

“If you’re Māori then it’s your birth right” – Kauae Expectations on TikTok

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INDIGEN 792 A & B - Dissertation (45 Points)

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Date: 13th November 2023

Abstract

Indigenous identity construction and relational complexity is never more evident than on social media. These platforms provide visibility, accessibility, and creativity in constructing and maintaining identities that are distinctive to social media. However, the benefits of these platforms are colliding with the complexities of Indigenous identity, which calls into question how Indigenous identity expression is being presented on social media.

Identity assertion, acceptance and denial create friction between Indigenous communities, and this is most apparent on social media. The growing visibility of kuaae by wāhine Māori indicates a resurgence, and social media platforms provide spaces to share their experiences, understandings, and perceptions. However, the differing perceptions of kuaae expectations reflect the complex and diverse online understandings and contentions between Māori communities.

This study aims to show to what extent historical contexts and generational influences continue to impact perceptions of kuaae expectations. By examining these through TikTok, the contemporary context of wāhine Māori can be examined to reflect social media's place in our lives today. And case studies present the two dominant perspectives of kuaae expectations, which are indicative of wider Māori communities on TikTok.

Limited existing literature showed the need to diversify interpretations of expectations found on TikTok and further exemplifies the complexity of Indigenous identities online. These case studies show that kuaae expectations are influenced by pre-colonial meritocracies, with the generational context of familial teachings shown to impact the ability of wāhine Māori to assert self-determination. Furthermore, that colonisation impacted the perceived value of wāhine Māori, which continues to influence the harmful discourses, receptions, and appropriations of kuaae.

The power and influence TikTok has in Indigenous identity construction is non-existent in academic literature. This study introduces the plethora of knowledge TikTok can provide in understanding contemporary identity construction in a hyper-visible and unregulated space. Due to TikTok's influence the need to explore how Indigenous identity is being constructed, accepted, and denied on this platform is significant to the future of Indigenous Studies.

Acknowledgements

This project came at one of the most challenging times in my life, and like moko, many crises have come my way, and this work reflects triumph. Waimarie (Linda) supported what has been an incredibly testing journey, that I have succumbed to nearly twice before. Her experience and advice during my lows contextualised my fears and anxieties and allowed me to rationalise (to my best ability) and navigate the complexities imposter syndrome affords to Māori and Pacific women in academia. This work, although not large, is a consolidation of reasserting my ability to not only succeed but thrive in tertiary education and reach heights the seventeen-year-old undergraduate me could never have imagined. From exploring the creation of Indigenous identities, the connection to myself, my cultural identity and its expression comes now from a place of empathy and patience for what growth is still to come.

Ko Tinana te waka

Ko Ongaro te maunga

Ko Rotokakahi te awa

Ko Morehu tōku marae

Ko Te Rarawa, ko Samoa, ko Tokelau okū iwi

Ko Te Uri o Tai, ko Vaito'omuli, ko Fakaofa okū hapū

No Pawarenga ahau.

To my family, It's over! Thank you for your support in this project. Your continued encouragement and faith in my ability was always felt and will forever be appreciated.

To my friends, it's over! Another dissertation down and it feels just like 2018. Although we are in different places (and some of us have still not left Waipapa Taumata Rau yet) you've always been my main inspiration, and in part the delusion that empowered me to return to study this year.

To me, it's over! The internal doubt, fear and judgement came – but we still made it. The nights of anxiety, the wanting to quit, and the tears came – but we still made. The imposter syndrome, the constant back spaces and endless 'final drafts' came – but we still made it.

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Introduction

This study analyses the perceptions of kauae expectations on TikTok. TikTok focuses on contextualising the experiences and perceptions of wāhine Māori in our contemporary online society. It aims to show how historical contexts and generational influences impact perceptions of kauae expectations. Furthermore, how social media adds depth and further complexity to Indigenous identity construction. Overall, this study aims to provide a generational perspective of kauae to build on previous literature.

This study begins with a brief historical overview of tā moko, kauae and Pākehā contact's impact on these practices. This sets the foundation for how historical events influenced and shaped perceptions and provides context to previous resurgences of kauae.

This is followed by a literature review broken up into three sections. The first section discusses the central texts to the study of kauae, looking at *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo* and *Moko: Māori Tattooing in the 20th Century*. These provide the basis for understanding kauae experiences, perceptions, and expectations. Without these texts, many of the experiences captured would have been lost, further fracturing our understanding of kauae as a consequence of our continued oppression and attempted assimilation.

The second section focuses on wāhine Māori literature following these great texts. These exemplify varied experiences of wāhine Māori and research that discuss the assertion of self-determination, the navigation of receiving of kauae, and the impact of colonisation on the perceived value of wāhine Māori.

The third section looks at the growing kauae prominence in mainstream media, including the positive and negative aspects of this increasing visibility. Although contentious, mainstream representation is an indication of kauae resurgence. However, the appropriation of kauae, discourse around eligibility and how this impacts wāhine Māori is also discussed.

A short history of social media, TikTok and Indigenous engagement is provided, followed by a brief discussion on Indigenous identity construction. Literature on Indigenous engagement with TikTok could be more extensive. However, in an attempt to show what existing sources have explored Indigenous and Māori peoples on TikTok, some creators' experiences have been highlighted. Due to the platform's birth in 2020, previous literature has been too early to account for this. Although some academics have recognised TikTok as a future avenue for exploration, this section contextualises the power and complexity TikTok adds to the discourse of Indigenous identity construction and assertion.

A summary of the methods used is then provided, which outlines the criteria chosen to identify the two case studies that reflect common perceptions of kauae. A discussion about the motivations and limitations of using a scoping review to source information and a case study format is also provided here. By including a methods discussion here and acknowledging the lack of critical research on the use and availability of social media platforms such as TikTok, the hope is that this will form a foundation for future research to continue in this space.

From this, two case studies, TikTok One and TikTok Two, are presented, including an overview of its purpose, creator and content. This is followed by a discussion examining three main themes related to kauae expectations identified, including an examination of responding comments. TikTok One features discussions around kauae eligibility, understandings of whakapapa and whānau support, whereas TikTok Two looks at te reo Māori fluency, challenges to authenticity and mana of kauae, and the appropriation of vanity. These case studies are followed by a discussion that provides an overview of the main points, the value of the perspectives provided and recommendations for further research.

As a wāhine descendant of Te Rarawa, Vaito'omuli Samoa and Fakaofa Tokelau, growing up with two Indigenous parents disconnected from their turangawaewae, my academic journey began from a deep need to understand Indigenous identity. Coming from a background in Ancient History, History and Sociology, my focus has been the impact the past evidentially has on ideas of Indigenous authenticity and identity construction.

Kauae, as a pathway of exploration, came late in my academic journey. During a conversation with friends, I was asked if I would consider receiving moko, and I answered yes confidently. Then I was asked if I would receive kauae. I hesitated and said, "We'll see". It was at this point that I recognised that while I had spent years reconnecting, unlearning colonial constructs and promoting self-determination – I still felt that I was not worthy.

Inquisitively, I explored what led me to imbue kauae with greater significance and expectation than other moko. Was identity insecurity, fear of judgement, or vanity creating this hesitation? I recognised that these perceptions were extremely personal and undeniably impacted by my upbringing and cultural understanding. This was the genesis for exploring kauae, its perceptions, expectations and how our upbringing and historical contexts have actively shaped these.

This study does not attempt to prove which perception or expectation is correct. An experience shared by Māori is, therefore, a Māori experience. This study will show how colonisation continues to influence the contentious and complex nature of Māori identity construction.

Tā moko

Origins of moko:

The origin of moko comes from Rūaumoko the child of Papatūānuku and Ranginui who associated with earthquakes and volcanoes lay unborn within her mother. The volcanic activity of Rūaumoko created cracks in the skin of Papatūānuku and this natural process was named moko (Higgins, 2004). The adornment of moko on the body of Papatūānuku was then carried onto the bodies of her children, the atua.

Moko was kept within the realm of Rarohenga until Niwareka fled from the land of the living, followed by her abusive husband Mataora. In awe of the beauty of moko and ashamed of his treatment to Niwareka, Mataora made a commitment to disregard violence and practice the values of Rarohenga. This commitment would be realised in the receiving of moko. With the commitment to uphold the values of Rarohenga Niwareka returned to the land of the living with Mataora, bringing with her the knowledge of tāniko and Mataora the knowledge of tā moko (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007).

Kauae:

Tā moko, the practice of applying moko, is distinctively Māori and unlike any other body marking practice in the Pacific. Tā moko is the creation of grooves in the skin by carving out lines where pigment can be inserted with a finished texture likened to whakairo. The permanence of moko, the permanence of beauty, was desired in Māori society. For wāhine Māori kauae, the blue adornment of the lips and chin, was a beauty standard (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007). The purpose of receiving kauae differed, such as tangi, war, celebrations and tapu or auspicious events, but most commonly received with the transition to womanhood.

Facial markings were common throughout western Pacific. However, these were applied to the surface of the skin, like modern tattoos, rather than carving into the skin like tā moko. The uhi required to apply kauae needed to be small, sharp and tactile to create clean scars and encourage the healing process. Aotearoa offered new resources that allowed for the development of these uhi such as tapahi and whakatatarāmoa, that previous sites of migration could not allow (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007).

The pigment used for kauae in the North was called wai kauri. When fallen, the kauri produced a resin-like substance that when fired would produce a dark pigment. Wai kauri was known to create the darkest pigment, and for this was considered a taonga and was fiercely protected. This was then mixed with fish or bird oil and applied directly into freshly furrowed skin (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007).

Rongoā was used to support the healing of the kauae such as kopakopa leaves that would soothe inflammation and protect the skin from infection. Although rongoā was provided no pain relief was given. The process of moko was about the spilling of blood, and pain was required as payment for an adornment made for the atua. Nikora (2007) states that for wāhine Māori life is “about shedding it [blood], making it flow, in the pursuit of beauty, terror, artifice, enhancement and pleasure.” (p. 76). Young wāhine Māori desired kauae, understood the pain and endured it to receive the ageless beauty it provided.

The patterns used in kauae reflect the receiver’s purpose, with their whakapapa, skill set, and achievements incorporated. Kauae are created for the wearer and unless requested no two are the same. Tohunga tā moko worked within and moved between iwi and hapū incorporating tribally distinctive markings. This allowed others to tell where someone is from, and in some cases who they are, based entirely on their tribally distinctive markings (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007).

Impact of contact:

In 1840, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi were the catalyst for the expansion of the British empire into Aotearoa and would dramatically disrupt Māori culture. The assimilatory processes of colonisation were established with the Crown government, making state education compulsory through Native Schools Acts and westernisation of land custodianship through the Native Land Court (Calman, 2012). Both systems actively worked towards removing Māori cultural practices by enforcing the superiority of Crown power and culture.

These systems began to actively deteriorate the value of wāhine Māori within Pākehā and Māori societies. Some Māori men, through both silence and participation, supported the oppression of wāhine Māori voices and roles in favour of the patriarchal benefits of Pākehā society (Murphy, 2013). Leonie Pihama stated, “Māori women’s knowledge has been made secondary to Māori men’s knowledge and Māori women’s roles redefined in line with colonial notions of gender relations.” (Murphy, 2013, p. 7). Despite this, kauae was still desired and continued to be received, while tāne Māori moko, under pressure to conform to Pākehā society, ceased (Nikora, Rua, & Te Awekotuku, 2005).

The Tohunga Suppression Act in 1908 made tā moko illegal and forced tohunga tā moko into seclusion. This impacted access for wāhine Māori who desired kauae and the training of new tohunga, pushing some to later go to Pākehā tattoo artists to receive kauae (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007). Although in seclusion, Tohunga tā moko maintained their status in Māori society, and even during some of the most challenging periods for Māori, tohunga were still paid handsomely.

In exchange for kauae, tohunga were given rare foods, prized feathers, and elegant garments with the addition of shillings and pounds when the currency became more widely

used. Ensuring that tohunga were compensated appropriately was important. Appropriate compensation ensured a skilled light hand, making the unbearable more bearable. However, transgression of a tohunga and their mana by underpaying or not paying would result in the opposite, as Te Rangikaheke warned, “make him bleed, strike till he screams...” (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007, p. 62).

The 1970s saw a reclamation of tā moko by tāne Māori as a contemporary collaboration of Māori sovereignty and the establishment of gang culture. During this time, tattoos were already associated with crime, and tā moko was associated with violence, gangs and rebellion (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007; Ellis, 2018)

Michael Kings (1972) *Moko: Māori Tattooing in the 20th Century* brought forward imagery and narratives of kuia mau moko, which attempted to recenter moko as a practice of adornment and ancestral pride. King’s text served as a watershed moment, thrusting kauae into the public sphere, encouraging others to explore and creating new pathways of academic inquiry. This was supported by the broader revitalisation of Māori culture and language, seen in the establishment of Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori in the 80s and Whare Wānanga in the 90s (Walker, 2023).

This revitalisation reflects a growing acceptance and understanding of Māori culture and language within Pākehā and Māori society. Those with kauae, their visibility and self-determination are indicative of this cultural shift. Kauae is survived by wāhine Māori despite its ever-changing perceptions. Beginning as the height of pre-colonial Māori feminine beauty, to a curious, exotic, and masterful adornment after contact, then to a symbol of savagery and violence during expansion, and now a symbol of survival and resistance reflective of our contemporary colonial context.

Foundational Literature

In 2007, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Linda Waimarie Nikora, Mohi Rua, Rolinda Karapu and Becky Nunes published *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo*. This text collates an archive of individual, iwi, and whānau experiences and memories of tā moko through its "history, songs, traditions, issues, myths, technologies, styles, forms, admirers, wearers, artists, and modern narratives." (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007, p. 8).

It is a central text to this study as it collates all literature of tā moko and kauae from the origin stories of Niwareka and Mataora till the mid-2000s. *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo* reignited the conversation and reframed moko from a mourned practice of the past to a practice that continues to thrive after two hundred years of curiosity, manipulation, lust, and disgust.

Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo collated and critiqued previous literature on moko, including Micheal Kings' *Moko: Māori Tattooing in the 20th Century*. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku was given access to the interviews from King's work and wrote the foreword for King's 1992 edition, thanking him for the "richness and raw beauty" gathered in the experiences of kuia mau moko (King, 1972, p. 10). These experiences showed that during the 1920s and 30s, this practice remained rich and diverse when it was believed to have nearly disappeared (King, 2008). King's text came at a pivotal time, given that by the 1992 second edition, all but one of his participants had passed away.

King's text significantly influenced the revitalisation of kauae within the public sphere and academia. King himself stated that there was little interest within academia for tā moko. And although later he admits this work felt inappropriate to be led by Pākehā, without the documentation of these stories they most likely would have been lost. *Mau Moko: The World*

of Māori Tattoo collated these stories to complement King's work by providing a generational comparison and producing a richer understanding of moko through history, waiata and pūrākau from a Māori perspective.

This study attempts to further this line of research by considering social media and its role in sharing experiences and perceptions of kauae. During the late 2000s, social media's influence was beginning, and therefore, earlier research had not been able to consider this approach. Today, social media is a central part of everyday life. It provides a place for people to curate their identity and has become such a defining aspect of our ethos that it has the power to create new cultures (Boffone, 2022). Therefore, this is a required inquiry pathway when assessing how kauae is presented and perceived in our contemporary context.

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Linda Waimarie Nikora, and Mohi Rua have collaboratively and individually published many works from the findings in *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo*, which have been considered here also to support further and expand this work.

Wāhine Māori experiences and research

The following texts show a variety of wāhine Māori experiences and research regarding kauae since the release of *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo*. These texts provide their perspective on kauae with wāhine Māori self-determination and its barriers as a common thread throughout each work. These works reinforce the (re)centering of wāhine Māori voices in kauae discourses and how these perspectives indicate broader community experiences. Like *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo*, these have further strengthened the previously captured narratives of kauae and provided new generational experiences and contemporary discourses.

Rawinia Higgins:

Rawinia Higgins PhD *He Tanga Ngutu, He Tūhoetanga Te Mana Motuhake o te Ta Moko Wahine: The Identity Politics of Moko Kauae* investigates how kauae reflects Tūhoetanga; connection to the atua, the whenua, and the mana motuhake of Tūhoe wāhine. Higgins provides an in-depth whakapapa of the origins of moko, outlining the connection this practice has to the whenua. She shows how moko through Papatūānuku by Rūaumoko was carried down to Uetonga, Niwareka, and then ultimately tangata Māori. The richness of Higgins's inquiry shows the understanding of reclamation by Tūhoe wāhine Māori and the significance whenua, and therefore kauae, has to their tribal identity.

Ngarino Ellis:

Ngarino Ellis, a Māori Art Historian who supported the early research for *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo*, wrote a short essay called *Toitu te moko: Maintaining the*

Integrity of the Moko in the 19th Century and the Work of Gottfried Lindauer. Ellis's work exposed the lack of detail and, at times, repetition of patterns used by Lindauer in the capture of kauae in contrast to paruhi. This text suggests that the value of women in Lindauer's worldview reflected the quality of what was captured. Although this does not impact the taonga these paintings are for their whānau it does, instead, reinforce the inequity and inequality of women in European society. Ellis also discusses the resurgence of paruhi during the Lands Wars and how mainstream reporting made it synonymous with violence. This provides context to the generational impact of moko perceptions since the Land Wars, where the value of wāhine Māori is seen to decline through the capturing of kauae by Lindauer.

Hinekura Smith:

Hinekura Smith wrote a reflective piece called *I wear my pride upon my skin: becoming more of who I am* detailing her experience as a white presenting Māori and navigating her cultural expression often against the perceived expectations of 'being Māori'. Smith highlights the unease of meeting both the suspicious eyes of Māori and the offended eyes of Pākehā. However, the self-determination in receiving kauae and negotiating these uncomfortable situations exemplifies the complexity of Smiths' identity assertion.

Ariana Tikao:

Ariana Tikao's *Mokorua: ngā korero mō tōku moko kauae = my story of moko kauae* provides an account of a lifetime of contemplation, preparation, and confrontation, receiving and living with kauae. Her experience is significant as it shows the shift of kauae perceptions in Aotearoa from her childhood in the 1970s to the post-treaty settlement Kāi Tahu women she is today. Tikao shared how her father regretted not being able to speak te

reo Māori and how this was impacted by state schooling. She also showed the impacts of eurocentric policies that convinced her parents that "te ao Pākehā was the way of the future" (Tikao, 2022, p. 13). University is where Tikao began her identity journey, learning and unlearning through exploring the history of settler colonial occupation and policies. Her experience captures the societal expectations, discrimination and disenfranchisement that impacted perceptions and receivership of kauae in the late 1970s.

Kelli Te Maihāroa:

Kelli Te Maihāroa in *Moko Kauae: A symbol of Indigenous resistance and resilience* discusses the validity of kauae wearers. Kauae is shown as a method of decolonial resistance and resilience in its ability to signal the survival and commitment one has to their Māoritanga. The transformative aspect of kauae in navigating crises is a vital and expected part of the metamorphic change kauae provides. However, the crises Te Maihāroa experienced exemplify the authenticity contentions that become barriers to self-determination for wāhine Māori.

Kauae in Mainstream Media

Mainstream media has always been a place of contention for Indigenous peoples, and kauae is no exception. The following section focuses on the resurgence and visibility of kauae in Aotearoa media. It highlights the difficulties of managing this visibility when potentially determinantal discourses for wāhine Māori are reinforced by mainstream media coverage. The complexity of kauae expectations is evident in mainstream discourses, which indicate the extent to which the dominant Pākehā society perceives, accepts and denies kauae representations. This section also provides an example of Pākehā women receiving kauae. It outlines their justifications, responses and the impact this privilege has on wāhine Māori sovereignty.

In 2018, Sally Anderson, a Pākehā life coach, received a kauae from tā moko artist Inia Taylor, thrusting kauae eligibility into mainstream media. This was highly criticised by Leonie Pihama and Mera Lee-Penehira, who wrote opinion pieces in response. Pihama (2018) wrote a thought piece for *The SpinOff* called *Moko kauae is the right of all Māori women. It is not a right for anyone else*, clearly showing her perspective on Anderson's kauae whilst also addressing her stance on the eligibility debate. She outlined the colonial context of tā moko and Māori identity reclamation today and that Anderson's privilege further impacts the perceived accessibility for wāhine Māori. Roger Te Tai, Andersons' Māori husband, stated that she is more Māori than anyone else because "her heart is pure" (Newshub, 2018). The privilege of Pākehā women to receive kauae is reflective of the extent wāhine Māori voices have been undermined and, as Pihama asserts, it is particularly detrimental when our people contradict us.

Although improving, the mainstream normalisation of kauae is still met with resistance. In 2019, Oriini Kaipara became the first mainstream television host to wear kauae.

However, she was met with backlash from viewers who believed her kauae was "offensive and aggressive looking." (Newshub, 2022). She stated that these types of comments were relentless, but they are reflective of a minority. The positive messages she received showed that her presence was required to normalise and promote kauae, "The fact that my existence triggers some people is testament to why we need more Māori advocates in key roles across every sector." (Newshub, 2022).

The 2023 election saw more moko kanohi in the public sphere than ever, with Debbie Ngarewa-Packer, Takutai Tarsh Kemp, Darlene Tana and Rawiri Waititi in parliament. Māori television created a series named *Moko* exploring tā moko practices, experiences, and resurgence. Coconet TV created a documentary series called *Marks of Mana*, which explores female body marking across the Pacific. Furthermore, on TikTok, the hashtag #mokokauae has been viewed over 85 million times and #mokotheworld with just over 124 million.

The visibility of kauae through mainstream and social media clearly indicates a resurgence. Although this presence provides challenges for the safety of Māori cultural representation and voice, the benefits of its accessibility and the ability to respond and contribute outweigh these concerns.

Social Media, TikTok and Indigenous Identity

Social Media:

Due to social media's constantly evolving nature, it has yet to have a universally accepted definition. However, social media could be described as electronic communication that connects and creates communities to share diverse content. Today, the level of human interconnectivity social media provides dismantles barriers such as time and proximity, allowing for more diverse and niche content to be shared instantly, from anywhere and at any time (Langmia, 2014, p. xii).

Social media sites have developed exponentially over the past thirty years, from chat sites such as AOL, MySpace, and Bebo to social media corporate monsters like Facebook, X (formally Twitter) and arguably the most culturally influential, TikTok. Social media's evolution has matched our technological advances. Where one was limited to accessing sites like MySpace via desktop computer and noisy dial-up internet connections, today users have the freedom to access social media from the comfort of their laptops, cellphones, and even from their motor vehicles. Social media platforms provide career networking, dating sites, travel and parenting advice, making it difficult to define due to its broad and diverse reach. Although the platform is still dominated and heavily influenced by youth culture, it is not limited to this demographic (Langmia, 2014, p. xvii).

Social media's influence on our daily lives should not be underestimated. In 2023, a Kepios global analysis showed that almost 79% of all people aged 18 and over use social media sites and over the past year, over 215 million people have joined. Furthermore, 9 out of 10 internet users use some form of social media site, suggesting that social media is an inherent and integral part of our contemporary global society (Datareportal, 2023).

Indigeneity and Social Media:

For Indigenous people, social media "...bridges distance, time, and nation-states to mobilise Indigenous peoples..." (Carlson & Berglund, 2021, p. 3). The diversity of social media platforms provides a plethora of creative mediums for Indigenous content, which many are used in the controversial discussion of 'who counts as Indigenous?' (Carlson, 2013). Moreover, since its inception, Indigenous peoples have used social media to build and display their identities. This ability provides a complex environment for Indigenous communities, as social media also provides a space for these identities to be tested (Carlson, 2013).

The previous but limited literature on social media and Indigenous identity construction shows that, unlike other groups, Indigenous peoples are more likely to promote and exemplify their culture rather than not. Significantly, social media is essential for those exploring their cultural identity, questioning their understanding, and developing confidence (Carlson, 2013). However, existing literature does raise the question of the safety of Indigenous peoples and knowledge in such a hyper-visible and unregulated space. Indigenous data sovereignty, appropriation and manipulation are calls for concern. However, it is consistently shown that despite this, Indigenous people are not deterred from the benefits these platforms can provide (Langmia, 2016).

TikTok:

TikTok was developed in 2017 by the Chinese-based company ByteDance. After buying out and replacing the similar platform Musically, the platform became famous for its dance challenges. Likened to "digital crack cocaine", TikTok gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic as isolation turned many to social media sites for entertainment (Boffone, 2022, p. 4). The platform's popularity is thanks to its short bursts of content,

allowing users to avoid boredom by quickly moving between videos with a simple swipe.

TikTok currently has over 1.1 billion users, an average daily engagement of over 95 minutes, and is opened eight times on average (Doyle, 2023).

TikTok's cultural impact is seen with the creator Charli D'Amelio, whose popularity from completing dance challenges made her a cultural icon that could "dictate the culture of the app." (Boffone, 2022, p. 18). Coined as the 'D'Amelio effect', if the creator shared a dance to a particular song, it would be copied, shared, and promoted to the extent that it became entrenched in pop culture; it went viral. This impact can be seen in the correlation between dance trends and music charts, with the top trending song on Spotify dictated by the top trending song on TikTok, regardless of when the song was released (Doyle, 2023).

Indigenous peoples and TikTok:

Those who focus on social media and Indigenous peoples, such as Bronwyn Carlsons (2021) *Indigenous Peoples Rise Up: The Global Ascendancy of Social Media Activism*, wrote that TikTok is the most important and influential social media platform for Indigenous youth today. However, academic literature on Indigenous engagement on TikTok, including Carlson's work, is non-existent.

TikTok literature that does focus on minority experiences is coming out of the US, but these are limited to African America, LatinX and LGBTQI+ groups. The inclusion of Indigenous peoples in Trever Boffone's 2022 *The Rise of TikTok in the US Culture* is collapsed into Black experiences or mentioned briefly alongside cultural appropriation in a section named *WitchTok Education for Baby Witches* (Boffone, 2022).

However, documentation of Indigenous experience has been acquired thanks to small, Indigenous-owned journalism outlets. The Indigenous Canadian media

source *Windspeaker* captured a series of Indigenous creators on the platform, providing the only in-depth accounts of their experiences.

One such documentation discusses a Navajo Nation TikTok creator, @KairynPotts, who Indigenises TikTok trends to make them relatable to Indigenous Two-Spirited people. Often using the hashtag #rezhumor, he shows what it is like growing up and living on a reservation. @KairynPotts would naturally bring aspects of advocacy to their content through colours, clothing and makeup. For example, he would wear red clothing to support Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited People. He would also create makeup looks incorporating orange, symbolising the Every Child Matters movement, calling for justice against Indigenous children in residential schools (Potts & Boateng, 2023). The content created by Potts is nuanced by providing viewers with humorous content while educating and promoting Indigenous movements.

This nuance is significant for Indigenous creators, as Cree TikTok creator James Jones, known on TikTok as @NotoriousCree, discusses the constant expectation placed on him by his audiences to educate. Jones began on TikTok posting comedy videos. However, one day took part in a TikTok dance trend where creators would dance to The Weeknds hit song Blinding Lights. Jones decided to complete the trend in full Cree regalia, after completing it in 'street clothes' felt off. Since that initial TikTok in 2020, Jones has amassed over 3.9 million followers on TikTok. However, this type of content can take its toll. Jones expressed that the most popular content on his page, advocacy and visibility of Cree regalia and dance, has made him feel siloed and regretfully moved him away from the comedy content that drew him to the platform initially (Singh, 2020).

These indicate the experiences and expectations of Indigenous creators on TikTok to educate and advocate, regardless of the content they create. This raises awareness of the

potential creation of new expectations that are placed on Indigenous peoples as a demand of the online space. Furthermore, it questions at what point existing as Indigenous and advocating for Indigenous peoples in the online space converge and split.

For Māori, documentation is also restricted to small news pieces, with many of these coincidentally centred around significant Māori events, such as "The best Māori TikTok creators to follow this Te Wiki o te Reo Māori." (Templeton, 2023). Popular Māori TikTok creators have been interviewed regarding their rise to fame. However, perhaps reflective of *Windspeaker*, an Indigenous-run news outlet and *Stuff*, a seemingly constantly apologetic Pākehā news outlet, the discourses around the complexity of online engagement for Māori are limited.

Haukatangi Heta began creating TikTok's, which showed his lived experience of being Māori through exacerbated humour. These included skits highlighting what it is like to live in a Māori household, have Māori aunties, and be on the marae. His Māori followers praised the content created by Heta for giving them a sense of home away from home. Heta began creating content during the COVID-19 lockdown at the height of the platform's growth and shared that being creative helped with his mental health and is what drew him to the platform (Dimitrof, 2022). He discussed how his success on the platform created opportunities for him to pursue comedy acting full-time. This included writing and starring in the Māori comedy series *A Place Called Te Awamutu*.

The song *35* by Ka Hao and Rob Ruha went viral on Tiktok in 2022 after young Māori creators created a dance routine that went viral. Its popularity saw it duetted by TikTok creators across the globe, thrusting te reo Māori into the mainstream sphere of TikTok trends. Ruha created Ka Hao, a youth choir from the East Coast, as one of many strategies to address growing social issues. Although happy with the success of *35* and the exposure for Ka Hao,

Ruha notes that there is hesitancy when Māori music shifts into the mainstream for fear of what might be lost (Blank, 2022). However, ultimately, Ruha feels that the visibility of Māori music on TikTok is removing a deep-seated resistance once felt towards Māori cultural expression.

These provide an example of what factors drew some Māori creators to TikTok. Although, unlike the Indigenous TikTok experiences mentioned by *Windspeaker*, these evidently show how little advocacy explicitly is accounted into their content but may also be indicative of the limitations of the interviewers purpose. This also raises the same question of whether Indigenous content is inherently advocacy content, just as Māori bodies are inherently political bodies. However, both creators show TikTok's power and influence in shaping their careers and popularising Māori content into the mainstream.

The power of influence TikTok has makes it a significant social media platform in the study of Indigenous identity construction. The Canadian National Screen Institute (NSI) recognised this and created an accelerator program for First Nation, Métis and Inuit TikTok users. The programme focused on exploring what it means to be Indigenous online and provided creators with tips and tricks for content creation (Laskaris, 2021).

This is evidence that Indigenous communities are present and participating on TikTok. Locating and creating these communities are simplified through hashtags such as #MāoriTok. The experiences that have been captured show that the platform provides a space where Indigenous identities are promoted and praised but that expectations to advocate and educate are challenging to manage. Indigenous creators are expected to fit certain stereotypes and create specific content, which can foster resentment. Despite this, the visibility and accessibility of Indigenous content for and by Indigenous creators is shown to outweigh this (Singh, 2020).

Social Media and Indigenous Identity Construction:

Indigenous identity is inherently ambiguous, so reconstructing such an identity is problematic (Hokowhitu, 2010). For Māori identity, colonial assimilation impacted our fundamental ways of being and, almost cruelly, in its attempted reconstruction, cemented our relationship to the colonial 'other' as a foundational aspect of our contemporary identity. Brenden Hokowhitu (2010) argued that Indigenous identity construction has sometimes been contradictory to our lived realities. Indigenous perceptions of authenticity are reflective of our colonial context, and social media platforms provide a new space to explore and assess the reality of this authenticity.

Today, our lives are more than ever interlinked with our online identity; as Langmia stated, "our lives are now postpersonal and logged in a database..." (2016, p. xii). The fluidity of expression the internet provides further compromises Indigenous identity construction and the question of 'who is Indigenous?'. Furthermore, social media raises concerns about its capacity to continue imperialism due to the hypervisibility, and therefore, its ability for appropriation (Langmia, 2016).

Acknowledging the complexities of cultural identity construction and the contentions that rise in the online world, the ability of the space for identities to explore, make connections and thrive is significant. In the online space, self-determination is conveyed through identity expression and assertion, with kauae on TikTok emerging as a display for wāhine Māori. The internet and social media have been likened to the Industrial Revolution's cultural shifting compacity. It is a tool that demands conformity as the world becomes ever more reliant on the online space (Langmia, 2014). For Indigenous peoples, the challenges and advantages of this space make it contentious but, ultimately, inescapable.

Methods

Literature on kauae, including tā moko, was collated to identify common themes in existing sources as a foundation for exploring TikTok. Search terms used to identify this literature were tā moko, Māori tattoo, Polynesia Tattoo, kauae, moko kauae, moko kanohi, facial tattoos, Indigenous body marking, Native body marking and Polynesian body marking. This search showed that only one text provided a summary of the ancestral and historical literature on tā moko up until 2007 and that overall, very little literature has been published on kauae. This text provided the thematic foundations that supported the identification of reoccurring themes of kauae expectations on TikTok.

Due to the vast amount of information and varied application of search functions on TikTok, a scoping review was employed to summarise discourses around kauae expectations thematically. A case study approach was used to show how individual experiences correlate to their prevalence in broader communities, and, through analysis, how these can inform historical patterns of kauae resurgence.

The research question informing this scoping review was, 'what perspectives of kauae expectations are dominant on TikTok?'. For this, the hashtag #mokokauae was used to identify content that existed on the platform. After skimming the 776 videos identified, most did not explicitly present perspectives of kauae expectations. However, two main perspectives were identified: kauae is a birthright, and kauae is a birthright that comes with expectations. Subsequently, both exemplified the majority and minority perspectives on the platform, indicative of those found in previous literature and the support or lack of support from TikTok responses.

Using a case study approach allowed individual experiences to be highlighted and showcased how these feed into broader community voices. Furthermore, the depth of analysis

afforded by this approach allowed for the voice of wāhine Māori creators to lead this study, adding to the quality of literature exploring the perceptions of kauae.

The limitation of using TikTok is the ability to present the plethora of information it provides. A case study approach attempts to resolve this through an in-depth analysis of one example that, through a scoping review, reflects a common theme. However, the complexity of Māori identity, contexts, influences and lived experiences on TikTok makes it challenging to capture all experiences.

The criteria chosen to select a TikTok case study for each perspective were centered around wāhine Māori voices and limited the need for content interpretation to honour them. From this, the decision to choose only wāhine Māori voices is indicative of the historical context of this study and to intentionally put wāhine Māori voices at the forefront of this resurgence. The decision to include kauae and non-kauae wearers is again indicative of this, as kauae is a right for all wāhine Māori and, therefore, a right for all wāhine Māori to share their views. The most viewed TikTok's identified contained little to no dialogue, instead followed dance trends, and had one or two-sentence captions. Ultimately, I decided against using these, despite their popularity, due to the potential of wide interpretation, and this ran the risk of working against the creator's intentions. From this, the two TikToks chosen effectively summarized these dominant perspectives and featured consistent dialogue. Furthermore, this consequently improved the diversity of discourses within each TikTok's responses.

Once appropriate TikTok's were identified, and to ensure depth and complexity were shown in the expectations presented, a variation of points relating to the overall themes were identified. This ensured that discussion points were distinct across both case studies and reinforced the variations of understandings that underpinned these common themes.

TikTok One, created by @teetime89, an Australian-born wāhine Māori with kauae, represents the majority perspective that supports kauae is a birthright without expectations. Furthermore, TikTok Two, created by @im_back_itz_oce, a wāhine Māori without kauae, represents the minority perspective that kauae is a birthright that comes with expectations.

From this, the two TikTok's chosen exemplified the uplifting of wāhine Māori voices, included perspectives from both kauae and non-kauae wearing wāhine and limited the need for interpretation to uphold the sovereignty of these voices. They presented one of the two dominant perspectives of kauae expectations on TikTok and provided various discussion points that further our understanding of what underpins kauae perspectives.

My intention to diversify themes in this study from my awareness of the complexity and contentions in Indigenous Studies at Waipapa Taumata Rau. The complications of Indigenous identity construction require a broader understanding of the context and experiences of Indigenous peoples. By supplying a range of kauae expectation interpretations, a greater awareness of Indigenous identity construction can be provided. Furthermore, by using social media as a medium in which to explore these interpretations, it further contextualizes the contemporary realities of wāhine Māori identity today.

Case Studies

The following case studies explore two different perspectives of kauae expectations from TikTok. For each case study, three main themes have been identified and discussed to show how they fit into the broader discourse around kauae expectations. These are followed by an analysis outlining the main points and how these inform recommendations for further research.

Case Study: TikTok One @teetime89

TikTok One was published on the 10th of October 2022 by @teetime89, an Australian-born wāhine Māori who has received her kauae. This TikTok focused on sharing the experience of @teetime89, her views on kauae eligibility and how her understanding of the criteria for receiving kauae has changed over time.

@teetime89 began their TikTok by acknowledging their understanding of kauae eligibility. She stated that whakapapa was the sole requirement and that "If the blood flowing through your veins is Māori, then it is your birthright to be able to accept and receive moko kanohi should you choose to.". She explained how this was not her understanding growing up and that she was taught that kauae had many expectations; these included being born in Aotearoa, speaking fluent te reo Māori, providing service to your iwi and marae and having a certain level of knowledge regarding whakapapa. She expressed how being born and growing up in Australia, these expectations reinforced that she was not worthy and made her see kauae as "untouchable". She shared how her whānau were not supportive of her receiving kauae and that these expectations justified the continuous denial of permission by her parents and older sibling, which she stated, "fucking sucks".

@teetime89 shared that from their experience, it is typically those who do not have kauae that challenge those who do and that receiving kauae is a distinctive and intense

journey that can only be understood by experience. She ended her TikTok by sharing how difficult it was to accept whakapapa as the only criteria for kauae. She encouraged other wāhine Māori to overcome feelings of being undeserving and unworthy. She stated, "... it's still hard to accept when you have been programmed your whole life that you are not that bitch, then to be told you are. But I'm telling you, you fucking are!"

Analysis:

The three themes to be analysed from TikTok One are criteria and eligibility of kauae, perceptions and acceptance of whakapapa and the place of whānau in exploring and receiving kauae.

Eligibility:

Perceptions of cultural eligibility begin with those closest to us, our parents, caregivers, and friends. These perceptions shape how we see ourselves, our culture and define what and how we access it. An experience shown in TikTok One is an example of unlearning negative understandings of culture taught to us by those closest and how those unlearnings are sometimes the most difficult to accept. However, this experience reveals that societal views of kauae change and will continue to change across generations, but these can resist time and impact how kauae is viewed today.

A significant point raised in this experience is how eligibility is framed in different generational contexts, specifically how societal perceptions of kauae has impacted this. @teetime89's TikTok focused on her upbringing, which she recognised as a barrier to her right to self-determination. Oral histories, waiata and chants tell us that kauae was a normalised part of everyday life. However, for contemporary Māori, kauae is a politically confronting and critically reflective decision (Nikora, Rua, & Te Awekotuku, 2007). This change, specifically for wāhine Māori, is an impact of colonisation and degradation of our

value and roles in society. Mythologies were created from colonial belief systems that attempted to end or restrict kauae under the guise of authenticity (Pihama, 2018).

TikTok One lists a series of expectations the creator was taught by her parents, which convinced her that she was ineligible for kauae. One of these expectations was service to her community. Being born in Australia and growing up with whānau who knew little about their whakapapa, @teetime89 struggled with her cultural identity, stating, "I know that hearing 'it's your birthright, you're okay', it's still hard to accept when you have been programmed your whole life that you are not that bitch.". These expectations placed on her as a child have been difficult to unlearn and impacted her ability to accept kauae as her birthright. Like @teetime89, due to their context, it is common for many wāhine Māori to feel inadequate to meet whānau, hapū and iwi expectations.

This is reflective of how Indigenous peoples often frame their identity, which Brendan Hokowhitu argued is often contradictory to the context of their existence (Hokowhitu, 2010). This can be seen in the responses by @teetime89's parents, denying her the right to receive kauae, as being born in Australia meant she did not meet expectations that ultimately contradict her context. However, the societal acceptance in the generation of her parents could be evident of impacting the way kauae is viewed and influenced its perceive criteria.

The generational differences in the opinion of kauae eligibility have also been discussed by Ariana Tikao. Tā moko was rare during her childhood, and having never seen one in real life, she only wanted kauae as a joke. However, it is made clear that the societal perceptions of kauae at the time influenced this understanding, and as time changed, so did her position, as she stated, "Thirty years later, I had changed – and so had Aotearoa." (Tikao, 2022, p. 7).

Tikao writes of how she felt a sense of grief when finding pictures of her ancestors with kauae as a young teenager. This experience made her determined to explore her Māori identity when she moved away from home and began tertiary education. Although she flourished in exploring her Kāi Tahu whakapapa, she still had moments in her journey where she stumbled while unlearning the societal expectations and disenfranchisement of her parents. This is seen in @teetime89's experiences as she struggled to unlearn and overcome the criteria that denied her access to kauae when she was younger.

@teetime89 and Ariana Tikao exemplify the consequences of generational, cultural teachings. However, both share their experiences in hopes of helping others recognise and unlearn similar views. @teetime89 reasserts that although this unlearning is complex, it is required for the self-determination of wāhine Māori. Kauae is reinforced through TikTok One as a birthright for all wāhine Māori, as she stated, "... to anybody who thinks that they are unworthy... I'm telling you - you fucking are!".

Whakapapa:

TikTok One emphasised that whakapapa is the only criterion required for kauae. Rāwiri Taonui defines whakapapa as the binding of all things so that our "mythology, legend, history, knowledge, tikanga (custom), philosophies and spiritualities are organised, preserved and transmitted from one generation to the next." (Taonui, 2023). However, @teetime89 presents whakapapa in a problematic fashion, as she states, "It does not matter if you are half Māori, quarter Māori, fucking 1/5th Māori.". This view of what it means to be Māori does not reflect whakapapa but instead correlates to blood quantum measurements. Whakapapa is not measured; it is Māori identity (Smith, 2022).

Blood quantum is an archaic notion used in the colonial process to illegitimise Indigenous peoples. Derby and MacFarlane define blood quantum as a mathematical formula

"whereby (we think) we are supposed to divide the number of generations since our tūpuna (ancestors) were 'full-blooded' by the number of marriages with people who are non-Māori in order to determine who is a 'real Māori' (or not)." (2019, p. 219). Blood quantum is still used by and against Indigenous communities today. However, this is no longer accepted in Aotearoa.

Statements such as 'quarter Māori' and 'half-caste' are remnants of this archaic practice in Aotearoa. This again shows the influence of generational perceptions and their impact on concepts such as whakapapa. However, by discussing whakapapa in this way, @teetime89 has engaged and validated a community of Māori on TikTok, as one comment stated, "Appreciate the inclusion and validation of "1/5". Although blood quantum measurements are detrimental, their use today reinforces the complexity of understanding identity construction for Māori. @teetime89 shared a learning experience that allowed others to relate, discuss, challenge, and unlearn detrimental beliefs of kauae, as she stated, "All that you need is to be able to whakapapa Māori".

TikTok One also highlighted the difficulty in accepting that whakapapa is enough. Hinekura Smith (Te Rarawa and Nga Puhī) describes being not the "traditional Māori phenotype" and that as a white presenting wāhine Māori, she struggled to 'look' and 'feel' Māori (Smith, 2022). Smith shared feelings of inadequacy as @teetime89, where she often bought into colonial criteria that limited her identity expression and security. However, both showed a clear need to encourage wāhine Māori to stop "... 'waiting' to be brown enough, fluent enough, worthy enough, to receive what is their birthright." (Smith, 2022, p. 4). Although each overcame this sense of inadequacy, the effect blood quantum had on what it means to be Māori has impacted individuals' ability to feel secure in their whakapapa.

However, an emerging dynamic that has impacted wāhine Māori self-determination is the place of Pākehā women in kauae discourses. Sally Anderson, a Pākehā life coach, received 'kauae' from tā moko artist Inia Taylor (Pihama, 2018). Anderson's kauae brought to light two different perceptions of kauae eligibility: that kauae is the right of wāhine Māori, and the other, that kauae reflects connection and commitment to te ao Māori, regardless of whakapapa. Leonie Pihama wrote a response to Anderson, stating, "It is not a right for Pākehā women. The resurgence of moko kauae is a resurgence of Mana Wahine. It is not a resurgence for Pākehā women." (Pihama, 2018).

The privilege that enabled Pākehā women like Anderson to receive kauae is disrespectful of the current colonial context of Māori and our attempts to revitalise our ways of knowing and being (Pihama, 2018). Pākehā women are not confronted by the generational consequences of colonisation that alienate and oppress wāhine Māori today. Anderson would not have faced the same emotional and spiritual battles that @teetime89, Hinekura Smith and Ariana Tikao did in their journey to receive their kauae. When Anderson's story broke, it became headline news around Aotearoa, where she expressed that she had the right to claim kauae. For wāhine Māori like @teetime89, we are constantly enthralled by expectations and restrictions. Pākehā women claiming kauae as a privilege reminds us of our continued contemporary colonial context. Furthermore, as Pihama states, the marking of Anderson disrespects all wāhine Māori and reflects the denial of our right to our ancestral symbols.

Whānau:

Whānau is an important factor for wāhine Māori receiving kauae. However, TikTok One shows an experience where whānau was the barrier to self-determination. For @teetime89, she discusses the unlearning she had done to receive her kauae, as her whānau did not support her decision. She recalled that when she was young, she would ask her

parents for permission every year, and although she was always denied, she continued to ask regardless. This shows how important whānau permission was to @teetime89 and how difficult this was to be denied, as she states, "being surrounded by that type of energy or thinking – it fucking sucks". This is not uncommon, as many have expressed fear of judgment when approaching whānau with the desire to receive kauae (Nikora, Rua, & Te Awekotuku, 2007). However, receiving kauae is about metamorphic change, and although it becomes the strategy to cope with and negotiate these changes, it requires crises. For @teetime89, navigating her whānau expectations and permission was one of her crises (Te Maihāroa, 2021).

Kelli Te Maihāroa (Waitaha, Ngāti Rārua Ātiawa, Taranaki and Ngāti Maniapoto) also experienced a whānau crisis when exploring kauae. One of her sisters expressed that they did not want her to receive kauae out of fear it might impact Te Maihāroa's future job prospects (Te Maihāroa, 2021). Although Te Maihāroa wanted the support of all her whānau, she recognised that her sister's fears came from their own reservations about being identified as Māori within Pākehā dominant society.

On her journey to receive kauae, Te Maihāroa had to negotiate the judgments of her whānau to express her self-determination for kauae. @teetime89 shows this same negotiation, where she struggled to respect the opinion of her whānau. *Mau Moko: the world of Maori tattoo* shows that some claimed their moko as a journey of self-growth, where asking permission negated their tino rangatiratanga and right to self-determination (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007). Although it also shows that a majority saw whānau as a fundamental support system, @teetime89 and Leonie Pihama show that it is not a necessity, "it is a decision made in line with our fundamental right to wear the symbols of our ancestors." (Pihama, 2018).

@teetime89 advises those without whānau support to gain advice from those who have kauae and have already gone through the "pretty intense fucking journey". This is recommended by other kauae wearers also. Reaching out to knowledgeable people like tā moko artists, community members, or someone on social media to provide insight and help inform their decision (Nikora, Rua, & Te Awekotuku, 2007). Uniformed opinions can prevent receiving kauae, and @teetime89 states that those without would struggle to articulate the preparation required for the metamorphic change and crises it demands.

Lack of whānau support and understanding is common and shared by @teetime89 and Kelli Te Maihāroa. Both show that whānau permission and support is important but not necessary, as they can serve as a barrier to the self-determination of wāhine Māori. However, support systems can be found by connecting with those who have received kauae, such as @teetime89. TikTok One is an example of how wāhine Māori can find communities on TikTok that can support exploration through the sharing of experiences by those who have been on the "pretty intense fucking journey" kauae demands.

Discussion:

TikTok One shares the perspective of an Australian-born wāhine Māori on the eligibility of kauae and the vital place of whakapapa and whānau. This experience reflects the dominant perspective that kauae requires whakapapa only. However, it also alludes to the complexity of the decision to receive kauae, which gives full autonomy to wāhine Māori to say when they are ready and what they must do to prepare for receiving and living with kauae.

TikTok One explored generational societal change and how colonially constructed criteria heavily influenced the understanding of Māori culture. In 2003, a survey of Aotearoa university students on the perceptions of moko showed that it was trendy and reflected

resistance and solidarity, but some saw it as a radical disfigurement (Nikora, Rua, & Te Awekotuku, 2007).

However, the increased presence of kauae today is undeniable. The faces in parliament, on television, in documentaries and the public are ever more reflective of this resurgence. With this emerging hypervisibility, what would the 2023 Aotearoa university student say about moko? Would comments such as trendy and radical disfigurement still be present?

Given the generational changes exemplified in TikTok One, exploring the impact of kauae's growing visibility on changing public perceptions is required. Following on from *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo*, this study could track the broader generational societal change and map the critical influences of kauae resurgence across history.

A recommendation for future study is using social media, specifically TikTok, to explore this impact. The power dynamics in interpreting Indigenous participation on TikTok, due to its various creative mediums, requires negotiation. However, the negotiation of Māori identity construction, as seen in the exploration of kauae perspectives, has never been more visible and accessible to academia than on TikTok.

Case Study: Tiktok Two @im_back_itz_oce

TikTok Two was published on the 12th of October 2022 by @im_back_itz_oce, a wāhine Māori without kauae. This TikTok focused exclusively on how those who do not speak te reo Māori and have kauae feel about not being fluent.

@im_back_itz_oce began her TikTok by identifying their specific audience, "This one is for those getting moko kauae, or those who already have their moko kauae...". She asked them if they could speak te reo Māori. She discusses how there is a rise in wāhine Māori with kauae but that most can not speak te reo Māori. @im_back_itz_oce then shared how she would be embarrassed if she received her kauae and could not speak te reo Māori.

@im_back_itz_oce provided an example of a kuia asking a question in te reo Māori, such as *kei te pehea koe?* and how she would feel ashamed to have "something on my face" and not be able to understand or respond to "basic shit". She acknowledged that she is a beginner in her own reo journey but is interested in why those with kauae did not learn te reo Māori before receiving it. She concluded her TikTok by acknowledging the controversy this type of question could raise, but also affirmed that she is entitled to her own opinion, "...my opinion, not yours, hate I don't care."

Analysis:

The three themes to be analysed from Tiktok Two are the requirement of te reo Māori fluency for wearers, authenticity and mana of kauae receivership today and the appropriation of vanity in the decision to receive kauae.

Te Reo Māori:

Tiktok Two highlights a common anxiety around kauae and the need to be fluent or competent in te reo Māori. Although fluency has been shown by those such as Leonie Pihama

and Hinekura Smith to be unnecessary limitations of kauae, the perceived social expectation remains. @im_back_itz_oce shares that she would feel embarrassed to wear kauae and not speak te reo Māori. This is seen by others in her comments stating, "I wouldn't get mine until I was fluent in Reo aswell", showing that te reo Māori is understood as an expectation for receiving kauae.

This discourse is interesting for several reasons, particularly in relation to the perceptions of access to te reo Māori education. @im_back_itz_oce stated, "ATAAHUA! I love seeing more of us embracing our culture & not allowing what happened 45 years ago to affect us learning it today.". This comment implies that overcoming barriers is expected to learn te reo or that barriers from 45 years ago no longer impact learning now. Regardless, this perspective is shared by another who states, "If you have the money & time to get your kauae done you have the money & time to learn Te Reo Māori". Some moko wearers share this perspective to an extent, as they advise, learning te reo Māori helps you to be taken more seriously due to these types of perceived fluency expectations (Rua, 1999).

Access to te reo Māori learning is now more widely available than ever. Online sites, resources and books allow you to study at your own pace. Institutions such as Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and UNITEC provide free short courses and other longer and higher qualifications such as Bachelor programmes at universities or full-year immersion classes at Te Wānanga Takiura, which come with fees.

Conversely, although accessibility has improved, the consequences of intergenerational trauma and language alienation of Māori remain, and this should not be reduced to "money & time". Some of the comments on Tiktok Two showed that learning language is a path kauae can provide, "For some the journey only begins when they receive their kauae. For others it's the completion." From this, it is clear that there is an expectation

for those with kauae to be fluent in te reo Māori, and that due to this some moko wearers encourage the learning of reo Māori to navigate the demands of these expectations better.

Although expectations of fluency are not necessarily harmful, it is the conveying of this expectation by @im_back_itz_oce that causes contention (Rua, 1999). Melissa Derby (Ngāti Ranginui) and Sonja MacFarlane (Ngāi Tahu; Ngāti Waewae) (2019) published a short reflective piece named *"How High Is Your RQ?": Is Te Reo Māori The New Blood Quantum?* which discussed the growing discourse around te reo Māori as a social requirement of being Māori. They stated, "language is but one marker of a person's identity.". This calls for concern that such perceptions continue to play into colonial hegemonic frameworks that neglect our past and current context (Derby & MacFarlane, 2019).

TikTok Two shows how intrinsically linked perceptions of language and kauae are by those such as @im_back_itz_oce. In the comments, she stated, "Learn your language be proud to speak it and wear it!!!". This implies that kauae is a marker of language fluency. However, this perspective contradicts where @im_back_itz_oce discusses the difference between shaded and unshaded lips of kauae. She stated that if your "lips are done you can speak reo, if they ain't your still learning or can't". This comment shows an understanding that the shading of lips can indicate language fluency. Therefore, that kauae can be worn without fluency, without the shading of the lips.

Mana:

Another contentious discourse found in Tiktok Two is the discussion of kauae and mana. One comment states that not speaking te reo Māori "defeats the mana" of kauae. Although Leonie Pihama has negated this statement, this perspective provides another layer to the complexity of kauae authenticity. Mohi Rua (1999) found that for moko wearers, their adornment was perceived by others as a symbol of cultural fluency. When wearers did not

meet these expectations, they are not taken seriously. Perceptions of the mana of moko were not discussed by Rua specifically, however, it is implied that mana sits with the wearer's ability to navigate their own communities alongside the Pākehā dominant society (Rua, 1999).

The contentions of authenticity can be seen in the pre-colonial understanding of kauae and, therefore the expectation that the same level of cultural competency should be applied to wearers today. One comment exemplified the issues with pre-colonial essentialism, stating, "I personally don't think it's attractive. it's attractive only on the elders from the past. also they had earned there's for real reasons.". Here kauae is being 'remembered' in the visceral images of kuia mau moko, like those captured in the paintings of Lindauer. By viewing kauae this way, expectations sit within a meritocracy that serves only to further exclude based on a romanticised understanding of pre-colonial Māori.

Many commenters on Tiktok Two challenged this understanding, one stating, "...speaking our reo would never have been a prerequisite in a time where that's all we knew, this whakaaro is outdated and colonised.". Again, @im_back_itz_oce contradicts herself by replying in agreeance, stating, "Thankyou for you comment it sure is outdated but so is Māori shaming others for learning our language when they don't bother themselves.". Although no context is given to who 'others' are here, she acknowledges that her initial inquiry in TikTok Two is "colonised". This reinforces the fact that this is not a simple issue and discourse like this exemplifies the complexity and often contradictory understandings of our identity and colonisation's evident impact. However, the caption of TikTok Two stating, "My opinion will bother you & that's okay with me.", shows that @im_back_itz_oce understood this and was prepared to be confronted with the reality of this understanding.

The harm this type of inquiry had is evident from the audience of TikTok Two, with an overwhelming majority supporting that it promoted a colonised view of kauae and that the judgement it implied directly impacts wāhine Māori. One comment that addresses the colonial view stated, "our people were colonised, our native tounge ripped from our mouths, our women dont need to speak reo to where [wear] what is rightfully theirs." Another comment addresses the harm of the use of the word embarrassment in TikTok Two stating, "Not embarrassing, but what your doing is now making it unsafe for te Iwi Maaori, to be and feel worthy. That's a paakehaa mindset and worldview e hoa." Furthermore, one comment shows how this type of rhetoric has impacted their decision to receive kauae, "[I] don't have a moko yet.. But I wish to get one and it's these kinds of whakaro that makes me think I'm not worthy and probably won't get one yet.". From this, Tiktok Two is an example of how opinions underpinned by colonial constructs serve to validate these types of judgements and act as barriers to wāhine Māori self-determination (Te Maihāroa, 2021).

The perspectives above show that the contentions between differing expectations are consistent with previous studies of moko, with the ability to navigate the reactions and expectations of others as an inescapable demand of moko wearers. This is further exacerbated by moko wearers classification as being different to 'other' Māori and from the dominant majority. These different audiences make the reconciliation and validation of cultural identity and competency more complex and stressful for moko wearers (Nikora, Mohi, & Te Awekotuku).

For moko wearers, the ability to have reciprocal conversations that can inform and educate on aspects of mana and authenticity are only sometimes available (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007). On TikTok, discourses can be shared into a hyper-visible but also relatively un-regulated space, creating both positive and negative qualities.

However, what is clear from TikTok Two is that the majority on the platform reject the potentially harmful, colonial constructed views of kauae.

Vanity:

In the responses to @im_back_itz_oe TikTok, some comments expressed that the resurgence of kauae is a negative consequence of a generational trend and that today kauae receivership is not 'earned'. One user commented, "These younger generation are trying to normalise not speaking te reo is okay but get your moko Kauae that [is] fine[?] I think that the stupidest thing.". This is supported by others, who believe kauae today is being received out of want, with one comment stating "I've been brought up with the belief that you have to earn your moko kauae and that you can't just get it because you want it.".

Ngahuaia Te Awekotuku raised an important point regarding kauae and its attainment purely for its beauty. She questioned the inherent need to imbue kauae with significance; that it needs to be earned. She stated that for kauae, "its own elegance surely carries its own mana.". Comments on Tiktok Two emphasise kauae is negatively associated with vanity and the following of trends, with one comment stating, ". Most people are getting it because it's coming back into fashion.". These comments show a perspective of kauae resurgence that is indicative of a trend underpinned by vanity. And that due to this, kauae is being received under false pretences as wanting kauae for its looks, therefore, means for Māori that "culture flew out the window".

However, the origin stories of tā moko provide a basis to support vanity as a main driver of receiving kauae. The story of Niwareka and Mataora show an apparent want for the beautification and permanent adornment moko provided. It was about beauty and admiration, a cultural beauty standard for wāhine Māori that emphasised sex appeal and marriageability (Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, Karapu, & Nunes, 2007). This shows, as Te Awekotuku

suggests, that vanity has shifted from being a valid driver in receiving kauae. For wāhine Māori the patriarchal Christian belief system vilified the concept of vanity, shifting kauae perceptions from beatification to disfigurement. Therefore, the reconstruction of kauae perceptions and vilification of vanity is in direct conflict with our ancestral and pre-contact understandings, showing the extent of colonial impact on the practice of tā moko.

Discussion:

TikTok Two shows a clear stance on kauae that is reflective of a small minority of colonially impacted perspectives, with some points made by @im_back_itz_oce acknowledged as contradictory. However, @im_back_itz_oce's TikTok provided a series of perspectives that offered insight into the rich discourses around the expectations of kauae and how they are presented on social media.

This case study indicates the prevalence of these types of discourses on TikTok and the reactions from the Māori TikTok community. Furthermore, an overwhelming group did not support @im_back_itz_oce and critiqued the questions about the fluency, mana and authenticity of kauae wearers.

A consideration for future study is to what extent the hyper-visibility of kauae discourses on social media platforms harms more than it helps. Current research and literature have begun exploring the capability of social media in Indigenous education and resistance. However, TikTok, the most widely used and influential social media tool for Indigenous youth has yet to be considered in these studies. TikTok Two clearly shows that most respondents believed the content was harmful and could directly impact the cultural understandings and journeys of wāhine Māori. However, whether this is indicative of Indigenous youth which only is another avenue that could be explored through a reflective generational approach.

Conclusion

Individual experiences on TikTok are shown here to be indicative of wider community perspectives. Both TikTok One and Two present the majority and minority perspectives that contextualise and reinforce the complexity of Indigenous identity today. Although the main themes discussed here are not new to the literature on kauae expectations and experiences, it is the extent of the historical, generational unlearning that this study significantly contributes to the conversation.

An in-depth study of kauae wearers has not been undertaken since *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo*. The communities' perspectives captured in these case studies provide further context to how societal kauae perceptions impact how wāhine Māori perceive, recognise and unlearn certain expectations.

TikTok One showed that certain perceptions of eligibility are remnants of colonial mythologies that contradict the contexts of many wāhine Māori today. These mythologies created obstacles for wāhine Māori, and to overcome these, unlearning was required to assert their self-determination confidently. Generational influences, such as blood quantum, are discussed to show how these continue to limit and disenfranchise Māori from their understanding of whakapapa. Furthermore, whānau is discussed as a supporting factor, but ultimately shown in TikTok One as a barrier to self-determination. Whānau, whose expectations are influenced by generational perceptions, are shown to uphold a romanticised Māori meritocracy. This also showed the need for alternative avenues for future kauae wearers to find support outside of whānau through online communities such as TikTok.

TikTok Two showed that for some, fluency is still expected of kauae wearers. Also, despite a history of language alienation, some moko wearers still insist on learning te reo Māori to help ease the demands and expectations of others. The mana of kauae is shown to be

challenged and considered inauthentic without fluency of te reo Māori. This perspective exemplified that kauae is being 'remembered', stuck in a pre-colonial context that is expected to be still applied to wearers today. The harm of inferring the stripping of mana and authenticity of kauae is shown to be refuted by most of the audience. However, the question of visibility and safety of these perspectives was raised. TikTok Two shows that vanity is presented as a harmful appropriation and that those who received kauae for its looks are inauthentic. However, origin stories, pūrākau and waiata are proven to negate this firmly and that the vilification of vanity in a te ao Māori context is a consequence of colonisation.

A consistent barrier to wāhine Māori self-determination is shown to sit within enduring pre-colonial romanticised understandings of Māori authenticity, which are inconsistent with our context today. Kauae expectations within this meritocracy continue to push this ancestral right out of reach for wāhine Māori, further compromising the ability to assert self-determination.

Social media is a significant part of our world today, and its influence in our daily lives shows its intended permeance in our society. Therefore, a required pathway for future research on Indigenous identity and TikTok's value in understanding Indigenous perceptions today is evident. For Indigenous youth, TikTok is the most influential social media platform, and this study is the first to analyse its place in Indigenous identity construction.

From what little existing literature has been gathered, thanks to those such as *Windspeaker*, it is clear that advocacy and education are a demand of Indigenous peoples on TikTok. This is not highlighted in these case studies as they are already reflective of advocacy and education through the sharing of their experiences. The assertion of self-determination by @teetime89 and the inquisition of kauae and fluency by @im_back_itz_oe are centred around identity exploration. This not being specifically addressed in these case

studies is intentional. It reflects an earlier question on to what extent Indigenous people are inherently reflective of advocacy regardless of the content they create. This shows that a new demand for Indigenous, and by extension minority peoples, to constantly politically reflect their community on TikTok is emerging. Furthermore, with Indigenous people shown to embody their culture online rather than to subdue it, the complexity of producing and presenting these identities is creating new demands for policing the complex question of 'who is Indigenous?'.

From this, recommendations for future research are shown in the limitations of this study. Further exploration of generational trends to map key points in kuaae resurgence and the impact of colonial constructs on this our contemporary context is required. However, studies like these should also consider to what extent social media platforms provide more harm than help to Indigenous communities. The hyper-visibility TikTok provides calls into question the safety of Indigenous cultural knowledge and to what extent new and emerging demands of social media platforms influence Indigenous identity construction today.

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