FROM ROOTS TO RECREATION: UNVEILING SAKAU PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Sakau en Pohnpei or *sakau*, the name for kava in Pohnpei and other parts of Micronesia, is an integral and a ubiquitous part of Pohnpeian culture or *tiahk en Pohnpei*. This ethnographic study considered the ways that modern influences, especially the marketing of the *sakau* plant, have affected the Pohnpeian identity. Despite the ongoing effects of modernity and marketing, the traditional preparation and consumption of *sakau* is still a communal activity, with people coming together to share the drink and socialize. The primary objective of this ethnographic study is to assess how *sakau en Pohnpei* is an important part of Pohnpeians' cultural identity and why it survived generations of colonial rule. To validate this perception, 31 individuals were interviewed. Eleven recorded interviews with male participants were transcribed and coded for themes. The analysis was guided by both the Cultural Resilience Theory and Greenfield's Social Theory of Change and Human Development. With these lenses, the researcher analyzed each transcript and field notes to determine the resilience of cultural practices of *sakau* to help maintain the Pohnpeian identity. Notes from 11 interviews with women (not recorded) were analyzed as a comparison on the themes. Although existing literature suggests that traditional practices and customs related to *sakau* have significantly shaped Pohnpeian cultural identity, the results from local interviews painted a more complex picture. The interviews included in this study revealed a diverse range of perceptions regarding *sakau* traditions and rituals among Pohnpeians. As a result, these shifts in *sakau* traditions and rituals have contributed to a transformation in Pohnpeian identity itself, highlighting the dynamic nature of culture and the influence of contemporary factors on traditional practices.

Keywords: Sakau, Pohnpei, culture, identity, Cultural Resilience Theory, Greenfield's Theory of Social Change and Human Development, cultural perceptions

Dedication

To my beloved Nohno Elnora,

Pahpa Randy, Pahpa Mainer, and Nohno Agnes

whose love, wisdom, and guidance have shaped me in ways words can scarcely express.

To my cherished siblings:

Kai, Rochelle,

Michelle, Chester,

and Elijah,

for your unwavering support, laughter, and love—

you are my constant source of strength.

And to our precious Deigha,

may all your dreams come true,

and may you always walk in light and love.

And to Pohnpei Sarawi,

for the beauty and strength of our roots,

and for the rich legacy that continues to inspire us all.

Ahi pwukoah ahi peneinei, oh ahi pai atail pai.

This journey is for you all.

From Roots to Recreation: Unveiling Sakau Perceptions

In present-day Pohnpei, the marketing of *sakau en Pohnpei,* a local beverage made from the *sakau* plant, is rapidly increasing, contributing to cultural shifts. Other than the harmful environmental effects of *sakau* cultivation on the *nansapw* (cultivated areas) and *nanwel* (upland forest), traditional practices are also being reshaped by the influences of capitalism and modernization. For example, cash is increasingly replacing *sakau* and other valuable crops in the traditional feasts such as *kamadipw en wahu* (Anson & Raynor, 1993). Historically, *tiahk en wahu,* the Pohnpeian culture of respect (for high chiefs), which emphasizes chiefly generosity of land lending, required tribute offerings of agricultural products, such as pigs, *kehp* (yams), and the *sakau* plant to the *Nahnmwarki* or highest chief of the village. In return, the *Nahnmwarki* redistributed these offerings, fostering a cycle of mutual exchange, or reciprocity (Merlin et al., 1992). Usually, individuals who accumulated and increased their tributes were rewarded with higher titles, ensuring continued participation in the *tiahk en wahu* system. This reciprocal exchange continues to bind Pohnpei's agroforestry practices to its traditional cultural system, even as modern influences introduce new dynamics (Merlin et al., 1992).

Pohnpeian culture and beliefs have always influenced the relationship that Pohnpeians have with nature (Anson & Raynor, 1993). Since childhood, the researcher's maternal grandfather, a lifelong resident of Pohnpei, would often share the proverb, *"Meh men me nan kikin peh samin, e pan med,"* which means *"Someone who has dirt under their fingernails will be full."* This saying was his way of teaching his grandchildren the value of hard work in agriculture. He encouraged them to cultivate essential food crops like bananas, yam, and taro, and to raise pigs, emphasizing that these practices are crucial for their sustenance (cf. Falgout, 1984).

In Pohnpeian culture, nature serves not only as a source of food but also supports plants like *sakau*, which are integral to traditional agricultural practices (Merlin et al., 1992). The proverb illustrates that dedication to farming can sustain a community, even when facing challenges. Similarly, Cultural Resilience Theory posits that cultural practices, such as *sakau* cultivation, can adapt to modern influences while retaining their core importance (Smyntyna, 2016).

The belief that Pohnpeians should continue cultivating their land serves as a safeguard against global uncertainties and aligns with the theory's focus on cultural resilience amid globalization and modernization. This anecdote underscores how traditional knowledge and values can be preserved and applied in contemporary life, ensuring that the cultural identity associated with *sakau* remains vibrant and relevant despite external pressures.

Although literature reviews reveal that cultivating *sakau* holds the promise of abundance for individuals and communities in Pohnpei, hence, the reason for planting and nurturing more *sakau*, there are still foreseen and unforeseen effects on the Pohnpeian cultural practices. Throughout this paper, the researcher aims to apply the wisdom of the proverb to the reasons that Pohnpeians cultivate the plant today. Two theoretical approaches are useful in interpreting the data: Cultural Resilience Theory and Greenfield's (2009) Theory of Social Change and Human Development. This exploratory study investigated Pohnpeians' perceptions on *sakau en Pohnpei* and the plant's effect on the current Pohnpeian cultural identity. It investigated whether contemporary influences, such as marketing, have shifted traditional customs or whether marketing has bolstered its cultural significance. The central hypothesis was that significant alterations in *sakau* practices have occurred, driven by modern influences, and evolving social norms, which in turn, have shifted the Pohnpeian identity. Findings will contribute to

understanding how traditional practices adapt in a modern context and how they continue to shape cultural identity in Pohnpei.

Research Questions

The main research question of the study was, "*How does sakau or sakau en Pohnpei influence one's cultural identity as a Pohnpeian?"* This main question was further broken down into several smaller questions to guide the research process as follows:

- How have the traditional practices and rituals surrounding *sakau* consumption in Pohnpei changed across generations?
- What impact have globalization and Western cultural influence had on the traditional uses and cultural significance of *sakau* in Pohnpei?
- In what ways have economic factors, such as the commercialization of *sakau*, influenced its cultural and social significance in Pohnpei?

Research Objectives

The objectives for this study were:

- To investigate whether traditional customs and applications of *sakau* have changed over time in Pohnpei, particularly in response to modern influences.
- To assess the impact of globalization and Western cultural influences on the traditional role of *sakau* within Pohnpeian society.
- To investigate whether *sakau* continues to be a vital component of Pohnpeian cultural identity.

Significance of Study

This study of *sakau en Pohnpei* is significant for several reasons, particularly in terms of cultural preservation and social cohesion. *Sakau en Pohnpei* is more than just a beverage; it is a

cultural symbol that plays a vital role in the social and spiritual life of Pohnpei. By thoroughly examining *sakau's* use and significance, this research may help to elucidate a powerful plant that is integral to Pohnpeians. Additionally, *sakau* ceremonies contribute to community bonding and conflict resolution, making them crucial for maintaining social harmony. Understanding these practices provides insights into how traditional methods can continue to support the well-being and cohesion of the community in a rapidly changing world.

This study holds broader implications beyond cultural psychological interpretation. The economic impact of *sakau* production and its role in the local economy are areas that require careful consideration to balance cultural heritage with economic development. The research also has educational value, offering material that can be used to teach younger generations about their heritage, thereby strengthening cultural identity. Furthermore, by contributing to global knowledge about indigenous practices, the study fosters greater respect and a general understanding of the Pohnpeian culture or *tiahk en Pohnpei* on an international level. In addition, the findings of this research may guide policymakers in unpacking culturally sensitive decisions that continue to protect and promote the community's heritage and social fabric.

Sakau's History and Importance in Pohnpei Culture

Native to the Pacific Islands, such as Pohnpei, Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, and Samoa, *sakau,* or kava, is a plant in which the roots (or sometimes, stems) are used to make a narcotic drink also called *sakau en Pohnpei* or *sakau* (Mathews & Riley, 1988). Traditionally, Pacific islanders consume these psychoactive chemicals by drinking cold-water infusions made from *sakau* stumps and roots which are typically chewed, grounded, pounded, or otherwise macerated (Merlin & Raynor, 2005). Like other uses of *sakau* across many Pacific Island cultures, the

sakau plant is an important part of *tiahk en Pohnpei and* is also used for social and medicinal purposes.

Oral History

There are various legendary accounts regarding the origin of *sakau*. One legend attributes the discovery of *sakau* to *Uitenegar*, a native of Uh in Pohnpei. In this story, *Uitenegar*, when he was an elderly man, was taken by the god *Luhk* to the mythical land of *Air* in the south (Riesenberg, 1968). There, he regained his youth, and a peculiar transformation occurred: the skin from the sole of his foot turned into a *sakau* plant. A small piece of its root, after being pounded in heaven, fell to earth, and took root, eventually growing into the *sakau* plant as known today (Riesenberg, 1968). From the skin grew a plant that all Micronesians know as *sakau* (Merlin & Reynor, 2005). Another legend gives credit for the discovery of the effects of *sakau* to a rat. In accordance with this narrative, a rat gnawed on the *sakau* root, and while experiencing the effects of the plant, its actions were observed. This eventually resulted in an understanding of the plant's properties when ingested. Following the rat's experiment, members of the community decided to explore *sakau* themselves (Riesenberg, 1968). They were drawn to the plant's soothing effects, which prompted them to begin consuming *sakau*. This narrative is not only unique to Pohnpei but is also found in Western Polynesia, Fiji, and Vanuatu (Riesenberg, 1968).

The Local Beverage of the Pacific

Sakau's origin has been a matter of prolonged scholarly debate, with two main areas in Melanesia as proposed by scholars: Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu. During the German colonial era in Pohnpei, missionaries expressed disapproval of the customary preparation, which involved chewing the plant's root and expelling the contents into a receptacle—a practice referred to as premastication (Churchill, nd). Over time, the preparation process transitioned

from premastication to grinding the root, followed by mixing it with water to create a thick, bitter brew.

In other Pacific islands, such as PNG and the Solomon Islands in the Melanesian region, the use of kava diminished due to the introduction of Christianity by European settlers, but they substituted the cultural drink with chewing betelnut (Lynch, 2002). Importantly, across many Pacific Island cultures, the act of sharing *sakau* with guests signifies notions of hospitality and camaraderie (Sakai & Nakazawa, 2022).

Traditional Uses of Sakau

Despite ongoing debates about *sakau's* origin, the distinctive way of Pohnpeians preparing *sakau en Pohnpei* challenges traditional practices observed in other Pacific islands like Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu, marking Pohnpeians' use of *sakau* as unique within the broader Pacific islands' context.

Sakau was employed in dispute resolutions as well as various other social occasions such as weddings, funerals, and other 'traditional' occasions when a local needed to meet with the *Nahnmwarki* or a paramount chief (Merlin, 1992). The term 'traditional' is employed to characterize the fundamental aspects of *sakau en Pohnpei's* preparation and its usage as a beverage (Baker, 2012). *Sakau* plays a pivotal role in resolving minor to significant matters, particularly disputes involving a *Nahnmwarki*. A *Nahnmwarki*, serving as the executive and judicial leader in one small village or municipality out of Pohnpei's five municipalities, holds authority over community projects and the maintenance of peace and fairness (Riesenberg, 1968). In instances where a community member deviated from societal expectations, punishment ensued unless they sought absolution. For example, seeking forgiveness for offenses against a *Nahnmwarki* required presenting *sakau*, pounding it, and offering it to the paramount chief to

drink. If the *sakau* is consumed by the paramount chief, the action signifies the acceptance of the apology (McGrath, 1973). *Sakau* gatherings, which the majority of adult Pohnpeians now attend daily, and which are the primary arenas for public discussions, are always charged with *wahu,* (respect), another quality essential to Pohnpeian social life (Petersen, 1993). *Sakau* surpasses all other crops in its *wahu* value, making it the central element in almost all traditional activities (Anson & Raynor, 1993; Merlin, 1992).

Spiritual Value of Sakau

In 1865, the missionary Sturges wrote that *sakau* was Pohnpeians' sole means of communication with their spirits, akin to the Christian cross, believed to have fallen from heaven and essential for obtaining divine attention (Riesenberg, 1968). In spiritual contexts, *sakau* serves as a crucial medium for communication with spirits (Baker, 2012). *Sakau* is integral to various rituals, including ceremonies for attaining higher titles and prestige competitions. It plays a significant role in seeking forgiveness during the feast of propitiation, historically reserved for high-ranking individuals. The public could partake by presenting fruits to high chiefs, while women of elevated status were permitted to consume it (Balick & Lee, 2002). In times of discord, individuals might relinquish titles or opt for self-exile. However, many disputes found resolution through the formal feast of propitiation, where the potency of *sakau* is believed to facilitate reconciliation, making it a potent stabilizing force within the culture (Ward, 2005). The multifaceted roles of *sakau* underscore its central place in shaping social dynamics and spiritual practices.

Medicinal Value

Beyond its social and spiritual significance, *sakau* possesses several medicinal properties. It has been employed to address various ailments, including anxiety, insomnia, and pain (Pluskal

et al., 2018). Notably, *sakau* is renowned for its anxiolytic effect, which aids in combating General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) (Bian et al., 2020). Studies have suggested potential anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties associated with *sakau*, and it is also used as a traditional medicine for ailments such as headaches, colds, and other minor illnesses (Soares et al., 2022).

Theoretical Background for This Study

Two theories guided the development of this study: Cultural resilience theory (CRT) and Greenfield's (2009) theory of social change and human development (GTSC).

Cultural Resilience Theory (CRT) and Sakau Practices

One distinctive aspect of *sakau en Pohnpei* that many local Pohnpeians take pride in is the traditional preparation of the beverage. The process requires *kanengamah* or "an abstract quality and a manner of behaving fundamental to social life," which is another virtue that Pohnpeians highly regard (Petersen, 1993). Even after the influence of three colonial periods on Pohnpei, *sakau* practices have continued to persevere.

Despite many colonizers' attempts to eradicate *sakau en Pohnpei* and its cultural practices, the *sakau* plant still thrives today. This reflects the core principles of Cultural Resilience Theory (CRT), emphasizing the enduring connection between the Pohnpeian identity and the land, particularly through the cultivation of *sakau*. The Pohnpeian proverb, "*Meh men me nan kikin peh samin, e pan med*," underscores the belief that diligent effort in tending the land ensures sustenance and survival. This perception, passed down from generation to generation, resonates with a central concept of the CRT—the ability of a culture to adapt to external influences while maintaining its essential values and practices (Smyntyna, 2016). CRT provides a useful framework for examining the cultural shifts in *sakau* practices in Pohnpei. CRT is used to explore how the Pohnpeian culture, while dynamic, has an inherent ability to absorb external

influences like globalization, individualism, and modernity, all while striving to maintain traditional *sakau* practices (Falgout, 1984).

Greenfield's Theory of Social Change and Modernization

As Pohnpei's economy has modernized, *sakau's* role has evolved from a purely ceremonial drink to a commercialized product available in bars, reflecting the shift from a subsistence to a cash-based economy. This transformation aligns with Greenfield's idea that socioeconomic changes drive cultural shifts (2009). Patricia Greenfield's theory of social change also provides a nuanced lens for understanding how traditional practices evolve through economic and technological transformations. Her conceptual framework of Gemeinschaft (community-oriented) and Gesellschaft (society-oriented) environments offers critical insights into how cultural practices like sakau preparation and consumption adapt across different social contexts. However, *sakau's* persistent importance in traditional contexts, such as funeral feasts, demonstrates that change is not a simple linear progression from old to new. Instead, Pohnpeian society is crafting a unique blend of traditional and modern elements.

The changing use of *sakau* mirrors broader societal shifts, including alterations in gender roles and social mobility pathways. Yet its enduring cultural significance, even as it adapts to new economic realities, showcases the resilience and flexibility of Pohnpeian culture or *tiahk en Pohnpei*. While not directly related to *sakau*, Hezel stated that "Although society is organized into matrilineages, children inherit land from their fathers, and married couples typically reside on the husband's family estate" (2001, p.8). This hybrid system of matrilineal organization and patrilineal inheritance indicates a complex adaptation to evolving family structures, influencing the use, and sharing of *sakau* within families. This process not only reshapes the cultural practice itself but also fundamentally alters how cultural knowledge is transmitted between generations.

Children become both observers and active participants in this cultural adaptation, their experiences reflecting the dynamic interplay between traditional values and modern economic realities. This nuanced evolution of *sakau's* role exemplifies how societies can modernize while still maintaining connections to their cultural heritage, creating a distinctive hybrid culture that balances tradition and modernity.

Method

Positionality

As a Pohnpeian male researcher, I approach this project from an insider perspective. Being a member of the Pohnpeian community allows me to draw on a shared cultural understanding, which facilitates rapport-building and respect for local protocols and practices. This insider position has afforded me a level of trust from participants, allowing for more open and authentic conversations. However, it is also important to acknowledge that my position as a male researcher may have influenced the types of participants willing to engage with the study. For example, gender dynamics in Pohnpeian society may have led to underrepresentation of women or individuals from certain age groups, as cultural norms may affect their willingness to participate in interviews or share their experiences with *sakau* uses both in the traditional and contemporary settings. Additionally, my own familiarity with the subject matter could have shaped the way I interpreted and interacted with the data. These factors should be kept in mind when considering the limitations of the findings, particularly in terms of generalizability and external validity.

Research Design

This study employs an exploratory-ethnographic approach to investigate the cultural significance and evolving practices of *sakau* use in Pohnpei. This design was chosen to capture the rich, contextual data necessary to understand the lived experiences of Pohnpeians in relation to *sakau*, while also allowing for the exploration of emerging themes and patterns. The

investigation aims to shed light on the evolution of these practices over time and the impact on the Pohnpeian cultural identity.

Field Site

This research was conducted in Pohnpei, one of the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Pohnpei, an island located in the western Pacific Ocean, is the second largest and populous island in the FSM (Falgout, 1984). It is known for its lush rainforests, mountainous terrain, and rich cultural heritage, including the cultivation and use of *sakau*, a plant that holds significant social, cultural, and economic value in Pohnpeian society.

The island of Pohnpei is divided into five municipalities: Sokehs, Kitti, Nett, Uh, and Madolenihmw (sometimes six, including Kolonia the main town on island). A well-developed road network connects all municipalities, with most inter-municipal travel possible within 20 to 30 minutes by car. This connectivity may facilitate the spread of both traditional and modern influences on *sakau* practices. Refer to Figure 1 for a map of Pohnpei.

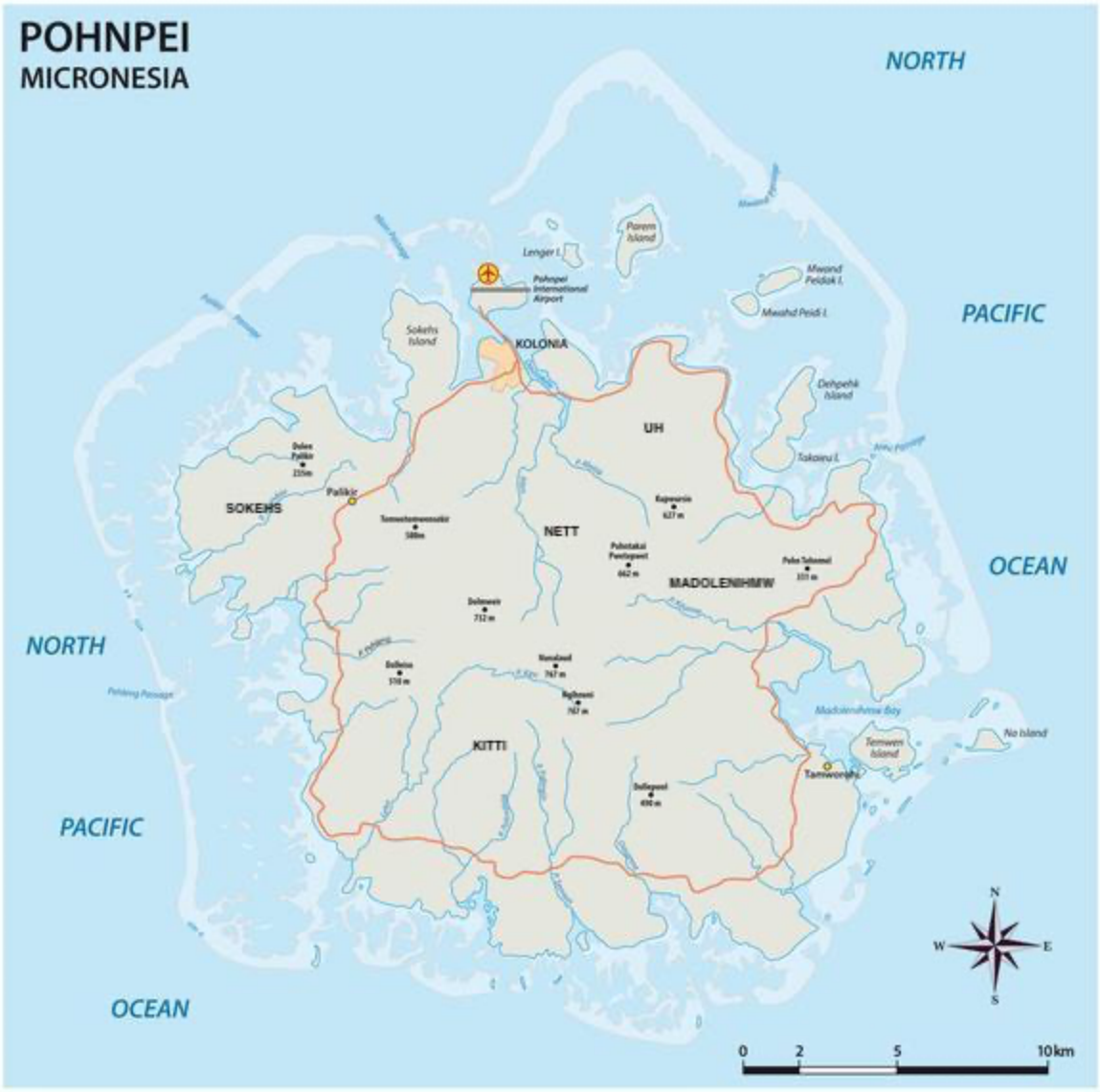

Figure 1: Vector road map of the main Micronesian island of Pohnpei

These municipalities vary significantly in their ranging from rural and agricultural to semi-urban and urban areas:

Kitti: Southern, largest area, predominantly rural with traditional agriculture

Madolenihmw: Eastern/Southeastern, rural with extensive agriculture and historical sites

Uh: Eastern, smallest, preserves traditional customs

Nett: Central, includes urban and rural areas, houses government offices

Sokehs: Northwestern, mix of rural and semi-urban areas

Kolonia: Main urban center, most westernized

Participants

The study sample comprises approximately 31 participants, consisting of 20 males and 11 females aged between 18 and 80 years. Table 1 lists the participants' pseudonym, age, gender, and where they are from. Eleven of the men consented to have their interviews recorded. The remaining participants did not consent to audio recording. However, notes were taken during all interviews and are being stored securely. Most participants were *sakau* users from five different municipalities/villages in Pohnpei. The sample was a convenience sample, focusing on individuals of Pohnpeian origin or citizenship, or those who had resided in Pohnpei for an extended period. Both male and female participants were intentionally included to enhance the study's generalizability.

Participant	Age	Gender	Municipality
1. Souwel	45	M	Kitti
2. Luhk	40	M	Sokehs
3. Persuhs	80	M	Sokehs
4. Sihp	52	M	Sokehs
5. Kiroun	52	M	Uh
6. Iahkop	62	M	Madolenihmw
7. Welson	69	M	Kitti
8. Lihna	67	F	Madolenihmw
9. Makari	46	M	Madolenihmw
10. Sohn	68	M	Kitti

11. Lohtik	48	M	Nett
12. Darrel	65	M	Kitti
13. Paul	60	M	Kitti
14. Meilyn	55	F	Nett
15. Kaselinda	31	F	Nett
16. Carlos	23	M	Kitti
17. Sinter	69	M	Nett
18. Edward	41	M	Nett
19. Soumaka	59	M	Kitti
20. Mark	32	M	Madolenihmw
21. Lorna	45	F	Nett
22. Saum	22	M	Sokehs
23. Deina	18	F	Sokehs
24. Merlynn	20	F	Sokehs
25. Lorna	36	F	Uh
26. Jack	39	M	Sokehs
27. Cindy	60	F	Nett
28. Cathy	42	F	Sokehs
29. Merlihse	39	F	Uh
30. Deffeny	24	F	Nett
31. Cliff	25	M	Sokehs

Table 1: Participants' age, gender, and municipality.

Sources of Data

Information for this study was gathered using multiple methods to triangulate data: interviews, observations, and field notes. Interviews included two types of questions: open-ended

and closed-ended. The same interview questions were used for all respondents, with both English and Pohnpeian versions available and, the version preferred by each interviewee was utilized. Both language versions of the interviews are included in the appendices. In addition, observations and field notes allowed the researcher to capture contextual information, non-verbal cues, and real-time practices related to *sakau* that might not be fully captured through interviews alone.

Procedures

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Institutional Review Board (IRB #2023-00398). Participant recruitment involved making appointments in person, though some interviews were conducted as walk-ins to accommodate participants' schedules. Interviews were conducted between July and August 2023 in locations preferred by the participants, ensuring privacy and security. Before each interview, the researcher explained the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' rights, often in the local language, or Pohnpeian.

To protect participants' privacy, all names used throughout this paper are pseudonyms. The researcher implemented proper data management protocols, with all interview notes and audio recordings being kept securely for safekeeping. As compensation for their time and contribution to the study, each participant received a $10 cash gift voucher. This systematic approach was designed to ensure ethical conduct, participant comfort, data integrity, and confidentiality throughout the research process, while allowing for flexibility in data collection and creating a comfortable environment for open discussion.

Analysis

The research design employed a blend of deductive and inductive reasoning. Initially, deductive reasoning guided the process, starting with broad generalizations about *sakau* use and working toward specific conclusions. Data analysis then followed an iterative, inductive cycle. This process began with the transcription of the recorded interviews, followed by a detailed reading and examination of each transcript. Emergent themes were identified both within individual cases and across multiple cases, leading to the development of a comprehensive codebook. The codebook encompassed superordinate and subordinate themes, reflecting two key theoretical frameworks:

1. Cultural Resilience Theory (CRT): This is represented by superordinate themes such as Cultural Identity Reinforcement, Health-Culture Balance, and Environmental & Social Sustainability. These themes explore how traditional *sakau* practices persist and adapt in the face of modernization, reinforcing cultural identity.

2. Greenfield's Theory of Social Change (GTSC): This is reflected in superordinate themes like Traditional-Modern Tension and Economic-Cultural Nexus. These themes examine how societal shifts, such as urbanization and economic changes, influence human development and cultural practices related to *sakau*.

Each subordinate theme in the codebook was clearly defined and illustrated with quotations preserved in the native Pohnpeian language, demonstrating their connection to the superordinate themes. Figure 2 shows a snapshot of the codebook, highlighting the overarching themes.

Data Analysis: Observations, Interviews, and Municipal Insights

This research on *sakau* practices in Pohnpei incorporates a comprehensive analysis of data collected through observations, interviews, and a table summarizing key demographic and

contextual information about the 31 participants. Observations were conducted during *sakau* preparation, serving, and consumption in both traditional and contemporary settings, allowing for the documentation of rituals, social interactions, and gender roles associated with *sakau*. Observational data was recorded immediately after each community gathering and formal ceremonies were witnessed.

In addition to observational data, the analysis included insights derived from a table of participant data (see Table 1), focusing particularly on the municipality column. This column revealed patterns related to regional variations in *sakau* practices and perceptions. For example, participants from urban municipalities like Nett and Kolonia (Gesellschaft) demonstrated a stronger inclination toward recreational and social uses of *sakau*, while those from rural areas like Kitti and Madolenihmw (Gemeinschaft) emphasized its ceremonial and traditional significance. However, this does not mean that rural areas do not also use *sakau* recreationally; rather, these patterns highlight differing emphases based on geographic location, providing valuable context for understanding the diverse roles *sakau* plays in Pohnpeian society.

Interview data, including responses from women participants, was also thematically coded to explore their perspectives on *sakau* practices, particularly in relation to changing gender roles and cultural significance. The themes identified in the interviews were cross-referenced with both the observational data and the demographic patterns from the table. This integrated approach revealed, for instance, that women from Gemeinschaft or rural municipalities often described *sakau* preparation as a community obligation tied to cultural continuity, whereas Gesellschaft or urban women viewed it as an emerging space for social inclusion and individual expression.

By triangulating these diverse data sources—observations, interviews, and demographic patterns—this study provides a nuanced analysis of *sakau* practices across different municipalities in Pohnpei, highlighting both regional and gendered dynamics in its contemporary use.

Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**	**Definitions**	**Quotations from transcripts**
Traditional-Modern Tension	Traditional use	Instances where sakau is used in traditional ceremonies such as marriage proposals or forgiveness rituals	“Kaping karesepe, ipwidi, eh kapwopwoud, songen mehkot me. Ah ih tuhkoahu me…eri Sohpeidi pwehki… Pil ma ahmw nohno pahpa nsensuwed, ah ke sakau ei ira, mwo ihme koatore nsensuwed o” Translation: "For example, on birthdays, during weddings, sakau is used. And it is the tree…. And because *Sohpeidi*... When our parents are sad, and when sakau is there, it makes them happy"
	Paramount Chief and Pohnpeian Identity	How sakau connects with the role of the paramount chief and its significance in shaping Pohnpeian identity	“Because in the nahs, the sakau can only go to *Nahnmwarki, Nahnken, Soumas en kousapw, peliendahl, nahnalek,* the few high titles. They get the sakau brought up to them on the high platforms at the front. But for nobody else does the sakau go to”
	Generational Changes and External Influences	Discussion of how the use of sakau has shifted over time due to globalization or external pressures	“Kahn kilang nan tiahk en Pohnpei, me mie nah mwohni, samwadalahr” Translation: “We see in Pohnpeian culture that those who have money climbs up the hierarchy"
Cultural Identity Reinforcement	Unites People/Community	Sakau’s role in fostering togetherness, serving as a social glue in	“e wia atail dipwsou en doadoahk eng tiahk pwe ih poahsoan en sakau me kak kemeleilei ihdi pingiping kan” Translation: "It is used in almost all cultural events, the importance of sakau is expressed when it is used to maintain

		gatherings	peace or resolve conflict"
	Peacemaker	Instances where sakau helps in conflict resolution or as a symbol of peace	“Ma ahmw peneinei, de noumw seri kemehla emen. Ke pan kohla sakau e rail,” Translation: “If a family member or your offspring murders another, you bring sakau to them”
Health-Culture Balance	Better Alternative to Alcohol	How sakau is perceived as a more positive or safer alternative compared to alcohol consumption	“Kamwahu pehu, e katikala sakauen wai. Sohlahr me pwulopwul tohto paren wai, katkatairong seli” Translation: Beneficially, sakau curbs alcohol use. Seldom does the youth get drunk and rowdy after drinking alcohol"
	Active Ingredients and Calming Nerves	The properties of sakau that are known to relax or calm the user	“Six active ingredients in it: there are 105 different varieties across the Pacific. The 6 compounds cause people to become sleepy, a sense of euphoria. The two here are predominantly narcotics. Narcotics are things that makes people go to sleep”
	Health Risks	Any negative health impacts, such as overuse or long-term effects	“Ihme aramas soumwahu kihda sakau, pwe re doaloahki beeru. Ansou koaros me re kin nda kapohpo. Ihme kemelahr aramas, pwe re sakau beeru, oh smoke, pwuh kapatahieng” Translation: The reason that people get sick is because they mix with beers. This is known as kapohpo. That is what kills them too, beers and smoking, chewing betelnut”
Economic-Cultural Nexus	Export Commodity	The potential or reality of sakau as a product for export, contributing to economic growth	“atail export la liki wie lapalala. Kitail export sakau laud sang atail plant sakau” Translation: “our exports are increasing. We export sakau more than planting them”
	Marketing Benefits	How sakau is marketed, both locally and abroad, and the benefits tied to its	“Market en sakau, udahn met e wiahlahr ehu revenue ong ehu ehu peneinei. Ih ehu kamwahu pen sakau mwo. Pwe sakau itself, you can make your own revenue” “Now the marketing of sakau has become a revenue for each family. That is one of the benefits of the plant. Because with

		commercializati on	sakau itself, you can make your own revenue”
Environmental & Social Sustainability	Environmental effect	The environmental consequences of cultivating and harvesting sakau	“pwe ansouet, pwihnen market pil kohla nanwel, problem. Kamohs, deforestation, e pil affect kitail. Affect atail river ka, kohdihdo lusdihdo nansed” Translation: “as of now, sakau farmers defrost, making that a huge problem. Deforestation affects us. It affects our rivers, further into the ocean as well”

Figure 2: Examples from the codebook including superordinate themes, subordinate themes, definitions, and quotations from the dataset.

Software-aided Analysis

To aid in the data analysis, the researcher utilized Quirkos Web, an online tool that color-codes interview transcripts and simplifies qualitative data analysis. The platform allowed the researcher to add descriptive details about their sources and create visual representations of themes, called "Quirks," using colored bubbles. Coding is accomplished by dragging and dropping highlighted text onto these theme bubbles, which grow in size as more data is added. Themes can be organized into hierarchical categories for better structure. Quirkos Web offers various exploration tools, such as filtered searches and overlapping views, to help the researcher identify patterns and connections within the data. Quirkos Web provided the researcher an intuitive visual representation of the data, making it easier to identify key themes and patterns. The use of color coding enhances the ability to compare different sections of the interviews, helping track recurring themes or ideas. Importantly, Quirkos Web also allowed the researcher to export their coded transcripts to Word documents, facilitating further analysis or sharing of results outside the platform.

Study Credibility

This study employed multiple strategies to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings. Methodological triangulation was a key approach, combining interviews, observations, and field notes. This multi-method design allowed for cross-verification of data from different sources, providing a more comprehensive understanding of *sakau* practices.

The codebook used for analysis included rich descriptions of themes, enhancing the depth and clarity of the coding process. Direct quotes from participants were extensively used to support findings and interpretations. The study also actively sought and included disconfirming evidence from the researcher's field notes or observations, challenging preconceived notions and strengthening the overall analysis. In examining the evolving role of sakau in Pohnpeian society, it became evident that its significance is perceived differently across generations. While elders emphasize sakau as central to rituals and community gatherings, younger participants often describe it as "just something to do on weekends," suggesting a shift towards social consumption detached from its traditional contexts (R. W. Higgins, personal communication, July, 2023). This disconfirming evidence challenges the assumption that sakau continues to hold its deep cultural and ritualistic significance for all members of the community, highlighting the potential influence of individualism and globalization on its contemporary use.

Also, the researcher's field notes captured contextual information and non-verbal cues, adding depth to the data analysis. Lastly, convenience sampling ensured the inclusion of participants with relevant experience and knowledge of sakau practices, contributing to the study's validity within the specific cultural context of Pohnpei.

Coding Process and Reliability

Ensuring reliability was a critical component of the study design. The researcher followed a systematic process for coding and analyzing the data, guided by a detailed codebook

to ensure consistency. This codebook was developed iteratively, combining a priori codes derived from Cultural Resilience Theory (CRT) and Greenfield's Theory of Social Change (GTSC) with emergent codes from the data. The a priori codes included Traditional-Modern Tension (GTSC), Economic-Culture Nexus (GTSC), Health-Culture Balance (CRT), Environmental & Social Sustainability (CRT) and Cultural Identity Reinforcement (CRT), each aligned with one of the two theoretical frameworks. To check the reliability of the coding, a second coder was involved in the analysis. The second coder received comprehensive training, which included a detailed explanation of each code in the codebook, discussion of the underlying theoretical frameworks, and practice coding sessions using sample transcripts. Following the training, both the primary researcher and the second coder independently analyzed the transcripts using the codebook. After coding each transcript, the coders met to discuss their analyses, compare coding decisions. To calculate the percentage agreement, the researcher and the second coder compared the number of matches (28) to the total number of items (33), resulting in an agreement rate of approximately 84.9%, which indicates a high level of consistency with the researcher codes across their entries. So, they resolved disagreements and reached a consensus that the primary researcher's codes are the final codes to be applied.

After 11 recorded interviews with the male participants were coded, the team conducted a final review to ensure consistency across all coded transcripts, identify patterns or themes that emerged across multiple interviews, and discuss any challenging or ambiguous coding decisions.

Results

The findings presented in this section are derived from a comprehensive analysis integrating data from in-depth interviews with 22 knowledgeable local Pohnpeians (the 11 recorded interviews with males and the notes from the 11 interviews with females), direct

observations of *sakau* practices across various settings in Pohnpei, and detailed field notes capturing contextual information and the researcher's reflections. This multi-faceted approach revealed five interrelated superordinate themes with corresponding subthemes (see examples in Figure 2). Due to space constraints, only key quotes and observations will be highlighted to illustrate each theme, with all names presented as pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy.

Recorded Interviews of Male Perceptions

The most prominent theme that emerged from this analysis was "Traditional-Modern Tension," reflecting the ongoing negotiation between traditional *sakau* practices and modern influences. This theme was consistently evident across interviews, observations, and field notes, underscoring its significance in contemporary Pohnpeian society.

Traditional-Modern Tension

All 11 men agreed that traditional practices remain deeply revered and are actively practiced today. Souwel highlighted the importance of sakau, stating, *"Sakau, tuhke mwahu iou, aramas wauniki. Sakau kamwahu, e wia men kamwahu, wia men pek pwopwoud, wia songen men kaperen tohto."* This translates to, "Sakau is a good plant, people respect it. Sakau heals, it is used for healing, it is used for marriage proposals and so many other spirited events."

Iahkop elaborated, *"Ma sohte sakau…ke sohte kak wia formality en doadoahk, pwe…sakau me kin wia program en Pohnpei koaros. Karesepe, doadoahk en kamadipw en wahu, doadoahk en kamadipw en kousapw, doadoahk en mehla, oh doadoahk teikan…me poahsoan e doadaohk en nan peneinei."* This means, "Without sakau, you cannot do formalities of any given occasion…because sakau is needed for all Pohnpeian functions. For example, a feast of respect, feast for residence, funerals, and numerous Pohnpeian ceremonies, including feasts, village gatherings, funerals, and family-related events." Their responses underscore

sakau's indispensable role in maintaining the cultural fabric of Pohnpeian society, highlighting its continued reverence and function in traditional practices today.

Eight of the 11 men also noted minor variations in *sakau* practices between villages, influenced by the paramount chief or *Nahnmwarki's* directives. Iahkop explained, *"E kin depend ong mwohnsapw."* This means, "It depends on the Nahnmwarki's preferences." The men noted that variations in sakau practices exist among villages due to these preferences. As Iahkop explained, *"Pwe rahnpwukat, rahnmwahu ape pil apwal lahr pwehki cell,"* or *"*Nowadays, greeting others is almost impossible due to cell-phones*."* He pointed out that *"Ma e dikidikau ih nan cell, pwangahki sarada rahnmwahu,"* which translates to, "If ones face is glued to a cell, [they] may not want to look up to greet someone else." Instead of the usual greeting, he elaborated, *"Rahnmwahu, ekei pak, e kelingeringer pwe mahs songesongen aramas pwon tuhpene 'Kaselehlie' ah met,"* meaning, "Greeting, sometimes, it can be frustrating these days, but in the past everyone, even strangers, meet another and say 'Hello.' He concluded by saying, *"Dah I pan nda, technology ape, cell phone ka kahreda aramas pwangahkihla,"* which translates to, "What can I say, these cell-phone has made people don't want to." This reflects how the introduction of cell phones has altered traditional greeting practices, making direct, face-to-face interactions less common.

All 11 men concur that contemporary use of *sakau* often strays from its traditional role. Makahri noted, "Now people are drinking it as a leisure, drink it like an outing thing…to try…others, like a social drug," which potentially undermines its cultural significance when consumed without proper context or intention.

External influences, particularly the advent of Christianity, have also impacted *sakau* practices. Luhk summarized this impact by stating, *"Pelien lamalam ka me kodohr oh katorehla*

apeh pwe re uhweng apeh," which means, "Religious groups have sought to replace or eradicate sakau practices due to conflicting beliefs." As Makahri noted, *"Protestant community, drinking, drinking…you become a sounpadahk, wan paron…no longer drink,"* indicating that "Individuals in Protestant communities, who used to drink, might abandon sakau consumption upon becoming preachers." Conversely, some religious groups, like Catholics, have integrated *sakau's* cultural significance into their own practices. Sihpw provided an example: *"Mwomwohdiso iang kamehlele me sakau iang wia mehkot kesempwal iou, e signifiy (kasalehda) wehwehki peace, respect, oh pil…kol soaren aramas"* which translates to, "Catholic practices also believes that sakau is very sacred, it is a symbol of peace, respect, and dignity."

Cultural Identity Reinforcement

Despite external and internal pressures affecting sakau practices, these traditions continue to thrive. Sihpw stated that sakau is used *"Almost daily…arail (their) daily living oh, especially those who are staying in the remote areas mas loale,"* meaning that "it is a daily part of life, especially for those in more isolated communities." Sakau gatherings promote communal information-sharing and unity; however, some, like Iahkop, believe these gatherings sometimes lack purposeful dialogue. Sihpw observed, *"Rahnwet sakau wiahla men kohpene wedwedei mwahl, kepit, likamw,"* which translates to, "Today, people gather without meaningful discourse over sakau, talking nonsense, joking, lie."

Beyond fostering unity, *sakau* plays a role in resolving disputes. Makahri emphasized its importance:

> I know that *sakau* is an important part of our culture. It is really, very important because it is the only tree that we can use for settling disputes, like if there is any conflict between families, *sakau* is used, if you will do your traditional tributes to the chiefs, *sakau* is used

> in the ceremonies, even now. It is a very important plant in our culture, as it stands to calm the nerves of those who are offended. *Sakau* serves as a peacekeeping drug, our tree. Settle disputes, settle unrest, many, many things, and they are very important in our tradition. And it [is] consumed I think daily.

Five men concurred that *sakau* is crucial for resolving disputes. Sohn, a botanist, supports this, noting that *sakau's* effects on mood and relaxation contribute to its role in maintaining peace. Six out of 11 men agreed that sakau is a preferable alternative to alcohol. Sihp remarked, *"Kamwahupehu, e katikala sakau en wai. Solahr me pwulopwul tohto par en wai, katkatairong seli,"* which means, "Its benefit, it reduces alcohol consumption. No more alcohol-related disturbances, especially among the youth." Sohn also noted that sakau consumption typically does not lead to the extreme inebriation associated with alcohol, highlighting its role as a more responsible choice for social gatherings:

> And actually, that is why beginners don't usually get pwopwuda, they might not even get sakaula, because if they drink enough to get sakaula, they might just throw up and they'll never make it there. So actually, I can take someone out who has never had a beer, and at the end of the night, they are going to be drunk, guaranteed. But sakau doesn't work that way. Very few people get the feeling very few times. You either drink too much and throw up, or drink too little and not get the feeling. It takes time to get to where you want it to go and also learn how not to throw up.

The overall benefits of *sakau* seem to outweigh the negatives, as it is less likely to result in disruptive behavior unless consumed to excess.

Health-Culture Balance

Among the 11 men interviewed, six agreed that consuming sakau in Pohnpei has health risks. Kiroun suggests that sakau leads to laziness, contrasting with past practices where it was consumed alongside work. He states, “It creates laziness… You know back in the day, people drank sakau [while] working. Now, with modernization, we just take it for leisure.” Conversely, Souwel argues that sakau can have positive effects, such as relieving stress and potentially lowering blood pressure. He mentions, *“Ehu aramas me sohte kak meir pwunod en doadoahk ah sakau, I meir… Sewese kemehla soumwahu en nta laud,”* which translates to, “When an individual is stressed and cannot sleep because of work, drinks *sakau* and goes to bed…helps curb hypertension.”

Botanist Sohn adds that the hibiscus tree used to squeeze *sakau* benefits gut health by promoting beneficial bacteria, though it can cause gas. He emphasizes that while the gas is socially problematic, it supports beneficial microorganisms. Sohn warns that the greatest health risk is not the *sakau* itself but potentially contaminated water used in its preparation.

Makahri highlights that *sakau* can dry out the skin and reduce appetite, which might help with weight loss but could contribute to anorexia. He notes, “Sakau dries the skin, makes you lose appetite. It can help you lose weight for obese people. When they drink sakau, they end up not wanting to eat.”

Iahkop further explains that *sakau* may lead to kidney stones due to dehydration. He advises drinking plenty of water and sweating it out to mitigate this risk: *“Pwehki sakau ahmw pan ale, kalapw kendip e… kak kahreda soumwahu en nan umwpwei,”* which means, “When drinking sakau, one usually spits…which can lead to an ulcer” In extreme cases, *sakau* is used in black magic to reverse harmful spells. Welson explains that *sakau* can be used to cast curses or to counteract them, causing severe physical reactions if misused: *“Sakau me pil aramas kalapw*

doadoangki, kalowehdi aramas…ekei kak pwopwuda, kak paisuwed. Ah ehu, re nda oakmwasahl mwo udahn ke pan mwus kihla nta oh kowe mehla," which translates to, "Sakau is what people usually use, to harm others…sometimes they can fall down, face bad luck. And another, they call it 'oakmwasahl'" because you will vomit out blood until you die."

Economic-Cultural Nexus

Sakau also provides economic benefits, particularly for those who cultivate it. Five of the eleven men agreed that the market offers significant advantages. Persuhs explained, *"Kamwahupe kan...e pil wia poahsoan en momour en mehn Pohnpei rahnpwukat. Rahnpwutak ehute pwotol tala eisek er. Mwahusang ansou samwalahr o. Pwe ma ke wiadah pwotol eisek, ah talaier 100. Itar eng mour en rahn ehu, riahu ape."* In translation, this means, "It benefits…it also supports a typical Pohnpeian family's living. Today, only one bottle costs $10 USD. Better than the old days. Because if you make ten bottles, you already have $100 dollars. That is enough for a day or two. He recounted his experience starting a sakau business, noting significant price increases over the years: *"I iang tepda market ni ansou sens 25 ehu kep...kep plastic kau. Ehu gallon limahu, se kin wiahkida tala 25...Nasong compare eng ansou et, gallon limahu o pan wiahda mwein kohlang tala 500 ape."* This translates to: "I remember when I started marketing the price was only 25 cents for a plastic cup. We earn $25 USD with just five gallons…Try comparing that to today, five gallons worth almost $500 USD." He compared past and current prices, demonstrating substantial growth in the *sakau* market. Iahkop affirmed that marketing *sakau* allows individuals to generate revenue, noting its role as a common local export item. Welson mentioned exporting *sakau* to territories like Guam and the U.S., where it is processed and used for fundraising.

Sohn also highlighted the shift from traditional methods to bottled *sakau*, noting that this development has mitigated some issues related to *sakau* consumption:

> Over the decades, there's been a shift to the bottle. People take bottles home and they drink it. That's been a key development because, in the 90s, there was a concern about the *sakau* orphans. Children were left alone because mom and dad were going to the *sakau* markets. But that problem kind of solved itself with the bottle. Mom and Dad now pick up bottles and come back to the *sakau* orphans.

While there are benefits to selling *sakau*, there are also acknowledged drawbacks. Six men discussed how marketing impacts children and cultural practices. Sihp noted that focusing on *sakau* marketing can detract from children's education, as families prioritize farming over schooling: *"Pahpa nohno wiahki lahr me irail pan market, kohdahla kowe ped sakau, pwe re wiahki er men market, arail source. Instead of kadarala seri ko ren sukuhl, seri ka koadkoadoahke irail pwang, seri ka sohla men sukuhl. Solahr arail madmadahu eng further arail education."* This translates to: "Parents who are heavily involved in the sakau market sometimes push their children into helping with the market, making it their primary source of income. Instead of supporting their children's schooling and focusing on education, they divert their energy toward the market, which limits their children's academic progress and further education."

Additionally, frequent marketing can deplete *sakau* resources needed for cultural events. Sihp observed, *"Re sakasakau, re sohla kak padokedi sakau ren doadoahngki ong tiahk, pwehki re pan market market, ah re kangala. Ah lel ansouen doadoahk, sohte neirail,"* meaning: "They use up sakau, and there is none left for family obligations and traditional gatherings, as they are focused on the market and its demands, leaving cultural responsibilities unmet." Lohtik

concurred, noting that excessive marketing can undermine contributions to traditional practices: *"mwein pil ekei doadoahki sipele la pwe mwein market ansou wet," or* "excessive marketing can reduce one's ability to contribute to traditional obligations."

Furthermore, the commercialization of sakau in bars, where it is treated like a casual beverage, can undermine the cultural significance of the plant, as Sohn argues. He suggests that markets devalue sakau because the traditional practice involves serving it in a way that honors its cultural importance. In a traditional setting, sakau is presented with respect, often to individuals of high social status. However, in a market environment, a server might bring sakau to anyone, which Sohn believes diminishes its cultural value. According to Sohn, "Sakau is being inappropriately cultured in these markets, impacting its traditional treatment."

Supporting this view, Souwel notes that the accessibility of sakau has altered its traditional use. He explains, *"Ah met, market e, lahpe kohla..ia kowe?... I pan sakau pwohnget, kahreda ah lel ninsorahn. Ah udahn sakau o, ma ke tungoal e mehlel, pahiou itar, ke meir er."* Translated, this means, "With the market's influence, people often buy sakau easily and host gatherings late into the night, inviting friends to drink extensively. In the past, traditional gatherings might only involve four shells of sakau en Pohnpei, which would be enough." This highlights how modern gatherings with *sakau* have shifted from the modest, culturally respectful practices of earlier times.

Environmental and Social Sustainability

Three out of the 11 men believe that sakau is both affected by and has an impact on environmental changes. Persuhs points out that climate change influences sakau growth by depleting soil nutrients and water. He says, *"Tuhkehu ihme e mwahuki pihl… Pihl me poahsoaneda en keirda mwadang. Ahpw pwehki climate change e, karakaralahr, wekweklahr*

ansou koaros e." This translates to, "The plant enjoys water… The water gives its existence and helps it grow faster. But due to climate change, its harsher and more unpredictable conditions have impacted its growth."

Sihpw suggests that the government should address these issues by designating specific areas for *sakau* cultivation and regulating them. He proposes, *"Kamohs, deforestation, e pil affect kitail. Affect (kawehla) atail pillap ka, kohdihdo luhdo nansed… Ren designate (kasale) ieng irail wasa re pan doadoahk ie o wasa re pan kak apwalih sakau…"* which means, "Logging and deforestation also affect us. They affect our rivers and further out into our ocean. We need to designate areas where people can gather resources or cultivate sakau."

Souwel supports this view, noting that overplanting sakau can harm the environment. He advocates for research into improving sakau cultivation practices and calls for government action against climate change and deforestation: *"Sakauka kawelahr nanwel ka... Mehkot sohla nan pwehl e… Men wahi lel nan maram, ah mehlel kitail sohte kak diarada dahme sohte nan pwehle pwe sakauo en kak pilehu pato?"* This translates to: "Sakau farming is affecting these upland forests… Something is missing from the soil… Americans can make it to the moon, so why is it that hard for us to figure out why the soil is no longer benefitting the plants' growth?"

Women's Perspectives of Sakau Practices

Analysis of interviews with 11 female participants revealed significant changes in gender roles within *sakau* practices. Traditionally male-dominated, *sakau* ceremonies now see increasing female participation. As Lihna noted, *"Mahs, lih sohte kin iang sakau. Ahpw met, se kak iang towehda oh pil iang tungoal,"* meaning: "In the past, women didn't participate in sakau ceremonies. But now, women can attend and even drink sakau." This shift reflects broader changes in gender dynamics within Pohnpeian society.

Additionally, women highlighted new economic opportunities through *sakau* cultivation and sale. Meilyn shared, *"Sakau wialahr ehu ahl en sawas ong lih akan en wiahda mwohni ong arail peneinei,"* expressing that "sakau has become a way for women to generate income for their families." This development demonstrates how traditional practices are adapting to modern economic structures.

Women also play a significant role in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge related to *sakau*. Kaselinda, an elder, emphasized the importance of teaching the younger generation about sakau's cultural significance, highlighting the role of women in cultural resilience and in ensuring the continuity of traditional practices. However, women expressed mixed views on the health and social impacts of *sakau* use. While some, like Deina, noted its stress-relieving properties, others, such as Lorna, raised concerns about excessive use disrupting family life. These contrasting views reflect the complex negotiation between traditional practices and modern health and social considerations.

Environmental stewardship emerged as another key theme in women's perspectives on *sakau*. Women demonstrated a strong awareness of the environmental impacts of *sakau* cultivation, advocating for sustainable practices. Merlynn, a farmer, expressed the need to balance cultural traditions with environmental concerns: *"Kitail anahne apwalih atail sahpw kan ni atail padokedi sakau pwe en sohte kauwehla atail wasa akan."* Translated, this means: "We, Pohnpeians, need to take care of our land when cultivating sakau to avoid damaging our environment."

Observations of Current Sakau Practices

In traditional ceremonial settings, such as a meeting observed in Sokehs, the researcher noted the continued adherence to hierarchical protocols. The preparation and serving of *sakau*

followed strict traditional guidelines, with designated roles for different participants based on their social status. The paramount chief or *Nahnmwarki* received the first and most prestigious serving, followed by other titled individuals. This observation reinforced interview data regarding the persistence of traditional practices and the role of sakau in maintaining social hierarchies.

However, in more casual social gatherings, particularly those involving younger Pohnpeians, the researcher observed a notable relaxation of these formal protocols. At a gathering in Kolonia, both men and women participated in sakau consumption, with less emphasis on traditional serving orders. The atmosphere was more egalitarian, with animated discussions ranging from local gossip to global issues. This observation aligns with interview data suggesting evolving gender roles and the adaptation of sakau practices to modern social contexts.

In commercial *sakau* bars, a relatively new phenomenon in Pohnpei, the researcher observed a further departure from traditional practices. These bars, primarily located in Kolonia, served *sakau* in a manner reminiscent of Western-style bars. Patrons, including tourists and locals of various ages and genders, consumed sakau casually, often alongside other beverages and snacks. This commercialization of *sakau* reflects the economic changes discussed in interviews and demonstrates the impact of modernization on traditional practices.

The researcher also observed the cultivation of *sakau* in different areas of the island. In more remote areas of Kitti, traditional agroforestry practices were evident, with sakau integrated into diverse forest gardens. In contrast, areas closer to Kolonia showed signs of more intensive, commercially-oriented *sakau* cultivation. This observation supports interview data regarding environmental concerns and the economic pressures on sakau production.

These observations provide a visual and experiential context to the interview data, illustrating the complex interplay between traditional practices and modern influences in Pohnpeian *sakau* culture. They highlight the dynamic nature of cultural practices, showing how *sakau* use adapts to different social, economic, and environmental contexts while still maintaining its central role in Pohnpeian identity and social life.

Discussion

In this research, multiple approaches were employed, framed by an overarching ideology grounded in indigenous protocols such as cultural preservation, respect for traditional practices, and community engagement. This framework emphasizes the importance of understanding *sakau* not only as a social beverage but also as a vital element of Pohnpeian identity and heritage. By incorporating the perspectives of both men and women, the study highlights the evolving roles of gender in *sakau* practices and the significance of environmental stewardship, ensuring that the voices of the community are central to discussions about sustainability and cultural resilience.

The research findings on *sakau* practices in Pohnpei reveal a complex interplay between tradition and modernity, aligning with both Cultural Resilience Theory and Greenfield's Theory of Social Change. These theories provide a framework for understanding how Pohnpeian culture adapts to modernization while maintaining core cultural elements.

Cultural Resilience Theory

Cultural Resilience Theory is evident in the persistence of *sakau* practices despite external pressures. Smyntyna (2016) defines cultural resilience as the capacity of a cultural system to absorb adversity, deal with change, and continue to develop. This resilience is clearly demonstrated in the continued use of *sakau* in traditional ceremonies, conflict resolution, and daily social interactions. As one participant, Iahkop, noted, *sakau* remains central to numerous

Pohnpeian ceremonies, including feasts, village gatherings, and funerals. This aligns with Petersen's (1993) observation that *sakau* gatherings are charged with wahu (respect), a quality essential to Pohnpeian social life.

However, the research also reveals tensions in this cultural resilience. The commercialization of sakau and its use in non-traditional settings (such as bars) suggests that while the practice persists, its meaning and context are evolving. This evolution reflects the dynamic nature of cultural resilience, where practices adapt to new socioeconomic realities while striving to maintain cultural significance (Falgout, 1984).

Greenfield's Theory of Social Change

Greenfield's Theory of Social Change (2009) is particularly relevant in understanding the shifts in *sakau* practices due to socioeconomic changes. The theory posits that socio demographic changes drive shifts in cultural values and learning environments. The evolution of *sakau* from a purely ceremonial substance to a commercial product available in bars exemplifies this theory. As noted by Hezel (2001, p. 162), "Who would have imagined forty years ago that *sakau* bars would be selling the local drink to Pohnpeians?" This transformation reflects the broader shift from a subsistence to a cash-based economy in Pohnpei.

The theory is further supported by changes in family structures and social mobility pathways associated with *sakau* use. Hezel (2001) observed that while society is organized into matrilineages, children inherit land from their fathers, and married couples typically reside on the husband's family estate. This hybrid system indicates complex adaptations to changing family structures, which likely impact how sakau is used and shared within families.

In the Gemeinschaft (community-oriented) setting of rural Pohnpei, children experience sakau as a deeply communal practice, now increasingly influenced by its growing commercial

potential. While traditional knowledge continues to flow through close-knit social relationships, the emerging market for sakau is transforming how younger generations perceive and interact with this cultural drink. The intricate protocols and cultural significance remain, but now intertwined with economic opportunities that are expanding the drink's social and economic importance.

In the Gesellschaft (society-oriented) urban environment, sakau has become even more of a commercial commodity, with marketing efforts intensifying across the island. Urban Pohnpeian children encounter sakau through increasingly diverse channels—commercial bars, media representations, and expanding market networks. The traditional boundaries between rural and urban sakau consumption blur as marketing strategies reach both areas, creating a new economic landscape that reimagines sakau from a purely cultural practice to a potentially lucrative product. This transformation reflects how economic pressures and market dynamics are reshaping cultural practices, making sakau simultaneously a traditional ritual and a modern economic opportunity.

Limitations

While this project provided valuable insights into the current perceptions of *sakau* through consumers living on Pohnpei, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. First, the study focused solely on Pohnpeians, overlooking the broader consumer base of *sakau*, which includes those living abroad and people from other Pacific Islands (PIs). This narrow sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relied on participants who were willing to engage, which may skew results since it reflects only the perspectives of those who chose to participate. This introduces a potential bias, as certain groups—such as women or those less comfortable with the topic—might have been underrepresented. In particular, gender

dynamics played a role; women may have been less likely to participate due to cultural norms of humility or reluctance to speak openly, which further skews the sample toward male perspectives. The male gender of the researcher could also have influenced the types of participants and responses gathered.

To address these limitations, future research should aim to include a broader and more diverse group of participants, with a particular focus on amplifying women's voices and engaging a wider range of demographic groups. Practical implications of this research could be better realized with more inclusive data, leading to recommendations that are more applicable to a wider population. Moving forward, expanding the sample size, diversifying participants, and incorporating other perspectives of *sakau* uses will strengthen the validity and relevance of future studies.

Conclusion

The study of *sakau* practices in Pohnpei provides a vivid illustration of a culture navigating the complexities of modernization while striving to maintain its traditional identity. The findings support both Cultural Resilience Theory (Smyntyna, 2016) and Greenfield's Theory of Social Change (2009), demonstrating how Pohnpeian culture adapts to new socio economic realities while preserving core cultural elements.

Sakau remains a central pillar of Pohnpeian culture, serving multiple roles from ceremonial use to economic resources. However, its evolving role reflects the broader changes in Pohnpeian society. The commercialization of *sakau*, while providing economic benefits, also poses challenges to its traditional significance. This tension between economic opportunity and cultural preservation epitomizes the challenges faced by many indigenous cultures in the globalized world (Falgout, 1984; Merlin et al., 1992).

The study also highlights the need for balanced approaches to cultural practices like *sakau* use. While it continues to play a vital role in social cohesion and cultural identity (Petersen, 1993), concerns about health impacts (Bian et al., 2020) and environmental sustainability suggest the need for thoughtful management of these practices.

In conclusion, the case of *sakau* in Pohnpei demonstrates that cultural change is not a linear process of modernization, but rather a complex negotiation between tradition and modernity. As Pohnpeian society continues to evolve, the role of *sakau* will likely continue to adapt, serving as a bridge between the island's rich cultural heritage and its modern realities. This aligns with Greenfield's (2009) assertion that cultures can adapt to socioeconomic changes while maintaining core values.

Future research could explore how other aspects of Pohnpeian culture are adapting to these changes, and how the balance between tradition and modernity is negotiated in other Pacific Island cultures facing similar challenges. Such studies would contribute to a broader understanding of cultural resilience and social change in the face of globalization and modernization.

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Appendices

Pohnpeian Interview

1. Ke rongehr lepin lokaia me iei “sakau” oh ke song ehr sakau pakehu?

2. Dahkot sakau oh ia kesempwal pen sakau ohng nan pelian tiahk?

3. Sang ni ahmw pein wehwehki de ese dahkot sakau, ia mwomwen aramas arail kin doadoahngki
sakau wasa tiahk ket de pato ie? Menlau kawehwe.

4. Dahme ke medewe me sakau wiahng aramas de tohn ehu kouson?

5. Ia kasuwed pen sakau, me pid soumwahu de ire tik tei kan? Menlau kawehwe ma mie me ke ese.

6. Ia mwomwen ahmw pan kak nda me wiepen wia sakau de tiahk en sakau ah wekdekla?

7. Ia mwomwen sakau ah kasalehda wiepen tiahk en Pohnpei? De ia tiahk me aramas wia me kasalehda kesempwal pen sakau?

8. Mie kasuwed pen netki Sakau Pohnpei de likin Pohnpei?

9. Ia pwungin sakau ah kin suksukdi oh nehnehieng ekei?

10. Ke leme me business wekidalahr kesempwal pen sakau de atail tiahk en apwalih de wiahda sakau?

11. Dahme mehn Pohnpei de aramas en liki kin medewehki aramas me kin sakau?

12. Songen kosonned dah me mie ier me pid sakau?

13. Oh ke leme me e anahne wekidala de soh?

14 Mie ekei kosonned me pid sakau me ke men patohwan?

15. Business en sakau mwahu eng atail tiahk de soh?

16. Ma ke kin sakau de soh, kowe mehn Pohnpei? Menlau kawehweh.

17. Ia mwomwen ahmw pan nda me kowe pwilidak de udahn mehn Pohnpei?

18. Songen tiahk en Pohnpei tohto, ah menia me udahn ke keioun kesempwal ki?

19. Mie pak me tiahk en ehu wasa de sahpw laud wekidala mwomwen ahmw medewe tiahk o?

20. Ia mwomwen aramas arail kak balance ih tiahk en ehu wasa patehng tiahk en Pohnpei (karasepe, social media)?

21. Iamwomwen sakau ah seweseiuk, me pid ahmw pelien lamalam, ahmw tiahk, oh ahmw wiwia?

22. Mie mehn liki me ke ese kin sakau? Re pwungki de sapwungki sakau o, oh pwehda?

23. Dah ke kak ndahng aramas me sapwungki o?

24. Pirpir en mwehi et wie wekwekila, ah ia mwomwen sakau ah sawas en koledi atail tiahk?

25. Mie pak ke tuwehng mehn liki, eri kowe ekis kaidi ahmw lamalam de ahmw madmadau wekdekla?

English Interview

1. Have you ever heard of or tried Sakau before?

2. What do you know about Sakau and its cultural significance?

3. Have you personally experienced or witnessed the consumption of Sakau in a traditional or a social setting? If yes, please describe.

4. What are your thoughts or perceptions about the effects of Sakau on individuals and communities?

5. Are you aware of any potential health benefits or risks associated with the consumption of Sakau? If yes, please describe.

6. How do you think the cultural use of Sakau has evolved over time, if at all?

7. In what ways do you think Sakau contributes to the cultural identity and practices of the communities where it is consumed?

8. Have you ever encountered any challenges or controversies related to the use or distribution of Sakau?

9. Are there any specific customs, rituals, or etiquette associated with the preparation and consumption of Sakau that you are familiar with?

10. How do you think the availability and accessibility of Sakau products and establishments have impacted its cultural significance?

11. Have you noticed any cultural or social stereotypes associated with Sakau and its consumers?

12. How do you think Sakau could be promoted and appreciated in a culturally sensitive and responsible manners?

13. Are there any regulations or policies in your country or region regarding the sale, importation, or consumption of sakau?

14. Are there any misconceptions or misunderstandings about sakau that you would like to address?

15. What are your thoughts on the potential commercialization of sakau and its impact on traditional practices and cultural heritage?

16. Is Sakau a significant part of your identity? If yes, please describe.

17. How would you define your cultural identity?

18. Which cultural traditions and practices are most important to you and why? Does it involve sakau?

19. Would you please provide an example of a significant event or experience that has shaped your cultural identity?

20. How do you navigate and balance multiple cultural identities if you have them?

21. In what ways does sakau influence your values, beliefs, and behaviors?

22. How comfortable are you engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds?

23. Have you ever experienced any challenges or conflicts related to your cultural identity?

How did you handle them?

24. How do you stay connected to your cultural heritage and ensure it remains important to

you?

25. Can you describe a time when you had to adapt your behavior or communication style to

work effectively with someone from a different cultural background?

Consent form (Pohnpeian)

Kaselehlie! Edei Macmillan Willyander oh I men patohwan ekis ahmw tungoal ansou oh peki iren sawas ong research project wet. I kankaneke nei daropwe ni University of Hawai'i nan Mānoa nan pelien Department en Psychology. Kahrepen doaropwe kiset, I anahne ahmw ineng en patehng project wet me pan sansal ni signature pohn daropwe kiset. Pwehki ahmw sawas, I pan kak kenekehla ai pwukoah pwe ien alehdi nei Masters.

Dahme I anahne wia?
Ama komw mweidada ien interview komwi, ah kita pan kak tep mwurin ahmw pan sign daropweh.

Komwi me kolokol manaman en patehng project wet.
Ama komw lel wasah iou me komw solahr inengieng de men patehng project wet, ah pil mwahu. Sohte keinepwi de apwal laud eng ie.

Ia kahrepen proatek wet?
Project wet wiawihda pwe ien kak wehwehki sakau en Pohnpei. I men patohwan alehdi kesempwal pen atail kin doadoahngki sakau oh ia kesempwal pen sakau ong atail tiahk oh momour. Sohte mehn liki kak ese kesempwal pen sakau ong men Pohnpei likin kitail, menda ma ke kin sakau de sto kin.

Dahme pan wiwia ong ie ma I iang project wet?

Kalelepak 25 me I pan patohwan. I sto pan dauliala awa ehu.
Ehu karasepen kalelepak mei pan patohwan, “Dahkot sakau, oh iawen ah kesempwal ong uhk?” De ehu pan idek, “Songen soumwahu dah me arams kak alehdi ama re nim Sakau, ama mie?” Kita te me pan kosoi ansouen interview o, oh ama ke mweidada, I men doadoangki nei cell e pwe ien can record ih atail mahsen o. Komwi oh meh pehk-isimen mei pan tuhweng.

Dahme kak sapwung ama I iang?
I kamehlele me sohte mehkot pan sapwungala nan eilepen interview o. Ama komw peien soansuwed ansou mei peipeidek, ah komw kak wehwehdo pwe ien uhdi de cancel project wet. Sohte keinepwi ma komw patohiei sang nan research project wet.

Private oh Safety:
I pan kanai daropweh ka pwe en deh sansal eng wehipokon. I pan pil save ihdi nan nei computer o pwehn kak mwahu. Ihte ai Professor sang University of Hawai'i oh ngehi me pan kak doahke oh kilang daropwehka. University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program me pil kolokol manaman en wadek daropweh ka.
Mwurin ata interview et, I pan nting ihdi ata kosoi ko, iahpw delete recording o. Ansou men I pan nting ihdi audepen ata interview o, I sto pan kihdi edemw o. Sohte me pan ese me ke iang project wet, ihte ma ke mweidada.

Pweipwei (FEE):
Ke pan pweipwei ki tala $10 ong ahmw men patehng ie nan ai doadoahk wet.

Project en ehu rahn:
Ma pil daropweh koskosla ehu ran, dahme kolkoldi sto pan kak doadaohk ehu rahn.

Kalelepek:
Ama mie ahmw iren kalelapak de keinemwe, ah komw call telephone no. e +1 304-559-8775 de komw email ihie mwillian@hawaii.edu. Komwi kak pil call ai advisor de weliepei nan project wet, Dr. Ashley Maynard, +1 808 222-0355 oh email ih amaynard@hawaii.edu. Ama ke sto itar kin kiht pil ni ansou ohte, komw kak pil repen sawas sang UH Human Studies Program 808.956.5007 de email uhirb@hawaii.edu. Website et http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd pil kak sowesei komwi.

Ama komwi men patehng project wet, menlau sign oh nting ihdi date.

Komw kak patohwan ehu copy en daropwehka.

Signature:

I kiheng ai manaman en iang patehng research project wet me kahdanki, “Mwomwen sakau ah wekila nan pahr silihsek (30) samwalahr o: Wehwehki ni duwehn tiahk en Pohnpei.”

Menlau kihdi ahmw initialni “Ehng” de “Soh”:

_____ Ehng _____ Soh I mweidada ngilei en record di nan eilepen interview o

Edei: _____

Ahi signature: _____

Ahn soun kaweid signature: _____

Date: _____

Kalahngan!

2
Consent form (English)

Hello! My name is Macmillan Willyander and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the Department of Psychology. I am doing a research project as part of the requirements for earning my graduate degree.

What am I being asked to do?
If you participate in this project, I will meet with you for an interview at a convenient location.

Taking part in this study is your choice.
Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you. Please be assured that your decision to participate or not participate will have no impact on the provision of services, specifically within the Community, Cultural, and Developmental Program (CCD).
Why is this study being done?
My project aims to evaluate the changes in sakau use within the past three decades (if any) and sakau’s cultural significance today. I am asking you to participate because you recently used these services.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?
The interview will consist of 25 open ended questions. It will take 45 minutes to an hour.

The interview questions will include questions like, “What do you know about Sakau and its cultural significance?” “Are you aware of any potential health benefits or risks associated with the consumption of Sakau?”

Only you and I will be present during the interview. With your permission, I will audio-record the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. You will be one of about 30 people I will interview for this study.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?
I believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the project altogether.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project have the potential to significantly enhance the Cultural Psychology or CCD program, bringing valuable insights and advancements that will directly benefit future studies within the Pacific Island region, specifically in Pohnpei.

Compensation:
You will receive a $10 gift in cash for your time and effort in participating in this research project.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
I will keep all study data secure in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office/encrypted on a password-protected computer. Only my University of Hawai'i advisor and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study.

After I write a copy of the interviews, I will erase or destroy the audio recordings. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Future Research Studies:
Even after removing identifiers, the data from this study collected for this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please call or email me at +1 304-559-8775 & mwillian@hawaii.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Ashley Maynard, at +1 808-956-7343 & amaynard@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign and date this signature page and return it to me.

Keep a copy of the informed consent for your records and reference.

Signature(s) for Consent:

I give permission to join the research project entitled, "*The perception of sakau use over the past 3 decades: A cultural lens on the Pohnpeian identity."*

Please initial next to either "Yes" or "No" to the following:

_____ Yes _____ No I consent to be audio-recorded for the interview portion of this research.

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Signature of the Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Thank you!