awakening during and after the *Ahtanook* workshop. Participants also expressed great sadness, loss, and anger as

emotional responses. Finally, in group and individual interviews, the women shared feeling physically lighter, more sensual, and tired from their participation.

### **Spiritual**

Spirituality, in this sense, is referred to as the ancestral connection or memory of an individual. Structural rules do not define Kumeyaay spirituality; instead, it is expressed by valuing a connection with oneself, the earth, and the ancestors. I found participants to have *remembrances* and *awakenings* during and following their participation in the workshop. By this, I mean participants made connections to their spirituality—without my instruction—and felt a deep sensory connection and awakening when ceremonial elements were presented. One person shared, “Spiritually, I feel more spiritual.”

### ***Heart Knowledge***

Blood memory, heart knowledge, and ancestral memory are terms used interchangeably among Native Nations. These terms represent the occurrence of experiences by those who have gone before us and are embedded in our physical and psychological being (Younging, 2009). Expressly, these remembrances live in our bodies and our DNA and are passed down from generation to generation. Key aspects of the Ahtanook workshop included introducing ceremonial songs and plants traditionally used in the ceremony. During the workshop, all participants remarked that they had never heard the ceremonial songs or smelt the scents before their participation, especially the songs sung during the workshop from the Ahtanook ceremony.

To my knowledge, these had not been heard or sung since their recording. During the workshop, participants were silent and admired the songs. One participant in the back of the room mimicked the rhythm of the songs and the accompanying-rattle. When asked about the reactions to being introduced to these elements, one participant remarked, “I was just thinking



how amazing the songs probably were.” Another participant speculated on what life would have been like knowing these songs earlier in life, sharing: “Wow. If I could’ve had these songs, can you imagine how much easier [things would’ve been]... and they’re thousands of years old, they’re as old as the bird songs.” Finally, another participant shared how she did not immediately have words to express how or that she knew the songs upon hearing them but felt a connection to them, describing almost faint or distant memory or rather remembrance of the songs from a time before. She commented:

I felt like I already knew them. I swear. I’ve heard this before, that second song nobody’s ever sang before. I feel like I’ve been a part of it. During the workshop, I did feel really connected to the song, and I felt like I almost recognized the voices. When you played them, oh my gosh! I feel like I’ve heard this before.

The reaction of participants, via their comments to me, related to the literature around blood memory, heart knowledge, and ancestral memory that speaks to an inherent or ancestral connection.

### ***Awakening***

Native American rituals guide and create foundational belief systems within women. This foundational belief system helps develop an inner knowing that guides and helps a woman make life decisions and discover who she truly is. Through one-on-one interviews, I also learned of a spiritual *awakening* among workshop participants. Explicitly, participants spoke about the relationships between their cultural and community engagement and ancestral knowledge. Participants described this knowing as a call or force but found a more significant connection within themselves that they now relate to their spirituality. For example, one participant shared, with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement, how she became spiritually aware of a knowing that had always been within her.

It's like a new awakening. This is why I do what I do. It's wakening that ancestral memory that's always been in you, but it's still trying to find further why it is. Does that make sense? It's a super amazing honor to witness this.

Furthermore, healing and balancing a person's inner and outer world is an essential aspect of Kumeyaay ways of life. The ceremonial process and participating in its rituals are a transmission of cultural knowledge that helps develop strong ties to an individual's culture. I found this tie developed within one participant as she described the sensation, she had become aware of the Ahtanook and its path.

I think it was so profound this workshop and it's because there has only been one really like it for our community, it's profound and pivotal, I think people are encouraged and even you can feel there's a pull, or a push, or some kind of affinity to transition into an actual ceremony. It's a raw, push or pull.

The male-dominated Catholic religion enforced the concept of female inferiority through their patriarchal views of religion to justify the inadequacies of Native women and the superiority of men (Brandt, 2014). Du Bois (1908) shares that Sinyahow, the first woman in the Kumeyaay creation story, was viewed by the Native people to hold vast power. Sinyahow later became diminished by priests who ensured she was regarded as a woman without power and connections to the stars. This cultural connection to femininity was dismantled so that Native women would not remember their ancestral connection.

The story of Sinyahow was shared with participants at the opening of the workshop. In discussion, I found that multiple participants found an instant ancestral connection to the account without hesitation, despite this being the first time many of the women learned of the story of Sinyahow. Several reflected on how the diminishment of Sinyahow impacted their lives. The following participant commented on constantly feeling a spiritual connection to "something" but never knowing what that "something" was. After the workshop, they firmly believed that this

“something” was Sinyahow, guiding and protecting them, especially during difficult times of their life. They commented:

It’s weird because I know it wasn’t the intention of your workshop, but I feel that she’s happy we know about her. And, it touched me because I’ve had a lot of tragedy in my life, a lot of trauma and I’ve always come out the other end positive and done really well and people always ask me, ‘how did you turn into this amazing person and... not kill yourself? Not get into drugs, when people suffering from trauma do?’ And I never had an answer. All I ever told people is, ‘Someone is there for me. I feel a presence.’ I’ve always felt that it’s either the Creator, or now there’s another person to think of. She’s there. And maybe she’s never left. We just didn’t know about her. And now that we know about her, we can tell other people about her and then it can go on and she can be powerful through us.

### **Emotional**

Emotion is a natural instinctive state of mind deriving from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationships with others (oxforddictionary.com). Throughout the workshop and in interviews, participants shared a range of emotions that arose within each of them. They expressed anger, sadness, guilt, and fulfillment after re-learning about women’s role in the community, how their status was changed because of missionization, and elements of the traditional ceremony were dismantled.

### ***Sadness***

Sadness was a palpable emotion felt throughout and following the workshop it was referred to by participants in various ways. Linklater (2014) writes that trauma refers to a response to a wound; disconnection and anger often occur when a person experiences trauma. Because the workshop was rooted in Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK) and used a Kumeyaay epistemology, it opened the door for resilience.

During the workshop, participants shared the types of sadness and grief that arose within them and reflected on how they could process it within themselves in the days and weeks

following the workshop. One participant shared how it took some time for the information to settle within her before she even realized what she was feeling.

Very disconnected. Very disconnected. I felt empowered, but when I left, I was... Wait a minute. Where did all that energy just go? They took this away from you, everybody, and then, it kinda was more hurtful. To sit and think about it, and understand that they made women not to feel empowered anymore. And that empowerment of women wasn't there. So having to try to re-embrace that now, Whoa! I'm taking baby steps right now and I'm gonna work this out.

After wrestling with their new knowledge, this participant shares their grief and response. Once she realized the deliberate effort to silence and disempower women, she asserted her power as a Kumeyaay woman.

Another participant referred to sadness with the loss of transmission of knowledge to young women. They commented that women were the target of federal laws to cut cultural transmission through boarding schools. Native women did not have connections with each other during the mission period and the boarding school era.

It's sad. Cause we've lost it. I don't want to say completely, but it's not there no more. Hopefully, it does come back or hopefully we learn from it a little bit more. Things that weren't taught that were passed down through many generations of women. You don't get that anymore. So it's so sad... I believe a lot of our younger generations are missing something in their life. Missing that piece. I feel like there's a disconnect amongst the women in my community themselves. What our young ladies and women had to go through, before this time. With the boarding schools, and the beatings, and the rape, that they had to endure, along with trying to keep their ceremonies alive. Makes me feel humble to say my parents, my grandparents, my ancestors, especially the women, what they've gone through and what we all have gone through to still be here and still have that knowledge.

This woman's sadness represents her longing to connect with herself, her culture, and the women around her, and it is an innate sense within Native women to do so.

Sadness also showed up physically for some. When learning about the actualities of events during the mission period and the specific treatments towards Kumeyaay women during

that time, this woman felt a sense of trauma and needed to physically remove herself from the room after this part of the workshop was completed to process the information.

Taking all that in. The part when you were talking about how it was before, just how beautiful it was, and then how the Spaniards came in and the church, that segment, God, I mean, even now, I think that's when we took a break, and I knew I had to go outside. I just needed to get up and walk around outside because it was very traumatic.

After spending some time outside, she remarked that she was ready to proceed with the rest of the workshop when she returned to the room. This act represents the epistemological and methodological approach taken in this study, which included the workshop.

The gathering was rooted in IWOK and based on a decolonizing methodology to provide space for the participants to process their emotions in an Indigenous or cultural way. Linklater (2014) shares that the resiliency of Indigenous people is often derived from cultural resources that generate strong contributions to community capacity concerning healing practices. My interpretation of this reaction is profoundly indicative of resilience and healing. This participant was surrounded by other Kumeyaay women sharing the same experience. They were learning the same knowledge. Because she wasn't alone, she was able to process the information and ground herself before returning to the workshop.

### ***Loss***

Following the presentation on colonialism and missionization, we paused to get reactions from participants. Several participants responded with dampened spirits that they now understood why many of their life events occurred, why they were treated in such ways, and why they tolerated abuse. In their sadness, they expressed a physical and emotional sense of grief and loss regarding their bodies or identities, such as losing their identity. For example, one shared:

I feel robbed. I feel the loss of my identity. Truly. I feel like a lot has been taken, stripped from us as a woman. And I feel... while I feel all those horrible feelings, it also empowers me. What can we do to reclaim this? How can we get this back?

This response can be traced to the intergenerational trauma that many Kumeyaay women face. However, amidst their loss, this participant asking the question of how to embrace and reclaim cultural traditions demonstrates a sign of resiliency. Linklater (2014) reminds us resiliency is the ability to withstand trauma and proceed with living and engaging in a productive life.

### ***Anger***

Related, while many expressed feelings of sadness, grief, and loss, for others, these emotions also turned to anger. During the workshop, several participants responded in serious and frustrated tones when they realized the effort of the Spanish Crown and Catholic missions to eliminate women's ceremonies. The anger was visible too. Their bodies were tense, and they sat up straight. In an interview, one participant best expressed the anger and resentment other participants felt. Referring to the horrible teaching style of the schools she attended and had questions about why so much knowledge had been omitted from schools and why the truth was not taught, she expressed:

It has made me really think [about] growing up, going through school, and doing the mission projects that we all did, and took the field trips to the missions, and how so much was left out, where they taught us that the churches were set up for the travelers to go a few days and they'd hit another mission all the way up the coast of California, but it was all built on the backs of our Natives. And it makes me think, 'How stupid was I?' I wish I could go back in time and just scream at the teachers. It makes you angry, what they teach you.

Something notable about this comment is that it came from a participant that would be characterized as an older generation. This participant reflected on her elementary school days over fifty years ago.

### ***Physical***

I also found that physical experiences were felt by many of the participants—changes in body weight, sensuality, and literal tiredness or exhaustion in their bodies.

### ***Emotional and Physically Lighter***

One participant remarked on an emotional and physical weight being “lifted” from them after participating. She shared that she began to notice her emotions and bodyweight fluctuated after the workshop. She remarked that she sincerely felt that this was due to all of the information learned in the workshop, as she had not done anything else different. She was interviewed two weeks after the Mot-ya-yoom, sharing:

I do feel disconnected and I have noticed a little bit of change in my weight where it’s fluctuating a lot more now. But it’s staying lower than it used to. So I’m about 10 pounds less, as of now. I’m about 10 pounds less than I was before I took the workshop which is really weird. I have felt a lot more tired lately.

In alignment with traditions, it is common for some participants to undergo physical transformations within their bodies in women’s ceremonies. In the Ahtanook, girls’ bodies are considered transmitters to the sacred. They are now releasing heaviness from their minds, spirits, and mot (body). Girls must also be expected to be mindful of their bodies during the ritual, as it is the vessel that helps bring them through this transition and should be treated respectfully and with kindness.

### *Sensuality*

Another woman talked about a change of sense within her skin. One participant had a shift in their confidence that altered how they now physically saw their body. They shared:

I feel that I need to speak up more. I need to let them know that me, as a person and my body is not just anything or anyone’s. And it’s sacred to me now. You just don’t get this (gesturing to their body). You don’t get my energy. You don’t get my time.

This quote frames a change shared by most participants of the workshop. Women’s ceremonies not only bring a woman to her innate knowledge and instill her cultural foundational belief systems, but the intricate parts also nurture the connection between a woman and her body. It is an intimate relationship that is fostered within a woman.

All plants, flowers, and herbs used within the Ahtanook carry medicinal properties to soothe the skin and relax the mind and body. Within the workshop, plants used in the ritual were placed around the room and warmed to emulate the sensory experience that women might have during the ceremony. To this *cha'alk* (woman), it was now more allowable to be herself. She shared:

[The] information you shared brought an entirely new element of... I don't know how to say it other than belonging... not just in my community or family, but in my own body... In a very strange way, there is an element of feeling more sensual, within my own skin... like, it's allowable now, since then, there's more of an acceptance of the 'feminine'... That part where it's, Okay, this body is not just a vehicle for the other person's needs or wants or desires. It's not really allowable. Wherever those belief systems came from might not have been there had the expression of femininity been nurtured from an early age. The whole, no, hide it, no, cover it, no, you know what I mean? My body is not an instrument for others.

Traditional teachings may be learned and experienced in different ways. Sometimes when people have been distanced from cultural learning, they may not be able to immediately recognize when cultural values and knowledge are part of their lives (Linklater, 2014).

### ***Tired and Exhausted***

Across a majority of participants and workshop facilitators, people remarked feeling physically tired or exhausted after their participation. One participant spoke about the length of tiredness she felt after the workshop, lasting over a week following. Another participant shared, "I was pretty drained that following week, and I don't know if it was emotional and also, kind of spiritually, too." Finally, a third participant elaborated further and commented:

It's draining in the fact. This is new information that our bodies and our minds are processing it. I think a lot of emotions came out of that space. I think that space was created to where everybody felt comfortable to express themselves, there was a lot of emotion and I could see how everybody can be tired. It was all surrendered during that time and that space.

Often, during and after some Native American ceremonies, a tiredness occurs that reflects the physical, emotional, and spiritual exertion given to the ceremony and community. Exhaustion



can be related to the physical and emotional surrendering of one's body and the necessity and practice of letting go so a person's body may process or release emotions. In the Ahtanook specifically, girls are asked to endure what would be considered intense ceremonial elements. If she is happy and works to endure during the process, she will view life this way.

Following ceremonies, it is common for participants to feel the need to sleep after the ceremony or the need to retreat into themselves. In the Ahtanook, an *ah-wa* would be built to provide space for women to take time for themselves. Interestingly, as the workshop facilitator, I also experienced prolonged tiredness a week following the workshop. It might be assumed that presenting is physically draining; however, I have spoken before in front of large groups. In those instances, I never experienced my body needing to rest as I did after this workshop. In a debrief meeting with my three workshop assistants—women who volunteered to help facilitate and take notes in the workshop—they also mentioned experiencing tiredness for a week after.

## **Q2: Intimate Experiences—Self-Efficacy, Inner Strength, & Empowerment**

There is limited literature on women's coming-of-age ceremony that discusses the role of self-efficacy, inner strength, and empowerment as ceremonial outcomes. Self-efficacy is the ability to believe in one's capacity to create their own life. Inner strength describes having integrity within themselves. Finally, empowerment is recognizing and acknowledging one's own confidence within. The following section answers the research question:

- In what ways, if any, will intimate experiences—such as self-efficacy, inner strength, or empowerment—be felt by Kumeyaay women who relive their cultural rituals?

This research question focused on understanding how, if at all, the reintroduction of ceremonial elements impacted participants following their attendance at the workshop. Expressly, it is

believed that women's coming-of-age ceremonies will aid in developing these qualities within a woman.

In group and individual interviews, participants shared about changes they experienced internally and inter-personally following the workshop. These experiences included a shift in how participants perceived themselves, their bodies, and others around them. Others expressed the desire to know about traditional transmissions of cultural knowledge. Experiences also included increased bonding with children. The following section discusses participants' perspectives on reclaiming menstruation, newfound optimism, a desire for more, belonging, interpersonal bonds, and inner strength.

### **Menstruation**

When talking about menstruation in the workshop, there was an eruption of examples of women sharing their first time experiences with tampons, seeing their blood, and having no one there to show them what to do. Some of them also shared the horrible feelings they harbored about their cycles. Before forced colonization and implementation of patriarchal gender norms, a woman's body was seen as a tie to the spiritual and physical world. A woman was seen as a portal connecting the spiritual and physical worlds during her menstrual cycle. Blood was believed to contain a being's life or spirit and demanded respectful treatment through ritual care (Wright, 2003). Thus, the creation of women's coming-of-age ceremonies.

Settlers and missionaries forcible took traditional teachings of menstruation practices from Kumeyaay women. The genocidal effects of colonization worked to degrade women's bodies and arbitrated Indigenous women's beliefs about their *ah-whot*. It took its toll and has resulted in many women being too ashamed to talk with the younger women in their families about it. The workshop changed this for most participants. Two women who attended later

commented in interviews how they got their periods after the workshop and saw it in a different light. One stated:

I did get my period after the workshop. And now—I felt a lot better, we did try to look when... we were both synced together because we live together. We're trying to look at our period in a better light, a different light instead of, 'Oh, I fucking hate my period.' And to look at it as more of a blessing. It's our right as women to have this. And we said, maybe not as far as looking forward to it every month, but when it comes, it's a blessing. And especially me—[I'm] most empowered about it. Instead of feeling gross or yucky, feeling like it's empowering us.

Another participant shared how she felt empowered to share the teachings of menstruation with her daughter. After attending the workshop, this mother had a way to share teachings with her. They shared: "I want to know more because I let my daughters know what I'm learning... I'm very open about menstrual things like that with my kids. And now it will be something, another tool to help."

Traditionally, during a woman's first menstruation, it is a time of instruction on how to care for her body and what new sensations will be coming to her. It is a time of women's storytelling and lessons on how women care for themselves. This participant spoke about her daughter's physical maturation at a young age and how she worried for her and lacked cultural knowledge about the importance of menstruation in Kumeyaay tradition. They expressed that she believed sharing this knowledge with her daughter would also empower her, stating:

I would like to share this experience with my daughter. She actually started her moon when she was nine. So, it was kind of rough. [I thought] 'Oh my gosh, you're still a baby. What do I, how do I explain this to you? How?' She had to grow up super-fast. It's always kind of emotional talking about her. I don't know, [if I'd be] able to be her age. She's very mature now and she's only 11. I think this would've been something good for her to see or to hear. So, me being able to kind of explain to her and share my notes with her, I think, she'll be like, 'Wow, mom, can I do this? Or how do I...' It would be nice.

## **Newfound Optimism**

The onset of forced religious coercion, violent female abuse, and destruction of Native women's traditional roles dismantled women's self-identity, sacred rituals, and belief systems. Native women, in particular, have a long history of distrust for federal agencies' programs and policies. Thus, it is significant to note whenever an Indigenous woman sees a positive future for herself. There was a newfound confidence in this *cha'alk*, especially in how she was talking. I noticed her confidence; her words were clear, and there was no hesitation in what she was saying. She knew there was a change in her, sharing that:

Since the workshop I feel there's change, I feel a sense of optimism, number one. I have multiple feelings about it, and multiple changes, there's a change in optimism towards Indigenous women, Indigenous matters especially when it comes to that. I have clarity for future endeavors. I feel as if there's a clearer future when it comes to ceremonies and there is direction there.

## **Desire for More**

The influence of patriarchal gender norms and religious oppression has resulted in many Native American women's disconnection from their inner spirit and traditional belief systems. Settlers and Catholic missionaries forcibly and violently took and dismantled Kumeyaay women's ceremonies and rituals during their efforts to colonize California. It resulted in prolonged intergenerational trauma and changed the role and belief systems of many Native American women across many generations. Participants expressed a desire to know or learn more about cultural practices and traditions in group and individual interviews.

It is essential to note the freedom within this participant's voice and the strong desire to know more. The U.S. federal government targeted large tribal feasts and ceremonies, with girls' coming-of-age ceremonies being among the largest across Native Nations. This resulted in them being heavily targeted and dismantled. It has only been 40 years since the *Native American Religious Freedom Act* was passed. Now a Native American woman can publicly demand her

ceremonies return. One participant spoke with an understanding of the true nature of the Ahtanook. She spoke with realization, asserting:

I feel like right after we left, I was thinking back on it, and I said, ‘Wow, this is crazy.’ Like we used to do this for all of our women. After, though, the more I thought about it, I was like, why don’t we do this anymore? I feel like our women would be so much more valued and appreciated if we did still have this around. And I really wish that it was still here.

Additionally, one participant shared her participation in the *Ahtanook* workshop also awakened a desire to know more about traditional foods and preparations.

### **Belonging**

Ceremonial processes foster social cohesion with one another. Lumsden (2016) explains that ceremonies held on traditional lands also reproduce Native people’s relationships with one another and enhance social cohesion. The workshop reinforced Kumeyaay relationships with land and community, as this workshop was held on Kumeyaay territory, and Ahtanook elements—such as sharing circles and storytelling—were used. One cha’alk excitedly shared how she had changed and the knowing that lingered within her throughout the day. She described her experience, stating:

I feel enlightened, I never knew about this. Emotional. Because the word that keeps coming to me throughout today is a sense of belonging. If I had had this when I was coming into being a woman, rather than being on my way out. I just wonder how different my relationships, not with just the women in my life, but [with the] men in my life, extended relations might have been if I were. If I knew who I was to be.

### **Interpersonal Bonds**

Relatedly, another participant commented on how their participation in the workshop impacted their interpersonal relationships, specifically with their daughter. They commented on how participating in the workshop created and strengthened their bond. With the knowledge from the Mot-ya-yoom, she could bring knowledge home and share what she knew.

Traditionally, Kumeyaay women would carry the responsibility of transmitting culture, and it is through the impacts of colonization that many women have internalized and altered cultural sharing (Weaver, 2009). The following participant statement demonstrates how this practice was replicated in the present day:

I would say the bond between my daughter and I... I was able to share the stuff that I found out and, to just let her know that it's okay. She's still young. She's pretty. She's confident. And she has nothing to beat herself up about, because everyone goes through it, no matter what age. So, we're able to connect with each other on a whole different level now.

### **Inner Strength**

Finally, analysis and group and individual interviews offered one unexpected emergent finding related to colorism and a sense of belonging. Colorism among Native Americans is a product of colonization and is expressed in various forms of emotional, psychological, and cultural domination (Brown, Branden, & Hall, 2018). It is racism that exists within Native American communities. Due to this, many Indigenous women of light skin find extra hardship in their communities and often feel a sense of dissociation. Reflecting on her experience, one participant shared what her attendance at the workshop did for her and how it eased her physical identity and sense of belonging, conveying:

For me, it's really opened my mind up [to] more because being a white Indian is difficult, I know sometimes the darker, Black Indians have difficulty too, being accepted as being Native and... I always feel like I don't know enough about my culture, and I've always felt like everyone else knows everything, which I know is not true. I feel like I fit in more, less judgmental about myself because I'm learning something new... The fact that there's something that I learned that I can't wait to learn more about. It reinforced that we're all here to learn together and there's not one Native that knows everything about everything. We're constantly learning about our own cultures. I can't wait to find out what else I can learn. It just made me feel more comfortable.

### **Q3: Impacts on Self-Concept and Self-Empowerment**

Colonization worked to dismantle Indigenous women's self-concept of themselves. Colonialism worked to shame a woman into submission over time through rewritten texts and ceremonial degradation. Maracle (2002) shares that historical oppression resulting from the accumulation of hurt sustained by Native people over a long time can reduce a woman to a substandard definition of herself, leading to a sensibility of defeat and ultimately changing her beliefs—corroding their belief system from within.

The following section explores the next research question:

- How does, if at all, experiencing elements of the Ahtanook impact the self-concept and self-empowerment of Kumeyaay women?

The purpose of this research question was to understand how participating in the Mot-ya-yoom more deeply would—if at all—impact how Kumeyaay women view themselves. When asked about their final thoughts after the Mot-ya-yoom, these are some remarks shouted at the end by participants: *I am woman, hear me roar! I am a goddess! The Truth! and I'd like to go through it* [the ceremony]. The following sections discuss the impact of participating in the one-day workshop, explicitly about themes of self-empowerment, cultural identity, and blood memory.

#### **Self-Empowerment**

As previously discussed, women's ceremonies and rituals were forcibly taken from Kumeyaay women through colonization. Women once held the pedagogy of the young and were the primary storytellers, especially when it came to the transmission of women's knowledge. In the Kumeyaay community, few women are willing to stand up and be storytellers. After the workshop, one such woman shared:

I've felt empowered, I just want to tell this story over and over again. And just having to tell the story even to my son who's a young bird singer and who's

involved in our culture, and for him to say, ‘That’s wrong, you know, we need to add her. She needs to go back into the story,’ that’s pretty amazing. I think that once our young women even know about it even more, they’re gonna be even more empowered. I know they will.

Her statement expresses her strong desire to share the story of Sinyahow and a definite knowledge of the change it will bring. This research shows that education of the past and igniting the senses with ceremonial elements have awakened Kumeyaay women.

Male domination persists within Native American communities. Patriarchal gender norms are still practiced, consciously and unconsciously. Some women find it hard to be themselves, and Native women still suffer from not feeling deserving of who they are (Maracle, 2002). One participant shared her newfound ability to speak up. I would distinguish this as one of the best internal changes from this research. When asked “what changed for her,” this participant responded:

I would say my confidence in speaking. Because I am one to tear back more and not say what I think, I get shy, or I try to think through it before I speak and when I do that, it takes too long. But I will say [what’s changed] my self-confidence to actually share what I know.

## **Identity**

Many participants asked for the revitalization of any element of the ceremony. They asked for more to be remembered and their desire to know more about women’s traditions. Through these conversations, participants talked about the misconception among many Native American communities that women are passive. One such participant excitedly shared what she would like regarding the value of Kumeyaay women:

It’s not just the Kumeyaay men that are important, and then the women are just a step below them. I feel like we’re all equal and that is, wow. We got this powerful woman that we can relate to and get our power from, and I like that.

This is due to learning the story of Sinyahow, the first woman in the Kumeyaay creation story, and the relationship they can now make with her.



## **Blood Memory**

Social cohesiveness is naturally fostered through ceremonial elements and components; it is gradual conditioning as women move through and participate in all parts. It is the result of colonization that worked to dismantle women's compassion towards one another that became disarrayed over time. Revitalizing ceremony helps restore the passion and understanding we should naturally feel for one another (Maracle,2002). In the group interview following the workshop, one participant reflected on what might have been. Sharing her thoughts tearfully, she expressed:

It blows me away how important this is because I know. I am a mother for a daughter, and having to go through my life doing all of this stuff on my own, and not knowing how to do any of it... raising my own children by myself, without a mother or grandmother or anyone. I just feel like this would've been so important because I know the other women in the clan, they would move in, and you would always have someone to teach you how to take care of yourself.

There was minimal talk of clanship, but inherently she knew that if traditions had been kept, there would be other women to help her.

The call of the feminine, return to woman, and return to knowing is expressed in various ways throughout this chapter. In their interviews, all of the women demanded that it happen—especially the resurgence of matriarchal roles in their communities and reservations. Speaking to this call for a revival of matriarchal roles, one participant shared what changed for them:

I've been really called to my feminine energy. I think, if anything has changed, I've become quicker to be quiet and observe. In terms of whenever there's talks about family issues... I have seen this kind of resurgence of the matriarch, of bringing back the essence of where we came from, in terms of academia, in my personal lives, really just kind of seeing this call for women to be empowered and to give space and to give voice for women in general. It's all full circle. It's all coming together and I think maybe I'm more, I'm seeing it through a different lens. It's something that has awakened in me.

The call to return empowered voices to Kumeyaay women is imminent.

## Summary

This chapter reported the findings from an analysis of interviews and data gathered from Kumeyaay women who participated in a day-long Mot-ya-yoom (gathering). This study examined the relationality between a woman and her inner knowing and how she connected to her foundational cultural beliefs. Each woman's experience highlighted the resiliency of Native American women, particularly Kumeyaay women. Throughout the interviews, the voices of these women showed a positive social change had occurred; a shift in self-identity, self-concept, and empowerment in how a woman sees herself, and a turn towards positive thinking trends. This is proof of historical trauma being released from a woman. Yellowbird and Waziyatawin (2012) share that neuro-decolonization is the deliberate and systematic use of particular exercises and activities that can be used to transform one's mind and thoughts. A desire to implement transformation in cha'alk is why a deliberate setting for the workshop and particular discussion topics were chosen to aid each woman in connecting with their traditional belief systems.

Interviews found that no matter when a Kumeyaay woman learns of her culture, it becomes embedded within her. This was shown in the instant connection for a woman's desire to know more about her culture. This research also indicates that a woman's inner connection to traditional knowledge was never lost; instead, it was simply clouded by colonization efforts. The use of Indigenous methods helps to uncover it.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, I share an overview of the study, including briefly revisiting the purpose of the study, problem statement, research questions, and methodology. Next, I share a summary of the findings, followed by recommendations for future research and practical recommendations for change and initiatives for the Kumeyaay community. Lastly, I close with a brief conclusion of the study.

### **Revisiting the Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, and Methodology**

Kumeyaay women do not have their cultural rituals and ceremonies to call upon when they need help in their lives. The absence of cultural rituals and ceremonies has resulted in the lack of cultural identity, permanent role models, and loss of ancestral tribal structures. This is due to the genocidal effects of colonization and historically prolonged abuses against Indigenous women, which have played a part in diminishing much of ceremonial and ritual significance (Delaney, 1995). Because of this, many Native women find themselves involved with issues like teenage pregnancy, gang violence, incarceration, and domestic violence (Markstrom, 2008). This study aimed to understand the experiences and impact of reconnecting Kumeyaay women to their foundational cultural beliefs through experiential learning when re-experiencing elements of the *Ahtanook*. Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK) was the theoretical framework, and Participatory Action Research (PAR) was the methodological approach for this study.

The data for this study were collected at a one-day workshop or *Mot-ya-yoom* wherein Kumeyaay women were exposed to elements of the Ahtanook, the Kumeyaay girls' coming-of-age ceremony, for the first time in over 80 years of dormancy. Specifically, I was interested in understanding what would occur for Kumeyaay women who experienced dormant ceremonial elements of the Ahtanook. The study was grounded in the following research questions:

1. What spiritual, emotional, and physical experiences will Kumeyaay women have due to participating in the elements of the Ahtanook?
2. In what ways, if any, will intimate experiences—such as self-efficacy, inner strength, or empowerment—be felt by Kumeyaay women who relive their cultural rituals?
3. How does, if at all, experiencing elements of the Ahtanook impact the self-concept and self-empowerment of Kumeyaay women?

Approximately thirty Kumeyaay women were invited to attend a one-day workshop at the Sycuan Golf Resort in El Cajon, California. The resort is on the Sycuan Reservation in eastern San Diego County, which is located within Kumeyaay ancestral territory. Twenty-three women, including two *shla*, participated. The ceremony's experiential elements—meaning the sights, sounds, and smells—were presented to the women in traditional teaching methods. This Mot-ya-yoom hoped to allow heart knowledge to arise within the women.

### **Summary of Findings**

Broadly speaking, this study examined the positive changes that occurred within a Kumeyaay woman after experiencing ancestral practices that have been dormant for over eighty years. These changes showed positive results in releasing intergenerational trauma brought on by the genocidal intentions of forced colonization. Question one focused on understanding the spiritual, emotional, and physical responses of Kumeyaay women who experienced their dormant ceremonial elements for the first time. Following the colonization of California, Kumeyaay women suffered immense mental, spiritual, and physical abuse over several hundred years. Such traumas continue to be experienced and are passed down generationally between women (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000).

I found participants to have *remembrances* and *awakenings* during and following their participation in the workshop. This is known as *heart knowledge* or *ancestral memory*. All the participants remarked that during the Mot-ya-yoom, they had never heard the songs or smelled the scents before their participation, especially the two songs sang during the workshop from the Ahtanook ceremony. One participant remarked that she did not immediately have words to express how or that she knew the songs upon hearing them but felt a connection to them, describing almost faint or distant memories of the songs from a time before. Through one-on-one interviews, I also learned of other *awakenings* among workshop participants, an inner knowing of which the women became aware. One participant shared how she became spiritually aware of a knowing that had always been within her; she described it as the Ahtanook and its path. Another became aware of the cultural connection to femininity and connected it to the first woman in the Kumeyaay creation story, Sinyahow. These participant reflections are proof that exposure to elements of the Ahtanook roused ancestral knowledge within the participants.

### **Impacts on Emotions**

Participants also shared a range of emotions that arose within them during and after the workshop. They expressed anger, sadness, guilt, and fulfillment. The gathering was rooted in IWOK and based on a decolonizing methodology to provide space for the participants to process their emotions in a cultural way. Because the Mot-ya-yoom was rooted in IWOK and used a Kumeyaay epistemology, it opened the door for resilience. *Sadness* was a palpable emotion felt throughout the workshop. One participant shared how it took some time for the information to settle within her before she even realized what she was feeling. Another participant referred to sadness with the loss of transmission of knowledge to young women. This woman's sadness represented her longing to connect with herself, her culture, and the women around her; it is an

innate sense within Native women to do so. Sadness also showed up physically for some. One participant felt a sense of trauma and needed to physically remove herself from the room after learning of mission system atrocities so that she could process the information.

Many participants also expressed a physical sense of *grief* and *loss* regarding their bodies or identities. One woman remarked, “she felt robbed of her identity.” This response was because she could trace the intergenerational trauma many Kumeyaay women faced over generations. However, amidst their loss, several participants asked questions about how to embrace and reclaim cultural traditions—demonstrating a sign of resiliency. *Anger* also showed during the workshop as several women responded in serious and frustrated tones when they realized the efforts of the Spanish Crown and Catholic missions to eliminate women’s ceremonies. The anger was visible as well through tense bodies and straight posture. One woman referred to the horrible teaching style of the schools she attended and asked why so much knowledge had been omitted. She responded, “I wish I could go back and yell at the teachers.”

Participants reported changes in body weight, sensuality, and literal tiredness or exhaustion in their bodies. One woman remarked about an emotional and physical weight being “lifted” after attending the workshop. Another woman talked about a change of sensation within her skin, a new sense of sensuality. The ceremonial elements she experienced helped foster an intimate relationship within her. For this cha’alk, it was now more allowable to be herself. *Tired* and *exhausted* also came across as an experience among most participants and workshop facilitators. Participants remarked that they felt physically worn out or drained after their participation. Interestingly, often during and after some Native American ceremonies, a tiredness occurs that reflects the physical, emotional, and spiritual exertion given to the ceremony and community.

## Impacts on Inner Qualities

This study also focused on how, if at all, the reintroduction of ceremonial elements of the Ahtanook impacted participants' inner qualities, such as self-efficacy, the ability to believe in one's capacity, inner strength, integrity with oneself, empowerment, and self-confidence. Many participants shared about changes they experienced internally and inter-personally following the workshop, summarized below. For example, during the discussion about menstruation, there was an eruption of examples of women sharing their first-time experiences with it. Most of the participants had mother figures in their lives; even then, the majority shared experiences of having no one to teach them or share stories about menstruation.

Some also shared the horrible feelings they harbored about their cycles. One participant shared about her daughter's physical maturation at a young age, how she worried for her, and how she—as a mother—lacked cultural knowledge about the importance of menstruation in Kumeyaay tradition. Traditionally when a woman's blood makes its presence known, it is a time of storytelling and lessons about how women care for themselves. *Empowerment* was shown by two women who attended the workshop and later commented in interviews that they got their periods after the workshop and saw it in a different light. They now saw their *ah-whot* as a blessing and felt empowered by the power of their bodies. Another participant, who had a three-year-old niece, felt equipped to share teachings about the Ahtanook and the power of what ceremony can do for girls.

Native women, in particular, have a long history of distrust for federal agencies' programs and policies. It was once a U.S. government strategy to target large feasts and ceremonies, with girls' coming-of-age ceremonies being some of the largest across Native Nations; it was heavily targeted and dismantled. It has also only been forty years since the *Native*

*American Religious Freedom Act* was passed, allowing Native American people to practice their cultural rites in public. For one cha'alk, there was newfound confidence and optimism within her, and she was ready to participate in more rituals. Another spoke with freedom in her voice and realization of the true nature of the Ahtanook, and she was able to confidently ask for more to revitalize it and publicly ask for her ceremonies to return.

Participants expressed a desire to know or learn more about cultural practices and traditions in group and individual interviews. Examples of *inner strength* by asking for more were shown through one participant who shared her desire to know more about traditional foods and preparations. Another cha'alk excitedly shared how she knew that it was ok to ask for more and that it was possible now. This thought lingered within her throughout the day of the workshop, and this knowing fostered an inner change within her. *Self-empowerment* was shown when a participant shared that their attendance at the workshop impacted her interpersonal relationships, specifically with her daughter. Being able to share traditional knowledge with her child strengthened their bond. This was also true for another woman who had a daughter she could now share the teachings with.

One unexpected finding emerged through analysis and group and individual interviews concerning colorism and a sense of belonging. Colorism among Native Americans is a product of colonization and is expressed in various forms of emotional, psychological, and cultural domination (Brown, Branden & Hall, 2018). Many Indigenous women of light skin find extra hardship in their communities and often feel a sense of dissociation. Inner strength was shown through this particular woman, who shared her attendance at the workshop, eased her physical identity, and helped her to know she belonged within her community.



## **Impacts on Views of Self**

Finally, this study also aimed to more deeply understand how participating in the Mot-ya-yoom would—if at all—impact how Kumeyaay women perceive themselves. Perception of self was an important element of the study because colonization worked to dismantle Indigenous women’s self-concept of themselves. Through rewritten texts and ceremonial degradation, it shamed women into submission over time (Maracle, 2002). It may take years or generations for the Ahtanook to return. As such, understanding the impact of returning elements to cha’alk is profoundly vital to the empowerment of Kumeyaay women broadly and the future of this ceremony specifically.

Women once held the pedagogy of the young and had command of village life, especially when it came to the transmission of women’s knowledge. In the Kumeyaay community, there are few women who are willing to stand up and share cultural knowledge or assume the role of storytellers. After the workshop, one such woman shared her strong desire to share the story of Sinyahow and had a definite understanding of the change it would bring. She was willing to share it with anyone who would listen. Moreover, male domination persists within Native American communities, and patriarchal gender norms are heavily practiced within the Kumeyaay community. Some women find it hard to be themselves, and Native women still suffer from not feeling deserving of who they are (Maracle, 2002). When asked “what changed for her,” one such participant shared she could speak up and no longer be shy about what she had to say.

This research shows that education of the past and igniting the senses with ceremonial elements has awakened a fire within Kumeyaay women. Some participants talked about a misconception in the Native American community that women are often passive. One participant excitedly shared what she became aware of regarding Kumeyaay women’s value. She now saw

herself and other women as equals with the Kumeyaay men. This is due to learning the story of the first woman in the creation story and the relation they can now make to her.

Social cohesiveness is naturally fostered through ceremonial elements and components; it is gradual conditioning as women move through and participate in all parts. It is the result of colonization that worked to dismantle women's compassion towards one another that became disarrayed over time. A woman shared her thoughts tearfully in the group interview following the workshop about what might have been. There was minimal talk of clanship, but inherently she knew that if traditions had been kept, there would be other women to help her. This is the recognition of blood memory through the empowerment of knowing.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that a call to return empowered voices to Kumeyaay women is imminent. Another participant shared an awakened call to return to the feminine. He shared that he had become quieter to observe and was beginning to witness matriarchal roles resurging within his own family and around him. This is an ancestral connection through recognition of women's empowered voices. The call of the feminine, return to woman, and return to knowing has been said in various ways throughout this chapter. All of the participants, in their interviews, demanded that it happen.

### **Implications and Recommendations for the Future**

Educational research is highly applied, thus having the potential to impact people's lives. As such, I offer implications and recommendations for future research to extend and deepen our understanding of the introduction of this ceremony. I also provide recommendations or implications for the community, which I interpret as recommendations for practice. The findings of this research demonstrate vast implications for ceremonial revitalization among Kumeyaay women and the community, meaning I found deep implications for what the return of the

Ahtanook ceremony could mean for Kumeyaay women on a large societal scale to impact larger issues that plague Native American women and the communities they live in, such as domestic violence and low self-esteem. Drawn from the findings, specifically what was seen in the women after they went through the ceremony workshop, I speculate on what could result from the return of the ceremony. First, the inherent conditioning of the Ahtanook is to build a girl's strong cultural foundational belief system. Meaning, after participating in the ceremony girls are intended to come away with a strong knowing within herself. This inner knowing is talked about in many forms and written about through many timeless texts. Phrased differently, this inner knowing is the ability to trust oneself and understand where positive life choices can lead you. Second, I believe raising awareness within a woman can lead to a positive societal change for the Kumeyaay. By women having strong cultural foundational beliefs systems, their inner guidance will help them to choose better, positive choices to create their lives. This may include a woman deciding she no longer desires to stay in abusive relationships. Her positive thinking may also lead to optimism within her, knowing she now has choices that can lead her to getting a degree or choosing a high paying career. Moreover, an important implication of this work is the anti-colonial and decolonial praxis placed into motion in women's lives and impacting the way in which a woman sees herself. It knocks down the walls of heteronormativity as sacred gender roles are restored, and it decolonizes the mind which allows for the remembrance of sacred teachings to return to women.

### **Recommendations for Research**

To my knowledge, this is the first and only study conducted on the Ahtanook. While findings are significant, they have revealed other areas of exploration regarding research. For traditions to carry on for Native Nations, future research can serve a vital role in showing the

importance of revitalizing ceremonial elements and, eventually, the ceremony in the lives of individuals and the community.

Given the impact of the use of the songs in the workshop, it would be interesting to explore further the use and healing properties of women's traditional songs. Kumeyaay women have a vast array of songs within their culture. There are lullabies for children, puberty songs, gathering songs, and celestial expressions that call to the sun and moon, to name a few. Intertwined with the songs would also be the understanding of language. Each woman's song, no matter the ceremony or life aspect it is sung for, will have a lesson, direction for life, or story to share. Each song also has dormant cultural rites and more languages or dialects ready to be learned and spoken within Kumeyaay women's traditions. This would open the door to full autonomy for a Kumeyaay woman to gain and add further value to forming her foundational cultural knowledge.

Next would be to seek out other museums across the U.S. that house Kumeyaay women's puberty songs. Audio restoration of recorded songs is required since many have been recorded on wax cylinders from earlier times. This will require work as audio restoration is not a wide field of experts.

Future research is also needed to speak with other Native Nations who have continually practiced their women's coming-of-age ceremonies with those who have recently revitalized them. This includes looking more deeply into the gender norms of the nations who kept their puberty ceremonies alive during colonial invasion. More research can provide insights into current women's identities and roles in nations that have revitalized their ceremonies; more can be uncovered by looking at how this information will help others working to revive their women's rituals.

## **Recommendations for Community**

To build from this research and continue to foster self-efficacy and positive thinking trends that promote positive cultural foundational thinking within Kumeyaay women, I also discuss practical plans for future work needed within the community.

After the workshop, I became aware of what was being asked to be taught, not only by the participants but the energy of desire they all presented. I was able to see gaps within cultural education for Kumeyaay women and knew certain classes were being asked to be taught. To continue to foster the positive effects seen from the workshop, future work in this area would require a series of workshop sessions. I recommend a workshop series of six classes taught on the land for Kumeyaay women and girls. The Mot-ya-yoom taught only a snippet of multiple ceremonial elements. Thus, smaller focused or detailed classes on singular subjects would offer a better learning environment for Kumeyaay women. I envision that these six classes would be on, 1) Sinyahow, 2) history of Kumeyaay women, 3) flowers and Ahtanook songs, 4) plant gathering songs and gathering practices, 5) menstrual practices, and, finally, 6) traditional food making. Because these topics are being reawakened, and it has been many years since a woman has taught these subjects, groundwork is needed to determine the amount of time required to prepare, the costs, the size of land and space required, and how many women I can hold capacity for to teach per class.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown the power of what returning and practicing cultural elements with Indigenous women can do to their spiritual, emotional, and physical body. Through this research, I have found a Kumeyaay women's cultural foundational belief system is within her, and ceremony elements help ignite it and develop her understanding of her values. The effects of

colonization continue to dwindle as more Native Nations reclaim their cultural components and return to traditions. I hope that research continues to find more cultural elements that contribute to the women and men of the Kumeyaay Nation.

## APPENDIX A: AGENDA



### *Motayoom Cha'alk*

9:30 am to 10:00 am	Registration & Breakfast
10:00 am to 10:30 am	Welcome & Introduction
10:30 am to 11:15 am	Creation
11:15 am to 12:00 pm	History
12:00 pm to 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm to 2:30 pm	Ah-ta-nook
2:30 pm to 2:40 pm	Break
2:40 pm to 3:40 pm	Group Interview - Voluntary
3:40 pm	Goodbyes



## APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

### A. Part One

1. Do you know anything about the *Ahtanook*?
2. Do you know anything about Kumeyaay women's culture?
3. Do you know anything about Kumeyaay women's history?
4. Do you know how they tortured us?
5. What do you know about our culture?

### B. Part Two

1. On a scale of 1-10, how knowledgeable would you rate yourself?
2. Are you ok with talking about taboo subjects in Kumeyaay culture?
3. What are your thoughts on revitalizing and bringing back ceremony and other rituals?
4. How do you feel about coming to a workshop like this?
5. How has this affected your self-confidence?
6. What are your thoughts on attending a Kumeyaay women's workshop?

### C. Reminders for the Workshop

1. Listen to your body as we move throughout the day and feel.
2. Check-in with yourself.
3. Take notice of any feelings that came up for you during this session.
4. Scan your physical body, your emotions, your memories.



## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Cha'alk Maatayoom—Unstructured Interview Questions**

1. How do you feel?
2. What are your thoughts on the workshop?
3. Has there been anything that has changed for you?
4. Is there anything you would like to share about your experiences during or after the workshop?
5. What else would you like to know?

## APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY

**Ah-nuck:** necklaces; abalone, pine nuts, or other sacred materials

**Ah-wa:** lodge

**Ah-whot:** Blood, specifically women's menstruation

**Ahtanook:** Kumeyaay women's coming-of-age ceremony

**Cha'alk:** women

**Cha'alk Mot-ya-yoom:** women's gathering

**Cha'alk toe-mimp:** a lot of women

**Esh-punk:** whale

**Koo-see-eye:** medicine person

**Kwe'rhame:** two spirit people

**Kwellhup:** earthen dug pit

**Mot-how:** spirit

**Mot-ya-yoom:** gathering

**Myhashaan:** Creator sit with me; ceremony

**Nah-pool:** basket hats

**Oonyow:** way or road

**Sha-look:** lightning

**She-yoolth:** bark skirts made most commonly from the willow or oak tree

**Shla:** moon or meaning of the moon; a person of the moon

**Shla-newh:** moon sickness

**Sinyahow:** the first woman in the Kumeyaay creation story

**Two-Spirit:** an individual who carries both feminine and masculine energies

## REFERENCES

- Adams, D. W. (1995). *Education for extinction: American Indians and the boarding school experience, 1975-1928*. University Press of Kansas.
- Akee, R., Spilde PhD, K., & Taylor, J. B. (2014). Social and economic changes on American Indian reservations in California: An examination of twenty years of tribal government gaming. *UNLV Gaming Research & Review Journal*, 18(2), 3.
- Akins, D. B., & Bauer, W. J. (2021). *We are the land: A history of Native California*. University of California Press.
- Alberts, C. K. (2018). We are dancing for you: Native feminisms & the revitalization of women's coming-of-age ceremonies (Cutcha Risling Baldy). *Transmotion*, 4(2), 192-194.
- Baldy, C. R. (2018, August 2). The flower dancers: Reviving Hupa coming-of-age ceremonies. *North Coast Journal of Politics People and Art*.  
<https://www.northcoastjournal.com/humboldt/the-flower-dancers/Content?oid=1022932>
- Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 60(10), 854-857.  
<https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2004.028662>
- Black, M. E. (1984). Maidens and mothers: An analysis of Hopi corn metaphors. *Ethnology*, 23(4), 279-288.
- Brandt, L. M. (2014). *A ritual-based approach of examining the Native American female bildungsroman* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. California State University, Dominguez Hills.
- Brown, D., Branden, K., & Hall, R. E. (2018). Native American colorism: from historical manifestations to the current era. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(14), 2023-2036.
- Bubar, R., & Thurman, P. (2004). Violence against Native women. *Social Justice*, 31(4), 70-86.
- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of Indigenous education*. Kivaki Press.
- Castillo, E. D. (1991, July). *California Indian Women and the Missions of Alta California*. Paper presented at An International Symposium the Spanish Beginnings in California 1542-1822. Santa Barbara, CA.
- Castillo, E. D. (1994). Gender status decline, resistance, and accommodation among female neophytes in the missions of California: A San Gabriel case study. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 18(1), 67-93.

- Child, B. J. (1993). Homesickness, illness, and death: Native-American girls in government boarding schools. In B. Bair & S. E. Cayleff (Eds.), *Wings of gauze: Women of color and the experience of health and illness* (pp. 169-179). Wayne State University Press.
- Child, B. J. (2018). The boarding school as metaphor. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 57(1), 37-57.
- Ciani, K. E. (2007). A “growing evil” or “inventive genius”: Anglo perceptions of Indian life in San Diego, 1850 to 1900. *Southern California Quarterly*, 89(3), 249-284.
- DeJong, D. H. (1993). *Promises of the past: A history of Indian education in the United States*. North American Press.
- Delaney, C. H. (1995). Rites of passage in adolescence. *Adolescence*, 30(120), 891-898.
- Densmore, F. (1932). *Yuman and Yaqui music*. Smithsonian Institute. Bureau of American Ethnology; United States Government Printing Office.
- Devens, C. (1992). “If we get the girls, we get the race”: Missionary education of Native American girls. *Journal of World History*, 3(2), 219-237.
- Du Bois, C. G. (1908). Ceremonies and traditions of the Diegueno Indians. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 21(81), 228-236.
- Dumas, J. (2005, Spring). *Jane Thing-Dumas teachings 2005-2007 – part one* [tape recording]. Barona Museum Archives.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.
- Evans, N. E. C. (2021, July 11). A federal probe into Indian boarding school gravesites seeks to bring healing. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/11/1013772743/indian-boarding-school-gravesites-federal-investigation>
- Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(3), 316-338.
- Fals-Borda, O., & Rahman, M.A. (1991). *Action and knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action research*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Fischer, S., & Stoddard, C. (2013). The academic achievement of American Indians. *Economics of Education Review*, 36(2013), 135-152.
- Forde, C. D. (1931). Hopi agriculture and land ownership. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 61, 357-405.

- Grayshield, L., Rutherford, J. J., Salazar, S. B., Mihecoby, A. L., & Luna, L. L. (2015). Understanding and healing historical trauma: The perspectives of Native American elders. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 37(4), 295–307.
- Heart, B., & DeBruyn, L. M. (1998). The American Indian holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 8(2), 56-78.
- Heilbron, C. L., & Guttman, J. (2007). Traditional Healing Methods with First Nations Women in Group Counseling. *Canadian Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 34(1). Retrieved from <https://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/article/view/58633>
- Herringer, C. E. (2013). *Victorians and the Virgin Mary: Religion and gender in England, 1830-85*. Manchester University Press.
- Holmes, L. (2000). Heart knowledge, blood memory, and the voice of the land: Implications of research among Hawaiian elders. In G. J. Sefa Dei, B. L. Hall, & D. G. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world* (pp. 37-51). University of Toronto Press.
- Horse, P. G. (2005). Native American identity. *New directions for student services*, 2005(109), 61-68.
- Hurtado, A. L. (1999). *Intimate frontiers: Sex, gender, and culture in old California*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Irwin, L. (1997). Freedom, law, and prophecy: A brief history of Native American religious resistance. *American Indian Quarterly*, 21(1), 35-55.
- Kicking Woman, D. K. (2013). *Blackfoot ceremony through the power of song* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Montana.
- Kovach, M. (2010). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Kroeber, A. L. (1925). *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Vol. 78). Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology. U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Linklater, R. (2014). *Decolonizing trauma work: Indigenous stories and strategies*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Lomawaima, K. T. (1993). Domesticity in federal Indian schools: The power of authority over mind and body. *American Ethnologist*, 20(2), 227-240.

- Lomawaima, K. T. (1994). *They called it prairie light: The story of Chilocco Indian school*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Lomawaima, K. T. (1999). The unnatural history of American Indian education. In K. G. Swisher & J. W. Tippeconnic III (Eds.) *Next steps: Research and practice to advance American Indian education* (pp. 1-32). Education Resources Information Center/Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Lomawaima, K. T., & McCarty, T. L. (2006). *To remain Indian: Lessons in democracy from a century of Native American education*. Teachers College Press.
- Lumsden, S. (2016). Reproductive justice, sovereignty, and incarceration: Prison abolition politics and California Indians. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 40(1), 33-46.
- Luomala Katharine, L. (1978). Tipai-Ipai. In W. C. Sturtevant (Ed.) *Handbook of north American Indians: California* (Vol. 8, pp. 92-609. Smithsonian Institution.92-609.
- Mahdi, L. C., Foster, S., & Little, M. (Eds.). (1987). *Betwixt & between: Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation*. Open Court Publishing.
- Maracle, L. (2002). *I Am Woman*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers.
- Maracle, L. (2006). Decolonizing Native women. In B. A. Mann (Ed.), *Daughters of Mother Earth: The wisdom of Native American women* (pp. 29-51). Praeger Publishers.
- Markstrom, C. A. (2008). *Empowerment of North American Indian girls: Ritual expressions at puberty*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Markstrom, C. A., & Iborra, A. (2003). Adolescent identity formation and rites of passage: The Navajo Kinaalda ceremony for girls. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 13(4), 399-425.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Miranda, D. A. (2012). *Bad Indians: A tribal memoir*. Heyday.
- Miskwish, M.C. (2006). *Sycuan, our people, our culture, our history*. Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation.
- Miskwish, M. C. (2007). *Kumeyaay a history textbook, Volume I precontact to 1893*. Sycuan Press.
- Miskwish, M. C. (2016). *Maay Uuyow Kumeyaay Cosmology*. Shuluk.

- Mithlo, N. M. (2011). Blood memory and the arts: Indigenous genealogies and imagined truths. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35(4), 103-118.
- Mussell, W. J. (2005). *Warrior-caregivers: Understanding the Challenges and the Healing of First Nation Men: A Resource Guide*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- National Congress of American Indians. (2020). *Tribal Nations and the United States an Introduction*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncai.org/about-tribes>
- Ojumu, B. (2016, October 10). *Civic education – Self-reliance*. Passnownow.com Technology Transforming Education. Retrieved July 29, 2021, from <https://passnownow.com/civic-education-self-reliance/>
- Palacios, J. F., & Portillo, C. J. (2009). Understanding Native women's health: Historical legacies. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 20(1), 15-27.
- Potter, T. (2006). Reciprocal regulation: Trans-Atlantic implications of colonial accounts of north American Indian women and menstruation. *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 29(1), 97-113.
- Ralstin-Lewis, D. M. (2005). The continuing struggle against genocide: Indigenous women's reproductive rights. *Wicazo Sa Review*, 20(1), 71-95.
- Ramirez, R. (2007). Race, tribal nation, and gender: A Native feminist approach to belonging. *Meridians*, 7(2), 22-40.
- Reyhner, J., & Eder, J. (2004). *American Indian education: A history*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Rojas, M. V. (2003). She bathes in a sacred place: Rites of reciprocity, power, and prestige in Alta California. *Wicazo Sa Review*, 18(1), 129-156.
- Rosay, A. B. (2016). Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women and men: 2010 findings from the national intimate partner and sexual violence survey. National Institute of Justice Research Report. NCJ249736. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.
- Rust, H. N. (1906). A puberty ceremony of the Mission Indians. New Era Print Company.
- Sewell, E. M. (1983). American Indian religious freedom act. *The Arizona Law Review*, 25(2), 425-472.
- Shipek, F. C. (1982). Kumeyaay socio-political structure. *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology*, 4(2), 296-303.

- Shipek, F. C. (1985). California Indian reactions to the Franciscans. *The Americas*, 41(4), 480-492.
- Smith, A. (2015). *Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian genocide*. Duke University Press.
- Smith, J. (1991). Transpersonal selfhood: The boundaries of identity in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 3(4), 13-26.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20736559>
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books Ltd.
- Spier, L. (1923). *Southern Diegueño customs*. University of California Press.
- Takahashi, M. L. (1998). *Adolescence and identity transformation: A cross-cultural analysis of puberty initiations* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Carleton University.
- Tsey, K., Patterson, D., Whiteside, M., Baird, L., & Baird, B. (2002). Indigenous men taking their rightful place in society? A preliminary analysis of a participatory action research process with Yarrabah men's health group. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 10(6), 278-284.
- Wabie, J. L. (2019). *Rites of passage for Algonquin & Ojibwe female adolescents: The Berry Fast experience* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Laurentian University of Sudbury.
- Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, M. (Eds.). (2012). *For Indigenous minds only: A decolonization Handbook*. School for Advanced Research Press.
- Weaver, H. N. (2009). The colonial context of violence: Reflections on violence in the lives of Native American women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24(9), 1552-1563.
- Weisberger, M. (2021, July 13). Remains of more than 1,000 Indigenous children found at former residential schools in Canada. *Live Science*.  
<https://www.livescience.com/childrens-graves-residential-schools-canada.html>
- Wilken-Robertson, M. (2018). *Kumeyaay ethnobotany shared heritage of the Californias*. Sunbelt Publications Incorporated.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Wright, M. C. (2003). The woman's lodge: Constructing gender on the nineteenth-century Pacific Northwest Plateau. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 24(1), 1-18.
- Younging, G., Dewar, J., & DeGagné, M. (2009). *Response, responsibility, and renewal*. Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Ottawa.