CAREER DECISIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND ASPIRATIONS OF WĀHINE MĀORI WHO WEAR MOKO KAUAE

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Abstract

This research explores the career decisions, experiences, and aspirations of wāhine Māori, offering insights to better support their positioning within workplaces and across the economy. Historically, wāhine Māori have been disadvantaged in professional contexts due to colonisation (Waitangi Tribunal, 2018). This study challenges dominant narratives about wāhine Māori in professional contexts and expands the body of knowledge on Māori career journeys.

It responds to two central research questions:

1. What are the career experiences of women who wear moko kauae?
2. What role do career experiences and aspirations play in decisions to wear moko kauae?

Anchored in kaupapa Māori and mana wāhine theory, the study draws on in-depth kōrero with wāhine who generously shared their experiences. Through this exploration, the research reveals that visible cultural expressions such as moko kauae are not only acts of cultural affirmation but also sites of tension within professional spaces, where institutional bias and emotional labour persist. These insights challenge organisations to move beyond performative diversity frameworks and instead embrace approaches that are attuned to the relational, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of wāhine Māori with visible markers of cultural identity.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:	Date:
Leigh-Moana Manihera	07.08.2025

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Ina tere ngā kapua, he hau kei muri.

When we unite around shared values, we become the wind, driving change, moving forward as one.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Karakia Tīmatanga

Whakataka te hau

Whakataka te hau ki te uru

Whakataka te hau ki te tonga

Kia mākinakina ki uta

Kia mākinakina ki tai

E hī ake ana te ataakura

He tio, he huka, he hauhū

Tīhei Mauri Ora

Cease the winds from the west

Cease the winds from the south

Let the breezes blow over the land

Let the red tipped dawn come with

a sharpened air, a touch of frost,

a promise of a glorious day

(Te Puni Kōkiri, 2020)

Chapter One: Introduction

I te taha o tōku māmā
Ko Hikurangi te maunga e rū nei taku ngākau
Ko Waiapu te awa e mahea nei aku maharahara
Ko Horouta te waka e kawe nei aku tūmanako
Ko Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Porou ōku iwi
I te taha o tōku pāpā
Ko Tararua te maunga e tū kaha ana
Ko Wairarapa te moana e pupuri nei aku moemoeā
Ko Takitimu te waka e whakamana nei taku wairua
Ko Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa tōku iwi

This pepeha, an ancestral saying for Māori, is something I recite when introducing myself as indigenous to Aotearoa. I position myself in relation to the taiao (nature, the natural world) to which I connect and offer a way of knowing who I am deeper than what you see. I share who my ancestors are and the waka and marae I affiliate with, but even moreso, that I feel is a part of myself. For Māori, these connections anchor us and inform our understandings of the world and the relationships that we have in this life.

As a wāhine Māori considering a moko kauae and being early in my career, I see myself growing as the research grows and using the learnings to navigate my own career journey.

This study is anchored in Kaupapa Māori methodology, which positions Māori at the heart of the research process and honours a Māori-centred lens (Higgins, 2004). Often described as a “by Māori, for Māori” approach, Kaupapa Māori elevates Indigenous worldviews and aims to advance Māori wellbeing and aspirations across societal domains (Smith, 2013; Williams & Cram, 2012; Staniland et al., 2020). The research is further shaped by a Mana Wāhine paradigm, a framework that draws from Māori feminism to examine the intersection of Māori identity and womanhood (Simmonds, 2012). Grounded in tikanga Māori, Mana Wāhine offers an epistemological and methodological foundation that privileges wāhine Māori experiences and guides the research design (Paul, 2014).

Background of the Research

Growing up, my parents kept us connected to our Māoritanga (Māori culture and way of life) through everyday rituals such as saying a karakia (prayer) before we eat to give

thanks for our food, or taking our shoes off at the front door of our house as one would a wharenui (meeting house). During school holidays, we would often visit whānau (family) and when we could, return to our marae to support the occasional working bee. I feel fortunate to have formed close friendships with other wāhine Māori during high school; many of whom I remain connected with today, including several who are fluent in Te Reo Māori. Every day I draw wisdom from my whānau; some with moko kauae, from my best friends; successful Māori professionals each with unique career paths, and from my partner; a respected and inspirational leader in the field of education.

So how exactly did I get here? Why am I doing this? What truth am I giving voice to? To answer these questions, I draw from the whakataukī "Ka mua, ka muri", which speaks to how Māori consider the concept of time where the past, present, and future are interwoven, each as vital as the other (Rameka, 2016). When I reflect on the *past*, I think of my tupuna: their struggles in another time, and the dreams and hopes they may have had for me. The *present* represents my research: re-examining these histories and bringing them to life by honouring the voices of wāhine Māori reclaiming their truth. The *future* represents aspiration: that this work contributes to enabling wāhine Māori to navigate their careers with clarity, pride, and authenticity in spaces that not only support them, but empower them to thrive. This project has taken shape through the merging of my personal relationships and research interests. Yet to truly understand the 'why' behind this kaupapa, and why now, I reflect on my academic journey and a life-changing kōrero I had with a cousin a few years ago.

My academic journey has not been linear, but rather full of ups and downs. I have always had a hunger for learning. Reflecting on being one of a handful of Māori students in a predominantly white primary and intermediate school, I can count a few times where my desire to learn was diminished. On multiple occasions, I remember completing my work first or responding with correct answers only to be scolded for it. Looking back, I now recognise that these moments were shaped by subtle forms of racial bias: expressions of a system that struggled to see brilliance in a brown face. I noticed that my peers did not receive the same treatment. These experiences chipped away at my confidence. The rest of my schooling was much the same; being exceptional and quick to learn, but not taken seriously, or worse, punished for knowing. Every time it happened, my inner fire would get dimmer.

Eventually, I stopped trying. I started doing things I considered 'fun'; things that had nothing to do with education. When I left high school without graduating, I entered university without a clear sense of purpose, mostly because "that's what everyone else

did". Over the next two years, I chopped and changed degrees, eventually walking away just one year shy of completing my undergraduate studies. I stepped away and travelled the world, untethered and curious. My career experiences around the world gave me a deepened appreciation of Aotearoa New Zealand and the privilege of being Māori.

Eight years later, I made the decision to return to university and complete the final twelve months of my degree. Having lived a lifetime in those eight years, I knew with certainty that this time, university was where I needed to be, and I passed with flying colours. That version of me was self-assured, grounded, and unstoppable. I went on to pursue postgraduate studies and, by chance, stumbled across a scholarship opportunity to begin a master's degree. The shift from not graduating high school to being considered capable of master's-level study reinvoked that fire that once lived in me. I felt called to study by a higher purpose. I knew I was not walking this path alone but carried with me the hopes of my whānau; both those who came before me and those yet to come.

When exploring ideas for my thesis, there was no question: it had to be Māori focussed. Why? Because I wanted to elevate and uplift Māori voices. I wanted to make my younger self proud; to validate her intelligence, her potential, and the generations of brilliance that our communities hold. I study to reclaim the space we were told we didn't belong in, and to spotlight others so they too can thrive.

During the time I was reflecting on potential thesis topics, I had dinner with a cousin, who had recently received her moko kauae. She shared her experiences of transitioning from a non-wearer to a wearer within a corporate organisation. Her journey was not framed as positive or negative, but it was different, and she noticed those differences. As she spoke, questions began to stir within me. Were there others who share similar experiences? Is anyone exploring the career journeys of wāhine Māori with moko kauae? It was in that moment that the focus of this thesis was born. However, this moment did not emerge from nowhere. It reflected a convergence of longstanding interests that have shaped both my academic and personal life. I have long been drawn to Kaupapa Māori spaces alongside issues of equity and representation. Through that kōrero, deep-rooted strands of cultural commitment, research, and lived experience came into clearer view.

When I first proposed this research, I stated that the thesis would focus on wāhine Māori, moko kauae, and their career experiences. Throughout the development stage, I regularly sought knowledge and insight from my professional networks including experts in gender equity and a prominent wāhine Māori within the business sector. These relationships were not accidental but rather cultivated over time through career

experiences. I also engaged in informal korero with wāhine Māori in my personal networks, seeking feedback, and being offered recommendations for potential participants. As I became increasingly conscious of wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae, I was struck by how many within my own circles either wore moko kauae or had considered receiving one. The response to this kaupapa (topic) has been overwhelmingly positive, and there is an air of excitement amongst my personal networks as its relevance continues to grow. As a wāhine Māori with whānau who wear moko kauae, I feel a deep responsibility to amplify wāhine Māori voices and, in doing so, expand collective understanding of the intersections between moko kauae and career journeys.

The thesis title, “Career decisions, experiences, and aspirations of wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae” was intentionally crafted to position wāhine Māori as the central narrators of their own professional journeys. My aspiration for this research is to contribute toward a deeper understanding of Māori customs and practices as they relate to career. While this research centres the voices of other Māori women, my own story sits alongside theirs shaped by similar tensions, hopes, and decisions. My cultural identity influences the way I move through the world; personally, spiritually, and professionally. I would describe myself as upbeat, thoughtful, and caring, with a deep commitment to uplifting Māori lives. One important part of my journey has been the decision to consider receiving a moko kauae. It is not a choice I take lightly; but rather something I have reflected on with whānau and friends. I have also navigated conversations about its significance with my non-Māori partner, who is slowly learning to understand the depth of its meaning.

For me, moko kauae represents more than tradition. It is a living expression of whakapapa. Professionally, I see it as something that would guide me in my career aspirations, helping me to centre Kaupapa Māori values in my work. I am aware that wearing moko kauae in professional settings may come with challenges and opportunities, but I also believe it holds the power to shift conversations and open doors.

Research Objectives

Building on the emerging research, this study centres the career decisions, experiences, and aspirations of four wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae, alongside two wāhine who are considering the decision to wear moko kauae. It seeks to understand their career

journeys and amplify wāhine Māori voices, with a specific focus on how moko kauae influences or is influenced by their professional experiences and aspirations.

Why is it important?

Findings from this research offer insights to better support the status of Māori women in workplaces and across the economy. The Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry (Waitangi Tribunal, 2018) highlights how colonisation has uniquely disadvantaged wāhine Māori, particularly in workplace contexts, professional relationships, and socio-economic participation. The resurgence of moko kauae and cultural reclamation signals new opportunities for visibility and identity affirmation within professional spaces. However, this visibility also exposes wāhine Māori to persistent barriers, including institutional bias and aesthetic labour expectations. Secondly, I hope that this research uncovers the experiences and insights of wāhine Māori in ways that prompt organisations to critically review their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) approaches, encouraging the adoption of practices and behaviours that genuinely support wāhine Māori. Thirdly, as a wāhine Māori early in my career and without a moko, I see myself growing alongside this research, drawing from its learnings to navigate my own professional path. By applying a Kaupapa Māori worldview to the concept of career this study contributes to expanding the body of knowledge on Māori career journeys and challenges the limitations of previous research that may not speak to the lived realities of wāhine Māori. Existing literature has often overlooked the nuanced relationship between personal and professional identities, particularly how wāhine Māori navigate work through embodied expressions such as moko kauae, aesthetic labour, and cultural visibility.

Te Tiriti in Employment

Te Tiriti o Wataingi provides the foundations for equity, partnership, and protection within the Aotearoa New Zealand employment landscape. It is relevant across both the public and private sector and continues to inform the rights and responsibilities of institutions in relation to Māori (Jackson, 2011).

Public Sector: Te Tiriti as Ethical Mandate

In addition to being a founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Tiriti o Waitangi informs the ethical and operational responsibilities of employers, particularly within the public sector. Under the Public Service Act 2020, public service leaders are required to build capability to engage meaningfully with Māori and uphold employment policies that reflect Te Tiriti principles (New Zealand Government, 2020).

Private Sector: Voluntary Commitment to Te Ao Māori

Although not legislatively mandated, many private sector organisations are increasingly recognising the value of engaging with Te Ao Māori. For example, Vodafone Aoteroa has developed a Te Tiriti policy outlining ten commitments to Māori development and cultural capability (Webb-Liddall, 2020). Approaches like this reflect a growing awareness of Te Tiriti aligned values and the importance of culturally responsive workplaces.

Research Questions

The key research questions that frame this study are:

1. What are the career experiences of women who wear moko kauae?
2. What role do career experiences and aspirations play in decisions to wear moko kauae?

Overview of the thesis

Chapter One introduces how the thesis topic emerged and situates the research within its broader context, including the background and positionality of the researcher. It then outlines the research aims, methodology, and guiding research questions.

Chapter Two presents a review of literature pertaining to moko kauae, wāhine Māori and careers, and aesthetic labour. It explores the historical and contemporary meanings and motivations behind moko kauae. It also delves into how wāhine Māori are participating in the Aotearoa New Zealand economy. Finally, it examines the theoretical context of aesthetic labour, particularly its interplay with cultural identity and indigenous expression.

Chapter Three details and justifies the design and methodology. Guided by a Kaupapa methodology approach and a Mana Wāhine paradigm, thematic analysis was used to identify patterns within the data which were then summarised into broader thematic categories. Personal reflections were also noted, offering critical insight into the relational and spiritual dimensions of the research journey and positioning the self as both analyst and participant within the kaupapa.

Chapter Four explores and discusses the key themes that emerged from the data analysis, highlighting the voices and narratives of wāhine Māori in their professional contexts.

Chapter Five builds on these findings, offering deeper discussion on moko kauae decision-making, the emotional and aesthetic labour associated with visible cultural markers in professional spaces, and the processes of normalisation and reclamation of moko kauae.

Finally, Chapter Six presents concluding whakaaro (reflections), discusses the research implications and limitations, and offers recommendations for future inquiry.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Wāhine Māori and Careers

The Evolution of Work for Wāhine Māori in New Zealand

Culture is dynamic (Reid, 2010), and over time, the force of pākeha culture in New Zealand influenced how Māori people identified themselves (Higgins, 2004). In the early 1900s, the loss of ancestral land led Māori to migrate from rural to urban areas, described as one of the most rapid movements of any population (Meredith, 2015). By 1951, Māori had lost control of over 90 percent of their lands (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005) and had become reliant on working for European farmers and public works (Spoonley, 1993). In response to the alienation of their land, many Māori began reconsidering their identities beyond traditional Māori structures (whānau, iwi, hapū), and Māori nationalism emerged as a key consideration (Higgins, 2004).

Adjusting to a settler society, Māori faced marginalisation and were primarily employed in low-skilled, tedious jobs (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005). With thousands moving to cities in search of employment, the need to fit in became increasingly important (Te Awekotuku, 2002). McNicholas and Humphries (2005) assert that rapid adjustments to living, and work environments significantly altered social relationships between Māori men and women, alongside Māori women facing pressure to conform to Western ideas of femininity. Further, pākehā men would negotiate and trade only with Māori men, reflective of colonial gendered relations (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005; Pihama, 2020). During the mid to late 20th century, many Māori women ultimately followed their husbands who were moving frequently for employment and often took on low paid menial work where they could (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005). For example, wāhine Māori in urban locations such as Auckland or Wellington, often worked in cleaning, factory production, or seasonal labour, while balancing caregiving roles (Te Ara, 2025).

Research on Wāhine Māori and Employment and Careers

A significant portion of the empirical literature on wāhine Māori draws on qualitative data and seeks to understand and improve the experiences of wāhine Māori across a range of professions. Themes within this scholarship include wellbeing, leadership, career decision-making, as well as social issues impacting on employment. For example, in healthcare, Walker et al. (2016) suggests that personal caregiving responsibilities impacts the emotional and physical well-being of Māori nurses. More recent research suggests wāhine Māori and Pasifika doctors are proactively managing their well-being using support systems created by and for themselves (Tutone et al. 2023). For wāhine

Māori in the sport sector, research by Palmer and Masters (2010) uncovered the barriers into and within sport leadership and explored the strategies they use to overcome them. More broadly, a study on young wāhine Māori living and working in Northland prioritises their voices and experiences to identify influencing factors on career decisions (Ruka, 2022).

For most of these studies, qualitative methods were used for primary data collection. A range of qualitative methods have been employed to explore wāhine Māori experiences of work and career, including face-to-face semi-structured interviews (Palmer & Masters, 2010; Ruka, 2022), focus groups (Pouwhare, 1999), and narrative inquiry grounded in Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theory (Ruka, 2022; Williams & Hastie, 2025). These approaches prioritise relational depth. The few empirical studies that relied primarily on secondary data were quantitative in nature and drew mostly from official statistics, annual reports (Manatū Wāhine: Ministry for Women, 2024), or census data (Warburton & Morrison, 2008). It is no surprise that Kaupapa Māori methodologies and Mana Wāhine paradigms were present across much of the discourse.

While most literature concerning wāhine Māori and careers employs qualitative methodologies, a small subset draws on publicly available and census-based data to examine broader patterns of economic participation. These studies often aim to advocate for policy change and foster dialogue between Māori women and government agencies (New Zealand & Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2001; McNicholas & Humphries, 2005; Reilly, 2019).

Research on wāhine Māori and careers also draws from census data and primarily focuses on economic participation of wāhine Māori in the Aotearoa New Zealand economy. Earlier research by Warburton and Morrison (2008) suggests that household situations limited labour market participation. Their findings propose that young Māori women often live in mixed-generation households where they care for children, elderly, or people with poor health which impacts education attainment and employment outcomes. More recent research by Manatū Wāhine: Ministry for Women (2024) aimed to highlight the contributions of wāhine Māori to the economy. Specifically, they examined the size and nature of the Māori women's economy, the value of unpaid work undertaken by wāhine Māori, and the roles they play within the economy. Their research revealed that unpaid work by wāhine Māori was valued at approximately 6.6 billion in 2022 and that they are often tasked with care work at younger ages compared to others. Despite both pieces of research having different foci, each seeks to understand the economic roles and challenges of wāhine Māori.

Intersectionality

The relationship between identity and the cause of subordination is layered and well-illustrated in Kimberle Crenshaw's metaphor of an intersection (Reilly, 2019). The concept of intersectionality provides insight into how the complexities of the world, in people, and in human experiences are influenced by a variety of interconnected and mutually shaping factors (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Across the literature on wāhine Māori, intersectionality is most evident in how wāhine Māori navigate simultaneous roles and identities. Māori women's lives are interconnected; they juggle caregiving duties, paid and unpaid work, education, and whānau and community roles all at the same time (New Zealand & Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2001). This is discussed in Ruka (2022) who found that Māori women are navigating their identities as wāhine Māori while working simultaneously within pākehā systems to upskill and gain experience to progress their careers. Ruka asserts that those who felt they were walking in both worlds experienced feelings of isolation in te ao pākehā (the Western world) and were presumed by peers or managers to have cultural expertise in te ao Māori (the Māori world). Cultural assumptions like this presume Māori are a homogeneous group which Tutone et al. (2023) firmly rejects.

McNicholas and Humphries (2005) suggest that Māori women accountants intentionally employ strategies to support them in participating in corporate culture while maintaining their identities as Māori. This demonstrates intersectionality as Māori women accountants navigate the interplay between their cultural identity and professional roles within a corporate environment. In healthcare, Māori women motivated to do well by whānau and community responsibilities navigate multiple realities as women, surgeons, and Māori, and are often encouraged by non-Māori peers to adopt individualistic work ethics to succeed (Tutone et al., 2023). The New Zealand Ministry of Women's Affairs (2001) noted disparities across sectors between gender and ethnicity, specifically differences between men and women, and māori and non-māori.

Ethnocultural issues are prominent across the literature, and Palmer and Masters (2010) assert that indigeneity and gender are key considerations when addressing these issues in diversity management. According to them, wāhine Māori in sport leadership face a multitude of barriers in the workplace including sexism, institutional racism, and a lack of support from governing bodies. Similarly, Tutone et al. (2023) claimed that wāhine Māori aspiring to become surgeons experienced similar challenges in their workplaces. Māori nurses have also reported facing discrimination across the wider health system (Walker

et al. 2016). For instance, many described the healthcare system as unsupportive of their Māori identity including their spiritual beliefs and use of te reo Māori (the Māori language). They further highlighted a lack of resources and flexibility needed to provide holistic, culturally grounded care where the emphasis is placed on attending to the whole person, and not just the illness.

Despite the insights provided by an intersectional approach, there are gaps in its application across the literature. A lack of methodological guidelines for adopting intersectionality into empirical studies limits its practical application and the ability to address the different realities faced by wāhine Māori. Furthermore, while ethnocultural issues are significant, the literature tends to overlook other intersecting factors like socioeconomic status, disability, or sexuality which could provide a clearer understanding of wāhine Māori experiences.

Barriers to Employment

Key barriers to employment for wāhine Māori that emerge in the literature centre around intersectional discrimination regarding their gender, ethnicity, and caregiving responsibilities, as well as challenges from household dynamics, and workplace discrimination (Reilly, 2019). Additionally, even in paid roles, they often encounter systemic bias, isolation, and a lack of support across various professions.

Recognising the many roles of wāhine Māori, Warburton and Morrison (2008) found that those living in households with children, elderly, or individuals with poor health had lower employment and education participation than that of their pākehā peers. Further, they assert that young Māori women are more likely to live in these types of mixed households.

Feelings of discrimination are not limited to wāhine Māori in sports leadership and healthcare. Ruka (2022) examined the career aspirations of young Māori in Northland who reported feelings of isolation, being judged, discriminated against, and undermined, particularly when challenging decisions, they believed would negatively impact Māori. For example, participants shared how difficult it was to raise concerns about harmful behaviour in mainstream organisations, knowing that doing so often led to negative responses from managers or peers. These reactions included being ignored, excluded from conversations or perceived as confrontational, even when they were advocating for the well-being of Māori communities. For Māori, resilience throughout the colonial context over the last couple of centuries has included drawing on traditional support systems

(e.g., whānau, hapū, iwi), as well as more modern pan-Māori communities and organisations like the Māori Women's Welfare League (Cram, 2021).

For Māori women, the establishment of Māori women's groups and organisations to challenge colonial systems began as early as the 1980s with 'Ngā Kōmiti Wāhine' (Māori women's committees) as a means whereby Māori women could confront issues affecting them at the time (Pihama, 2020). As mentioned earlier, their contemporary equal, 'The Māori Women's Welfare League' continue to help Māori women primarily concerning their well-being and their whānau (Rei, 1993).

Support systems play a vital part in helping wāhine Māori navigate and overcome barriers into and within employment. Evidence from a study of four sport leaders, all of whom were wāhine Māori (Palmer & Masters, 2010) shows that participants overcame workplace barriers by:

- Having suitable mentors
- Utilising sport and community networks
- Building relationships with members of the governing body
- Adopting a partnership approach
- Challenging ethnocultural and gendered expectations

Several studies confirm the notion of wāhine Māori supporting other wāhine Māori through organisational challenges. For those in accountancy, drawing on each other for support in the form of mentors and role models, formed from inside and outside of the organisation, helped them maintain their identities as Māori whilst navigating corporate culture (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005). What seems to bring Māori women together is a sense of unity over shared negative experiences (Tutone et al., 2023), drawing strength from feeling like a collective, and having whānau support networks (Ruka, 2022). Furthermore, Ruka (2022) asserts that the influence of older wāhine Māori play a vital role in shaping the identity and career choices of young wāhine Māori, illustrating the importance of tuakana/teina relationships.

In the context of healthcare, Tutone et al. (2023) articulate a vision for transforming surgical spaces for wāhine Māori. While some organisations efforts to increase diversity and embed cultural safety are underway, wāhine in this space collectively emphasise that meaningful change remains slow and largely aspirational. Key focus areas such as fostering non-Māori and Māori allyship and strengthening tuakana/teina mentorship relationship are framed as vital recommendations to guide long-term systemic reform.

Section Summary

New Zealand labour laws fail to address socio-economic inequality faced by māori women which is inconsistent with social justice, New Zealand's international human rights obligations, and Te Tiriti (Reilly, 2019). Government agencies need to collaborate with Māori women to develop programmes that celebrate and enhance their success and advance their progress (Manatū Wāhine Ministry for Women, 2022). This master's study endeavours to operate within these frameworks to explore how intersecting identities such as being both Māori and wāhine, shape career experiences, including the impact of cultural, structural, and socio-familial factors. Moko kauae in this context, becomes a powerful lens through which to explore the intersections of cultural identity within workplace settings.

Another key avenue for research is around cultural awareness at work, particularly how increased cultural awareness among non-Māori staff affects the personal and professional outcomes for Māori staff (Walker et al., 2016). Diversity initiatives in New Zealand have also been highlighted as being more focussed on the business advantages of diversity, rather than addressing diversity issues themselves such as intersectional discrimination (Reilly, 2019). Furthermore, research on how organisational strategies and policies can be enablers for wāhine Māori to thrive in the workplace (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005; Palmer & Masters, 2010) would also be beneficial. Lastly, the literature recommends longitudinal studies to deepen understandings of Māori women's career experiences and the impact of mana wāhine as role models on their career decisions (Ruka, 2022).

Despite the robust body of work on wāhine Māori and careers, little research has looked at Māori customs and practices within the workplace. However, McNicholas and Humphries (2005) explored cultural identity within the accounting profession, using critical research as a decolonising tool for women. Similarly, Palmer and Masters (2010) investigated how Māori feminist principles influenced the leadership experiences of wāhine in sport, resulting in culturally grounded insights into organisational dynamics. These exceptions highlight the value of indigenous methodologies in bringing forth workplace realities, while also pointing to a broader gap in sector-wide exploration.

Moko Kauae Decisions - Scholarship on Moko Kauae

Academic research on moko kauae is small but growing. Most research takes the form of contextual and historical review articles (Dunn, 2011; Nikora et al., 2004; Te

Awekotuku, 1997; Te Awekotuku, 2002), with a few empirical studies (Higgins, 2004; Nikora et al., 2007; Rua, 1999; Collins, 2012; Taitimu-Stevens, 2024). Across the empirical research, the predominant primary data collection method is interviews, with some studies opting for case studies or personal narratives instead. Most of the studies are contextualised with a description of the history and evolution of moko kauae, followed by an exploration of its resurgence and revitalisation (Taitimu-Stevens, 2024; Coster, 2019; Nikora et al., 2004; Dunn, 2011; Te Awekotuku, 2002). Their kōrero offers insight into the motivations, experiences, and evolving meanings of moko within contemporary Aotearoa.

The topic of moko kauae has also been popular in the media and non-academic outlets for voicing the perspectives of those who wear moko kauae and highlighting its cultural, political, and personal significance (Coster, 2019; RNZ, 2022; Webb-Liddall, 2020). Additionally, a study by Nikora et al., (2007) spoke with over 80 women about their journeys to wearing moko. Specifically, they explored how women engaged their communities to resist, challenge, adapt, or reshape the meanings linked to moko and their own identities. In another study, attitudes towards moko were examined by looking at the experiences of individuals who move from being a non-wearer, to a wearer of moko (Rua, 1999). These studies, along with others, point to motivations and expectations around wearing moko kauae; topics discussed in greater depth later in the thesis.

The History of Moko in Aotearoa New Zealand

Moko kauae is one form of tā moko. To understand the cultural depth of moko kauae, it is important to first consider the origins of tā moko as conveyed through Māori pūrākau (stories). One such story is that the art of tā moko was brought to Te Ao Tūroa (the natural world) by Mataora upon returning from Rarohenga (the underworld) where he sought forgiveness from his wife Niwareka for mistreating her (Te Awekotuku, 1997). This story not only illustrates the origins of tā moko but also highlights it as a symbolic practice rooted in the narratives of love, humility, and cultural identity.

The act of marking moko onto the skin is carried out by a tohunga tā moko; an expert at drawing moko (Howarth, 2019) and is a process described in the literature as long and painful, but spiritually uplifting (Collins, 2012). By tradition, a tohunga tā moko would use various sized uhi (chisels) made from albatross bone to puncture the flesh and insert pigment at the same time (Te Awekotuku, 1997). In the contemporary context, the process is collectively experienced by whānau through what is known as a mokopapa. As the wāhine receives her moko, whānau members gather around her, placing their

hands upon her as an expression of aroha, their voices lifted in song (Brankin, 2018). On some occasions, Māori drew self-portraits using only the moko designs, with no facial features or expressions indicating that moko was not just *part* of the way someone looked, but rather *was* them (Ellis, 2018). As technology has advanced, so too has the practice of moko kauae making the designs more defined (Higgins, 2004).

According to Nikora et al. (2004), early accounts from the first Europeans to arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand express feelings of both awe and discomfort towards facial moko adorned by Māori. With the arrival of Christianity in 1814, the practice of moko began to change and in areas where Māori and Pākehā were in close contact, were stopped completely (Ellis, 2018). European attitudes towards facial moko shifted as the colony become more established and it was instead condemned, becoming a metaphor for something that needed to be eliminated (Nikora et al., 2004). During the land wars in the 1860s, there was an active resurgence of moko however, closer towards the 19th century, the practice seemed to be disappearing (Nikora et al., 2004). This could be in part due to the introduction of the Tohunga Suppression Act being passed into parliament in 1908 making the practice of tohungā-tā-moko illegal (Ellis, 2018). By the early 1980s, tā moko had resurfaced in a negative light as part of the gang culture (Higgins, 2004). Further, movies like Once Were Warriors, a fictitious depiction of Māori life, portrayed characters with tā moko as violent, thereby stigmatising tā moko. The association between tā moko and gang culture in the early 1980s dissuaded Māori who were contemplating wearing a moko (Higgins, 2004).

Despite government efforts to displace Māori communities and eradicate their traditions, moko endured (Ellis, 2018). While the visibility of moko kanohi (facial moko) fluctuated over time, the practice of moko kauae continued rather uninterrupted (Nikora et al., 2004). Up until the 1950s, Māori women seldom engaged in activities beyond their iwi and the limited interaction with pākehā meant that judgements on traditional practices were minimal (Te Awekotuku, 1997). Etched into the faces of women, moko kauae symbolised tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty), and served as a reminder to the women themselves and their communities of the grace and power intrinsic to wearing moko (Ellis, 2018).

Over the last three decades, a growing number of Māori have revitalised and renewed the tradition of moko kauae (Nikora et al., 2007). The revitalisation of Te Reo Māori in the early 1990s paralleled a resurgence of moko as well as a shift in tikanga (Māori customs and protocols) regarding when moko can be worn and by whom (Quince, 2011). As revitalisation movements of the Māori culture increase, we see a resurgence of tā

moko, and more wāhine Māori carrying moko kauae (Brankin, 2018). Nikora et al. (2007) described the revival and resurgence of moko as a call for Māori to reaffirm their Māori identities, customs and traditions. This resurgence of moko demonstrates the strength and adaptability of the Māori culture, despite the impacts of colonisation.

Moko Expressions

Tā moko are cultural expressions of one's iwi, hapū, and whānau identity (Ellis, 2014) through patterns chiselled on one's body. Moko designs are unique to the wearer and, in earlier times, were transcribed by Māori chiefs on official documents in place of signatures (Te Awekotuku, 1997). For wāhine Māori, it is customary for tā moko to be expressed through moko kauae, markings on the chin (Brankin, 2018). Up until the late 1800s, markings were also on the central forehead, nostrils, and upper lip (Te Awekotuku, 1997). Traditionally, moko were symbolic of rank and accomplishment (Ellis, 2014) or were received around the time a woman would first menstruate (Te Awekotuku, 1997). In other early European accounts, female moko is associated to beauty, sex appeal, and marriageability (Nikora et al., 2004). By the late nineteenth century, the roles of men and women in the community were changing, heavily influenced by western gendered norms (Ellis, 2018). As a result, many Māori women became victim to gendered privilege, introduced by pākehā men and perpetuated by Māori men, significantly changing the meaning of moko to reflect an assertion of their mana motuhake (self-determination). In the present day, moko kauae are seen as an assertion of pride and the reclamation of an ancestral taonga (Quince, 2011).

Moko Expectations

According to the literature, wearing moko often came with expectations, especially from other Māori, to be fluent in te reo Māori, and to be able to exercise leadership (Rua, 1999). In some iwi the expectation is that you become a cultural leader once you receive moko (Nikora et al., 2004). A recent study on moko kauae expectations suggests wearers are expected to be fluent in te reo Māori despite a history of language alienation (Taitimu-Stevens, 2024). For example, Nikora et al. (2007) described a case where a wāhine was elevated to kaikaranga (woman performing the karanga) after receiving her moko kauae, while an older wāhine present was not considered for the role because she did not have moko kauae. Some self-imposed expectations noted in grey literature include the case of a wāhine who wanted to become a mum before receiving her moko (Coster, 2019).

Moko Decisions

Moko remains an important life decision for many Māori; both to honour their tupuna and as a declaration to embracing their Māori identity in the twenty-first century (Ellis, 2018). When it comes to these decisions, several contributing factors arise in the literature.

One factor is the notion of eligibility for acquiring moko. In research by Higgins (2004), participant eligibility was scrutinised including the ability to speak Māori, sing, weave mats, and perform pūkana after receiving their moko. Similarly, some participants in Nikora et al. (2007) set themselves goals to feel 'worthy' of wearing moko; for example, they aimed to quit smoking and drinking, increase their cultural competence, and pursue further education. According to Taitimu-Stevens (2024), perceptions of eligibility for wāhine Māori exist today because of colonial myths enacted to make it difficult to attain self-determination. Another factor that plays into decisions to mau moko (wear moko) is political motivation. In this way, moko is linked to the political beliefs of tino rangatiratanga, serving to express mana motuhake, and to resist the effects of colonisation (Higgins, 2004).

External reactions to moko kauae also appears to be a key theme emerging in the literature. Nikora et al. (2004) contend that in addition to the wearer transitioning their new appearance into their world of being, they too are simultaneously navigating the perceptions and responses of others. Participants in Higgins (2004) claim that the way other people react to their moko kauae strengthens their sense of who they are. Types of reactions noted in the literature range from blatant staring (Ellis, 2018) to hostile attitudes because of prejudice towards Māori (Nikora et al., 2004). According to Nikora et al. (2007), wearers often felt a strong responsibility to advocate for moko and Māori culture when confronted with such behaviour.

Across the literature, the reasons for wanting to wear moko appear consistent. Colins (2012) asserts that women desire to express and embody values that are not outwardly visible such as whanaungatanga (sense of family connection), whānau, hapū, and iwi, along with a deep respect for tupuna (ancestors), kaumātua (elders), and traditions. In the same vein, participants in Rua (1999) sought to wear moko to be identified as a Māori with traditional ideals and values, forging a stronger Māori identity.

While formal discussions about revealing moko kauae are not evident in the literature, the influence of whānau is apparent in this respect. Based on Nikora et al.'s (2007) research on moko in contemporary New Zealand, even though participants had accepted that they would transform by wearing moko, they were still interested in understanding

what their whānau thought. Specifically, they wanted to see if others' views aligned to theirs with many participants reporting feeling anxious about what whānau would think about their desire to wear moko. Contrary to this, for some wāhine, the decision to wear moko is at the request of their whānau, as illustrated in Higgins (2004), serving as an intervention intended to change the course of one's life. Although whānau are highly influential, they can also act as a barrier when their expectations, influenced by generational perceptions, reinforce romanticised views of Māori meritocracy as earlier mentioned (Taitimu-Stevens, 2024). It is worth considering the beauty and complexity of whānau relationships, and the importance of navigating these conversations with care as both the individual and the collective identity are deeply connected in such decisions.

An interesting idea that emerges subtly in the literature is the concept of blood quantum; the biometric fraction framework used to determine how much Māori blood one has (Collins, 2012), and by extension, whether one is considered 'Māori enough' to wear moko kauae. This notion of blood quantum is yet another colonial mechanism to further alienate Māori from understanding and connecting with their whakapapa (Taitimu-Stevens, 2024).

Section Summary

Moko kauae literature explores its cultural depth, historical disruption, and contemporary resurgence positioning it as both a taonga and an embodied expression of mana motuhake. Its origin has been traced through pūrākau alongside accounts of colonial suppression and decline. The endurance and revitalisation of moko is also well documented, particularly in relation to identity, reclamation and cultural pride. Decisions to wear moko kauae are shaped by political motivations, personal identity, and whānau influence, with common themes around expectations and eligibility. These insights provide a foundation for this research which seeks to extend current understandings by examining moko kauae within professional contexts; an area not yet thoroughly addressed in existing research.

Aesthetic Labour

Aesthetic Labour in Theory

Aesthetic labour is a concept primarily concerned with physical appearance and is most prominent in interactive service work (Warhurst et al., 2000; Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006; Witz et al., 2003). Among the definitions reviewed, the most frequently cited authors were Chris Warhurst and Dennis Nickson indicating their influence in this field of study.

According to the pair, aesthetic labour is the "supply of embodied capacities and attributes possessed by workers" (Warhurst et al., 2000, p.4). It involves employing individuals who look good and/or have the appropriate appearance for their job roles (Adisa et al., 2024) which employers then mobilise, develop, and exploit to their advantage (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Organisations intentionally seek to recruit and select individuals who are most aligned to their brand image (Pettinger, 2004) in a bid to create a particular style of service encounter that appeals to customer sensibilities (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). This prominence of service work is further supported by the employment backgrounds of individuals studied in aesthetic labour research, which are highly concentrated in interactive service roles ranging from banking and customer service groups (Warhurst et al., 2000), to fashion modelling and retail (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006).

The concept of aesthetic labour emerged as researchers in the UK observed job advertisements that, either directly or indirectly, called for applicants to *look good* and *sound right (*Warhurst et al., 2000). For example, employees' verbal attributes, particularly speech dysfluency can affect work and employment opportunities (Butler, 2014). Across the literature it is often described as an extension of emotional labour (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006) which is, a concept encompassing how individuals regulate their emotions to produce visible facial and bodily expressions (Hochschild, 1983, as cited in Witz et al., 2003). While emotional labour focuses on adjusting one’s feelings to conform with workplace norms, aesthetic labour requires maintaining one’s looks whether through their clothing or physical appearance.

In reviewing the aesthetic labour literature, another closely related theory is lookism which Warhurst and Nickson (2007) define as the prejudicial and differential treatment faced by employees because of their looks. Their study on Glasgow’s retail and hospitality industries highlights how appearance-based hiring decisions shaped workplace demographics, with both men and women expected to meet aesthetic standards. High-end venues reinforced stricter grooming expectations, while more casual settings placed less emphasis on employee appearance. This distinction reflects how lookism can influence recruitment and workplace culture, often favouring individuals who align with socially desirable aesthetic norms.

Indeed, as briefly mentioned above, both concepts of emotional labour and lookism contribute to interactive labour processes in the service industry. However, neither concept encapsulates the embodied dispositions of employees in quite the way that aesthetic labour does (Witz et al., 2003).

Research on Aesthetic Labour

Aesthetic labour research has largely used an exploratory interpretative approach by way of interviews to gather narrative data (Timming, 2016) and ascertain individual experiences (Adisa et al., 2024). In addition to interviews, other data collection methods that emerge across the literature involve face-to-face communication methods such as focus groups (Warhurst et al., 2000; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007) and individual conversations (Butler, 2014).

Some studies used photographic images as part of their data collection to explore the impact of visible physical characteristics on hiring decisions. For example, Timming et al. (2017) instructed participants to assume they were recruiters and view a series of photos, rating them on a scale based on how likely they would be to hire the person. Similarly, another study also rated photographs however more context was provided by asking participants to rate photos of job applicants with and without tattoos in two hypothetical organisations: a fine dining restaurant and a popular nightclub (Timming, 2016). This approach allows for a nuanced analysis of how context influences perceptions of physical characteristics. Finally, one data collection method that stood out for its unique approach was covert observations where participants in a study on aesthetic labour in fashion and retail were unknowingly observed at work by the researcher (Pettinger, 2004). This method offered a valuable lens into authentic, unscripted behaviours capturing how aesthetic labour is performed when participants were unaware, they were being watched. Follow-up visits where the researcher engaged with employees as a customer enabled insights into embodied presentation and emotional regulation in real time.

Participant recruitment methods observed in the literature varied depending on the nature and context of the research. Some studies targeted specific groups or networks. For example, a project seeking the experiences of individuals with tribal marks leveraged the researcher's professional network (Adisa et al., 2024). Other studies targeted employees from certain service settings or organisations (Warhurst et al., 2000) while others attended events created specifically for their target participant (Butler, 2014). Research by Pettinger (2004) on aesthetic labour in fashion and retail was one of the only studies to use purposive sampling as a means of participant recruitment. In her research, retail stores were purposively sampled to reflect a range of customer profiles, with the primary target being customers under 40 years of age. In contrast to targeted recruitment methods, some studies opted to employ random sampling methods. For

example, out of 182 respondents, a random number table was used to select 60 males and 60 females for a study investigating the effects of body art on employment chances (Timming et al., 2017). The ways in which participants were contacted also varied across the literature including using emails (Butler, 2014) and newspaper advertisements (Warhurst et al., 2000).

Much of the aesthetic labour research has been conducted in Western contexts; therefore, most of the samples are reflective of that. Research by Adisa et al. (2024) appears to be one of the few studies conducted in a non-Western context, specifically from Nigeria. Similarly, in research by Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) on the modelling industries of London and New York, it was noted that the race and ethnicity of the sample were predominantly white except for six participants who identified as either Asian, Black, or Latino. This highlights the need for more geographically diverse research to better understand how aesthetic labour manifests across different cultural and regional settings.

Diversity of age has been captured in studies on aesthetic labour. Participant ages reported in the literature range from as young as 16 to as old as 60 years, with the most common age groups being individuals in their 20s and 30s. Unless specifically focussing on a single gender, most of the research includes both male and female participants. For example, Butler's (2014) study, consisted of male participants only as the focus was on men who stammer.

Data analysis techniques across the literature reflect a thematic approach to interpreting patterns and insights. These interviews were then transcribed verbatim and analysed to generate codes based on emerging themes (Adisa et al., 2024). An inductive process also appears to have been used in some research allowing for movement back and forth between data and theory (Butler, 2014). Cultural frameworks and methodologies are notably absent from the literature, consistent with the dominance of Western contexts and samples discussed earlier.

In reviewing aesthetic labour literature, it appears that much of it relates to the interactive service industry which is not surprising that a concept centred around employee appearance is linked to customer-facing roles and service encounters. The notion that employees' appearances are commodified solely for the benefit of employers (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007) is a dominant theme in the literature. For example, a project on aesthetic labour in interactive service work explored how employers shape and develop the aesthetic of their workforce for effective customer interactions (Warhust et al., 2000).

Another study looked at how some employers' leverage employee appearance to gain a competitive advantage (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). For example, a focus group participant described how, before beginning shifts at a major sports event, workers were lined up for grooming inspections with men being sent away to shave, and women required to tie hair back neatly.

Although most of the literature focused on interactive service contexts, research by Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) aimed to extend the range of occupations where aesthetic labour is applied, as well as its conceptual scope regarding appearance in the workplace. They claim that aesthetic labour moves beyond being an output at work and instead requires the constant production of the body/self.

Research by Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) found that fashion models must adapt to constantly evolving aesthetic trends with the most successful being those who actively manage their bodies. They contend that, for fashion models, this is evident in the degree of body maintenance needed to align with the fashion model aesthetic. This emphasis on managing physical appearance further extends into discussions about how employee appearance impacts employment opportunities. In addition to 'looking the part', the literature also touches on 'sounding right'. For example, in Butler's (2014) study on stammering and aesthetic labour, it was revealed that there needs to be an alignment between the role of a speaker and the manner of their speech to appear credible and sound right for the role.

The intersection of aesthetic labour and tattoos represents a growing area of academic inquiry. The few studies that have been undertaken suggest that visible markings on individuals can have adverse effects in the workplace. For example, research conducted in Nigeria with individuals with tribal marks on their face, examined how biases, stigma, and negative perceptions of tribal marks contribute to discrimination or prejudice in the workplace. Drawing on in-depth interviews with tribally marked individuals, Adisa et al. (2023) found that participants experienced social rejection, stigmatisation, and exclusion during recruitment and workplace interactions. Many reported being intentionally removed from customer-facing roles, subjected to derogatory comments from colleagues and managers, and pressured to conceal or downplay their marks. The study also highlighted the psychosocial toll of these experiences, including diminished self-esteem and in some cases mental distress.

Additionally, a study by Timming et al., (2017) hypothesised that such applicants are rated as less hireable than their non-tattooed peers, especially for customer-facing roles,

citing concerns around professionalism and organisational branding. They examined the impact of visible body art on perceptions of employability, finding that tattooed job seekers are often subject to prejudicial treatment rooted in stigma. In contrast to these studies, another strand of research examines body art as a form of labour in customer-facing roles, where it is framed as an asset rather than the liability it is commonly portrayed to be (Timming et al., 2016). Drawing on a mixed methods approach, the study first conducted an online lab experiment where participants rated job applicants with and without tattoos across two hypothetical organisations: a fine dining restaurant and a popular nightclub. Tattoos were associated with reduced hireability in the former due to traditional notions of professionalism, but were seen as an asset in the latter, aligning with its 'edgy' brand identity. The findings suggest that visible ink may positively influence perceptions of brand alignment in organisations targeting youthful or subcultural markets. This was further supported by qualitative interviews, where participants reflected on the strategic use of body art in professional contexts. Accordingly, job seekers with visible tattoos were encouraged to be discerning and seek workplaces where their aesthetic expression aligns with the brand personality.

Overview of Relevant Literature

Research on aesthetic labour is largely UK-based and highlights how organisations curate employees' looks to reflect brand identities, sometimes enforcing grooming standards and hiring practices based on aesthetic appeal. Key themes include commodification of appearance, workplace bias related to body art, and the strategic alignment of employee aesthetics with organisational branding. Aesthetic labour clearly involves the management of employee appearance to benefit either the individual or their organisation, though more often it benefits the latter. Employee attributes may serve organisational objectives as valued assets, or, at times, come into conflict with prevailing organisational norms and priorities (Warhurst et al., 2000). The research is limited in understanding the scope of experiences beyond the fields of interactive service work and the broader service sector. Another limitation of the research is that it focuses most exclusively on Western contexts restricting the scope and applicability of the research findings. There were also limitations due to modest sample sizes which were not representative of all service sector employees.

This study responds by offering a Kaupapa Māori lens, exploring how moko kauae is navigated within professional spaces by wāhine Māori. A review of wāhine Māori and career literature reveals several key limitations. The first limitation relates to the data and methodologies employed in some of the research. For example, research on the Māori

Women's economy (Manatū Wāhine: Ministry for Women, 2024) drew from multiple data sources, which provided greater coverage but led to broad industry definitions. This limited the ability to access disaggregated sector data that could reveal deeper context into sector-specific challenges or successes. Gaps in the literature include perspectives from older wāhine Māori, as well as the experiences of those in employment sectors other than finance, health, or sports. Another limitation observed from a review of the wāhine Māori literature is the predominant focus on young Māori and pākehā women aged 15-24 (Warburton & Morrison, 2008) and the use of self-selected participants (Pouwhare, 1999; Walker et al., 2016) resulting in samples that exclude other age groups and ethnicities. Moreover, the outdated nature of some studies, for example those conducted almost 20 years ago (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005; Palmer & Masters, 2010), limit the relevance and applicability of their findings.

An obvious limitation across the moko kauae literature that must be acknowledged is the scarcity of recent empirical research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Mā te tokomaha ka kā te ahi.
By the many the fire will be kept burning.
This whakataukī serves as a reminder that the collective contributions of many enable me to undertake this research.

This chapter outlines the methodology used to address the research questions presented earlier. It begins with an overview of the research design, which is grounded in Kaupapa Māori principles and guided by a Mana Wāhine framework that amplifies and respects the voices of wāhine Māori. Subsequent sections detail the methods used to engage with participants and the steps taken to uphold rigour and validity throughout the data collection process. Participant profiles are included to provide context for each wāhine; their background, whānau connections, and journey of embracing or reclaiming Māori identity. The chapter also includes personal reflections that demonstrate the relational and reflexive nature of the research approach, followed by the procedures undertaken for data analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of the methodology and its contributions to the wider thesis.

Research Design

The purpose of this research is to understand how wāhine Māori are navigating both their career journeys and their identities as wāhine Māori, and whether decisions to wear or not to wear moko kauae have been influenced in some way along the way. This research has two main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to understand the career experiences of wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae. Secondly, it seeks to centre wāhine Māori voices through a specific focus on identifying how moko kauae is influenced by or in turn influences the career experiences and aspirations of wāhine Māori. It is a qualitative piece of research intended to understand the experiences of individuals with visible cultural markers in their relative work settings.

According to Dewey (1933, as cited in Gray, 2004), researchers typically begin with either inductive discovery (induction) or deductive proof (deduction). Gray (2004) explains that deduction involves developing hypotheses about abstract concepts which are then tested through observation or experimentation to determine the relationships between them. In contrast, induction involves identifying relationships between variables by collecting and analysing data to form conclusions.

Research is shaped by ontological and epistemological foundations which define how reality and knowledge are perceived and understood, thereby guiding the overall

research approach (Gray, 2004). Ontology concerns the nature of reality and the boundaries of what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology explores the relationship between the researcher and knowledge, providing a philosophical foundation for identifying what forms of knowledge are considered legitimate and adequate (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Gray, 2004). Once researchers have clarified their ontological and epistemological positioning, they must then consider what Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 13) term the *methodical question*: "How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?".

Considering how reality and knowledge are usually defined in academic research, it is crucial to recognise that Māori approaches are grounded in a different worldview. Therefore, research conducted with, by, and for Māori must move beyond dominant paradigms and be guided by Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing. According to Henare and Pene (2001), Kaupapa Māori research is grounded in tikanga, whanaungatanga, kotahitanga, wairuatanga, and kaitiakitanga. They assert that these principles collectively form the foundation of traditional Māori ontology and shape Māori perceptions of reality. These principles also underpin Māori epistemology, or as Henare and Pene (2001, p. 11) describe it, "to live according to tikanga Māori, that which is tika and true". Kaupapa Māori methodology emerges from these ontological and epistemological foundations, as a research approach that centres Māori values, aspirations, and ways of being (Henare & Pene, 2001).

These principles form the philosophical foundations or kaupapa for this research. In alignment with a relativist ontology, this research supports the idea of multiple truths and subjective experiences of reality (Levers, 2013). A relativist perspective is necessary as no two participants will have had the same experiences and it is important to capture and acknowledge each account. Constructivism is entrenched in symbolic interactionism and connects to the relational basis of kaupapa Māori theory (Wilson et al., 2021). This too aligns with the wholistic nature of a Māori worldview (Staniland et al., 2020) whereby different versions of our creation stories have been interpreted and shared by iwi and hapū.

Kaupapa Māori Methodology

This project aligns with a Kaupapa Māori approach to research which guides research with Māori located at the centre (Higgins, 2004). Described as a by Māori, for Māori approach (Smith, 1995; Williams & Cram, 2012), it privileges a Māori worldview to advance Māori in society and centralise Māori people, practices, and culture (Staniland

et al., 2020). According to Stevenson (2018), the underlying principles of Kaupapa Māori research were mediated by prominent Māori scholars (such as Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Professor Ngahuia Te Awekotoku) and the political struggles they engaged in to create and enable a decolonised space where Māori issues can be investigated with a Māori lens and grounded in a Māori worldview. Stevenson (2018) also found that such a space has paved the way for contemporary Māori researchers to conduct research with and for Māori, whilst further building on Kaupapa Māori theory as done by those before them.

A Kaupapa Māori approach was chosen for this research because it aligns with my positioning as both a wāhine Māori and a Māori researcher. Its purpose is to privilege Māori experiences and cultural knowledge and to whakamana (empower) Māori through both the research process and its outcomes. This approach is the most appropriate for the current study, which explores the career journeys of wāhine Māori, as it ensures that Māori voices remain central and are interpreted within a Māori world view. The research was guided throughout by tikanga, or cultural protocols, as articulated by Henare & Pene (2001), and were consistently upheld across the research process. For example, meeting kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) to wānanga (deliberate, discuss) through interviews (Hudson et al., 2010) reflected a commitment to relational engagement. This approach sought to strengthen the connection to participants through gaining a deeper understanding of their first-hand accounts (Blustein et al., 2005). Table 1 (below) details the practices enacted to build rapport with the participants.

Table 1: Kaupapa Māori Practices

Kanohi ki te kanohi	Present yourself face-to-face to
Opening karakia	Clear and prepare the space spiritually
Whakawhanaungatanga	Build trust and meaningful connections
Manaakitanga	Ensure hospitality, care, and respect
Te reo Māori use	Validate cultural knowledge and identity
Closing karakia	Close the space spiritually
Koha	Acknowledge and reciprocate participant contribution

The research design is guided by a Mana Wāhine paradigm. This is often referred to as a type of Māori feminism as it explicitly explores how being Māori and being female intersect (Simmonds, 2011). Rooted in tikanga Māori, Mana Wāhine is a theoretical perspective informed by decolonisation that centres the cultural status of wāhine Māori (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011; Paul, 2014). Unlike broader Kaupapa Māori

approaches, Mana Wāhine responds to ideologies of race, gender and class, that have corrupted many of the stories, values, beliefs, and practices that are connected to Māori women (Pihama, 2001). This distinction is critical in understanding the differential experiences of wāhine Māori post-colonisation, where colonial narratives marginalised wāhine Māori in both Western and Māori patriarchal structures (Pihama, 2001). This research centres wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae and focuses on their career decisions, experiences, and aspirations. Framed within a Mana Wāhine paradigm, this research honours their voices, cultural knowledge, and lived realities.

Data Collection Methods

This topic was chosen through a combination of personal reflections, academic inquiry, and consultation with Māori women in my networks including mentors, colleagues, and wāhine Māori leaders who wear moko kauae. The decision to explore the career experiences of wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae emerged informally through wānanga-style kōrero with whānau about a growing awareness of the tensions between cultural identity and professional aspirations. This prompted deeper consideration of how moko kauae is navigated within professional settings. This kaupapa felt necessary, speaking to the absence of research that amplifies the voices of wāhine Māori with moko kauae in professional domains.

Process to identify participants

Potential participants were identified through personal networks and approached by email. Invitations were extended to six wāhine Māori who:

- Self-identify as Māori
- Live in New Zealand
- Are aged 18 years or older
- Are currently employed or were employed within 12-months prior to data collection
- Wear, or are considering wearing, moko kauae
- Were able to commit to a 1-hour face-to-face or virtual interview

All six wāhine invited to participate agreed to be involved in the research. The majority resided in Auckland, with one based in Masterton. Of the six wāhine, four were wearers of moko kauae, while the remaining two were not yet wearers but were actively considering the decision to receive moko kauae. It was important to interview both wearers and non-wearers of moko kauae to better see the career experiences of wāhine

Māori as a whole and thus enabling a better understanding of the journey. This research aimed to capture the heterogeneity in the social economic background, education, and geographical location of the wāhine Māori interviewed. However, participant recruitment was driven by the researcher's existing networks and the willingness of individuals to participate. Upon the receipt of interest from potential participants, individuals were forwarded both the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form the researcher.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews

Once the process of identifying participants was complete, they were then confirmed by returning signed consent forms. A mutual arrangement between the researcher and each participant was then established to determine the time, date, and location for an interview. Guided by a qualitative and kaupapa Māori orientation, interviews were chosen for their relational nature and their capacity to better understand how wāhine Māori interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and the meanings attributed to their experiences (Smith, 1995; Babchuk, 2017). To support accessibility and convenience, participants were given the option to meet either in person or virtually using Zoom. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were then conducted over a period of one month.

It was important to build trust with participants and create a non-threatening environment whereby they felt comfortable and safe to share their personal experiences. Within a kaupapa Māori framework, the relational dynamic between researcher and participant was guided by principles such as whakawhanaungatanga and manaakitanga which build trust and reciprocity (Smith, 2013; Cram, 2001; Henry & Pene, 2001). Rather than viewing rapport-building as a transactional exchange, the emphasis was on cultivating genuine relationships that honour the mana of each person involved (Smith, 2013; Smith, 2015). Interview questions broadly focussed on their career experiences and aspirations, and the roles they played in decisions to wear moko kauae. Interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in duration and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to support data analysis. Additionally, the participants controlled the amount of information shared and could choose not to respond if they felt uncomfortable. Shared kai was provided during the interview as an expression of manaakitanga. At the end of each interview, a koha (an offering) in the form of a $40 e-voucher was given to each participant in recognition of their time and contribution to this research. In Te Ao Māori, this is a culturally appropriate practice (Kingi, 2020) to show gratitude and thanks. Participants were not made aware of the koha during the recruitment process so as not to persuade or coerce them into participating.

Participant Profiles

Participants ranged in age from their late twenties to their late fifties and were employed across a range of industries including construction, professional services, tourism, law, education, and health. Participant profiles were included to provide context about who each wāhine is, her place within her whānau, professional background, and her position along the journey of embracing or reclaiming her Māori identity. To protect their privacy and uphold ethical considerations, names and identifying information have not been used in transcripts or published material. Instead, participants have been assigned pseudonyms reflecting Atua Wāhine Māori honouring both the strength embodied by these atua and the courage demonstrated by participants in sharing their experiences.

Table 2: Participant Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	***Wearer of moko kauae***
Whaitiri	*No*
Mahuika	*No*
Hineraumati	*Yes*
Papatūānuku	*Yes*
Hineteiwaiwa	*Yes*
Hineahuone	*Yes*

Whaitiri

Whaitiri is a proud Māori and Tongan woman whose personal journey of reclamation and cultural connection shapes every aspect of her life. In her legal work she brings confidence, clarity, and a strong sense of purpose to everything she does. Last year, she immersed herself in reclaiming Te Reo Māori, deepening her connection to her heritage and ensuring her language lives on in her whānau.

Born in Northland, Whaitiri moved to Auckland for primary school but still considers Whangārei home. As the eldest of her siblings, leadership and responsibility have always been second nature to her; values she carries into her work and personal life. She and her husband are both employed full-time while raising their children. Determined to provide her children with opportunities she didn't have, Whaitiri ensures they grow up immersed in their Māori identity, learning Te Reo Māori, being surrounded by kapa haka, and attending kōhanga reo.

Throughout her career, her workplaces have always been more than professional spaces; she thrives in environments that foster genuine connection and whanaungatanga, where colleagues feel like family. She refuses to be in environments

that are harmful to her wairua or that challenge her sense of identity. She values authenticity, ensuring that she is accepted as her full self wherever she chooses to be. She is well-articulated, firm in her convictions, and unafraid of healthy confrontation.

Her reclamation journey extends beyond language; she has stood at Te Matatini, and she is preparing for the next step; receiving moko kauae. Raised primarily within her Māori culture, Whaitiri acknowledges the absence of her Tongan roots but stands firmly in the identity she has shaped for herself. Above all, she prioritises whānau, valuing time with her babies and husband.

Mahuika

Mahuika has built a strong career in the civil construction sector, where she has held senior leadership roles for the past five years. Working in a predominantly male-dominated industry has required her to step up, hold her own, and continuously develop her skills. Despite her expertise, she often avoids talking about herself, displaying a quiet but confident approach to her work.

Her journey of embracing her Māori identity is still unfolding, guided by whakapapa and actively strengthened through participating in kapahaka. Inspired by a whānau members mokopapa, Mahuika hopes to receive her moko kauae one day but feels it is essential to first learn Te Reo Māori. She intends to take lessons soon to strengthen her connection to her language and culture. Though she admittedly works in spaces that don't always foster inclusivity, she remains proud of her identity and committed to ensuring her heritage is acknowledged and respected.

Navigating leadership as both the only woman and the only Māori in senior spaces has posed challenges, but Mahuika has met them with resilience. She has forged a place for herself in an industry where Māori and female representation are scarce, offering a unique perspective on what it means to lead in male-dominated environments. Looking ahead, she hopes to progress further in her career but will only work in spaces that accept her as her authentic self in her Māori identity. Her long-term aspirations include working for a Kaupapa Māori organisation where her skills and identity can be fully embraced.

Hineraumati

Hineraumati is a confident and well-articulated young professional who has already built a strong foundation in her career. With a conjoint degree and experience at a

multinational consultancy and accounting firm, she now works within a Māori consultancy agency, continuing to contribute her skills in spaces that align with her values. She has also held a board position for three years with an initiative dedicated to increasing Māori and Pasifika representation in corporate environments. As the youngest of her siblings, Hineraumati has created her own path, excelling in her work while remaining connected to her cultural identity.

Her passion for kapa haka has been a defining part of her life. She is a seasoned kaihaka (kapahaka performer) and has stood at Te Matatini numerous times. Though she did not grow up surrounded by people with moko kanohi, she and her sister received their moko kauae together, ending a seven-generation absence within their whānau.

Hineraumati has reclaimed Te Reo Māori as a second-language learner and is now fluent, something she wears as both an achievement and a responsibility. She moves through life with confidence, clearly knowing who she is and where she is going. During the interview, she spoke with ease, requiring little prompting; her clarity and self-assurance were evident in every response.

Despite her confidence, Hineraumati acknowledges the challenges of wearing moko kauae, particularly the stares she sometimes receives. While it can be frustrating, she remains steadfast in her decision, knowing that she is a visual representation of Māori culture. She has made it clear that she will never accept work that is detrimental to Māori and will only step into spaces that allow her to be her full authentic self.

Hineraumati continues to travel the world, maintaining a broad outlook on life while staying firmly rooted in her identity. Her steady partner of nearly eight years has been alongside her through this journey, offering support as she steps further into her purpose. Confident, articulate, and unwavering in her stance, Hineraumati is creating her own legacy, one that reflects both her professional success and her cultural pride.

Papatūānuku

Papatūānuku is a seasoned leader with a wealth of experience in governance and senior leadership, having served on multiple boards including one as Chair. Despite holding significant mana, she describes herself as an easy-going nanny. She has travelled extensively, lived overseas, and even spent time living off-grid.

Growing up in a time when racism and hostility towards Māori were prevalent, Papatūānuku experienced a disconnection from her cultural identity. However, she was surrounded by people who recognised her leadership potential early on and nurtured her abilities, allowing her to step into rooms where she could advocate for rangatahi from a young age. While she travelled with kapa haka in her youth, she lacked Te Reo Māori and often found herself unsure of the meaning behind the waiata. Over time, she took it upon herself to learn the history of Māori, actively seeking knowledge and reclaiming Te Reo Māori in adulthood.

Her upbringing was deeply influenced by her large whānau, particularly her cousins, and she spoke often of her grandmother, with whom she shared a close bond. As the eldest of three siblings, leadership and responsibility were ingrained in her from a young age. She was not the first in her whānau to wear moko kauae; her father has had his full mataora for some time, followed by her mother receiving her kauae, and then herself. Because of this, moko kanohi has been normalised in her family.

Now at a stage where she mentors many wāhine, Papatūānuku is confident and well-versed in Māori history, with a presence that commands respect. She is highly spiritual, believing that her tūpuna guide her and send her signs to ensure she remains on the right path. Having lived the high-paced demands of leadership, she is beginning to seek quieter, less stressful roles that allow her to refocus on what matters most.

Throughout her career, she has often been the sole Māori woman in leadership spaces, carrying the responsibility of being a voice for her iwi and whānau. In her current role, she frequently interacts with foreign tourists who are curious about her moko kauae, navigating these conversations with a calm patience. As she moves forward, Papatūānuku remains committed to supporting whānau Māori and rangatahi, ensuring her work continues to uplift others.

Hineteiwaiwa

Hineteiwaiwa has built her career within Kaupapa Māori spaces, steadily working her way into senior leadership. As the eldest of her siblings, she has always carried a strong sense of responsibility and belonging. She grew up with Te Reo Māori, though she has lived away from her ancestral lands having been born and raised in Auckland. Married with children, she keeps her whānau at the centre of every decision she makes, ensuring that the path she walks is one that will uplift and protect them.

Her moko kauae came to her when the time was right. She received it on the anniversary of the loss of a cherished whānau member, marking a deeply spiritual milestone in her life. She strongly believes that her tūpuna guide her, presenting the experiences she needs to grow, succeed, and create change. She received her moko at a mokopapa in the area where she grew up, feeling that it signified her transition into the next phase of her life.

Hineteiwaiwa describes herself as an active relaxer, leaning into her creativity and nurturing spirit. Her wellness is directly tied to how much time she spends in the kitchen. She loves to cook, feed, and create. When her hands are busy, her wairua and mind feel free. Despite her pride in her identity, Hineteiwaiwa has had to navigate complex whānau dynamics regarding moko kanohi. On one side of her whānau, body markings are not common due to strong religious beliefs, presenting challenges she has had to heal through. On the other side of her whānau, moko kauae is more openly accepted. She continues to clear the path for her children, ensuring they can embrace their journey without barriers, challenges, or inherited trauma.

In her professional life, Hineteiwaiwa has stepped into her power. She firmly believes that the roles she holds, the spaces she enters, and the tables she sits at are exactly where she is meant to be. She is on a mission to help whānau Māori and their hauora aspirations, ensuring that their voices are heard at decision-making tables. Soft-spoken but intentional, she does not need to be the loudest in the room. Her quiet confidence, self-awareness, and deep consideration for the past, present, and future define how she moves through the world.

One of the greatest challenges she has faced is addressing tokenism in the workplace. However, she does not shy away from these moments, confronting them head-on by educating her colleagues, clearly outlining the cultural boundaries that have been crossed, and guiding them toward a better understanding. She is unwavering in her commitment to ensuring that Māori are authentically represented, not merely included.

Hineahuone

Hineahuone is a highly respected senior leader in education, known for her unwavering commitment to serving whānau Māori and their tamariki. She has held multiple leadership positions throughout her career, motivated by a drive to create the greatest impact through each leadership role she accepted. Others describe her as a wāhine toa;

strong, passionate, and sometimes intimidating in her presence, yet always driven by a deep desire to empower others, particularly wāhine Māori, to reach their full potential.

Her journey toward receiving her moko kauae has been one of reflection and patience. She first felt the call to receive it ten years ago but admitted that it took that long to finally make it happen. Now, she encourages wāhine to embrace moko kauae the moment they feel drawn to it, rather than waiting as she did. She is also on a journey to reclaiming Te Reo Māori.

Hineahuone carries herself with a calm temperament and a strong presence. Her words are carefully considered and well-articulated, delivered with a soft voice that nonetheless commands attention. In her leadership role, she has faced challenges; the highs and lows that come with holding such responsibility. Some days, the weight of leadership is heavy, but she remains grounded by her purpose and the reason she chose this path.

A senior educational leader, she finds herself at a pivotal juncture. A new opportunity has surfaced, resonating deeply with her long-held aspiration to serve her community. Yet, a lingering sense of unfinished mahi at her current kura leaves her torn between duty and her dream.

Beyond her career, Hineahuone's unique perspective is shaped by her personal experiences, including her journey with moko kauae and her close bond with her sibling. Though deeply connected, she spoke of her kauae journey as an individual one, reflecting on how she came to embrace it in her own time. As she continues to lead and inspire, she remains committed to making a meaningful impact, ensuring that her leadership is not just about education but about uplifting and empowering those around her.

Personal Reflections

Personal reflections were noted within 24 hours of each interview. These notes captured how the interview unfolded, what stood out, how the participant engaged with the questions, and any emotional or intellectual impact their experiences had on me. These reflections became more than just observations. They helped me honour the relational nature of the research process. I often found myself thinking about how confidently or hesitantly participants shared their journeys and how those stories connected to my own experiences. Some left me feeling uplifted and affirmed, while others prompted deeper contemplation about things I had not considered before. Topics such as cultural identity,

visibility, cultural integrity, and merit arose frequently across participant kōrero. Engaging with these through varied lenses helped deepen my understanding of both the kaupapa and my interpretive orientation.

Reflections on cultural integrity guided the development of the theme, “Navigating Māori Identity”, which captured how wāhine navigated professional spaces while upholding their cultural authenticity. Participants expressed themselves in different ways. Some responded directly, while others engaged through storytelling or subtle cues. These differences reminded me that meaning often sits beyond what is spoken. Taking time to reflect helped me stay connected to the kaupapa and grounded my thematic analysis. Although these reflections were not coded as part of the data, they shaped how I interpreted the wider narrative and reinforced the importance of relationality, reciprocity, and positionality in kaupapa Māori research.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was selected as the analytical method for this study. While not inherently kaupapa Māori, thematic analysis has been meaningfully applied to support the emergence of culturally grounded themes. It offers a flexible yet rigorous tool to organise kōrero in a way that honours and centres participant narratives. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a useful tool in generating rich and detailed accounts of complex data. In this context, it enables the identification of themes that reflect the emotional, spiritual, and relational dimensions of wāhine Māori in professional settings. Guided by a Kaupapa Māori methodology, this approach serves to explore the career experiences, decisions, and aspirations of wāhine Māori and provide steps to collect and analyse data within the bounds of Kaupapa Māori practices (Ruka, 2022).

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a widely recognised six-step guideline to thematic analysis, describing it as a recursive and ever-changing process that includes:

1. Familiarising yourself with the data
2. Code generation
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and further refining the themes (naming of themes)
6. Write-up of the report

Familiarising the Data

The day after each interview, with the data still fresh in the researcher's mind, the transcript was carefully read and re-read. Key quotes were identified and drawn from the participants' kōrero. This process was guided by the research questions, with themes deliberately shaped to respond to the specific focus of the study, including the career decisions, aspirations, and experiences of wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae. Table 3 (below) illustrates this thematic process, showing how transcript quotes were condensed and interpreted into thematic summary extracts.

Table 3: Transcript Extracts and Summary

Full Quote	**Summary Extracts**
So yeah, I suppose that's my journey of how I came to receive it, but also a bigger part of that journey was, you know, my upbringing, not only not having many people with it in my that are close to me, but also reclamation and returning of this taonga to our whānau on one of my sides.	*Reclamation and returning of this taonga to our whānau*
When I was younger, I never really thought I would like I honestly never, ever ever thought I would ever get one, and that was just because it wasn't prevalent in my life with people close to me.	*I honestly never ever thought I would ever get one*
But part of my journey as well has been about reclaiming that, yes, it's actually a birthright, and wearing it now I understand the responsibility of wearing it, you hold to our culture being a physical representation of who we are.	*Reclaiming that yes, it's a birthright…now I understand the responsibility of wearing it*
Because everywhere I go, people, 100% someone is always looking staring at me, wondering what this is.	*Someone is always looking, staring at me*

Generating Initial Codes

An iterative process of understanding can be described as a cycle of constructive engagement where each pass through the data enhances clarity and deepens conceptual insight (Miyake, 1986). In this research, the process of theme identification began with a thorough reading of the summary extracts developed earlier. This was followed by a second reading, during which initial codes were noted. These codes were colour-coded to group related ideas into broader thematic categories. For example, *reaction to kauae* and *opportunities to educate* were assigned the colour blue to reflect their shared thematic connection. Initial codes were then labelled with a word or phrase that represented their relevance to the research questions such as *identity* or *moko*

decisions. Where codes were not directly aligned to either research question, a conscious decision by the researcher was made to exclude them from subsequent rounds of theme generation. Table 4 (below) illustrates this thematic coding approach.

Table 4: Initial Codes and Relevance to Research Questions

Initial Codes	**Words/phrases Relevant to Research Questions**
Appearance	Kauae in the workplace
Journey of finding Māori identity	Identity
Spirituality – tupuna, tohu	Identity
Younger generations	Moko decisions
Mentorship	Moko decisions
Conversations had	Moko decisions
Influences	Moko decisions
Aligning work with values	Kauae in the workplace
Normalisation	Kauae in the workplace
Support – whānau, friends, colleagues	Kauae in the workplace
Reaction to kauae	Kauae in the workplace
Opportunities to educate	Kauae in the workplace
Feelings of legitimacy / meritocracy	Identity
Collective identity, being part of a whole	Not relevant
Kauae as a source of healing	Not relevant
Internal thoughts	Not relevant
Kauae process	Not relevant
Role of family in shaping identity	Moko decisions
Religion	Whānau
Cultural identity as strength	Identity

Searching for Themes

Initial codes that were colour-coded to identify related ideas were then analysed to explore broader thematic similarities in response to the research questions. These patterns informed the generation of thematic categories. Table 5 below presents the elaborated codes and the resulting themes.

Table 5: Elaborated Codes and Generated Themes

Elaborated Codes	**Generated Themes**
Reactions to kauae directly linked to appearance	Reactions to kauae
Personal identity and growth: journey of finding māori identity	Kauae decisions
Kauae decisions: Spirituality - tupuna, tohu	Kauae decisions
Kauae aspirations: inspiring younger generations to mou moko	Kauae aspirations

Personal identity and growth: mentorship and its role in personal development	Kauae aspirations
Kauae decisions: conversations had	Kauae decisions
Kauae decisions: influences	Kauae decisions
Career aspirations: aligning work with values	Kauae aspirations
Kauae aspirations: normalisation of cultural markings	Kauae aspirations
Kauae decisions: support - whānau, friends, colleagues	Kauae decisions
Reaction to kauae	Reactions to kauae
Opportunities to educate	Reactions to kauae
Kauae decisions: feelings of legitimacy/meritocracy	Kauae decisions
Personal identity and growth: Connection to Te Ao Māori and Collective identity	Navigating Māori Identity
Kauae decisions: religion	Kauae decisions
Personal identity and growth: Cultural identity as strength	Cultural identity as strength

Reviewing Themes

The themes generated through earlier coding stages were then systematically reviewed by re-examining them alongside full participant narratives. This process involved assessing whether themes were congruent across multiple data points and evaluating the extent to which they authentically reflected wāhine Māori experiences. For example, the theme “Kauae Decisions” emerged consistently in kōrero from participants across their career journeys underscoring its significance. As illustrated in Table 4, the overarching themes that emerged from this analysis were:

- Reactions to kauae
- Kauae aspirations
- Navigating Māori identity
- Cultural identity as strength

Defining Themes

Four key themes were determined, each accompanied by sub-themes that articulate their underlying essence. Table 6 below presents the key themes alongside their associated sub theme, with colour coding used to highlight their relevance to the research question.

Table 6: Key Themes and Sub-themes

Key Themes	**Sub-themes**

Responses to kauae: appearance and opportunities to educate	Reactions based on appearance (aesthetic labour), questions, stares, reactions from Māori and non-Māori.
Kauae aspirations: generational inspiration and cultural normalisation	Inspiring younger and older generations, normalising cultural markings in whānau and at work, opportunities to educate; in the workplace: cultural competency in organisations, using the right language, understanding the journey. Individual experience at work, but personally it's self/iwi/hapū.
Navigating Māori identity	Journey of finding Māori identity; collective identity, mentorship from elders, the role of whānau in shaping identity, influencing decisions on kauae (whose business is it to know about journeys of self/moko).
Cultural identity as empowerment	Empowered by kauae, confidence in self, knowing who you are and what you're worth in professional settings, creating pathways for other wāhine to mou moko.

Chapter Summary

This chapter draws on a Kaupapa Māori methodology and a Mana Wāhine paradigm to explore the career decisions, experiences, and aspirations of wāhine Māori who wear, or are considering wearing, moko kauae. Data was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews guided by culturally responsive practices such as karakia and whakawhanaungatanga, which helped establish respectful, reciprocal relationships between researcher and participant. Within hours of each interview, personal reflections were recorded to capture immediate emotional and intellectual responses. As a wāhine Māori researcher who is considering moko kauae, this process often led me to reflect on my own experiences, values, and aspirations. Engaging with the kōrero of other wāhine invited a relational and spiritual connection that extended beyond the boundaries of conventional scholarship. At times, their stories reflected parts of my own journey prompting me to consider how my Māori identity shapes not only my interpretations, but my aspirations. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, supported by an iterative approach that involved multiple readings and rounds of coding to deepen understanding. The interviews surfaced rich narratives and perspectives, resulting in four key themes that will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter articulates the key themes that emerged from analysing the interview data. Participants' comments are italicised for emphasis. Privacy and confidentiality have been by ensuring consent forms and transcripts are stored separately preventing any association between data and specific individuals. The chapter concludes with a summary of key themes, leading into a deeper discussion of the findings in Chapter Five.

Finding, Reclaiming, and Navigating Māori Identity

For all participants, it was clear they were on a journey of finding, reclaiming, and navigating their identities as wāhine Māori, both personally and professionally. Many of the wāhine shared feelings of loss and disconnection, particularly around whakapapa and the absence of Te Reo Māori in their upbringing. Alongside these experiences there were also powerful learnings about identity, resilience, and reclaiming what was once suppressed or lost. Though participants were at different stages of their journeys, they all began their interviews by reciting their pepeha, immediately grounding themselves within their iwi and whānau.

What stood out strongly for these women was the sense of loss they felt about not fully knowing where they came from or why that was. This realisation often surfaced in moments of cultural expectation where they were confronted with uncertainties about who they were. They spoke of feeling disconnected from their Māori identities, shaped by missing historical knowledge, limited cultural exposure, and growing up away from the ancestral lands identified in their pepeha. For example, Whaitiri found herself interviewing before a Māori panel for entry into her chosen degree. In that moment, she was confronted with her lack of whakapapa knowledge and, ultimately, her connection to her identity. She stated:

> *They just asked general questions like, 'Tell us about yourself,'. I think the expectation was, which I found out later, that you would say your pepeha. But up until that point, I had never said my pepeha to anyone before. I kind of knew where I was from, but I didn't really know. We always knew that we were Māori, but it was only when people started asking us questions that we didn't know how to answer that I realised, okay, I've probably been living in a state of identity crisis growing up.*

Similarly, participant Papatūānuku recalled how she felt when the foreshore protest was coming through the city, highlighting her disconnect from her identity at the time. Looking back, she reflected:

> *I was actually quite angry. Why were they doing that? Why didn't they just stop? But that was because I never knew my history. I was never taught it in school. I didn't realise the loss and displacement my people had experienced because no one had ever taught me. (Papatūānuku)*

Some of the women acknowledged that Te Reo Māori was once spoken in their whānau by their grandparents but was not passed down. As a result, they grew up primarily speaking English, without their native language, and have had to actively seek opportunities to learn it. Papatūānuku recalled being in a kapa haka group and, although she enjoyed it, she often wondered what they were singing about, as she did not speak te reo Māori.

The idea of belonging to something greater than oneself was echoed across all women as an important aspect of their identities. There was a strong sense of responsibility to honour their tūpuna and create opportunities for future generations with Hineteiwaiwa commenting:

When you move in this world you don't move as your own…you are your tūpuna's aspirations and your mokopuna's aspirations as well. So being Māori means that you're part of a whole.

Moko kauae: an expression of identity

Mahuika, at the early stages of her journey and having considered moko kauae describes her understanding of what it means to be Māori and the uncertainty that comes with defining her own identity, saying:

I wouldn't say I'm super Māori, even though you don't have to be super Māori, and there's no real black and white photo of what that means. I'm just saying I'm still trying to figure it out.

In contrast, Hineraumati, who has been on her journey for almost ten years, spoke about the significance of her moko kauae, explaining:

I've been on my own journey of understanding who I am, where I come from, of reclaiming te reo Māori as well. I'm a second-language learner speaker, and very proud of that. And so, this taonga is also a representation of that entire journey.

All the participants who wore moko kauae, shared that they were among the first, if not the very first, in their whānau to do so in generations. When speaking about her moko kauae, Hineraumati stated:

A bigger part of that journey was the reclamation and return of this taonga to our whānau on our Nana's side, it had been seven generations since someone had it, which is crazy to me.

In receiving their moko kauae, participants not only underwent a physical transformation, but an internal shift deeply tied to identity and empowerment. Their moko kauae became a source of strength, helping them to navigate different spaces with certainty and pride.

Hineteiwaiwa described how her moko kauae reinforced her sense of self, allowing her to fully step into her power. She reflected on how it increased her confidence and reaffirmed that she belonged in any space she entered, stating:

I was a more empowered version of me.

Similarly, Hineraumati shared how her confidence grew by working in a culturally aligned environment. She explained how shifting into a Māori consultancy organisation gave her the opportunity to embrace her identity, saying:

I was in a Māori space, doing Māori things, being the best Māori person I could be with a moko kauae.

Both participants expressed how their moko kauae has influenced how they carry themselves in professional settings. Specifically, Hineteiwaiwa shared that she became more conscious of representing Māori in different spaces, stating:

I conduct myself differently… when you see me, you see Māori.

For these women, moko kauae was not only a mark of identity but also a statement of accountability, which at times extended into the workplace. It shaped how they moved through their careers, influencing the roles they took and the way they carried themselves in professional settings.

When I'm in spaces and I'm a representation of us as a people, I will make sure I'm carrying myself in a certain way…I conduct myself differently…when you see me you see Māori. (Hineteiwaiwa)

Interestingly, Hineahuone described her moko kauae as an intuitive force shaping her path, guiding her towards places she is meant to be while recognising places she does not belong.

I knew that it didn't matter what space I went into, if I'm not supposed to be there, I'm not supposed to be there. Like, it's almost like it feels like my compass.

Hineraumati spoke about the importance of understanding that moko kauae is not just about recognising an individual's personal journey but also the collective journey of their whānau, hapū, and iwi. In a workplace setting, although it may seem like a personal choice, the decision to wear moko kauae is deeply rooted in wider connections. Hineraumati emphasised this, stating:

It's their own personal, internal journey, but it's also a journey of a whānau, hapū, iwi, all of that… Understanding the journey that they've gone through to get to this point, to agree to get it, but then also confide and share that with you and share that with the workplace, that's another part of it.

Moko kauae decisions

When it came to decisions to receive moko kauae, all the women confirmed it is a deeply personal experience, but one rarely made in isolation. It is a decision influenced by a complex interplay of relationships, self-perception, spirituality, and even religious beliefs. For many of the wāhine, whānau support played a crucial role throughout the journey. This was indeed the case for Hineraumati, who shared how her parents, despite initial hesitation, ultimately stood alongside her during her mokopapa. Their presence not only affirmed her decision but also represented a transformation within her whānau; an evolving acceptance of moko kauae as a reclaimed taonga.

They were both there at my mokopapa, as reluctant as my dad was towards it, he was right there. And I think it was a great change for him, for them, and as part of the evolution and the return of this taonga to our people as well, this shift of elders, of our parents, towards being more open to this taonga that was nearly lost. And so, it's been cool to bring my parents on that journey. (Hineraumati)

Within the workplace, all but one participant stated they there was a need to be selective about whom they shared their moko kauae decisions or thoughts. Interestingly, only one participant expressed that she had no desire to share her decision with anyone in her workplace.

Legitimacy to wear moko kauae

At the same time, internal reflections on legitimacy and worthiness shaped how all the participants saw themselves in relation to moko kauae. Mahuika shared feelings of needing a certain level of cultural understanding to feel valid in her own connection to Te Ao Māori. While she acknowledged that certain aspects, like fluency in te reo Māori, were not strict requirements, she personally saw them as significant steps in her own readiness.

It's a very personal and in-depth journey that you've got to assess for yourself, like, for me, I feel that you've got to be able to speak Māori, even though it's not a prerequisite. That's just how I see it, and I'd prefer to get that out of the way or at least have a better understanding of Te Ao Māori as an overall. (Mahuika)

Contrastingly, Hineteiwaiwa shared a different perspective acknowledging the colonial influences on ideas of legitimacy. She reflected on the pressures many wāhine face, feeling as though moko kauae must be "earned" through their actions rather than recognising it as an inherent connection to whakapapa.

Over the last few years, this measure of 'Am I Māori enough?', this colonial perception that you have to earn your kauae by what you were doing. I thought I had to do certain things to deserve it, rather than listening to that deeper feeling within me that told me I was ready. (Hineteiwaiwa)

Spirituality: Guided by tupuna

Beyond these internal and external considerations, spirituality often serves as a guiding or affirming force. Many of the women described receiving signs from their tūpuna, which contributed to their decision-making process.

Papatūānuku shared how she felt her journey to receiving her moko kauae was predetermined:

I didn't have so much of those conversations really, because I think the pathway had already been set. Well, I know the pathway had actually already been set. I'd been getting tohu all the way through.

Similarly, Hineteiwaiwa reflected on how spiritual signs aligned with significant moments in her life, reinforcing her readiness to receive moko kauae:

From that part of my life, up until the date that I received my moko kauae, all of the different tohu aligned, even to the point where I received my moko kauae on the day that we lost my dad. And so all of those things just really aligned in terms of me accepting myself and letting my moko come to me.

Hineraumati recalled her experience of receiving moko kauae, explaining that when you go under the needle, you enter Rarohenga; a realm akin to the underworld, bridging Te Ao Kikokiko and Te Ao Wairua. She described a moment of seeing her tūpuna, saying:

One minute I was there, hearing the singing, and the next minute, I was still there. It wasn't that I was outside of my body, but with my eyes closed, I remember looking up and seeing all the loved ones who had passed, looking down at me.

For Hineteiwaiwa, religion also played a role in her decision to wear moko, adding a layer of complexity as she navigated her Māori identity within her whānau and their faith-based beliefs. She stated:

My mum's side of the whānau…are really religious, so tattoos are already a no-go. And, you know, growing up, there were different perceptions around atua Māori, and then, like, God and stuff like that. Like, it becomes a real blur when you mix and culture.

Māori identity in the workplace

The role of whānau

Whānau was mentioned throughout all the interviews, highlighting its significance among the women. It was especially common for them to consider their whānau when making career decisions, aware that their choices would impact not only themselves but also their families. For some, this meant prioritising workplaces that respected their values and identity.

I'm not going to work in a workplace that belittles who I am, my identity, or doesn't value family the way that I do…if I'm going to sacrifice time away from my children then it has to be worth it. (Whaitiri)

Mentorship

Mentorship has been discussed from both a mentor and mentee perspective. Two participants shared their experiences as mentors. Whaitiri shared how she has guided others through workplace challenges, encouraging authenticity in career choices and supporting them throughout their journeys. Hineahuone has also mentored women, particularly Māori women in the education space, emphasising the importance of investing in other wāhine Māori to continue the cycle of mentorship.

From a mentee perspective, Papatūānuku believes she would not be the person she is today without the guidance of her mentors, reinforcing the idea that leadership is learned from those who came before.

I grew up around some really good people who enabled me to be different and possibly groomed me for leadership. They saw in me qualities that would later serve us as a people. I've been given the knowledge, the ability, and the opportunity. It's learned from the many, many people before me who have shared their knowledge and time to mentor me. (Papatūānuku)

Further, she shared how the presence of strong mentors had helped her step into her own power and navigate spaces where being openly Māori, particularly in advocating for Māori interests, was not always welcomed.

I will say this: when you've been making waves and gain a reputation for being that angry Māori, you know you're doing something right. (Papatūānuku)

For these women, mentorship was not just about career progression; it was about maintaining wellbeing, holding space for each other, and ensuring that the knowledge they carried was passed down to those who would come after them.

Cultural Identity as Empowerment

All the participants emphasise the importance of knowing who you are, standing firm in your identity, and refusing to compromise your sense of self for the comfort of others. Two of the participants spoke about the significance of staying true to oneself, noting that people who are not aligned serve only as temporary lessons. For Hineteiwaiwa, she stressed the need to lead with authenticity rather than sacrificing your own feelings for the sake of making others comfortable, stating:

Don't risk making yourself feel out of sync and minimizing your own feelings… not out of fear of making them feeling uncomfortable.

This sentiment was echoed by participant Papatūānuku who refused to engage with people who remain rigid in their perspectives. She advised that her energy is best spent upholding the mana of her people rather than trying to persuade those unwilling to learn, stating:

I refuse to allow my job to define me, because I know who I am. I know where I belong. I've got the backing of my whānau, my hapū, my iwi, no matter what I do.

Responses to Moko Kauae: Curiosity, Dialogue, and Discomfort

For the four participants who wore moko kauae, the change in their physical appearance naturally elicited different responses from both wearers and non-wearers. For the two participants who had not yet received their moko kauae, they anticipated similar responses.

Curiosity

All the participants shared different ways in which moko kauae sparks curiosity, dialogue and, at times, discomfort in professional spaces.

One of the participants recalls witnessing an interaction where someone was physically engaged with due to having visible cultural markings. Whaitiri stated:

One of the things that I have seen, but not experienced myself, not with moko kauae, but just moko in general, is people coming up and, like, you know, grabbing your arm like, 'Oh, what does this mean?

She explained that she does not expect anyone to approach a moko kauae in the same way, stating that such an action toward the face is intrusive. However, she argued that even without direct physical contact, curiosity remains and is often expressed through questions.

Hineahuone noted experiences with non-Māori where they would ask what the story is, what each line represents. She reflected on these interactions, acknowledging that while people often intend to be respectful, their curiosity stems from a lack of cultural understanding and may sometimes be misguided. She shared:

Often non-Māori will ask me 'What is the story to it?' And it is like, well, here is the story. 'But where does it say that?' You know, like a Pākehā narrative they want to see the line for this, the line for that.

She further explained that moko kauae is deeply symbolic, embodying whakapapa and personal kōrero rather than being broken down into individual components. She emphasised the importance of educating people to embrace moko kauae for what it is rather than trying to interpret it through a Western lens, explaining that its meaning is shared between the wearer and their kaitā (tā moko artist).

Dialogue

All the participants who wear moko kauae have experienced hesitancy from colleagues who, when approaching the subject, were unsure about what was appropriate to ask. Two of the participants encouraged open dialogue while one of the participants made a point of making it clear that they were a safe space to ask questions. Papatūānuku recalls a time when she encountered comments from a customer that reflected ingrained biases and how, over time, she has learned to respond to such remarks. She stated:

I've had people say to our other kaimahi, who are tauiwi, 'Oh, that Māori stuff is everywhere, isn't it?'… I have learned now to be a lot more tolerant of those sorts of comments and not be so reactive.

Participants who wore moko kauae also mentioned how often they had been referred to as 'beautiful' because of their moko kauae. Being engaged with at work specifically to comment on their appearance was common among these participants. One of the participants shared that some of her colleagues would ask for permission before commenting. Another participant described arriving at a council meeting and being addressed by the mayor, who first commented on her appearance, and then emphasised the importance of fostering culture within their workplace. She stated:

She just said, 'You know, thank you for coming. You look amazing. You know, this is something that we want to encourage in our workplace.'

Interestingly, one of the participants reflected on her own thoughts about the appearance of her moko kauae in the lead-up to revealing hers, stating:

What if it's ugly like? That's another one, because when this got drawn up, I didn't actually look at it.

Regarding the aesthetic of moko kauae, participants spoke of other wearers with admiration, noting that they radiate beauty simply by being themselves. Hineteiwaiwa spoke of instantly feeling drawn to other Māori who wore moko within her organisation, describing a strong need to mihi to one another and make themselves known. She explained that these interactions feel natural and familiar, stating:

It opens up conversations of connection… they are curious about it, or they share their own experiences around, you know, if they have people in their whānau that have moko kanohi… our moko recognise each other.

One participant expressed that moko kanohi brings out the Māoritanga in a person, while another described how she felt cool no longer needing to line up for a moko stencil when performing with her kapahaka group. Hineraumati reflected on her shift from admiring moko kauae and telling others how beautiful they were, to becoming the recipient of admiration, stating:

I always wanted to go to them and say, 'You're beautiful.' And I would. And then, now that I've got one, everyone does that to me. And I'm just like, 'Oh yeah,' and I know that it's coming from a good place. But I'm like, 'Okay, I've heard this twenty hundred times before'

Discomfort

Managing stares was mentioned by all the participants who wore moko kauae. While none of these interactions were negative, their frequency was sometimes bothersome. One participant described always receiving the ‘double look’ while Hineraumati stated:

100% someone is always looking, staring at me, wondering what this is. And if I'm being honest, sometimes it's actually really irritating.

She goes on to share how, through the visibility of her moko kauae, she sometimes has to navigate uninvited energy from strangers stating:

The way they look can make you feel a certain way and give off a different wairua that, you know, you don’t invite. So that has been interesting for me to navigate in the modern day, and because, obviously, I am still very much proud to wear it.

Whaitiri, who was yet to receive her moko kauae, highlighted how perceived client responses could limit her engagement at work. She stated:

In terms of the type of mahi that I do or have done in the past, there would be situations where people would be more standoffish than not. If it bothered me a lot, I would

probably excuse myself from that, not because I don't think I'm capable of doing the work, but because it's not good energy… I think protecting my wairua and my kauae is more important than my mahi… I know that if I felt that way, then my colleague and my manager, my managers would support me.

Some of the women spoke about negative internal thoughts regarding how they imagined others at work would react once they received their moko kauae. Their initial concerns, however, did not align with the reality they experienced.

Hineraumati, working at a well-known consultancy company at the time, reflected on the significance of wearing moko kauae in that environment. She noted that many of her colleagues had likely never encountered or personally known someone with a moko kauae before. Internally, she struggled with how others might treat her or what they might think of her as the only employee with a moko kauae. However, the reality proved to be the complete opposite. She stated:

You know how there's fight or flight mode? It's like you just go into fight mode and think about the worst possible things that could happen if you get it. And, like, none of it has happened to me, but it's literally like, people won't accept you, my parents don't want me to get it, people are going to be racist towards me, all of that. But it just hasn't turned out like that.

Two of the participants wondered if they would face judgment but expressed that these thoughts were fleeting, quickly overshadowed by a strong sense of self-assurance. As Papatūānuku stated:

I can't stress it enough. We are worthy. We are deserving. You don't need to be judged by somebody else and get approval for something that is inherently yours. Ever. You don't need to justify it to anybody. Go and do it.

Aspirations to normalise moko kauae in Aotearoa

All participants spoke about how moko kauae is becoming more normalised in Aotearoa New Zealand. Among the women, there was a sense that moko kauae was already normal for Māori people and culture, and that it was finally moving towards becoming normal for everyone else.

Normalising within whānau

Nearly all participants spoke of the impact their moko kauae has had on younger family members with many of them expressing admiration and a strong desire to one day wear their own. For Hineteiwaiwa, this sentiment became clear during an interaction with her daughter immediately after receiving her moko kauae. She recalled:

After I received my moko kanohi, she was excited. She said, 'I can't wait to get mine.'

For four of the wāhine, the normalisation of moko kauae within their whānau has led to a natural expectation of receiving one in the future. This was evident for Papatūānuku who shared that her mokopuna, despite being only seven years old, already envisions herself with a moko kauae. Whaitiri shared that wearing a moko kauae stencil for Te Matatini was a transformative moment, not just for herself but for her daughter, evoking reactions of awe and admiration. Although Whaitiri explained that it was only ink, her daughter remained captivated. She shared:

Her eyes were just beaming looking at me, and she was like, 'Wow, look at your kauae... It's so beautiful… You look like a Māori now.'

According to Hineraumati, the shift in mindset among rangatahi extends beyond admiration and into certainty, as illustrated by a conversation with her nieces in their early teens. Rather than asking if they should get moko kauae, they confidently discussed when they would receive one. She explained:

I remember them saying to each other, 'Oh, when are you going to get yours?' or 'I'm going to get mine at this age.' And it wasn't even, like, a matter of 'I don't know if I'm going to get mine' or, like, 'Should I get mine?' It was, 'When are you going to get yours?'

Normalising at work

In the workplace, two of the six participants shared that they were not the first in their organisations to wear moko kauae. As a result, when they returned to work after receiving theirs, they felt that they blended in. Another participant suggested that her employment opportunities had not changed nor been affected, which she attributed to its normalisation in society.

For Hineahuone, working in education with moko kauae serves to normalise it within a school environment allowing tauira (students) to see it without bias or prejudice. She stated:

The kids, that's what matters to me most. Doesn't matter what nationality I teach. They call me Whaea, you know, and respectful of it.

She reflected on the importance of moko kauae being visible in education, explaining that children need to see it, to have it normalised, and to understand that it does not change who a person is; if anything, it lifts their mana.

Cultural competency within an organisation emerged as vitally important to participants, ensuring that Māori practices, including moko kauae, are understood, acknowledged, and appropriately integrated into workplace culture. Papatūānuku stated:

It's not your job to make other people feel comfortable about you having something that is inherently yours. Ever. Cultural competency isn't just a Māori thing. It's an everything thing.

For Hineahuone, cultural competency also means challenging misconceptions about moko kauae. She spoke of her colleagues not meaning to be offensive but at times making comments that implied moko kauae was just a trend. She shared:

I guess they haven't meant to be offensive, and they've said something like, 'Oh, everybody's getting it done now.' It's the tone, the tone that I hear is almost like it's a fad, right? Again, that is a very Pākehā way of thinking about things. But it is actually not a fad. It is reclamation, it is revival. We are not getting our kauae done because it's the thing to do.

For Hineteiwaiwa, it was essential for colleagues and managers to have at least a basic understanding of tikanga to avoid unintentionally causing offense. She recounted a time when she was invited to a meeting and, as the only Māori in the room, was asked by a non-Māori colleague to lead the karakia. She declined and immediately noticed that her colleague was taken aback. She explained:

I recognised, ka pai, we're trying to stick to tikanga by starting the hui with karakia. And then I just explained, 'I'm a manuhiri here. This is not my hui. This is not my whare, you know.' Then I encouraged, 'You know, this is actually a space for you guys. You invited us here.' And it was just an opportunity to educate.

Another key aspect of cultural competency, as explained by Whaitiri, is ensuring that the language used to describe or acknowledge moko kauae is culturally appropriate. She stated:

Referring to it as 'that' is probably not appropriate, because it's not 'that,' you know. And then, obviously, they might say tattoo, which is a little bit more accepted, but I think language is probably important. Using the Māori terms is key because chin tattoo or a tattoo on your chin does not carry the same mana or wairua as moko kauae.

Future aspirations

For these wāhine, receiving moko kauae has made their journey visible to others, unintentionally paving the way through their experiences. Hineteiwaiwa shared how her mokopapa had a profound impact on her cousin, inspiring her in a way she had never felt before. She reflected on this moment as a significant step forward for her whānau, saying:

I've already done something for our whānau and healed that part for the wāhine in our whānau to feel empowered with whatever their journey for moko kauae.

When asked what advice the participants had for wāhine considering moko kauae, their responses collectively highlighted the importance of listening to oneself when making your decision.

Don't seek validation outside of yourself. You're Māori, that's enough. (Hineteiwaiwa)

Listen to yourself. Listen to your whānau. But the biggest one is just listening to yourself and understanding within yourself why you want to do this. (Hineraumati)

All the participants agreed that receiving moko kauae is an internal journey, guided by self-awareness and connection to whakapapa rather than external validation.

Chapter Five: Discussion of the findings

This chapter explores the key themes identified from the findings, highlighting participants' moko kauae journey, the effort involved in navigating and managing responses to moko kauae in professional spaces, and the movement towards its normalisation in workplaces and careers. Each section of this chapter expands on these themes, providing insights into the career experiences of wāhine Māori who wear or are considering wearing moko kauae, and the role of these experiences in their decisions to wear moko kauae. These discussions are linked to existing literature, drawing on prior research to contextualise and deepen understanding of their experiences.

Moko Kauae Decision-Making: Whakapapa and Cultural Reclamation

Higgins (2004) noted that the arrival of Pākehā had a significant impact on how Māori identify themselves, disrupting traditional practices and indigenous expressions of identity such as moko kauae. Despite more than 100 years passing, the effects continue to be seen, evident in the fact that all participants who wore moko kauae were either the first in their whānau or among the first in several generations to do so, marking a revival of the practice within their families. This aligns with research by Nikora et al. (2007), which asserts that increasing numbers of Māori have been renewing the practice over the past three decades.

Participants in this study emphasised that while the choice to wear moko kauae was ultimately, an individual one, it was rarely made in isolation. The decision to receive moko kauae, although very personal, is inherently tied to whakapapa and cultural reclamation reflecting a broader journey of identity and connection to ancestral traditions.

The desire to reclaim one's culture aligns with earlier literature that highlights the impact of colonisation on moko kauae and its resurgence as an act of resistance (Ellis, 2018; Smith, 2013). Furthermore, research across indigenous diasporic contexts asserts that reclaiming cultural practices is central to decolonisation and healing (Smith, 2013; Ortega-Williams et al., 2019). This intersects with African American scholarship, which contends that colonialism continues to shape identity through imposed aesthetic hierarchies, with cultural reclamation functioning as a disruptor to intergenerational trauma (Ortega-Williams, et al., 2019).

One key influence on decision making for wāhine in this study was whanau perceptions. Although the literature did not indicate formal consultation processes, it does show that family members hold considerable weight in moko kauae decisions for wāhine Māori. In

this study, participants engaged in ongoing, meaningful dialogue with their parents and grandparents, often spanning weeks or months. Participants valued their perspectives and leant on them for both moral and emotional support. This research affirms the role of whānau as a key source of validation and encouragement. Across participants' moko kauae journeys, whānau were largely supportive, offering emotional reassurance and affirming their sense of readiness.

Research shows that while individuals accept the physical transformation involved in wearing moko kauae, concerns arise around whānau views, especially when those views differ from their own (Nikora et al., 2007). Previous research acknowledges that internal conflicts and tensions such as parental expectations and internal ambitions are commonly experienced across identity-related decisions (Erikson, 1980, as cited in Collins, 2012). These dynamics were evident in this study, where whānau attitudes towards moko kauae sometimes acted as a barrier for wāhine navigating these decisions. This tension was illustrated in Hineraumati's experience, where her father initially resisted the idea of her receiving moko kauae. His resistance stemmed from societal stigma surrounding the treatment of moko kauae wearers, particularly concerns for her safety, the possibility of limited future opportunities, and the risk of mistreatment. His hesitation, while initially a barrier, eventually shifted into support after Hineraumati repeatedly shared her reasons for her decision and expressed how deeply important it was to her. These findings align with research acknowledging the influence of whānau perspectives (Nikora, 2007), and the potential for intra-whānau tensions (Collins, 2012) affirming that whānau responses can both support and impede wāhine Māori on their journey toward wearing moko kauae. Hineraumati's experience also demonstrates that moko kauae decision-making is a negotiated process and that through dialogue and wānanga with whānau, it is possible to work through tensions shaped by internal colonialism and historical trauma; a notion reinforced in Kaupapa Māori literature on relational healing (Pihama et al., 2019).

Deliberations about the right to wear moko kauae were also influenced by participants' broader life experiences. Many wrestled with both external pressures and internalised expectations, including the belief that wearers should be fluent in Te Reo Māori or must reach certain personal milestones to be considered 'deserving'. This belief and its emotional weight have been articulated in previous studies. For example, participants in Nikora et al. (2007) felt they needed to achieve specific goals before feeling worthy of receiving moko. Higgins (2004) also explained how recipients of moko kauae were questioned by other Māori women about their ability to engage in cultural practices, such as speaking Māori or performing a pūkana. Māori scholars have further highlighted the

perception that moko kauae wearers are expected to embody cultural leadership and fluency in Te Reo Māori (Rua, 1999; Taitimu-Stevens, 2024).

This study interprets such expectations as being influenced, at least in part, by colonial ideals of meritocracy where outcomes are distributed based on perceived merit (Son Hing et al., 2011). Indigenous scholars have critiqued how dominant colonial discourses and hierarchies have shaped Māori women's identities in ways that disempower and disenfranchise (Simmonds, 2011) reinforcing the notion that identity must be earned or proven. These beliefs can become internalised leading some wāhine to question their worthiness or readiness to receive moko kauae. Colonisation has been described in recent literature as an ongoing system of oppression that has disrupted Māori ways of being including identity formation (Pihama et al., 2019). Such disruptions contribute to internalised doubt and hesitation around cultural expressions like moko kauae, particularly when such expressions are measured against inherited colonial criteria. In this study, one participant that initially felt she needed to prove her readiness for moko kauae, later rejected these imposed expectations. Instead, she affirmed her right to wear moko kauae was inherited, not earned, and grounded in whakapapa rather than external qualifications.

A third factor identified in the decision-making process in this study, was how wāhine Māori interpreted tohu (spiritual signs) as validation of their readiness to receive moko kauae. Tohu refer to spiritual and symbolic ways of being and connecting to with our tūpuna (ancestors) and are often used to communicate a correct way forward (Te Maihāroa, 2021). Three of the participants who wear moko kauae described receiving tohu from tūpuna prior to receiving their moko, highlighting the spiritual dimension of receiving moko kauae. For example, Hineteiwaiwa shared that she had arranged to be part of a mokopapa in Te Tairāwhiti (the East Coast of New Zealand), where she is from. However, in the lead up to the event, she began receiving what she considered negative tohu including uncertainty around travel logistics, whānau disagreements, and the fact she had not yet shared her decision with anyone. These signs were significant for her and ultimately, she chose not to proceed. In time, it became clear that this was meant to be. When she eventually received her moko kauae, she described how all the tohu aligned, so perfectly in fact, that the day she received it marked the one-year anniversary of her father's passing. In this study, these signs provided assurance as to whether they were on the right path in considering moko kauae, offering guidance and affirmation throughout the process. For another participant, this connection was particularly profound, as she experienced seeing her tūpuna while receiving her moko kauae, further confirming her belief that she was meant to undertake this journey.

The significance of spiritual signs in guiding personal decisions aligns with broader discussions on the reclamation of whakapapa and the interconnectedness of identity and culture. Research has acknowledged that moko is deeply tied to ancestral relationships (Nikora et al., 2007). While moko kauae is often framed within cultural revitalisation, the findings of this study suggest that spirituality plays a more integral role than previously explored, particularly in how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to tohu. For Māori, moko originates from Rūaumoko, the atua (god) of volcanoes and earthquakes (Higgins, 2004). In Māori pūrākau, it is said to have been brought to Te Ao Tūroa by Mataora upon his return from Rarohenga after seeking forgiveness from his wife, Niwareka, for his mistreatment of her (Te Awekotuku, 1997). These narratives highlight the spiritual origins of moko, and raise questions about how tohu are perceived, interpreted, and retrospectively affirmed in journeys towards receiving moko kauae. While existing research highlights the cultural and symbolic significance of moko kauae, further exploration is needed to understand the role of tohu as an active force in shaping contemporary moko experiences.

Moko kauae in the Workplace: Curiosity, Dialogue, Discomfort

This research demonstrates that wearing moko kauae in the workplace requires wāhine to engage in a form of cultural and emotional labour as they navigate interactions due to their heightened visibility. These interactions were grouped into three response types: curiosity, dialogue, and discomfort. *Curiosity* refers to the reactions of others towards participants; especially colleagues, clients, or strangers who may be unfamiliar with moko kauae and seek to understand its meaning or significance. In this study, curiosity often emerged through lingering stares, being asked personal or cultural questions, or assumptions that participants would educate. *Dialogue* includes both spontaneous and intentional verbal interactions due to moko kauae visibility. Participants described being drawn into unsolicited conversations about identity, whakapapa, or tikanga, whether they wanted to or not. *Discomfort* speaks to the interactions participants experience in professional spaces because of their moko kauae, that prompt discomfort. Some participants described this as having to conceal their true feelings internally while outwardly presenting a composed or culturally appropriate demeanour.

These findings are consistent with research indicating that the transition from non-wearer to wearer requires individuals to negotiate shifting social interactions (Rua, 1999) and navigate external perceptions and responses (Nikora et al., 2004). Much of this earlier literature focuses on general responses such as public reactions in everyday settings

like shopping centres or social gatherings. However, this study identifies a range of experiences unique to the work context.

For participants, professional environments often required repeated explanations, where wāhine feel obligated as an engaged professional to respond to inquiries from colleagues about the meaning of their moko kauae. This work-related finding adds weight to evidence that indigenous workers and cultural minorities can carry additional responsibilities in the workplace (Haar & Martin, 2021). Research by Haar and Martin (2021) explores the additional role pressures faced by Māori professionals who wear multiple hats in the workplace. They identify the phenomenon of the *cultural double-shift*; a form of cultural labour in which Māori employees are expected to carry out extra responsibilities tied to their identity such as enacting appropriate tikanga or translating cultural perspectives for non-Māori colleagues (Haar & Martin, 2021; McAllister, 2021; Haar, 2015; Love, 2021). For example, Hineteiwaiwa recalled how she was expected to lead a karakia in a meeting despite being a guest, exposing organisational assumptions where wāhine Māori uninvitingly enact cultural labour.

While this concept acknowledges the cultural expectations placed on Māori staff by virtue of their identity, it does not consider embodied elements of labour, specifically, the work involved in navigating cultural aesthetics such as moko kauae. The present research expands this concept to consider how cultural aesthetics contribute to added labour within professional contexts, which includes managing reactions, responding to inquiries, and upholding cultural integrity in relation to visible cultural markers such as moko kauae.

All participants wearing moko kauae had received compliments, yet they reported the repetitive nature of having to respond to them was tiresome. Interestingly, when discussing others who wore moko kauae, participants spoke of radiant beauty, confidence, and how it enhances a person's Māoritanga. Yet, when receiving similar compliments themselves, they described increasing frustration implying that such remarks often felt superficial. In contrast, when compliments came from other wāhine Māori who wore moko kauae, they were received as affirmations of mana, whakapapa, and shared cultural understanding. This distinction reflects that compliments are not neutral, but rather shaped by the positionality of the speaker and the depth of cultural knowledge that informs the interaction. Research affirms that wāhine Māori are often subject to aesthetic readings that overlook cultural significance (Higgins, 2004; Simmonds, 2011). Compliments from wearers were seen to acknowledge identity and journey, whereas compliments from non-wearers were experienced as unsolicited commentary disconnected from the deeper meaning of moko kauae.

The historical stigma surrounding tattoos contributes to the complex role that visible markings like moko kauae play in contemporary professional settings in Aotearoa. Early Western scholarship often links tattooing to cultural or social behaviours presumed savage or barbaric with scholars associating the practice with non-Western peoples or lower-class Westerners perceived as uncivilised (Pritchard 2001). In the Judeo-Christian context, marking your body with tattoos was considered a decivilizing process seen as active disobedience or going against the norm (Langman, 2003). This framing cast those with visible markings as outsiders.

In contrast, many non-Western cultures regard tattooing as spiritually and culturally significant. As described by Saunders (1987), the ‘tattoo’ can serve as both a sign of distancing oneself from mainstream society and a declaration of individual identity. While tribal marks in other cultures have been linked to stigma (Adisa et al., 2024), moko kauae carries cultural prestige in Māori communities. Participants in this study shared experiences of admiration, including from non-Māori colleagues and strangers. These responses may indicate a shifting landscape influenced by wider reclamation movements and increased organisational engagement with Māori language, customs, and values. Yet such movements of recognition also prompt deeper questions about cultural awareness and the politics of visibility within professional settings. As Te Maihāroa (2021) asserts, moko kauae is a visible assertion of whakapapa, mana motuhake, and tino rangatiratanga as well as a symbol of indigenous resistance. In this way, the presence of moko kauae in professional spaces not only challenges colonial framings of tattoos as deviant but reclaims visibility as a site of cultural sovereignty.

Emotional Labour

The participants in this research demonstrated how they engaged in emotional labour in their workplaces, particularly in how they navigated everyday interactions, met professional expectations, and managed the ignorance of others regarding the cultural significance of their moko kauae.

Drawing on Hochschild’s (1983, as cited in Witz et al., 2003) concept of emotional labour, participants’ experiences can be seen as a balance between surface acting (projecting outward confidence while navigating internal discomfort) and deep acting (maintaining genuine pride despite external pressure). This underscores the emotional labour involved in cultural reclamation, specifically the reclamation of moko kauae. Research on moko kauae has shown that wearers must not only integrate their new physical

appearance into their personal identities but also simultaneously navigate external responses (Nikora et al., 2004). In this study, participants described the constant attention drawn to their moko kauae in professional spaces, which required them to actively manage both others' reactions and their own emotional responses. This reflects emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983, as cited in Witz et al., 2003) where individuals must regulate their reactions in response to workplace interactions.

Over the last three decades, research on emotional labour has tended to focus on interactive service work, often in the context of employee-to-customer interactions (Hochschild, 1983; Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006). However, less attention has been given to how workers navigate emotional labour within collegial relationships. Unlike mainstream definitions of emotional labour which describe workers adjusting their behaviour to meet customer expectations, this study highlights how women with moko kauae must also manage unsolicited attention both from colleagues and customers, alongside meeting workplace demands and expectations.

Emotional labour literature posits emotional regulation as a strategy used by indigenous and marginalised professionals to protect their identity and maintain relational balance in culturally dominant environments (Hochschild, 1983, as cited in Witz et al., 2003; Simmonds, 2011). In this study, one wāhine shared that certain looks from others carried an unwelcome energy which she navigated by holding her head high and taking pride in her moko kauae. She was also frank with herself, acknowledging that moko kauae visibility inevitably invites reactions from others. This reflects a form of emotional preparation; a strategy that allows her to stay grounded, anticipate discomfort, and carry her identity with mana rather than defensiveness. For others, emotional labour involved deciding when and how to educate others, mostly non-Māori, on the meaning behind their moko kauae. This included consciously regulating emotions and responses to ensure interactions were positive, regardless of the nature of the interaction. One participant shared that rather than letting constant attention make her uncomfortable, she reframed these moments as opportunities to normalise moko kauae by educating non-wearers about its meaning and significance within Te Ao Māori. For her, ensuring such interactions maintained a positive tone stemmed from personal disposition rather than to avoid wider social implications.

Papatūānuku described being angrily confronted by a customer at work about Māori culture, and how she remained calm in a high-tension situation. She shared with conviction that she was not there to persuade or inform anyone whose views were already entrenched. Further, she reflected, "They want the angry Māori and when you

don’t become that, you’re breaking so many stereotypes. You don’t need to be that”. Earlier research has highlighted the sense of responsibility often felt by wearers to champion moko and Māori culture when confronted with prejudice or hostility (Nikora, 2004). Papatūānuku’s approach, where her conscious decision to remain composed, served as a counter-narrative to the ‘angry Māori woman’ stereotype. This stereotype originates from colonial distortions that misread Māori women’s emotional expression as threatening or inappropriate (Mikaere, 1994). In choosing restraint, she not only protected her emotional wellbeing, but actively represented her culture and her tūpuna with mana.

For some of the other participants, the emotional toll of increased visibility caused discomfort as they often found themselves navigating prolonged stares. This reflects Ellis’ (2018) observation that increased attention from others in social settings can evoke a sense of being out of place or belonging to a different time. While these gazes were not always hostile, they contributed to a persistent feeling of being watched and scrutinised. Existing research on monitoring employees in the workplace argues that modern surveillance operates through both direct observation (employers observing employees) and employees’ internalised awareness of being visible (Manokha, 2020). For wāhine Māori with cultural markers like moko kauae, this visibility can manifest as a type of embodied surveillance where being seen is not passive, but infused with judgement, expectation, or cultural scrutiny. Participants described feelings of constantly being watched. Their moko kauae seemed to invite increased attention that shaped how they navigated meetings, which clients or colleagues they engaged with, and how they carried themselves professionally. Being hyper-visible required social and emotional labour, managing how others perceived them as well as how they expressed their identity under that gaze.

One participant who is considering moko kauae, signalled the possibility of emotional labour emerging from a need for self-protection. She anticipated that bias from clients, whether real or imagined, might prompt her to voluntarily withdraw from certain interactions, not because she doubted her capability, but as a way of protecting her mana and emotional wellbeing. This imagined act of strategic disengagement speaks to the preparatory emotional labour involved in constantly checking professional surroundings for safety and weighing potential career consequences against personal authenticity. In contexts where high-value clients may hold discriminatory views towards Māori or moko kauae, such dynamics can lead to exclusion from certain opportunities, potentially limiting career progression (Tan et al., 2024). While this may preserve her wellbeing in

such moments, as a systemic issue, this type of discrimination can contribute to the underrepresentation of Māori professionals within these spaces.

Riggio's (1986) framework on assessing basic social and interpersonal skills provides a useful lens for understanding why individuals may feel comfortable commenting on moko kauae in professional environments. His emphasis on nonverbal communication highlights how visible cultural markings such as moko kauae function as indicators of identity and heritage. This visibility can prompt comments that are not consciously thought through but instead guided by underlying assumptions about how moko kauae should be recognised and spoken about. While aspects of appearance, such as weight gain often go unremarked due to dominant social etiquette norms (Gillon & Pausé, 2021), this study suggests that moko kauae appears to operate outside these boundaries of restraint. Contemporary workplaces generally discourage unsolicited remarks about physical appearance, however participants in this study described a contrasting experience. Moko kauae seemed to invite commentary that bypassed these boundaries, giving others perceived license to question and comment freely. Individuals may perceive it as a socially permissible topic of curiosity informed by learned social behaviours that dictate when inquiries are seen as acceptable (Riggio, 1986).

Further, the perceived entitlement to comment on moko kauae may stem not only from a lack of cultural understanding, but also from the social security afforded by white privilege. As Wolgast and Wolgast (2025) argue, individuals racialised as white in Western societies often live with systemic advantages as well as workplace norms that treat their presence, behaviour, and perspective as standard or even authoritative. These conditions can make unsolicited remarks seem acceptable. Additionally, some of the participants in this study felt a deep sense of frustration being asked what the story was behind the designs in their moko kauae. One participant shared how, when she would explain its meaning, the response was, "But where does it say that?". The emotional labour involved in navigating such interactions, requiring both surface and deep acting (Hochschild, 1993) lies in the need to self-regulate and decide whether to educate, deflect, or withdraw, as well as having to justify the symbolic meaning of moko kauae within frameworks that demand written or linear validation.

When asked what organisations and colleagues should understand about moko kauae, participants described how workplace challenges arose due to limited Māori cultural competency. Existing research echoes these experiences, citing the difficulties experienced by Māori employees in professional settings where cultural understanding is lacking (Haar & Martin, 2022; Staniland et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2016). Collectively,

these workplace realities demonstrate how non-Māori staff's lack of awareness and understanding of Māori culture can significantly shape Māori employees' experiences, reaffirming the need for strengthened Māori cultural competency. Participants further emphasised the importance of language when referring to moko kauae, noting that linguistic choices can either uphold its mana or reflect a lack of cultural respect. For instance, using appropriate terminology instead of referring to moko kauae as 'that' or 'it' which can demean its significance and disconnect it from its whakapapa. These examples position language as a key aspect in ensuring Māori cultural competency. Improving this competency could improve interactions and limit this type of emotional labour for Māori employees.

While it was not clear exactly how often these encounters occurred, or whether they were repeated interactions with similar people, or across different encounters, the emotional labour involved was evident. This was especially true in terms of deep acting: the internal effort required in these moments to stay patient, maintain composure and offer explanation was evident. For Māori workers, this persistent use of emotional and cognitive resources to assume informal cultural educator roles can detract from other professional responsibilities. Existing research also suggests that repeated emotional labour over time can contribute to burnout, role conflict, or identity fatigue (Grandey, 2000; Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Haar & Martin, 2021).

Aesthetic Labour

Existing literature primarily frames aesthetic labour as a concept within service industries where employers recruit workers based on physical appearance and individual qualities that align with the company's brand (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; 2000). In this view, the way employees present themselves becomes a form of commodified labour used to attract customers. However, discussions typically centre on physical attractiveness and its role in selling products, with limited attention to how visible cultural markers influence professional experiences. Additionally, gendered expectations across professions see women's appearance evaluated more narrowly than men's (Warhurst et al., 2012). According to aesthetic labour scholars, women are subject to a form of performative labour where their professional role carries expectations to manage their appearance, expectations that do not equally apply to men (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006). Another closely linked concept frequently noted in aesthetic labour literature is lookism – defined as the prejudicial and differential treatment that workers face due to their appearance (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007), a concept that remains relevant in Aotearoa.

On top of this, Eurocentric norms of professionalism are inherited from systems grounded in colonial ideals that disrupt indigenous ways of being (Mikaere, 1994). Cultural markings such as moko kauae may be misread through these western frames, leading to bias and misinformed assumptions in the workplace. Misconceptions surrounding moko kauae reveal how workplace bias can marginalise indigenous identity, particularly when visible cultural markers are misread. One participant described a colleague dismissing her moko kauae as a passing trend, undermining its meaning as an act of reclamation and revival. These moments highlight how aesthetic labour and lookism intersect in cultural misrecognition.

Māori women represent intersectional identities that cause them to navigate multiple layers of discrimination (Reilly, 2019; Warburton & Morrison, 2008). In workplace settings, they navigate their identities as Māori, and as women (Ruka, 2022), experiencing compounded barriers like racism and sexism (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005; Palmer & Masters, 2010). For wāhine Māori, wearing moko kauae may add to these challenges or be a statement of resilience in the face of them.

This research did not find that moko kauae is strategically exploited for organisational benefit by managers. Participants did not express being hired *because* of their moko kauae, nor did their employers position their moko kauae as part of a commercial brand. However, aesthetic labour also refers to the expectation that individuals adapt themselves to suit the image of the organisation (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). While moko kauae was not positioned as exploitative within these workplaces, one participant considering receiving moko kauae noted the possibility that her visible cultural identity could bring challenges in a client-facing role. This may indicate that, even in the absence of overt commodification, the pressure to conform remains a potential site of emotional labour and career tension.

In contrast to the strategic leveraging of moko kauae, participants were also not asked to suppress it. Instead, their moko kauae remained visible, and yet largely unacknowledged within dominant aesthetic norms (Higgins, 2004; Pihama, 2018). While suppression was not explicitly described by the participants, one wāhine shared that she modified her wardrobe to carry herself with heightened formality; not to hide her moko kauae, but to manage how others perceived it. This indicates that visibility may prompt a deeper negotiation of appearance where some wāhine consciously select clothing or adapt their demeanour to offset assumptions and affirm their professionalism.

Moko kauae also appeared to have an influence on workplace interactions. For example, some participants felt that their moko kauae influenced expectations around cultural leadership or knowledge. One wāhine noted that, once she became visibly identifiable as Māori, colleagues began approaching her for culturally specific contributions such as translating te reo Māori words or leading karakia. Although she possessed these skills and was willing to support where appropriate, she reflected that her moko kauae had led people to assume she could and would assist with organisational needs linked to Māori identity or Te Tiriti obligations. She remarked, “People see you in another way, like ‘Oh, can you help with this?”, highlighting how visibility can prompt unsolicited expectations that extend beyond interpersonal education. This dynamic reflects Ruka’s (2022) findings which show Māori women are frequently presumed to hold cultural expertise leading to expectations on them to perform identity-based labour in ways not expected of others (Haar & Martin, 2021).

While the experiences of wāhine with moko kauae do not align precisely with traditional definitions of aesthetic labour, its presence clearly carries cultural and relational weight in professional settings.

While existing aesthetic labour theory implies that workers must ‘look the part’ and ‘sound right’ for credibility (Butler, 2014), participants in this study reject the notion that their moko kauae should be modified to meet externally imposed standards. Instead, they assert self-determination, demonstrating that empowerment comes from being grounded in culture rather than workplace validation. In doing so, they expand the concept of aesthetic labour beyond appearance-based labour and into the realm of cultural labour.

Cultural Aesthetic Labour

Aesthetic labour research has largely been conducted in Western contexts with a few exceptions including a study in Nigeria that focussed on tribal marks and workplace discrimination (Adisa et al., 2024), and another that included participants who identified as either Asian, Black, or Latino (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006). While aesthetic labour is typically discussed as strategic and employer-driven, moko kauae is a deeply personal expression of Māori cultural identity. While both forms of visual presence influence workplace interactions, only aesthetic labour is performed to align with corporate expectations. In contrast, the impact of moko kauae occurs regardless of organisational aims. However, aesthetic labour is not always promotional and can work against individuals when their appearance is perceived as misaligned with the organisation’s brand (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007).

This study offers a different lens on aesthetic labour where cultural aesthetics, rather than employer-driven appearance standards, shapes how individuals are perceived and positioned in the workplace. This research adds to existing discussions of aesthetic labour by reframing it through the concept of *cultural aesthetic labour*. Cultural aesthetic labour is the performative and relational work involved in representing visible cultural markers in professional spaces; markers that evoke customer and collegial sensibilities, and which often require strategic navigation to preserve authenticity and mana.

The findings of this research raise important questions about visible representations of cultural identity and Māori empowerment in workplace contexts, indicating that wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae may navigate professional spaces in ways that prioritise authenticity over assimilation. For Māori women with moko kauae, heightened visibility in the workplace can influence interactions in ways that are comparable to aesthetic labour though grounded in entirely different intentions. One participant working in tourism often overheard non-Māori tourists making dismissive remarks such as, 'that Māori stuff is everywhere', directed toward her non-Māori colleagues. She reflected how she had learnt to be tolerant in those moments; an example of the emotional labour Māori women exercise to uphold cultural integrity in professional spaces. This example illustrates a key tension: even in contexts where moko kauae should be an asset, such as tourism, negative responses still surface, reinforcing the complexity of navigating visibility. These interpretations raise questions about conventional workplace norms that often expect employees to compromise aspects of their identity for professional success.

Wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae navigate a constant tension between self-presentation and cultural representation within professional settings. When moko kauae is misunderstood, stereotyped, or tokenised, the risk extends beyond organisational misalignment to a misrepresentation of whakapapa, iwi, and the mana of the communities they belong to (Higgins, 2004; Pihama, 2018). This interplay between aesthetic and emotional labour is deeply complex as each decision around appearance or behaviour carries layered meaning (Nikora et al., 2007). For these women, a misstep can have both personal and professional consequences.

This study has demonstrated how wearing moko kauae has potential implications on work and career, shaping workplace interactions, organisational expectations, and pathways to progression. It unsettles the idea that workspaces are neutral, echoing Migliore et al.'s (2022) argument that professional environments reflect and reinforce social hierarchies. Further research is needed to develop the concept of cultural

aesthetic labour and explore its implications across diverse professions, cultural communities, and geopolitical contexts. In particular, investigating the organisational practices that either support or undermine visible cultural markers in professional settings. Moreover, exploring how cultural aesthetic labour and emotional intersect may provide insight into how it shapes career progression and leadership opportunities.

Normalising Moko Kauae: Within Whānau and at Work

Participants in this study consider their career highly important, shaped by personal values, cultural identity, and relational responsibilities rather than conventional measures of success. Rather than viewing career advancement as purely an individual pursuit, participants prioritised mahi that aligns with Kaupapa Māori principles, upholds their identity, and allows them to be a positive presence for whānau and iwi. The findings of this research indicate that career does not necessarily take precedence over personal and family commitments. Some participants shared that while they enjoy their mahi, their responsibilities at home remain central, and work must fit within that balance rather than overshadow it.

Participants responses offer a more nuanced understanding of the economic participation of wāhine Māori than what has previously been discussed in the literature. Warburton and Morrison (2008) suggest that young wāhine Māori limit labour market participation due to living in households where they care for children or elders; a perspective in which work is prioritised over whānau. In contrast, this research suggests that personal and family commitments are not constraints, but deliberate choices that reflect cultural values, where whānau responsibilities take precedence over paid work, though not without consequences. These value-driven decisions, while grounded in cultural priorities, can disadvantage wāhine Māori within the workplace. The ability to prioritise whānau over paid work may be more accessible to those with greater resources, flexibility or support systems, highlighting how structural inequities shape decision-making power. While existing research has acknowledged the value of unpaid work by wāhine Māori to the New Zealand economy (Manatū Wāhine: Ministry for Women, 2024), further inquiry is needed to understand the impact of such decisions on individual career-progression and financial stability. These outcomes may also carry intergenerational implications on how future generations access work, build wealth, or navigate their Māori identities withing professional settings.

Across the participants in this study, it appeared that the normalisation of moko kauae was growing within their whānau circles and workplaces. Participants who wore moko

kauae described the admiration received from younger whānau members suggesting that visibility of moko kauae may foster cultural pride and continuity within whānau. In this study, moko kauae visibility shifted the mindset of younger whānau members from seeing it as an exception, to recognising it as natural part of their culture. This shift highlights how cultures evolve over time. As Aotearoa's Māori population grows with higher proportions of younger people, it is likely that workplace cultures will evolve, influenced by emerging expectations around Māori cultural competence and cultural expression. Further research is needed to examine how this generational momentum could redefine what inclusive and culturally grounded workplaces look like in the future. Current research shows that rangatahi wāhine Māori are embracing moko kauae through digital platforms like TikTok, framing it at a birthright and actively reshaping narratives of identity. This affirms the role of visibility in bringing about cultural pride among younger whānau members.

Most participants expressed that moko kauae was becoming more visible and influencing how younger generations may navigate professional pathways with moko kauae. For two of the participants, wearing moko kauae no longer felt like an anomaly at work because others in their workplace also wore it. This normalisation, fostered by having others in the workplace also wearing moko kauae, helped reduce the frequency of questions or unsolicited attention, thereby easing some of the emotional labour often involved in navigating others' responses. One participant who wore moko kauae did not believe there was any impact on employment opportunities which could indicate a degree of acceptance in her professional context. While this is positive, this cannot be taken as indicative of wider societal attitudes, as experiences are likely shaped by the specific context, industry, profession as well as individual perceptions or biases.

The impact of normalising moko kauae in professional settings is that it may shift perceived career possibilities for wāhine Māori, encouraging them to enter professional spaces without the fear of being discriminated against or excluded for being visibly Māori. Another outcome of this normalisation is its potential to reshape workplace appearance norms. Rather than being perceived as challenging these norms, wāhine Māori would instead come to embody them. Nikora et al. (2007), discuss how moko wearers engage with their social environments to challenge stigma, reshape perceptions, and reinforce cultural identity. This study extends that conversation by illustrating how these processes unfold within professional environments. While this study reveals a positive shift, they also draw attention to ongoing complications and tensions that participants continue to negotiate.

Mentorship can help normalise moko kauae in the workplace by providing both visibility and practical support for wāhine Māori. Mentoring relationships also emerged as a vital intervention, helping to normalise Māori leadership and identity by providing culturally safe spaces and relational guidance. It can empower wāhine Māori to step into leadership while reinforcing a cycle of support and knowledge-sharing. In this study mentorship appears to be a critical factor in identity formation, enabling wāhine Māori to develop a strong sense of self within professional spaces. Rather than focusing solely on individual career advancement, mentorship in this context fosters the collective strength of Māori leadership over time. It also appears to reflect whānaungatanga, extending beyond mentor-mentee relationships to benefit the wider collective.

From a Māori perspective, mentoring has been conceptualised in terms of tuakana/teina relationships, whereby a tuakana (an older more experienced individual) guides and supports a teina (a younger less experienced individual). Research shows that collaboration and support among wāhine, particularly through mentorship and role modelling, plays a key role in navigating professional spaces while maintaining cultural identity (McNicholas & Humphries, 2005; Ruka, 2022). Participants in this study echoed these insights, describing how seeing Māori women in leadership roles fosters confidence in younger generations, affirms cultural identity, and helps reframe professional norms. Some were mentors themselves, building relationships to support not only career development but also personal and cultural growth. One participant described mentorship as an investment in wāhine Māori, suggesting it was about ensuring representation and strengthening Māori leadership long-term. She saw it as a reciprocal process, where those who receive guidance later pass it on, so that knowledge and support continue to grow for Māori professionals.

From a mentee perspective, one participant's experience illustrates the transformative power of mentorship, as she attributes her leadership journey to those who came before her. Notably, her mentors were not provided through her organisation but came from beyond the workplace through personal connections. She shared that these mentors had fundamentally shaped her understanding of herself and her place in leadership, enabling her to bring her full identity into her career without compromise. Her experience reflects a broader pattern observed in research, which highlights that Māori women have historically drawn on collective support systems as a useful strategy to navigate challenges and sustain cultural identity in professional contexts (Cram, 2021; Pihama, 2020).

Career success for the participants in this study could be supported through both individual actions and workplace interventions. Individually, participants appeared to prioritise kaupapa-driven roles that enables them to engage with decision-making in ways that benefit Māori, a pattern supported by existing research (Staniland et al., 2020; Ruka, 2022). Choosing roles that align with their values may allow them to navigate professional spaces while maintaining cultural integrity. In Aotearoa, organisations need to take proactive responsibility for educating non-Māori employees in Māori culture, a responsibility that often falls on Māori employees (Cram, 2021; Haar & Martin, 2021). Participants in this research highlighted that a genuinely supportive environment recognises the deeply personal and collective journey behind moko kauae; one that encompasses whānau, hapu, and iwi. They emphasised that cultural competency extends beyond one-off workshops and should instead, be embedded in policies, daily practices, and relational understandings. Practices like karakia before hui or kai, and tikanga informed protocols were noted as examples of organisations affirming Māori identity. As one participant asked, “Can you safely engage with indigenous people?’ – a question that reframes cultural competency not as a checklist, but as an ethical responsibility within professional spaces.

For some of the wāhine, wearing moko kauae in professional spaces shifted from aspiration to advantage enabling them to show up authentically and meaningfully. While the career benefits were often unclear, it took a lot of work bringing others into the fold of understanding. Authenticity required ongoing emotional and aesthetic labour to challenge assumptions and uphold the integrity of moko kauae in environments not built for them. These experiences reveal that while authenticity van be empowering, it does not always translate to career benefits.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explores three key themes: decision-making around moko kauae, the labour involved in wearing moko kauae in the workplace, and normalising moko kauae in professional spaces. Participants found that a strong connection to identity is essential before considering whether to wear moko kauae. When reflecting on the decision to wear moko kauae, participants in this study spoke of internal tensions such as self-doubt or anticipation of judgement, but also the dynamics of whānau responses and broader perceptions about being visibly Māori. Throughout their journey’s, whānau remained pivotal, offering support and grounding.

Once decisions were made to wear moko kauae, participants sought workplaces that aligned with their values, avoiding spaces that were detrimental to Māori or where their cultural identity was not accepted. However, wearing moko kauae required emotional labour, both deep and surface acting, as participants managed expectations to educate, explain, and advocate for their identity while maintaining cultural and professional integrity as well as personal boundaries and energy. While some felt a strong responsibility to represent Māori culture in professional settings, others actively reframed challenging interactions as opportunities to educate and normalise moko kauae. Furthermore, heightened visibility may influence access to opportunities as some individuals adjust their engagement based on anticipated biases. As moko kauae visibility increases in both whānau and professional environments, participants described a growing sense of normalisation. This visibility helps to expand perceived career possibilities for wāhine Māori by fostering cultural pride within whānau and shifting workplace norms. As you can appreciate from the findings and discussion chapter, the wāhine shared highly individualised experiences. While there were strong common threads such as a commitment to cultural authenticity, each journey was shaped by personal, professional, and contextual factors.

Chapter Six: Concluding Whakaaro

This thesis set out to explore the career experiences and perspectives of wāhine Māori who wear, or are considering wearing, moko kauae. The aim was to address two core research questions:

1. What are the career experiences of women who wear moko kauae?
2. What role do career experiences and aspirations play in decisions to wear moko kauae?

Through an in-depth review of relevant academic literature and semi-structured interviews with four wāhine wearing moko kauae, and two who are considering moko kauae, this study found that decisions to wear moko kauae are not driven by career experiences or aspirations. Instead, it is culture that guides career choices. Rather than being motivated by professional advancement, participants' decisions to wear moko kauae were rooted in cultural identity, whakapapa, and kaupapa Māori values. This in turn, influenced how participants navigated their career journeys, with culture acting as a guiding compass for professional decisions, rather than career aspirations determining cultural expression.

Literature focusing on wāhine Māori and careers largely centres on their work experiences and economic participation within Aotearoa New Zealand. It highlights the intersectionality of their roles as caregivers, employees, and members of whānau and wider community (New Zealand & Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2001). It also draws attention to key barriers they face when entering and progressing through employment, as well as the support mechanisms they rely on to navigate these challenges.

Research on moko kauae explores different motivations underpinning the decision to wear moko kauae, often following a period of deliberation in which both internal and external expectations are negotiated. The notion of 'eligibility' for moko kauae also recurs across the literature. Also discussed is how wearers frequently encounter varied reactions, prompting some to develop coping strategies to manage these interactions (Rua, 1999; Colins, 2012).

Aesthetic labour literature explores how employee appearance is managed to serve organisational interests (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Predominantly situated within Western settings in the hospitality and service industries, aesthetic labour research remains limited in Indigenous and non-Western contexts, especially within an indigenous Aotearoa New Zealand context. By interweaving scholarship on wāhine Māori and careers, moko kauae, and aesthetic labour theory, this study directly responds to the

research questions and contributes to a culturally anchored understanding of work, identity, and visibility. One of the few exceptions is a study conducted in Nigeria which examines the aesthetic labour experiences of individuals with tribal marks and provides valuable insight into cultural specificity in non-Western workplace contexts (Adisa et al., 2024).

This research positions wearing moko kauae as a personal decision, an act of cultural revival, and as a show of resistance. It affirms moko kauae as a deeply spiritual and relational form of Māori identity that carries mana, whakapapa, invokes tūpuna, and requires profound emotional resilience in professional settings.

Moko kauae and the reclaiming of identity

Across the participants, before arriving at the stage of considering moko kauae, most were already on a journey of reclaiming their identities as wāhine Māori. This process echoes insights from earlier literature that positions moko kauae within wider acts of resistance or cultural resurgence (Ellis, 2018; Smith, 2013). Participants engaged in cultural practices such as learning te reo Māori or joining kapahaka, which could indicate that consideration of moko kauae emerges only after wāhine are firmly rooted in a broader journey of reclamation.

Wearing moko kauae was described as a natural progression for these wāhine; a step that reflected their deepened cultural identity. The research concluded that final decisions around wearing, or not wearing, moko kauae were shaped through both personal conviction and through whānau wānanga. Whānau perceptions were held in high regard, with all participants drawing emotional strength, reassurance, and validation from these relationships.

For some of the participants, their older whānau members held beliefs about moko kauae influenced by societal stigma or historical legacies of colonisation. However, these initial reservations often shifted through ongoing dialogue, ultimately giving way to support and affirmation. This demonstrates that moko kauae decision-making is a negotiated process and that through dialogue and wānanga with whānau, it is possible to work through tensions shaped by internal colonialism and historical trauma; a notion reinforced in Kaupapa Māori literature on relational healing (Pihama et al., 2019).

A Kaupapa Māori reinterpretation of career and economic participation

The research also concluded that decisions to participate in the labour market were driven by whānau commitments and personal values. This offers a Kaupapa Māori reinterpretation of career and economic participation, challenging earlier literature that prioritises work over whānau (Warburton & Morrison, 2008). Participants sought work that aligns with their values and benefits Māori communities, placing collect impact above individual gain (Staniland et al., 2020). They emphasised that career success is grounded in roles that allow them to serve their whānau, iwi, and community aspirations. While they generally enjoyed their mahi, it needed to accommodate their home responsibilities, rather than take precedence. Their prioritisation of personal values and relational obligations goes against dominant labour narratives, highlighting the possibility that career decisions are made within culturally grounded contexts.

Moko kauae at work

Participants' kōrero affirmed that moko kauae visibility fostered pride among younger whānau members shifting the mindset from exception to birthright. Within the workplace, what was once perceived as an anomaly, is increasingly becoming normalised. The normalisation carries the potential to reshape workplace appearance norms. Rather than challenging these norms, wāhine Māori would instead come to embody them. Nikora et al. (2007), discuss how moko wearers engage with their social environments to challenge stigma, reshape perceptions, and reinforce cultural identity. This study extends that conversation by illustrating how these processes unfold within professional environments.

Additionally, mentorship emerged as a critical mechanism in identity formation, rooted in tuakana/teina relationships and whanaungatanga. It empowered wāhine to navigate professional settings with cultural authenticity. Participants described being mentored by senior wāhine Māori within iwi organisations, educational spaces, and professional networks; many of whom had navigated cultural and systemic tensions. These mentoring relationships supported professional growth, personal development, and cultural confidence. Some wāhine also took on tuakana roles themselves guiding other wāhine Māori in both formal and informal settings.

For all participants, embodying their authentic selves at work revealed a nuanced interplay, but it is the impact of culture on work, not work on culture. The results indicate that, for wāhine Māori wearing moko kauae in professional settings, leading authentic

lives often requires emotional and aesthetic labour to educate, navigate assumptions, and uphold cultural integrity.

This research expands aesthetic labour theory by offering an alternative perspective tied to cultural identity and representation rather than corporate image making. By locating moko kauae within broader debates of identity and appearance, in the context of professional settings, and through a Kaupapa Māori lens, this study reorients aesthetic labour discourse to centre indigenous embodiment.

This research also contributes to emotional labour theory. Traditional definitions speak to the invisible work required to regulate emotions and maintain socially desirable expressions (Witz et al., 2003). Participants who wore moko kauae constantly navigated hyper-visibility and intersecting expectations, enacting emotional labour to uphold cultural integrity and challenge assumptions. The findings underscore how cultural visibility amplifies emotional labour for wāhine Māori, revealing ongoing tensions between cultural authenticity and institutional norms.

This study highlights the emotional labour required by wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae in modern professional contexts, where visibility amplifies that labour. Such visibility adds another layer to the cultural double shift (Haar & Martin, 2021), where wāhine Māori perform not only cultural labour, but also the emotional and relational labour needed to navigate responses, stereotypes, and professional expectations. For example, wearing moko kauae as a visible marker of identity can lead others to presume fluency in te reo Māori or proficiency in tikanga, regardless of the wearer's explicit claims. Existing research affirms these expectations (Rua, 1999; Taitimu-Stevens, 2024), and this study suggests that such assumptions often prompt colleagues to seek cultural guidance or insight from wāhine with moko kauae. This research identified three common interaction types prompted by visible cultural markers: curiosity, dialogue, and discomfort, all of which require emotional labour and strategic engagement. Some participants described deliberately disengaging from interactions at work they felt no longer served them, revealing a form of emotional preservation.

While participants in this study generally welcomed culturally grounded roles, these interactions also reveal how symbolic cultural identity is interpreted as functional capability. Aesthetic labour and the strategic reading of visible cultural markers can result in wāhine Māori being invited into roles that enhance organisational cultural image, such as leading karakia or participating in pōwhiri. While these invitations may be offered with

good intention, they also raise questions about whether the organisation is genuinely affirming Māori identity or capitalising on visible authenticity for representational gain.

This research offers a Kaupapa Māori lens on aesthetic labour, highlighting how cultural aesthetics, rather than employer-driven appearance standards, inform how wāhine Māori with moko kauae are perceived and positioned in professional settings. By centring moko kauae as a visible cultural marker and evocative form of cultural imagery, this study conceptualises cultural aesthetic labour as a relational, performative, and strategic effort; one that is deeply entangled with visual representation and the symbolic maintenance of authenticity and mana in professional contexts.

Implications

The implication for theory is the introduction of *cultural aesthetic labour*. It reframes aesthetic and emotional labour through an indigenous lens, challenging Western-centric frameworks and asserting that visibility, particularly through moko kauae, carries relational, spiritual and emotional dimensions. The significance that it has for Māori women is that it reclaims the narrative around professional visibility and emotional experience, shifting it from one that commodifies difference, to one that validates visible cultural expression.

The implication for practice is the call for a re-evaluation of workplace norms and inclusion strategies, questioning whether visible cultural markers are genuinely affirmed or commodified for organisational benefit. In doing so, it critiques tokenistic engagements and affirms the need for culturally grounded HR and DEI frameworks.

Within a Kaupapa Māori framework, mentorship, dialogue, and whānau wānanga function as mechanisms of healing and affirmation, reinforcing identity progression through tuakana/teina relationships. These cultural practices inform broader discourse revealing opportunities for interdisciplinary scholarship and social transformation. Indigenous embodiment, particularly in professional settings not only disrupts dominant narratives but generates new understandings of work that centre authenticity and mana.

Limitations

The objective of this research has been affected due to the limited sample size with just the experiences of six participants studied, therefore it cannot be generalised that all wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae in professional contexts share similar experiences

as were found in this research. As with all qualitative research, the findings are interpreted through the researcher's lens (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While this research is grounded by Kaupapa Māori and mana wāhine frameworks, there is still a risk of privileging certain narratives over others because of unconscious bias.

Future Research Direction

While Taitimu-Stevens (2024) has begun exploring contemporary motivations for receiving moko kauae, further research is needed to examine these decisions withing professional contexts; an area not yet deeply addressed in current literature. Another area of future research needs to be qualitative in nature and explore the narratives of those with moko kauae living in the 21st century.

The emotional impact of managing curiosity and discomfort arising from visible cultural markers remains an area that warrants further exploration. Future research could look at the long-term implications of cultural visibility in professional spaces. The repetitive nature of compliments demands an element of emotional labour, where Māori women who wear moko kauae must consistently regulate their emotions, and respond. Over time, this may contribute to emotional exhaustion, as the expectation to acknowledge admiration becomes a routine aspect of workplace dynamics. While curiosity is generally positive, the constant burden of having to navigate workplace interactions prompted by visible cultural markers may contribute to fatigue or frustration over time, particularly when attention feels excessive. Understanding how these experiences shape professional wellbeing is crucial in expanding discussions around cultural identity in professional spaces.

Research that evaluates the long-term career impacts of wearing moko kauae would be beneficial; research that is conducted across a range of roles, professions and industries. It may also be valuable to examine how visible cultural markers amplify the culture double shift, particularly for wāhine Māori who are assumed to hold cultural expertise simply by virtue of their visible identity. These dynamic highlights the significance of cultural aesthetic labour; the embodied representation of identity through taonga such as moko kauae. Looking more closely at how organisations see, react to, and sometimes use these cultural expressions for their own purposes could help us better understand the emotional experiences, relationships, and power dynamics that wāhine Māori face in professional environments

Future research identified in the literature needs to focus on the socio-cultural and structural issues faced by indigenous women at work, and whether these issues arise because of being both indigenous and a woman (Palmer & Masters, 2010; Tutone et al., 2023). Studies suggest that caring responsibilities have implications on attaining higher education, decisions about work, and employment outcomes (Manatū Wāhine: Ministry for Women, 2024) but further research is needed.

Timming et al. (2017) propose further research into the different types and placements of tattoos on the body as these factors may influence perceptions of employability. Similarly, Adisa et al. (2024) highlight the value of comparative research examining workplace experiences of individuals with visible body art versus those with tribal marks. They further suggest exploring why visible tattoos appear to garner greater acceptance in the professional settings than tribal markings.

Karakia Whakamutunga

He Karakia Whakakapi

Kia whakairia te tapu
Kia wātea ai te ara
Kia turuki whakataha ai
Kia turuki whakataha ai
Haumi e. Hui e. Tāiki e!

Restrictions are moved aside
So the pathway is clear
To return to everyday activities

(Te Puni Kōkiri, 2020)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

15 August 2023

Candice Harris
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Candice

Re Ethics Application: **23/126 Career decisions, experiences, and aspirations of wāhine Māori who wear moko kauae.**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 15 August 2026.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please do not store data on a USB as these are an unstable device for long term storage and data may be lost.
2. Please include an escalation protocol in the researcher Safety plan i.e. who does the researcher contact when finished an interview in a private home and what action is taken if a predetermined amount of time has passed and they have not made contact.

Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC unless requested but must be completed before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

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