

He Taonga te Ta Moko ki Tauranga Moana
A survey of attitudes, opinions, whakāro noa iho, towards ta
moko during the Tauranga Moana, Tauranga Tangata
Festival (Labour Weekend 2002)

Puawai Cairns M.A. (Hons.)

Ngāti Ranginui, Ngai te Rangi, Ngāti Pukenga

Tena koutou,

Ka nui te mihi atu ki a koutou katoa kua tae mai ki konei. Mihi atu ki nga kaikaranga o tenei hui, tena koutou. Ka nui te mihi atu ki nga kaiako, nga tauira o te Whare Wananga o Waikato, a nga tauira katoa i tautoko i tenei kaupapa. A, he mihi aroha hoki ki te hau kainga, nga tangata whenua o Tauranga Moana.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, kia ora ano tatou katoa.

Ta Moko is Māori body adornment; the scarification of the skin, and the insertion of colour - Māori tattoo (Ngahuia Te Awekotuku & Linda Waimarie Nikora).

During Labour Weekend (26 – 28 October 2002) in Tauranga, a celebration called the Tauranga Moana, Tauranga Tangata Festival was held. The festival represented the artists, kapa haka, lectures, sports, and personalities of Tauranga Moana. It was during this festival that a ta moko survey was conducted, with the support of the lead ta moko artist there, with the aim to canvass opinions and attitudes towards ta moko. The basis of the survey was to broadly examine the extent to which ta moko has become a form of inscribed identity for Māori. This is a first stage in a wider research project to examine Māori attitudes towards ta moko, but it happens that this initial step was taken in the author's own rohe.

Under scrutiny, the increasingly popular presence of ta moko within different forms of media reveals a wide and often contradictory number of discourses that, according to each representation, alter and stretch the meaning of the moko. It is quite straightforward to state that within New Zealand, the moko has almost always been viewed with varying degrees of derision, intimidation, or as an oddity of the by-gone era of pre-European Māori. Through its synonymity with fearsome Māori warriors, gang culture, the resurgence of Māori activism in the last twenty to twenty-five years, and the extraordinary popularity of the images from the *Once Were Warriors* film and novel, moko has acquired a reputation as a symbol of Māori alienation and disaffection.

The gathering popularity of its image, so imbued with densely packed meanings and associations (positive and pejorative,

political and prejudicial), has been apparent to any media watcher. Indeed, the research for my own MA thesis, which focuses on the representation of ta moko in mainstream media, found that ta moko was slowly becoming subsumed as an icon of New Zealand difference on a global stage of increasing sameness and cross-cultural consumerism. Examples of this could be seen in various NZ 'exports', such as offshore tourist advertising, fashion lines, and films (e.g., *Utu*, and *Once Were Warriors*). Yet, while ta moko was being garnered as an image of "Kiwiana" and "New Zealand-ness" for the benefit of offshore audiences, it was still an icon of intimidation and aggression to the mainstream domestic gaze, conditioned through news images, documentaries, and films to fear it. The gaze upon moko has always been one of wonderment, fear, repulsion and an almost fetishlike

fascination. It follows that much research on ta moko has come from this same perspective: that of the outsider looking upon an exotic specimen, sometimes biological in its dissection, sometimes fanciful, sometimes burlesque.

Nevertheless, much has been made by Pākehā researchers about ta moko as a dying art of a dying race. However, there are resounding gaps in research into ta moko, especially when it is considered that scarcely have Māori perspectives been documented. It is due to this dearth of insight, lack of critical analysis of existing research, and the lack of Māori voice in the field of ta moko research that has motivated me to begin researching Māori opinions and perspectives of this re-emerging art form. The first of several excursions to form part of a wider research project, this initial survey canvassed opinions towards ta moko at a ra whakangahau called the Tauranga Moana, Tauranga Tangata Festival and was held on Labour Weekend 2002 in Tauranga.



Tauranga Statistics: A summary

- Overall population of Tauranga is approximately 90,906
 - 16.1% of the Tauranga population identify themselves as Māori
 - The median age of Māori people in the Tauranga District is 21.3, compared with 21.9 for all Māori in New Zealand
 - 3 iwi (Ngai te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Pukenga)
 - One of the fastest growing cities in New Zealand
- (Statistics NZ, 2001) Tauranga Moana,

Tauranga Tangata Festival Brief

The Tauranga Moana, Tauranga Tangata Festival was held over a 3-day period in Tauranga, Labour Weekend 2002. The organisers sent a brief describing it thus:

Tauranga Moana Tauranga Tangata is a festival to showcase Tauranga Māori talent, ability and achievement. This festival is about bringing our Marae, Hapu, and Iwi back together to celebrate as Tangata Whenua. We want to achieve this in the best and most positive manner.

Tauranga Moana Tauranga Tangata is also intended to create an opportunity for the whole community within the Western Bay of Plenty to celebrate with us (Festival Panui, 13 September 2002).

The Festival was held in Tauranga City, as central as a festival could possibly be in Tauranga, and proved very successful, with high participation rates evident as I circulated amongst the festivalgoers. After enquiring to Jack Thatcher, one of the organiser's regarding the kaupapa of the festival, we briefly discussed the intention behind the festival. Due to the eloquence of his reply, I include his entire statement:

You are right it is about celebrating our identity, being proud of who we are and where we come from that makes us unique. This can be viewed from, as I see it, two levels - the local level of defining our place here in the Tauranga Community, and in the global view of the place of Māori in the world at large, one reflects on the other.

Our kaupapa was about inclusion, of inviting all communities within Tauranga Moana to enjoy our Māori heritage, history, art, culture, skill, achievement, language, talents, and most importantly our growing pride in these things. To me, we achieved all of the goals we set ourselves in terms of providing the opportunities to participate with us.

Our festival will grow from here into something fantastic! (Personal communication, 18 November 2002)

Broadly then, the festival aimed itself as a celebration of identity, and an invitation to all to join the celebration. Therefore, it seemed highly appropriate, that the survey be utilised to seek opinions about ta moko and its own contribution to the construction of identity at this festival. I approached the organisers with a request

to leave a survey to be filled out on the ta moko table. After being referred to the chief ta moko artist, who agreed and offered his table, I drafted the survey form and prepared for the festival.

He Taonga Te Ta Moko Survey: A Brief.

The questionnaire was composed of a series of 11 questions. Most questions asked for a yes / no responses (ae / kao), while two asked for a qualitative response.

The following questions were asked:

1. What age group do you belong to?
2. What ethnic group(s) do you mostly identify with?
3. Gender?
4. Do you have any ta moko / tattoos?
5. Do you intend to get a ta moko / tattoo in the future?
6. Do you think there's a difference between ta moko and tattoo? (required qualitative response)
7. What made you want to get a ta moko / tattoo?
8. Does your ta moko / tattoo have a particular meaning? (required qualitative response)
9. Are you involved in or perform i, a kapa haka group?
10. Do you think your design is traditional or contemporary?
11. I think ta moko wearers should...

The survey was left on the ta moko table (see Figure 1) during the three days and gathered 40 responses. Copies of Information Sheets were left, as well as a mailing list if respondents or observers were interested in knowing more.



Figure 1. Survey table and return box.

The respondents were anonymous, but some asked for clarification from myself as they filled it in or added their own commentary about the succinctness of the questions.

Summary of responses

Demographics

As can be seen in Table 1, demographically, the respondents were a widely varied sample group, and there was an equal ratio of male to female participants. Due to the nature of the Tauranga Moana Festival, and thus the high level of Māori participation in the festival itself, I believe it was inevitable to have a sample group primarily composed of those who identified as Māori.

The two largest age-groups to respond to the survey were 26-30s and 41 upwards. Originally, while devising the objectives for this survey, I had intended to focus primarily on rangatahi between the approximate ages of 16 – 25, the two smaller groups. However given the responses and enthusiasm from the older of the groups, this approach has had to be happily reviewed.

Table 1.

Demographics.

| What ethnic group do you identify with? | <i>n</i> | % |
|--|----------|-------|
| Māori | 28 | 70.0% |
| European | 4 | 10.0% |
| Māori / European | 4 | 10.0% |
| Māori / Fijian | 1 | 2.5% |
| Cook Island Māori | 1 | 2.5% |
| Polynesian | 1 | 2.5% |
| no response | 1 | 2.5% |
| Gender | <i>n</i> | % |
| Tane | 20 | 50.0% |
| Wahine | 20 | 50.0% |
| Age | <i>n</i> | % |
| 17-20 | 3 | 7.5% |
| 21-25 | 6 | 15.0% |
| 26-30 | 10 | 25.0% |
| 31-35 | 4 | 10.0% |
| 36-40 | 6 | 15.0% |
| 41-upward | 9 | 22.5% |
| no response | 2 | 5.0% |

Ta Moko – present and intentions

When asked if they had ta moko or tattoos, 60% of the respondents confirmed that they had (see Table 2). It was a deliberate decision that no definitions or a distinction was made between ta moko and tattoo at this point.

A staggering 80% answered yes to the question if they intended to get a tattoo / ta moko in the future (see Table 3). However, this must be taken in context as the survey was located on a ta moko artist's table where people are most likely either waiting or considering getting work done themselves. In any case, the results should be considered as coming from a captured sample.

Table 2.
Do You Have Any Ta Moko / Tattoos?

| Response | n | % |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Ae | 24 | 60.0% |
| Kao | 16 | 40.0% |

Table 3.
Do You Intend to Get a Ta Moko / Tattoo in the Future?

| Response | n | % |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Ae | 32 | 80.0% |
| Kao | 5 | 12.5% |
| no response | 3 | 7.5% |

Ta Moko – differences

One of the chief objectives of this survey was to establish whether there was a general perception of a distinction between ta moko and tattoo (see Table 4). Without supplying a fixed definition of either, 90% answered that they believed there was a difference between the two.

Table 4.
Do You Think There's a Difference Between Ta Moko and Tattoo?

| Response | n | % |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Ae | 36 | 90.0% |
| Kao | 2 | 5.0% |
| no response | 2 | 5.0% |

Ta Moko – motivation and meaning

Several themes emerged from the responses to these questions. The motivations behind gaining a moko / tattoo varied widely; however, 42.5% responded

that it was motivated by a need to reflect identity (iwi / hapu / whānau / individual) (see Table 5). The aesthetics of the design also played a major part in the choice to get a moko / tattoo.

Of those that were able to answer the question “Does your ta moko / tattoo have a particular meaning?” (see Table 6), 42.5% confirmed that they believed it conveyed or bore some meaning.

Table 5.
(If You Have a Ta Moko / Tattoo) What Made You Want to Get it? You Can Tick More Than One Box.

| Response | n | % |
|--|----------|----------|
| Liked the look or design | 8 | 20.0% |
| Trendy | 2 | 5.0% |
| Identity (iwi, hapu, whānau, individual) | 17 | 42.5% |
| Political statement | 6 | 15.0% |
| Asked by whānau | 1 | 2.5% |
| Can't decide on a reason | 0 | 0.0% |
| To remember an event | 6 | 15.0% |
| Other (please describe) | 1 | 2.5% |
| no response | 12 | 30.0% |

Table 6.
(If You Have a Ta Moko / Tattoo) Does Your Ta Moko Have a Particular Meaning? Tell us About it

| Response | n | % |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Ae | 17 | 42.5% |
| Kao | 8 | 20.0% |
| no response | 15 | 37.5% |

Ta Moko – wider influences

To establish preliminary information on whether the resurgence of moko can be attributed to the popularity of kapa haka, the question was asked whether the participant was involved or performed in a kapa haka group (see Table 7). However, 65% stated that they were not involved.

Table 7.
Are You Involved or Perform in a Kapa Haka Group?

| Response | n | % |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Ae | 11 | 27.5% |
| Kao | 26 | 65.0% |
| no response | 3 | 7.5% |

Ta Moko – divergences

When asked if their moko / tattoo was contemporary or traditional (without supplying a definition for either), the responses were evenly divided for those that answered the question (see Table 8).

Table 8.
(If You Have a Ta Moko / Tattoo) Do You Think Your Design is Traditional or Contemporary?

| Response | <i>n</i> | % |
|-----------------|----------|-------|
| Traditional | 13 | 32.5% |
| Contemporary | 13 | 32.5% |
| no response | 22 | 55.0% |

Ta Moko – personal regulations

In order to establish the various self-imposed regulations that a wearer, a potential wearer, or people in general place on the wearing of moko, the questions in Table 9 were asked.

- 62.5% stated compellingly that maumoko (moko wearers) should seek advice first before taking on moko.
- 52.5% stated that the maumoko should show knowledge of te reo and tikanga, while 27.5% stated that this was not a necessity.
- 40% stated that the maumoko should only be Māori, while very close behind, 32.5% stated that this was not a strict requirement.

Table 9.
I Think Ta Moko Wearers Should

| Response | <i>n</i> | % |
|---|----------|-------|
| Have sought permission from their whānau first | | |
| Ae | 25 | 62.5% |
| Kao | 9 | 22.5% |
| no response | 6 | 15.0% |
| Know te reo me ona tikanga | | |
| Ae | 21 | 52.5% |
| Kao | 11 | 27.5% |
| no response | 8 | 20.0% |
| Only be Māori | | |
| Ae | 16 | 40.0% |
| Kao | 13 | 32.5% |
| no response | 11 | 27.5% |

To establish the expected behaviours of maumoko, various questions were asked to assess the respondents' own perceptions of the obligations of maumoko (see Table 10). Fifty-five percent believed that maumoko should remain drug-free. When asked if maumoko should be smoke free, a less assertive response was given, where 42.5% stated that this should be the case. Finally, when asked whether they thought maumoko should be alcohol free, the results were less definitive with a 37.5% responding yes and 35% replying no.

What can be gathered from the responses to these three questions is that personal and socially appropriate behaviours are considered important requirements for maumoko. The consumption or use of drugs and cigarettes are, as suggested by the results, considered unacceptable. Surprisingly, alcohol is considered less unseemly compared to the other two.

While there was some confusion regarding the final question regarding independence and self-sufficiency, the responses to this question were evenly divided between affirmative (37.5%) and negative (35%).

Table 10.
I Think Ta Moko Wearers Should

| Response | <i>n</i> | % |
|---|----------|-------|
| Be drug-free | | |
| Ae | 22 | 55.0% |
| Kao | 10 | 25.0% |
| no response | 8 | 20.0% |
| Be smoke-free | | |
| Ae | 17 | 42.5% |
| Kao | 12 | 30.0% |
| no response | 11 | 27.5% |
| Be alcohol-free | | |
| Ae | 12 | 30.0% |
| Kao | 15 | 37.5% |
| no response | 13 | 32.5% |
| Be independent and self-sufficient | | |
| Ae | 15 | 37.5% |
| Kao | 14 | 35.0% |
| no response | 11 | 27.5% |

Emergent Qualitative Themes

There were several themes that arose from the qualitative responses given by the participants. The two questions that required written answers were:

Do you think there's a difference between ta moko and tattoo? What do you think that difference is?

(If you have a ta moko / tattoo) Does your ta moko have a particular meaning? Tell us about it

Please note that many of the responses have been categorised in more than one theme, due to multivalent replies from the participants.

Question 1. Major Themes.

The major themes that could be discerned from the responses to Question 1, [Do you think there's a difference between ta moko and tattoo? Do you think that difference is?], are as follows:

Social Grouping Identity vs. Individual

Many of the responses considered moko as a specific sign or emblem of social grouping, of either tribal or cultural identities. For the most part, the respondents identified these social groupings as 'Māori-centric'.

Ta moko should portray whakapapa, iwi / hapu / whānau links wherever possible.

Ta moko links to identity as tangata whenua, it's more than decoration. It's the beauty of Māori art instead of a rebellious statement - as tattoos traditionally have been.

A tattoo could be or mean anything whereas a moko signify signifies you as a Māori. It has background, roots, history.

Whakapapa versus decorative

Closely related to the previous, this theme also featured in a number of the responses. Moko and Ta Moko were identified as a specific sign of whakapapa or genealogical links, identified as marks

with an inherent sense of deep spiritual and/or cultural meanings that transcend the apparent notion of the meaningless tattooing. Significant here is the perception that tattoo has no invested meaning and merely decorative, whereas moko is imbued with meanings and significances:

Ta moko has a whakapapa to it. Tattoo is just a picture has no meaning

My tamoko is my personal life and my whānau. Tattoo is a decoration

Cultural Māori vs Cultural Pākehā

Another emerging theme was that of culture to distinguish between moko and tattoo. As a cultural icon, for these respondents, moko was fixed as an irrefutable sign of Māori and the Māori world, whereas tattoo was associated with the European world:

I assume ta moko is specific to Māori culture. Everywhere I've traveled the designs are specific to that culture.

Ta Moko is if you believe in Māori and can speak the reo. Tattoo is the Pākehā way.

Te Ao Māori vs a mark.

Restriction versus lack of restraint

An interesting distinction that the respondents made between moko and tattoo was that of restriction. Ta moko is considered to have a set of regulations that the wearer should abide by, while tattoo is unrestrained:

I think that a moko is a design that is put on your chin and a tattoo goes anywhere else

Ta Moko - nga mahi atahua no nga tupuna <koha>. Tattoo - anything goes.

Ta moko - special, restricted, whānau-hapu related. Tattoo - art form not restricted in nature. For me = less significance to family

Question 2. Major Themes.

The major themes that could be discerned from the responses to Question 2, [(If you have a ta moko / tattoo) Does your ta moko have a particular meaning? Tell us about it], are as follows:

Personal Life Story

For many, the tattoo / moko represented a life story with deeply personal associations and events:

taku ora

traveling, on a yacht, across an ocean and a peace [?] symbol, protection, love

my life voyage + my kid's

Iwi/hapu identity

Connected to the above, tattoo/moko was considered a sign of specific iwi/hapu identity that tied the wearer to tribal links:

Being of Tainui/Maniapoto Design pertaining to our Tupuna Whare

Pirirakau People (hapu)

Whakapapa

Whakapapa / Māori identity

Also related to the last point, in a less specific context than the tribal identification, is the association the wearer's tattoo/moko had to whakapapa or cultural identity. Rather than marking the wearer as particular to an iwi or hapu, the tattoo/moko bore general Māori significance:

Whakapapa, cultural identity

He korero whanui mo te whakapapa o te ao Māori

Māori tangata Whenua Tuturu

Ko te mana Māori motuhake e kore, e ngaro

Whānau

The deeply personal meanings of the tattoo/moko were especially prevalent here when regarding the associations the tattoo/moko had with whānau or family members. One offered story in particular (refer to the final point) highlights the beauty of the decisions behind the tattoo/moko for some:

symbolises my eldest son

The Marquesan Turtle represents a change in one life - passing from one state to another. Two Marquesan warriors to represent my 2 sons - these designs are linked by traditional tike designs.

It tells of my husband who has passed over and my tane today and how the two worlds are linked through me. It tells of my tupuna and my tamariki and how the circle of life are linked.

Conclusions

This survey was an introduction to an (up until now) unexplored avenue of research in the field of moko and tattoo. The complexities in the blurred natures of moko and tattoo, the various imposed regulations on wearers of moko, and the persistent deviant stigma attached to tattoo and, by association, ta moko further contribute to the difficulties in distinguishing between the two. The results of this survey highlighted the wider debates regarding identity, and the construction thereof, through the presence of moko/tattoo on the body of a wearer. The distinction between contemporary and traditional moko will resonate for as long as the practice of ta moko continues, thrives, and develops, and the practice of tattooing develops alongside.
