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From the Margins to the Frame: Social Identities and a “pan-Pacific” Moana

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Photo: Taken from *Best Latest*

From the Margins to the Frame:

Social Identities and a “pan-Pacific” *Moana*

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SIT Samoa, Spring 2017

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the implications of Pacific representation and regional identity in Disney's film, *Moana*. It evaluates if the film successfully represented a broad range of Pacific cultures and peoples. It weaves together 20 secondary sources, 8 interviews and 56 surveys. The sample population involved college-aged students from universities throughout the Pacific along with academic professionals and involved members of the Oceanic Story Trust. Overall, the study found that *Moana* successfully captured a pan-Pacific identity on several indicators, while it also found dissenting reactions toward the film by some respondents on measures of cultural representation. To Pacific students, *Moana* appears to be most popular for its potential influence and awareness-raising on a global stage. As such, the results suggest a need for future studies assessing the importance of Pacific regional studies as well as the power dynamics shaping *who* has control over whose stories are told and shared.

-148 words

Key words: *Moana*, cinema, identity, Regional Studies: Asia, Australia & Oceania

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DEDICATION

“‘O le fogava’a e tasi” – Samoan Proverb

To two sets of loving parents, for their intentions and care, for continuing to support my growth and evolving identity, and for allowing me the opportunity to broaden my learning halfway around the world. I would not be who or where I am today without your decisions, guidance and patience. #OneFamily #AdoptionIsLOVE

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Finally, I would like to recognize the individuals who have helped me, knowingly and unknowingly, throughout this project. For me, conducting research in Samoa has only further reinforced the importance of interpersonal connections and sharing knowledge.

Fa'afetai tele lava.

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INTRODUCTION

“Too many times people think ‘that’s just a movie.’ It’s not just a movie. To somebody, that’s the truth. Is representation about showing truth or is representation about starting a dialogue about issues that need to be addressed? I think representation should do all of that.”

—Dionne Fonoti, member of Oceanic Story Trust

During the 2016 Thanksgiving weekend, Walt Disney released *Moana*, its long-awaited and 5-year-in-the-making animated film that is set in and inspired by the Pacific Islands. The film follows the trials of a young girl, Moana, who sets out on a wayfinding journey across the ocean with demigod, Maui, to save her village from environmental disaster. Financially, the movie was considered a huge success as it “made \$82 million over the five-day weekend, placing it only behind *Frozen* (2013) for a Thanksgiving debut” (Perry, 2016, p.1). Moreover, directors John Musker and Ron Clements were pleased to provide their audiences with their film synopsis, which intended to encapsulate the collaborative efforts that were invested in the film’s development, editing and final production:

For centuries, the greatest sailors in the world masterfully navigated the vast Pacific, discovering the many islands of Oceania. But then, 3,000 years ago, their voyages stopped for a millennium – and no one knows exactly why.

[Moana and Maui] voyage across the open ocean on an action-packed adventure, encountering enormous monsters and impossible odds, and along the way, Moana fulfills her quest and discovers the one thing she’s always sought: her own identity.

—Moana, Disney Movies (2016)

Based on the above description, Disney has made no secret of the fact that this film incorporates cultural elements from a wide range of Pacific cultures and peoples, largely because of the Oceanic Story Trust (OST), a consultation team which involved Pacific artists, anthropologists, historians, fishermen, linguists, and community leaders (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2017, p.16; Perry, 2016, p.1). Drawing from prior knowledge of said collaboration, this paper

seeks to investigate the extent to which *Moana* captures and represents a pan-Pacific identity as it is intentionally inspired by themes, legends, observations and knowledge within the Pacific.

The aforementioned epigraph highlights the potential and powerful role of film in shaping global understandings of people and places—whether they be positive or negative, humanizing or exoticizing, representative or misleading. Furthermore, Disney has a record of producing films that misrepresent indigenous peoples, including but not limited to *Pocahontas* and the Powhatan Tribe, *Mulan* and the Chinese, as well as *Lilo and Stitch* and Native Hawaiians (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2017, p.17). Realizing the widespread influence that Disney wields and its history portraying peoples of color, I was interested in gathering Pacific reactions and perceptions of *Moana* to assess the film’s representation of the people it is intended to portray.

Musker and Clements also mentioned that their film was motivated by conversations with Tahitian community members, who told them, “English culture has consumed our way of life for so long” and “For years, we’ve been swallowed by your culture. For one time, can you be swallowed by ours?” (Keresoma, 2016, p.1; Franc de Ferrière, 2015, p.1). These two comments highlight an urgency for the representation of marginalized global identities in mainstream media. As the very first Disney film to incorporate Trust members who are not considered Disney “insiders,” *Moana* challenges the dominant filmmaking process (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2017). In doing so, *Moana* offers itself as a critical case study that may be used to investigate the possibility of future collaborative filmmaking and film’s broader, simultaneous role as a weapon and a tool (Fonoti, PC¹, 2017). More specifically, *Moana* can be examined for its role in representing the Pacific around the world, shaping identity development in Oceania, and highlighting Pacific regionalism.

¹ Personal Communication, see Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Identity is ‘mutable’ and a ‘dynamic process of interaction and exchange between the individual and the many levels of social collectives’” (Abes et al., 2007, p.16)

Regarding the framing of cultural identities, Vilsoni Hereniko (1994) remarked that,

Representations of Pacific Islanders from the 18th century to the 1980s became the domain of Europeans. The general trend...had been...to portray Polynesia as a paradise where simplicity, beauty and innocence reigned, and Melanesia as a dangerous jungle where death and evil lurked (p.413).

Over time, this “paradise trope” has continued to be a theme of films depicting the Pacific, as evidenced by examples like *Bird of Paradise* (1932), *South Pacific* (1958), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), *Paradise, Hawaiian Style* (1966) and, more recently, *Blue Crush* (2002) and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008), all of which were directed by filmmakers from outside of the region for outside audiences (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2017, p.1). Typically, former colonizers of this region exert overwhelming influence over depictions and impressions of the Pacific around the world. Thus, in a formal “post-colonial” era, Pacific peoples can find themselves in a “marginal existence across multiple dimensions of culture, nationality and otherness,” especially those who are a part of the Pacific diaspora (Perez, 2002, p.469).

Alternatively, Pacific Islanders have been actively intentional in their self-construction of national and regional identities, catalyzing their social agency and turning to each other for social solidarity (Norton, 1993). In response to impending social processes like globalization and Westernization, Pacific communities have engaged “the evocation of an ideology of sharing and communality to distance a...‘Pacific Way’...from the individualism and fragmentation of Western capitalist society” (Keesing, 1989, p.28). Tamaira and Fonoti (2017) describe this process of drawing from cultural similarities with a desire to resist an imposed identity as *Pasifikation*, through which Pacific people coopt foreign narratives and make them their own (p.23). In Oceania, the critical reclamation of Pacific identity construction, through *Pasifikation*,

increases the likelihood that mainstream films, like *Moana*, will be less idealized and more reflective of the lived realities of their depicted people (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2017).

In seeking to look beyond the historically limited narratives of the Pacific, Disney's *Moana* not only engages a collaborative approach to the film's development but also seeks to be pan-Pacific in the sense that the directors "deliberately wanted to be ... inclusive of the Pacific" in their representations of culture, both in the film itself and throughout the process of making it (NPR Staff, 2016, p.1). Pacific regionalism is no new concept to Pacific Islanders. In fact, it is even *encouraged* by Pacific scholar and writer Epeli Hau'ofa (2008) who claims that "a solid and effective regional identity can be forged and fostered" by Pacific Islanders, not for the sake of "sustained regional cooperation" but because it is "necessary for the quality of our survival" given that Oceania's "current regionalism²" is a direct outcome of colonialism (p.41-42, 47).

With these considerations and ongoing conversations in mind, I question the appropriateness and ability of Western film directors in shaping this process of identity construction. One mother in the Pacific shared her thoughts on the film and the considerations she may pose for her daughter as she matures: "we should be sharing our own narratives and not relying on ... [white men] with no connections to our history to make that happen" (Matagi, 2016, p.1). In other words, with representation at stake and the widespread audience that Disney has the capacity to impact, one question to consider is: who gets to tell whose stories?³

² Oceania was arbitrarily divided into "3" sub-regions—Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia—by former colonial powers. With this knowledge, any included references to these sub-regions are not intended to perpetuate these arbitrary boundaries; rather, they are either in the words of respondents or terms used to maintain anonymity.

³Fonoti, Lecture Notes, 15 February 2017.

METHODOLOGY

Research for this project was conducted over a three-week period in April 2017. The methods for research were surveys, interviews in the style of *talanoa* (conversation) and participant observations. The survey was intended to surface the reactions and perceptions of Pacific college-aged students toward Disney's film, *Moana*. Questions centered around issues of representation, identity and personal opinions. The survey involved 6 qualitative, open-ended questions and 5 quantitative, multiple choice questions.

Surveys were distributed in person throughout the campuses of the University of the South Pacific-Alafua (USP) and the National University of Samoa (NUS) as well as online to the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa, University of the South Pacific-Suva, and American Samoa Community College. The sample population involved 56 students from a relatively wide range of Pacific Island nations. Because the survey was not targeting Samoan students specifically, it was written in English, a factor that may have limited the pool of respondents because it assumed everyone participating would be fluent in English. All participants were made aware that their answers would be kept confidential and that they could opt out of answering questions they could not understand or the survey altogether if they desired.

This research method was beneficial to the findings in that it gathered broad perspectives of the film by Pacific students, even when a majority of the research was physically grounded in Apia, Samoa. On the other hand, this method of surveying made maintaining respondent consistency challenging because some surveys turned into interviews while others were only partially completed. These two constraints may have contributed to an imbalance in depth of responses across the sample population as well as non-response bias⁴. The sample population

⁴ See Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

was predominantly female (see Appendix B), although efforts were made to maintain a gender balance. Furthermore, most of the respondents were Samoan or Fijian, an imbalance that was likely due to the fact that both USP campuses tend to have larger numbers of their host citizens, and the population size of Pacific students outside of those identities tends to be smaller. With these constraints, it is challenging to generalize my findings to assess the film's depiction of the Pacific when a majority of them are heavily grounded in a few Pacific identities.

The *talanoa* method was another essential part of conducting research for this project. A total of 8 interviews were conducted in both structured and semi-structured formats. Prepared questions were often supplemented with follow-up questions as were fitting for clarification sake. Initially, I wanted to only interview students to further unpack their understandings and reactions to *Moana*. However, I was fortunate to also be in contact with academic professionals and members of the OST, all of whom shed light on their specialized roles in the film's production and/or their personal insights into the film's navigation of pan-Pacific representation and identity.

Both research methods, along with participant observation and personal reflections, helped me understand the usefulness of snowball sampling⁵, which played a large role in shaping my project's evolution. For all research matters, informed, verbal consent was given and no personally harmful information was involved throughout the research period or included in the final draft of this paper. Confidentiality and open-mindedness were key components of my research process, leading me to receive a wide range of perspectives, all of which were validated, incorporated and protected to the best of my ability. All research results were kept on a password-protected computer and guidelines for human subjects and ethical research were

⁵ See Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

adhered to. In summary, I wish to acknowledge the many biases and privileges that are inherent to my work as an academic scholar from the United States, trained primarily in Western institutions of higher education, where many of the concepts I have come to understand and remain critical of cannot or may not be applied universally. While my research is intended to *share* power in shaping narratives, I realize that intent can never be completely equated with impact. As such, one of the most important ethics considerations for my research was that of constant consultation and review with those involved, making sure that I was sharing Pacific voices in ways that felt most closely aligned with their realities.

INTRODUCTION OF THEMES

Over the course of my project's research, the dominant theme of pan-Pacific representation was ever-present. My surveys, interviews and observations further revealed the importance of understanding this representation in three different forms, or stages: *creation*, *incorporation*, and *reception*. Out of these primary resources, a discussion of possible interpretations, conclusions and implications is provided. While this research attempts a holistic and ethical understanding of Pacific perceptions of the film, *Moana*, it is by no means a complete analysis or one devoid of researcher bias.

SURVEY FINDINGS

A total of 56 surveys were completed by Pacific students between the ages of 18 and 65—1 of whom was likely a Pacific faculty member. The respondent sample population included self-identified US National, American, Pacific Islander-American, Fijian, Indo-Fijian, iTaukei, Maori, Vanuatuan, Samoan, Solomon Islander, Tokelauan-New Zealander and Tuvaluan students (see Appendix B). Not every Pacific nation was represented in the survey results, but a broad range of identities were accounted for despite the limited access to students from less represented countries within pan-Pacific universities. Surveys were designed to gather personal perspectives about the film, representations of culture and Pacific regionalism.

Students were asked to reflect on and share their personal impressions of the film, preferences, dislikes, and potential changes they would have made if they had the opportunity to do so. Shared personal impressions revealed the first wave of mixed reactions from Pacific students. Most “positive” impressions centered around thoughts that the film depicted “most of the Pacific’s unique cultures” and showcased the historic accomplishments of Pacific wayfinders (see Appendix C). One participant commented that “the strongest positive about the film...is that it created a dialogue between Pacific Islanders about how we should be represented in film.” More “critical” impressions focused on the film’s “Polynesian-centric presentation of Oceania” and the contested misrepresentation of Pacific cultures and peoples (see Appendix C). The strongest “praises” for the film were expressed for the female protagonist, centrality of the ocean, and the film’s role in bringing Pacific histories and cultures to the mainstream media (see Appendix G). As discussed later on, students expressed dissatisfaction with the film’s misinterpretation of Pacific cultures and partial representation of the Pacific (see Appendix H). A majority of the changes desired centered around these same points of dissatisfaction, while others

suggested a second *Moana* to continue the mythology-driven plot (see Appendix I) and a greater representation of Pacific voices in the film's production (artists, actors, actresses etc.).

Meanwhile, respondents were asked to provide feedback about the film's representation of their own respective Pacific nations. According to Appendix D, more than 75% of my participants agreed or strongly agreed that their countries and/or cultures were accurately represented in *Moana*. In addition, participants were asked to describe the elements of their cultures that were 1) present and 2) accurately represented in the film. They were encouraged to "check all that apply" for clarification of their previous ranking. Of the provided elements of culture, the greatest number of respondents claimed that the ocean (77.3%), food (68.2%) and animals (68.2%) were present indicators of their cultures (see Appendix E). An "other" category allowed respondents to include elements of their cultures that were not listed. These included gender, the "*Haka*" (traditional war cry) and the *Kakamora* ("coconut pirates")⁶. On the second measure, the results suggested that the ocean (68.6%), family structure, ship/canoe, and animals (all 66.7%) were the most accurately represented elements of respondents' respective cultures (see Appendix F).

The final purpose of the survey was to surface student perceptions of a regional, Pacific identity, cultural similarities within the Pacific, as well as their preferences in self-identification. To introduce the concept of Pacific regionalism, in case it was unfamiliar, I included a quote by widely-known Pacific scholar, Epele Hau'ofa:

The sea provided waterways that connected neighboring [Pacific] islands into regional exchange groups that tended to merge into one another, allowing the diffusion of cultural traits through most of Oceania. These common traits...have so far provided many of the elements for the construction of regional identities (Hau'ofa, 2008, p.38).

⁶ Because only 3 respondents included "other" dimensions, these results suggest the list of cultural elements was rather comprehensive.

Participants then responded to Hau'ofa's statement, offering their own reflections of what a pan-Pacific identity means to them personally or broadly. This particular question broke out the greatest variety in personal testimonies—many students sharing that this regional identity is most often forged by interconnected histories and common ties to the ocean, which one respondent claimed to be “the lifeblood of...Pacific Islanders” while another claimed that “the ocean makes [Pacific Islanders] connected in numbers” (see Appendix J). Reactions toward said regional identity surfaced mixed responses as well, some sharing that they had rarely given the concept much thought previously and still others expressing positive affirmations of the concept. One respondent further commented that, “this [regional identity] is something that should be decided by people within the region [because] Disney trying to impose [it] or to represent [it] to a mass audience for Pacific Islanders is wrong” (see Appendix J).

At the core of this regional identity, students were asked to identify characteristics, traits, values or elements of culture that could be found throughout the Pacific region. Common threads identified linguistics, religion, a physical and spiritual connection to the land and sea, respect (especially for elders) and reciprocity, variations of similar myths and legends, collectivity, food and a history of navigation (see Appendix K).

Participants then ranked (on a scale of 1-10) how successfully the film captured Pacific regionalism. Twenty-five percent (25%) ranked the film's depiction of a pan-Pacific identity at “must successfully” and the greater majority of the sample population (82%) ranked the film's depiction between values 6 and 10 (see Appendix L). Moreover, when asked about preferences in personal self-identification (national versus regional identities), results were split between choices “nationality” and “both” (see Appendix M). Taken altogether, these findings surfaced the importance of further analyzing student perceptions at different stages in the film's production.

REPRESENTATION AT THREE STAGES

After processing the results of the survey and supplementing these reflections with interview notes, it was made clear that pan-Pacific representation is mutable—an adaptable, multidimensional concept. In other words, an evaluation of this representation cannot be measured at only one stage in the filmmaking process, especially when considering a film like *Moana*. In the next series of sub-sections, I analyze the extent to which Disney's *Moana* is “pan-Pacific” in three stages: creation, incorporation and reception.

Creation

From the start, *Moana* was intended by its directors to be pan-Pacific, from its inspiration to its evolution. Director John Musker reported that one of the main characters in the film, demi-god Maui, was inspired by his own readings of Hawaiian mythology texts. He had learned that Maui was an important figure in several Pacific mythologies and legends, including but not limited to Hawaiian, Mangareva, Tahitian, Tongan, and Samoan cultures (Parkes, 2017). Through this character and many of the pan-Pacific cultural variations of his trials and accomplishments, John Musker and Ron Clements hoped for their film to be relatable to a wide range of Pacific traditions and peoples. While variations in Maui's legends exist across the Pacific, two consistent stories tell of Maui's role in creating islands with his magical fishing hook and of his lassoing the sun to elongate



Figure 1. "If we talk about landmass, we are smaller. When we include the ocean, we are bigger [with] our marine resources. The ocean makes us connected in numbers."

– Tuvaluan, Male

summer days and shorten the winter season (Parkes, 2017, p.1). These consistencies are integrated throughout the film and later explained in Maui's song, "You're Welcome."

The film was also inspired by the directors' time spent in the Pacific Islands. In October 2011, Clements and Musker visited Samoa, Tahiti and Moorea to conduct their first wave of research and drew many ideas for a storyline from what they saw and experienced (Sciretta, 2016). They then pitched and received approval for their proposal of an animated film set in the Pacific to their boss, John Lasseter. Upon approval, the directors conducted two subsequent research trips in the South Pacific, the second in March 2014 to New Zealand, Samoa, Moorea, Bora Bora and Tetiaroa and the third in November 2014 to Bora Bora, Tetiaroa, Moorea and Tahiti (Sciretta, 2016, p.1). The culmination of these research trips aided the production team in developing the film's music, costumes and visuals.

Because of and through these visits, the directors began to gather a consultation team—the OST—for their film. This team incorporated local, Pacific experts, who specialized in their own fields and disciplines. It also functioned, in many ways, like a filter for the film's development as members of the Trust were agents in fact-checking, vetting drafts of the script, and sharing their knowledge and stories throughout the filmmaking process (Sciretta, 2006). For one of these members, Dionne Fonoti, being a part of this team was motivated by her considerations of the potential outcomes of a film like *Moana*. To Fonoti, the invitation to join the team presented itself as "an opportunity to be a part of something that *could* be good and that would have the reach that Disney has" (Fonoti, PC, 2017). Meaning, the OST represented a "new wave in filmmaking," one that was grounded in collaboration with the people from whom the film's stories were drawn (Fonoti, PC, 2017). As mentioned previously, the OST was also critical as Disney's first Trust team to incorporate members not considered Disney "insiders."

With these three considerations, one might venture to say that Maui represents a pan-Pacific character in the film while the OST team itself marks an example of “pan-Pacific” representation because it brought together experts with Pacific roots, who each influenced the film’s representations of Pacific cultures⁷. Of additional importance were the influences of people like Taika Waititi (acclaimed Maori writer and director), who wrote the first draft of *Moana* and Opetaia Foa’i (leader of the Polynesian fusion band Te Vaka), who collaborated with Mark Mancina and Lin-Manuel Miranda to compose many of the film’s songs while fighting passionately to ensure “the music accurately portrayed the *mana* (power) associated with the story” (Corry, 2016, p.1).

To some, these measures taken to conduct local research and include Pacific knowledge, voices and traditions may be interpreted as successful indicators of the film’s pan-Pacific nature. They highlight the degree of research invested in shaping the film, the attempts to amplify Pacific histories and voices on a widespread scale and the crafting of a legendary character who might appeal to a broader spectrum of Pacific nations. Regardless of these measures, the film’s collaborative creation and evolution was also shaped largely by a “constantly transforming process of negotiation that was characterized by tensions and compromise” by both the filmmakers and OST members (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2017, p.21).

The OST certainly signaled a major shift in Disney’s history of film production. Without it, *Moana* would have likely been just another film to add to Disney’s poor track record of representing the Pacific and its people (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2017). Pacific representation was and

⁷ These included Samoans Tautala Asaua (archaeologist), Dionne Fonoti (anthropologist/filmmaker), Layne Hannemann (choreographer), Tiana Nonosina Liufau (ethnomusicologist/ethnographer) Su’a Suluape Peter (master tattooist); Tahitians Yves “Papa Mape” Tehiotaata (master fisherman) and Hinano and Frank Murphy (natural historians/cultural practitioners); Fijians Jiujiu “Angel” Bera (navigator/chief) and the Korovo Community; Rotuman Dr. Vilsoni Hereniko (academic/filmmaker); and Dr. Paul Geraghty (linguist). Disney’s OST point person was Native Hawaiian Kalikolehua Hurley, who served as the Community Relations Manager (Tamaira & Fonoti 2017, p.16).

remains important to mainstream storytelling, yet the OST was subject to multiple power dynamics, which left some of the final modifications of the film to the discretion of the directors. One interviewee mentioned that *Moana* may have been based in the Pacific, but “you still have to remember that [the directors] are producing it for mainstream audiences, so there are some aspects that they have to change to appeal to a general audience” (Lee, PC, 2017). This reflection further reinforced Fonoti’s perspective about the politics of audience in filmmaking, as she argued that *Moana* “was not made for Samoans or Pacific Islanders even, it was made for a white audience. We just happen to be able to watch it with them” (Fonoti, PC, 2017). She then discussed the limitations of working on a consultation team that was ultimately filtered by the directors’ overarching vision:

“One of the hardest things was being a part of a film that’s about your culture but you don’t have any final say...so I guess it’s a part of the issue of power and that we’re collaborators—we’re a part of the process, but we’re not really that powerful” (Fonoti, PC, 2017).

Thus, she and other members of the OST might have proposed changes, alterations or the removal of various scenes and interpretations within the film, but their consultation was not always treated with the utmost priority. Part of this dynamic may have been linked to the previous comments about appealing to a broader audience, while it may also have been due to the hierarchies already embedded within the filmmaking process and industry. Therefore, the choice to create an OST was itself a move toward pan-Pacific representation—its members certainly worked to make the film as true to their lived realities as they were able. Nevertheless, the extent to which the OST was able to mold a story about themselves was at times limited by the power hierarchies present within film production. Ultimately however, the film could not and would not have been nearly as pan-Pacific or pan-Pacific at all had it not involved collaboration with Pacific peoples and thorough research conducted directly in the Pacific.

Incorporation

As is logical, the research and representation that were a part of *Moana*'s creation became major determinants of the film's incorporation of pan-Pacific elements. Members of the OST worked with the directors to include cultural references, both explicit and subtle, to many Pacific Island cultures. Along with these references, the production team sought to feature a voice cast with actors and actresses who represent the cultures being depicted in *Moana*. The team also worked to promote the linguistic accessibility of *Moana* throughout the Pacific. Because of these efforts, *Moana* is intended to be familiar to the very diverse populations of the Pacific Islands at large instead of one specific region or country.

According to Fonoti, *Moana must* be pan-Pacific in its historical context because the only way one can tell such a story and place it 2,000 years ago is by making it broadly Pacific (Fonoti, PC, 2017). In line with archeological evidences, the character Moana is mostly likely from Tonga or Samoa, two of the first archipelagos to be populated at the time (Franc de Ferrière. 2015).



Figure 2. "I like the film because it inspires me personally that there's no gender inequality...men are not the only hero[es] in the Pacific Island[s]."

– Vanuatuan, Female

Beyond its time setting, the film incorporates other elements of Pacific cultures. The *fale*-style homes were inspired by observations in Samoa and Fiji as were the designs for the voyaging double-hulled canoes. The inclusion of an underworld was a broadly pan-Pacific concept, most directly connected to Samoan and Tongan perceptions of the underworld. On the

other hand, the attire in the initial voyaging scenes was a reference to Papua New Guinea as evidenced by the pandanus clothing, headdress and temporary face paint⁸. In the village scenes, viewers watch as Moana sports a Samoan *tuiga* (headdress) while her father, Chief Tui, has a traditional Samoan *pe'a* (Samoan tattoo). Moreover, the Goddess Te Ca is inspired predominantly by Hawai'i's Pele, the Goddess of Fire (Fonoti, PC, 2017). A majority of the survey respondents also identified these aspects along with the ocean, physical landscape and food as key *and* represented elements of their cultures (see Appendix E).

Another member of the OST, sixth-generation Samoan tattoo artist Su'a Peter Suluape, revealed the pan-Pacific nature of Maui's tattoos. Suluape played a major role in providing consultation for the placement, appearance and order of the tattoos, many of which were Eastern Polynesian designs and others that were stylized in different Pacific Island ways (Fonoti, PC, 2017). As a Samoan artist, he "had to make sure [the tattoos] had chemistry with [his] Samoan culture," but he also worked to make sure the patterns reflected Pacific motifs of tattoos and the variations of legends from across the Pacific (Suluape, PC, 2017). Not only was Maui a pan-Pacific legend in the film, his final appearance was shaped by the advice and modifications of Pacific experts. Suluape was one OST member who helped position Maui's tattoos with Pacific traditions and realities.

Tahitian Trust member and cultural practitioner, Hinano Murphy, also played a role in influencing the final draft of Maui's physical appearance. Originally designed to be much shorter and bald, Maui later sported curls because Murphy believed doing so was very important to

⁸ Unknown to many viewers, Fonoti shared with me how *Moana* incorporates the time history of art expression in the Pacific. The initial voyaging scene showcases historical temporary body art (with Melanesian roots) that later transitions in its evolution into scenes within the village, which highlight more contemporary forms of permanent bodily adornment (with Polynesian roots).

emphasize the relationship between hair and *mana* (Robinson, 2016). Maui was then further redrafted to better appeal to the Pacific through the eyes of OST members.

Along with the film's animated features, the voice cast incorporated Pacific actors and actresses, who quite literally brought the film to life. The main protagonist, Moana, is voiced by young Hawaiian Auli'i Cravalho and Maui is voiced by Seiyu Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, whose mother is of Samoan descent. Other Pacific members of the voice cast include New Zealanders who are also part Maori like Rachel House (as the voice of Grandma Tala), Temuera Morrison (as the voice of Chief Tui) and Jemaine Clement (as the voice of Tamatoa) along with Nicole Scherzinger (as the voice of Sina), who has Hawaiian and Filipino roots (Cavna, 2016). As one of the first Disney films to center the voices of the people from the cultures portrayed, *Moana* may mark a move toward mainstreaming culturally-sensitive casting for animations and films at large. In addition, "the cast was able to subtly help shape the performances to fit what *they* knew of Pacific culture," a touch of agency that improves the film's representation of the Pacific (Robinson, 2016, p.2).

Finally, the directors also paired up with Pacific linguists, who worked to ensure the film made deliberate use of *proto-Polynesian* language⁹, which would have been the spoken language dialect 2,000 years ago (Fonoti, PC, 2017). Along with these measures, *Moana* incorporates non-English lyrics in its score and it is also the first movie dubbed in Tahitian, a decision made to help preserve an indigenous Pacific language that is gradually fading. *Moana* will be used in Tahitian schools to "help [students] ... [maintain] ... their Tahitian language so it isn't overwhelmed by contemporary culture" (Mottram, 2016, p.1).

⁹ See Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Given all these incorporated considerations and cultural elements, one might suppose that *Moana* was pan-Pacific in this stage of its production. Some, however, underscore that these elements were incorporated but misrepresented. Others also identify the fine line between remaining true to history and trying to maintain a contemporary appeal on screen.

One of the most repeatedly-mentioned misrepresentations of the Pacific by survey respondents was of the *Kakamora* “coconut pirates.” Respondents from the Solomon Islands commented that the *Kakamora* are in reality human beings— “a legendary [group of] short-statured people of the Solomon Islands” (Herman, 2016, p.1; see Appendix G). Disney did not, however, portray humans in these scenes; instead, the directors decided to dehumanize this culturally significant group of people by employing coconuts—a well-worn racial slur used against Pacific Islanders along with other brown-skinned people (Herman, 2016). Another respondent expressed that the “sea warriors should be real and not objects” (see Appendix I). Hence, depicting these characters as “coconut people” is not only a misrepresentation of culture for the sake of mainstream humor, it also misses the mark for cultural sensitivity.

On this note of compromise, other elements of the film were incorporated but may not have been truly representative of the cultures they were historically drawn from or of the Pacific region overall. For example, the inclusion of plumeria flowers was perhaps aesthetically pleasing on screen but they technically came to Hawai’i after its first contact with Europeans (Robinson, 2016). More importantly, the respondent sample identified the controversy of a female protagonist in a film set within a region of the world that tends to be patriarchal in its social organization. To some, this cultural inconsistency was offensive because in many Pacific cultures, men are the ones who take up the responsibility to save their people while they also tend to be the ones considered next in line for leadership positions within villages (see Appendix

H). To others, Moana's role in leadership was an indication of the modern "fluidity in the Pacific Islands of how gender is treated" (Robinson, 2016, p.1). One respondent appreciated "Moana being a strong, beautiful and powerful female for Pacific Islander girls to look up to," while another saw her as inspiration that "men are not the only hero[es] in [the] Pacific Islands" (see Appendix G). Although representations of gender were not the central focus of my research, the respondent sample offers a valuable glimpse as to the role *Moana* played in shaping discussions about women's empowerment and gender equality in the Pacific region.

Despite the debates about representation that the film invigorated, it did incorporate several pan-Pacific elements both in its plotline and in its voice cast. While some of these elements were criticized for being misrepresented, one might consider: is it more important that cultures are represented *accurately* or that they are represented at all? Answers to this question remain varied among respondents; therefore, in its incorporation stage, *Moana* can be considered pan-Pacific in its representation of Pacific cultures and peoples. Respondent voices, however, raise the importance of analyzing whether this incorporation, though present, is appropriate or in line with lived traditions and realities.

Reception

As expected, the final stage of evaluation was inevitably shaped by the efforts toward pan-Pacific representation in the prior two. Points drawn from the responses received in both surveys and interviews will guide this final sub-section of analysis because they are some of the most direct forms of evaluation by Pacific Islanders themselves. With this frame of reference, it will be important to assess whether people from all ends of the Pacific were able to see themselves, their cultures, and their histories reflected in the film.

One of the most significant patterns observed in survey and interview responses was the repeated mentioning of “Polynesia” and “Polynesian.” Several students, many of whose identities fall outside of those considered “Polynesian” and some of whose *are* included within that region of the Pacific, expressed that the film



Figure 3. “If people overseas ask me, I say [I’m] Pacific Islander. When I’m with people from the Pacific, I say my nationality.”

– Tokelauan/New Zealander, female

was “Polynesian-centric,” a claim that was further supported by other responses stating that the film was “more Polynesian-oriented” and that it showed a “pan-Polynesia rather than a pan-Pacific” (see Appendix C, I and J). Altogether, survey respondents used the word “Polynesia” a total of 16 times to describe their reactions and perspectives about the film’s depiction of the Pacific, while every interviewee expressed the centrality of Polynesia in the film at least once.

When considering the influence of language and labels on issues of representation, one might question whether or not these responses indicate the prioritization of Polynesia in the film’s construction. As outlined by the prior sections, however, it is clear that *Moana* was—to a degree—pan-Pacific in its creation and incorporation stages. These efforts toward inclusivity may then be explained as a result of 1) the negligence of the production team or 2) the ignorance of audience members. Although the production team *did* run into issues of misrepresentation (for example, the *Kakamora*), it did play a major role in shaping the wide range of Pacific cultures represented in the film, both in subtle and obvious fashions. Therefore, one possible explanation

for the repeated use of the words “Polynesia” and “Polynesian” in describing the film may be one of viewer ignorance.

After speaking with Dionne Fonoti about these recurring patterns in both primary and secondary research, I was informed that when people (especially Polynesians) use “Polynesia” and “Pacific” interchangeably, “it’s...because of ignorance” and a few other factors (Fonoti, PC, 2017). Meaning, many Pacific Islanders and outsiders may unknowingly or mistakenly equate Polynesia with the entirety of the Pacific. Nevertheless, Pacific Islanders cannot be completely blamed for this ignorance because many receive educations that are still highly contoured by former colonial powers. For many Pacific students, “the Pacific story is excluded from history, unless you’re studying it specifically and at the higher level” (Fonoti, PC, 2017). Because of this exclusion, many Pacific students will grow up learning about the histories of other places in the world without learning about their own historical roots, an inconsistency that can be detrimental to their awareness of Pacific cultures, regions and peoples—including but not limited to their own (Lee, PC, 2017; Asitia, PC, 2017). The constant mentioning of “Polynesia” throughout the primary research conducted may be taken as an indicator of the film’s central focus on Polynesian cultures, a sign of viewer ignorance or a wavering combination of the two.

Pacific students were also concerned that the film, in seeking to be pan-Pacific, ended up being overly simplistic. One student expressed that “while the film creators were going for a ‘pan-Pacific’ approach in [their] presentation of Pacific Islanders, I felt it erased many Pacific cultures in the process” (see Appendix C). Another wrote that, “[*Moana*] is a misinterpretation of our Pacific Culture[s] and trying to blend in all the cultures from different island[s]...may result in conflicting views particularly as to who owns the piece” (see Appendix C). This tension in

subjectivity and representation marked a crucial turning point in my research as one respondent eloquently explained:

There's always going to be someone who says, 'well, *I'm* not represented in that movie.' Within Pacific cultures, we have pockets of people who have their interpretations of what their culture is. There's always talk about 'well, that's not *really* tradition' or 'it didn't represent *my* traditions.' Again, your truth is dependent on your pocket of knowledge and who you are and your upbringing. There are many factors that go into the lens you see culture through...I always have to remember that the word 'tradition' is always in transition. The way we define 'Pacific culture' depends on who's telling the story, who's telling the history. At the moment, so much of what we think is 'Pacific culture' is dependent on the person who's writing it or telling it (Lee, PC, 2017).

This reminder signaled the adaptability of one's definition of and requirements for "pan-Pacific" representation in film. Along with this reminder, many of these same students found the idea of a "pan-Pacific" or regional identity appealing. They acknowledged the role of the ocean and of voyaging in connecting Oceanic regions and diffusing elements of culture among different groups of Pacific Islanders (see Appendix J). The appeal of this regional identity to Pacific students then begs the questions: whose job is it to "represent" the Pacific and promote Pacific regionalism? Is this even possible to accomplish?

As a media and film giant, Disney may or may not have had its own agenda in constructing a pan-Pacific animation. Regardless, filmmaker Steven Percival highlighted that,

There's a fine line to be tread or trod by filmmakers when it comes to representing a people and their culture on film because if you're not careful, you'll end up romanticizing a culture to a point where people have a very false impression of a culture and a people (PC, 2017).

Films like *Moana* wield enormous potential to idealize regions of the world but they are also imperative, if done carefully, because Pacific culture is not a "subject that mainstream is [usually] interested in [n]or [one] that filmmakers can easily access funding for" (Percival, PC, 2017). As such, one of the overarching themes in the stage of reception was that of potential—potential influence and potential audience. As a multinational corporation, Disney could

potentially use *Moana* to increase the Pacific's visibility on an international stage. Pacific Islanders involved with the movie also used the film to *their* advantages to amplify Pacific voices and make Pacific stories more accessible to their home communities. For example, Opetaia Foa'i of Te Vaka "strategically used *Moana* as a vehicle to get the message of voyaging into 'more homes, more people without having to tour'" (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2017, p.25).

Moreover, in its reception, *Moana* can function as entertainment and an educational tool, both among Pacific nations and in the international community. Su'a Peter Suluape views the film as a way to teach younger generations about Pacific culture and everyday life. He sees animation as a powerful gateway for young viewers because "new generations would rather watch TV than go to school" (Suluape, PC, 2017). If this is the case, cultural learning through *Moana* can then become a part of Pacific homes. More broadly, even if *Moana* has been criticized by many at multiple stages of its production, it is a film that is and will continue to be viewed by young Pacific children, who for the first time in Disney's history will be able to see elements of their cultures and histories reflected in a character who looks like them *and* in a plotline that represents their many variations of traditions (Sanerivi, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings, *Moana* was a successful film in its pan-Pacific representation at three very different but interrelated stages of its production. In its initial creation stage, *Moana* was inspired by research trips to the Pacific Islands, molded by the advice of Pacific experts and centered a pan-Pacific legend, Maui, in its storyline. In its second stage, the production team was intentional about making sure *Moana* incorporated cultural elements from a variety of Pacific nations and regions, fusing together historical and contemporary references, while the casting call sought Pacific actors and actresses to give voice, literally and metaphorically, to the film. In its final stage of reception, Pacific students and community members have expressed a generally favorable impression of the film, adding that it is an important platform for Pacific visibility and cultural revitalization among younger generations.

Of course, these findings do not speak for the opinions of everyone in the Pacific Islands as evidenced by the respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with specific parts of the film or the film overall. Even though *Moana* was made, in large part, out of a process of constant negotiation, this collaborative project was also subject to the power dynamics and hierarchies in filmmaking that left final drafts of the script up to the discretion of a few, who often did not share any direct affiliation with Pacific identities or cultures. Regardless of these dynamics, from its very start, *Moana* would have been much less pan-Pacific without the representation and contributions of OST members. At the same time, these dynamics also influenced the (mis)representation of Pacific cultures, something that may have been impacted by the tension between staying true to history versus presenting a film that is pleasing on screen. Finally, the film raised concerns about ownership in constructing regional identities and the question first posed: who gets to tell whose stories?

More often than not, students acknowledged that a “pan-Pacific” regional identity was an already present concept and reality practiced among the Pacific Islands. Rooted in a common past of wayfinding and fundamental ties to the ocean, respondents were quick to identify common threads (traits, characteristics, values etc.), or Pacific themes, that could be found throughout Oceania. For me, these indicators were perhaps best summarized in the words of Dionne Fonoti, who said of the film’s pan-Pacific nature:

I don’t necessarily think that’s something [the directors] did, that’s something we’ve been doing for years. I think Pacific Islanders have always been interconnected...There’s definitely an affinity toward that, it’s the easiest thing to do (Fonoti, PC, 2017).

Pacific regionalism, whether an intentional part of Disney’s agenda in producing *Moana* or not, is not the result of any film or major corporation. Instead, it is an integrated part of Pacific collectivity and the historical links between Oceanic peoples. Moreover, the boundaries of this regional identity remain fluid and changing as revealed by respondents who are a part of the Pacific diaspora but who still firmly identify themselves with their Pacific roots.

All of these important points of discussion warrant further studies in related subject areas. Of particular importance is the lack of Pacific history in many primary and secondary school curriculums throughout the Pacific. Educational institutions, like the University of the South Pacific, offer themselves as potential spaces for cross-cultural learning. From what I have gathered during my research, I believe Pacific students everywhere, but especially on campuses like USP, would benefit from cross-regional conversations with fellow peers and curriculums that center Pacific histories and cultures, told through Pacific voices rather than the filters of former colonizers. Continuing to decolonize education in Pacific schools is one measure to promote regional awareness and self-pride in one’s history and identity (Thaman, 2003).

Two possible routes for future studies might emphasize these gaps in Pacific education. For example, one might consider examining the impact of the education systems throughout the Pacific currently in place on the levels of awareness students hold of their own histories and those of other Pacific nations. With this information, one might be able to compile readings and other educational materials to further aid local efforts in helping Pacific students reach a broader understanding of themselves, their histories, their peers, and their peers' histories.

Furthermore, *Moana* itself can be a tool for education. The film presents itself as a creative and powerful medium through which people can teach Pacific children about their cultures and histories while it also breaks away from the in-class, formal education style of many Western institutions. One might choose to look for other alternative forms of learning to supplement Pacific history and culture curriculums, perhaps through forms that are more accessible to everyday Pacific people. Higher education tends to be a socioeconomic privilege anywhere in the world, so if there are methods to teach students about themselves through creative forms that are not as expensive as school fees (such as, dance, song, poetry, film etc.), perhaps these alternatives can also be used to decolonize Pacific curriculums and continue sharing multigenerational Pacific identity and culture.

In closing, *Moana* marks a significant shift in Disney's dominant filmmaking process and it has clearly sparked a new wave of social dialogue between and among Pacific communities. Praise and criticism often go hand in hand, and I think both have inspired people in the Pacific to think twice about the role of film in representing culture and the subjectivity of *what* the "Pacific" means to someone along with *who* it includes.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Non-response bias: A form of bias that results when there is a potentially significant difference between those who responded to a survey and those who did not.

NUS: National University of Samoa.

OST: Oceanic Story Trust.

PC: Personal Communication.

Proto-Polynesian: the hypothetical proto-language from which all the modern Polynesian languages descend, reconstructed by historical linguists using the comparative method.

Snowball sampling: Non-probability sampling technique; researcher may refer to past respondents for assistance finding relevant future respondents from among their acquaintances.

USP: University of the South Pacific (locations in Alafua, Samoa and Suva, Fiji).

GLOSSARY OF PACIFIC TERMS

Haka: a traditional war cry, dance or challenge from the Maori people of New Zealand.

Fale: a house or building in the architecture of Samoa.

Kakamora: a legendary group of short-statured people from the Solomon Islands.

Mana: pervasive supernatural or magical power.

Pasifika: a term coined by Samoan artist Yuki Kihara (in contrast to Disneyfication) to describe the way Pacific people coopt what is foreign and make it their own.

Pe'a: word for tattooing in Samoan, also known as *malofie*.

Talanoa: chat, make conversation; also refers to conversation-style research methodology.

Tuiga: a ceremonial headdress from Samoa, only worn by members of certain families with rank and status.

APPENDICES

A. *Student Survey*

Statement of Confidentiality

- Yes – I understand that my answers will be kept confidential.
- Yes – I understand that I can opt out of the survey at any given point.

Age: _____ Nationality: _____ Gender: _____

1. What did you think of the film, *Moana*?

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I felt like my country/culture was accurately represented in *Moana*. (circle one)
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

3. Please check any of the following elements of your culture that you feel were PRESENT in *Moana*:

clothing	body shape	gender roles
color of clothing	facial features	music
family structure	height	instruments
food	weight	dancing
wayfinding/voyaging	myths/legends	animals
ship/canoe	ocean	plants/wildlife
physical appearance	accessories	
hair texture	language	
skin color		

4. Please check any of the following elements of your culture that you feel were ACCURATELY REPRESENTED in *Moana*:

clothing	body shape	gender roles
color of clothing	facial features	music
family structure	height	instruments
food	weight	dancing
wayfinding/voyaging	myths/legends	animals
ship/canoe	ocean	plants/wildlife
physical appearance	accessories	
hair texture	language	
skin color		

5. What did you like about the film?

6. What did you NOT like about the film?

7. Is there anything about the film that you would change, if you could?

8. Epeli Hau'ofa, an academic scholar from the Pacific Islands, states that "The sea provided waterways that connected neighboring [Pacific] islands into regional exchange groups that tended to merge into one another, allowing the diffusion of cultural traits through most of Oceania. These common traits...have so far provided many of the elements for the construction of regional identities" (Hau'ofa, 1998, p.38).
 - a) What do you think of this idea of a regional (or pan-Pacific) identity? Why?

 - b) What are 3 "common traits" (qualities, characteristics, values etc.) that you know of that are present throughout the Pacific?

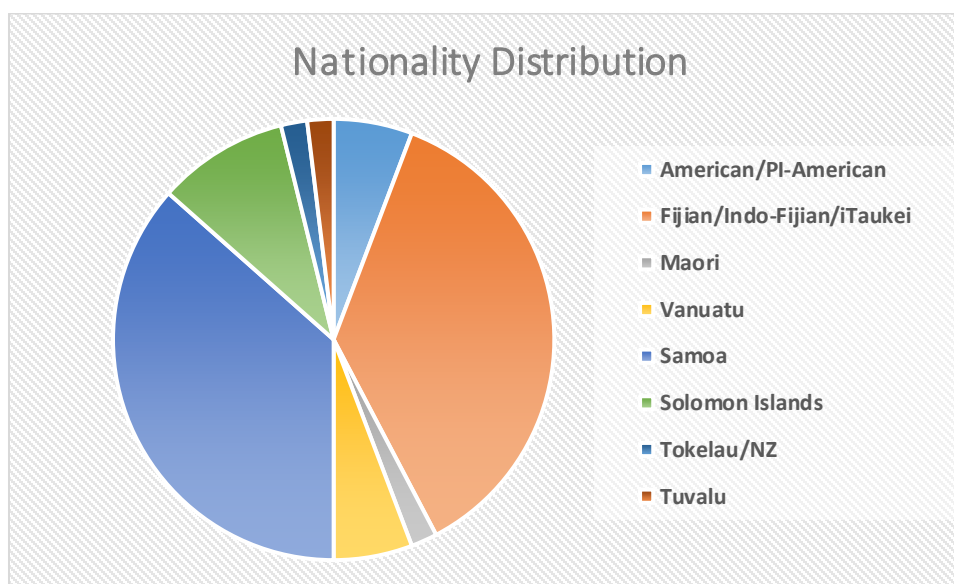
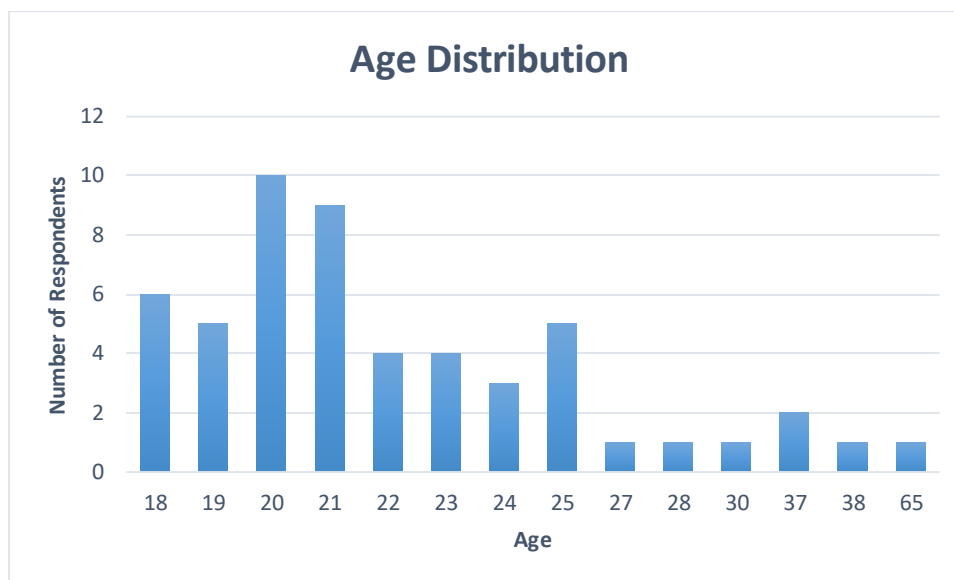
9. The directors of *Moana* claim that their film is intended to portray a pan-Pacific identity. On a scale of 1-10 (1=least successfully, 10=most successfully), how successfully did the film capture this identity? (circle one)

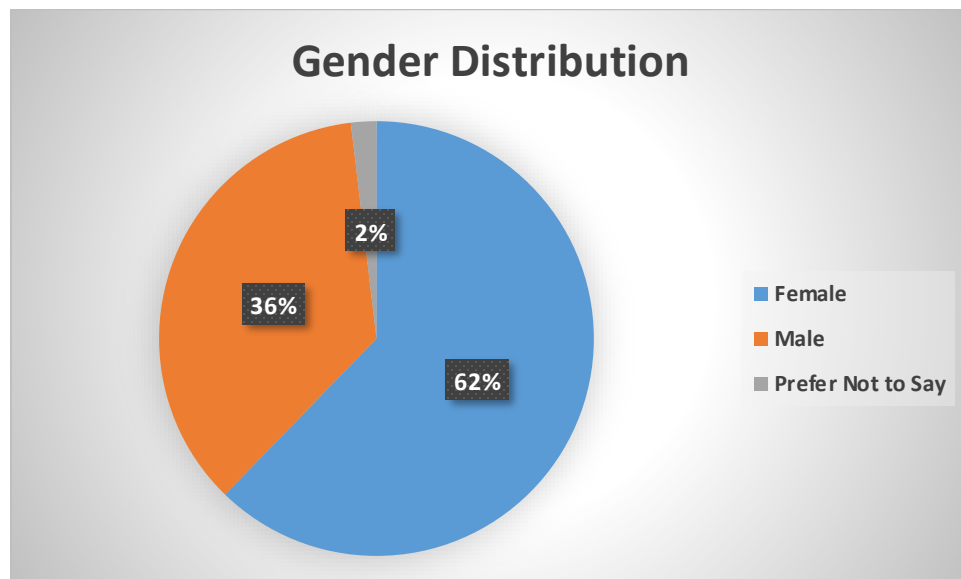
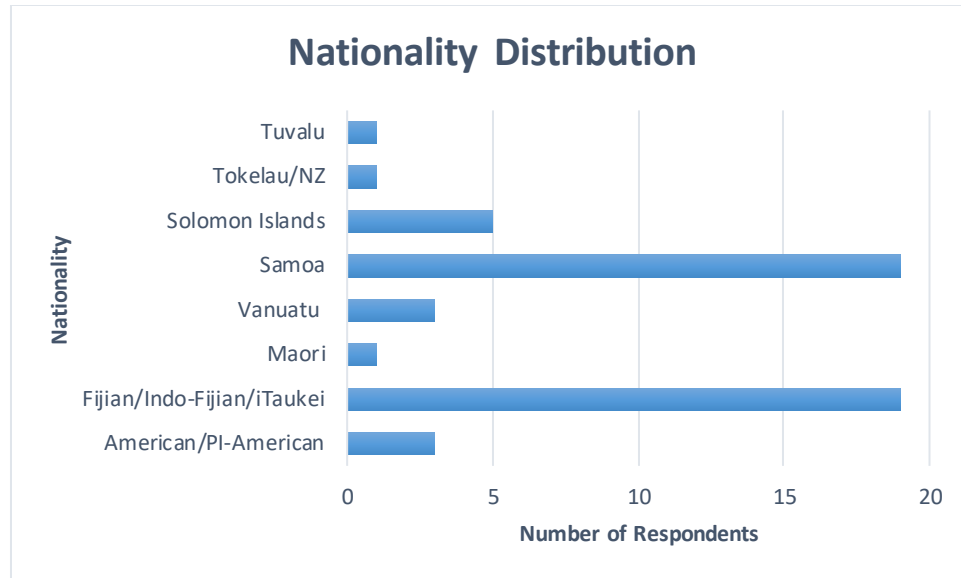
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Are you more likely to identify yourself by your nationality or more broadly as a Pacific Islander (or another regional identity)?

B. Survey Responses

B. Demographics





C. What did you think of the film, *Moana*?

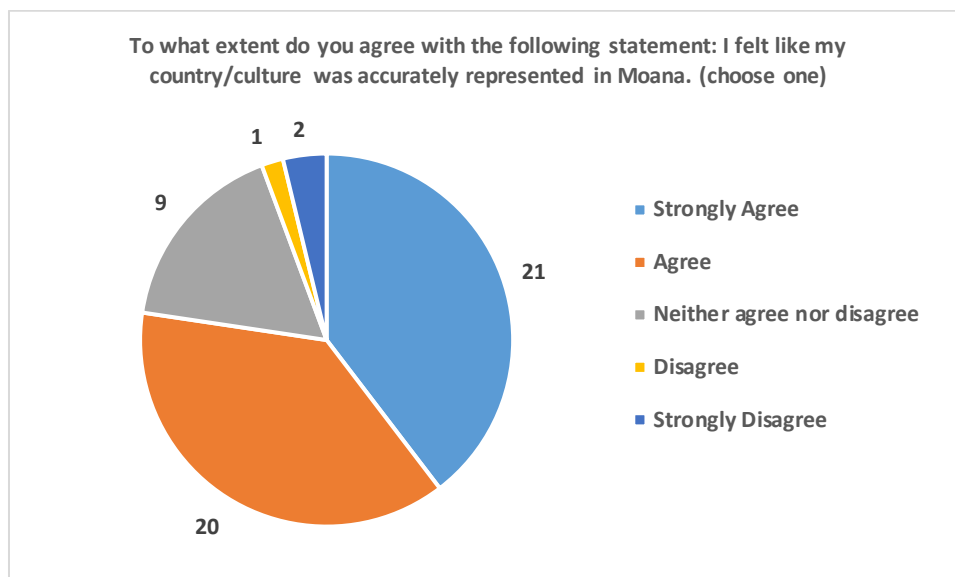
- It was good
- I loved it.
- Great
- I have mixed feelings about this film. While it was a beautifully animated film brought to the masses at Disney, I felt the film did not truly depict Pacific Islanders in a way that left me fully satisfied. I felt that the character Maui was incredibly goofy, brash, and not respectful to the revered demigod. The music in the film was very Disneyfied in the sense that the audience barely got a taste of music from the Pacific which I believe would have made the film a little bit more credible. While the film creators were going for a "Pan-Pacific" approach in its presentation of Pacific Islanders, I felt it erased many Pacific cultures in the process. In the end I felt this was a Polynesian-

centric presentation of Oceania. As a Pacific student from the region of Micronesia, I felt that my people or region in general was not represented. I was not expecting Disney to address the politics and history behind these colonial-imposed Nesian terms, I wish they would have chosen one culture from the Pacific instead of mixing all of them together and presenting them to a wide audience that will most likely not know anything about Oceania besides the tourist packaged paradise image. The strongest positive about the film Moana is that it created a dialogue between Pacific Islanders about how we should be represented in film.

- I reckon it was cool because it was the first time a Polynesian cartoon/film has ever hit worldwide. In the Pacific, we only have our own movies, not across the globe. The kids loved it.
- It's nice and interesting because they are showing some cultures in the Pacific.
- It's a combination of. The main focus is on the voyage, what I've learned in my courses, voyaging is one of the traditional ways for Pacific Islanders to connect Islands to Islands. They use the ocean as their roads. It's a combination of all cultures from the Pacific. It promotes the uniqueness of the culture.
- It was a great film, it brought back memories of how the islanders came or traveled to their designated islands.
- It's good actually, it highlights the aspects of the Pacific Islanders as "people of the sea."
- Teaching about the Polynesian culture and traditions.
- It is awesome explaining of the legend about Pacific Island.
- Interesting, could've been better
- Empowering, and bringing life to Polynesian culture.
- I think the film portrays the cultures of the Pacific Islands.
- Great view on culture.
- It was pretty good.
- It was very cool and lots of memories from the past and it was funny of how Maui act.
- I think the film is very special in the sense that it depicts most of the pacifics unique cultures
- It's quite interesting because it's educational and bring back what our ancestors used to do when they navigate around the island
- Our culture was presented
- I think the movie was good, it kind of reflected/portrayed the Pacific concept in how people lives and deals with the sea. From my perspective, the small islands are how we are connected. I like how it connected the people and the sea.
- I think its adorable and also inspiring
- I think it was one of the very good movies. It reflects what was seen, reflects the culture. It was based on Samoan mostly, and it was well-animated
- Best Pacific film I have watched so far
- Good n interesting
- I really liked it.

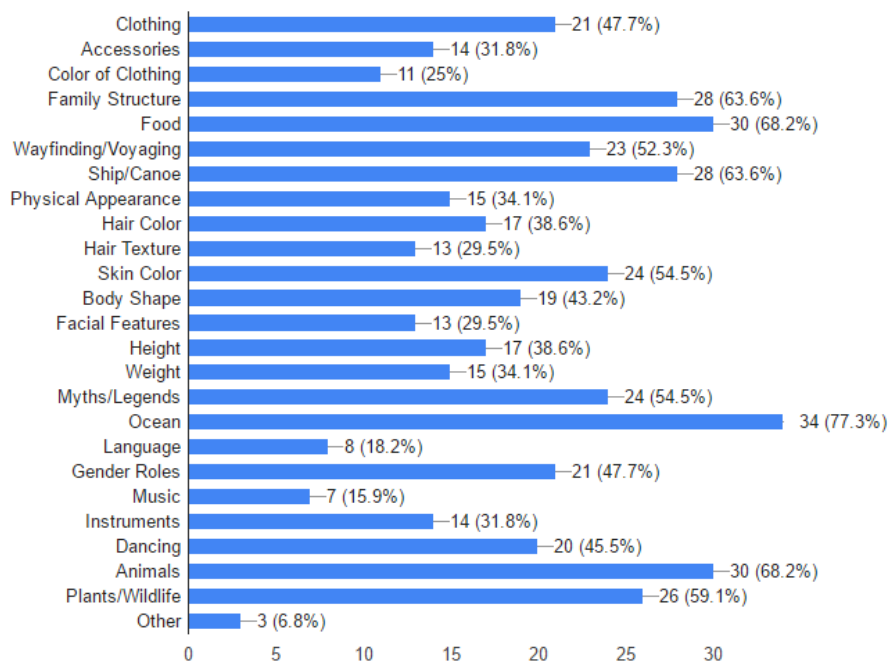
- Extraordinary
Superb
Ecstatic movie
- It was ok. It had a good message
- It was fun and adventurous.
- Moana is a very unique movie that shows some of the traditional historic symbols of the Polynesian people. The name of the movie itself describes a symbolic meaning. Moana meaning blue, refers to ocean. Moana is a very small yet a historic movie.
- The best Disney movie I have ever seen
- They show more Pacific culture
- It's amazing, I love it.
- My culture was glorified and I loved every part of the movie.
- It was awesome. I loved everything about it.
- It was amazing
- awesome
- Amazing
- It was a very interesting film.
- very Pacific like however how the fire lady crawled was scary but i love it
- I think about my real culture back in vanuatu
- I love the fact that it represents the different aspects of the different cultural symbols of almost all the pacific islands.
- I really love it and will never get bored of it
- In my opinion, it is a misinterpretation of our pacific culture and trying to blend in all the cultures from different island homes may result in conflicting views particularly as to who owns the piece. For example the "Drua" (canoe) depicted is problematic in regards to ownership, 3 pacific island nations have claim over this Fiji, Samoa and Tonga. Hence disney animation has only one purpose which is commercialization and making billions of dollars regardless of the importance our indigenous culture is concerned.
- the film was great to some extent but was also a disappointment as it was misleading and portrayed in a way that may have offended some other pacific island countries such as the pirate coconuts "KAKAMORA'S" (sp?).
- Great
- Interesting
- Moana portrays the Pacific Island culture, and it is very educational to children
- I enjoyed the film. I can't really say with confidence that it accurately depicted our culture, but I am glad that it gave others who are unfamiliar with the culture in the Pacific a "sample" of what our culture is like. It also made use of elements that are shared among the many different cultures in the Pacific which was awesome because I made many of us feel relevant. It wouldn't have been the same if they narrowed it down to only one or two cultures.
- It was really interesting for me to watch and hear legends from our Pacific Island neighbors. It did bring out the Pacific way of life, I hope to see similar movies based in our very own Pacific nations.

- D. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I felt like my country/culture was accurately represented in *Moana*. (choose one)



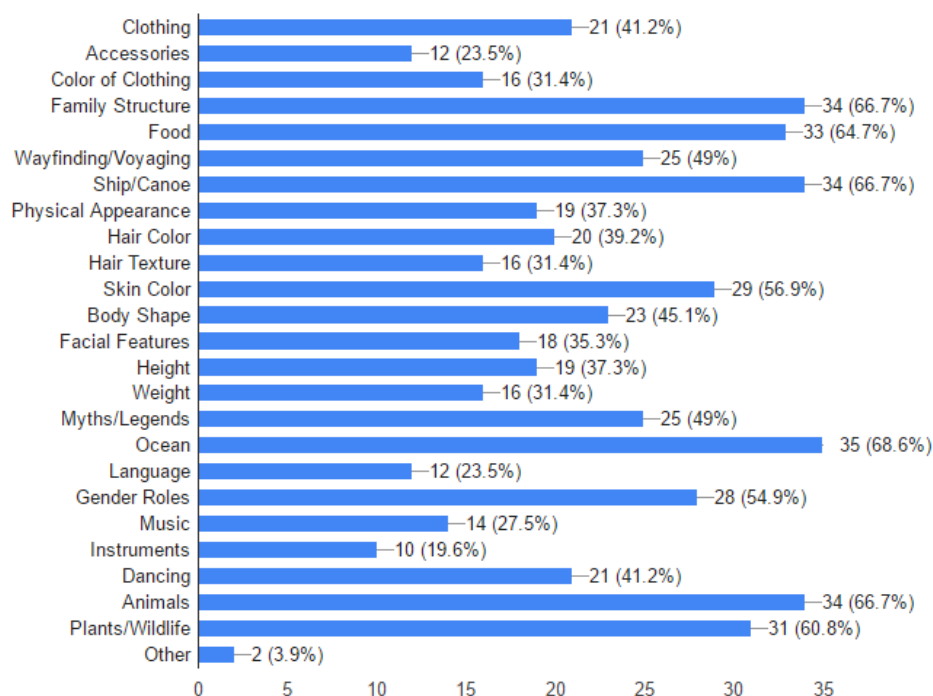
- E. Please check any of the following elements of your culture that you feel were PRESENT in *Moana*:

(44 responses)



Other: the Haka, Kakamora, Gender

F. Please check any of the following elements of your culture that you feel were ACCURATELY PORTRAYED in Moana:
(51 responses)



Other: the term ACCURATELY is misleading,

G. What did you like about the film?

- It brought Polynesian mythology to the mainstream
- The story, cinematography for that genre, screenplay
- Entertaining
- Moana's relationship with her grandmother. The fact that there was no outsider/foreign character coming into the narrative. Moana being a strong, beautiful, and powerful female character for Pacific Islander girls to look up to.
- How it traced back to our ancestors and where we came from. How we were skilled in survival techniques. We were navigators, for fact. And how tradition and culture was portrayed. And how Moana, usually it's guys who take those places. I really liked how Moana was portraying the main character. Girls aren't allowed to do those things in Pacific culture.
- I liked everything in the film, except for the ones from the Solomon Islands (kakamora) because they are humans but they didn't use humans. They are just coconuts.
- Basically the whole story of it.
- The way they portrayed each culture, the myths and legends of each native island.
- The legends or legend of Maui.
- Encouraging women to be strong.
- Music and especially most of features like Maui tattoo and the "Tuiga" Moana's use to put on the head.

- The Samoa national tattoo (mens sonaimiti)
- Empowering women.
- I like how Moana succeed in restoring the heart of Teviti, saving her islands and the people.
- How she portrayed strength in a lady to complete a particular task.
- What I like about the film was the culture, the voices of people, especially the chief of the village.
- What I like about the movie is to tell the young generation and remind them about our Samoan culture.
- It was based on the Pacific
- Using of the natural sign as an act of compass
- I liked about the culture which was presented about the Pacific island
- The thing I like about the film is the thought that we are completely forgetting about navigation. People are turning toward modern technology. In my country, we are on the frontline of climate change. But we moved toward modern technology, which contributed to emission rates. People need to know how to travel, when is the best time to travel. Now people depend on GPS, those small techniques are fading away.
- Well I like the film because it inspires me personally that there's no gender inequality which Moana portrays in the story, thus men are not the only hero in Pacific island countries, but girls can be way more better
- I liked the natural atmosphere that was in the movie. The ocean part. And the girl being very brave.
- It showcased the importance of culture within the film
- It help me a lot to know more about voyages
- I liked the fact that it was based in the Pacific. It was the first Princess from the Pacific. I liked that they had Moana leading her people in a male-dominated area of the world. Wayfinding is also something PI are really good at.
- Culture, Language, Background, How they portrayed the legend was just phenomenal
- The way they ran the village and mostly the voyaging part
- I like the songs.
- The fact that our ancestors were voyagers and yet now a days their descendants still travel.
- The songs and music .
- It's showing how Pacific Islanders find their way to the Pacific Ocean by the skillful navigating skill
- They are interesting as they portray pacific island culture
- I like the part where a woman can lead.
- The songs, the clothing and tattoos ancestry
- Grandmother tala role in helping Moana understand her role in saving not only their family but also their island by following what the gods and the sea have chosen her to help put back the heart of teka
- The songs
- I liked how they used the female gender as the protagonist to carry out the main purpose of the film as the person who everyone depended on
- The film portrays most of my culture
- Songs

- awesome
- The song, the way of life that have been portrayed in the movie and the overall movie
- mostly the relationship Moana and her people have with the Ocean.
- The talking tattoo
- The way Moana expresses about her culture
- I like about seeing their dressing and how they dance.
- The music is inexplicable.
- The ways in which the people live in the rural community. They look extremely happy in whatever they have (natural resources and beauty of the island)
- The animation of the whole Disney film
- the songs and Moana's journey, the film was entertaining.
- The song composed
- The background of the film
- The songs are each character are singing
- The music was great! I also enjoyed the tatau that was shown.
- The myth

H. What did you NOT like about the film?

- It was a kinda simplistic version of Polynesia.
- perhaps the music could have been more premodern
- Maui's pronunciation of the language specially his own name -Meaowi- ugh!
- The entire character of Maui. Disney should not have used a revered and powerful figure in Oceanic lore at all. The in-between conflict scenes, specifically the kakamora and the crab scene. These sort of took me out of the movie and it didn't really mesh well with the overall feel of the movie. The fact that they killed the grandmother irked me.
- I don't know why they put the chicken in. The coconut pirates, they could've did something else.
- They should have dressed the kakamora properly or made them like humans. Their actions are very human-like, they're small and strong.
- It was incomplete. The end of the story doesn't have a satisfactory ending. I wanted to see more of what will happen next after Moana became the warrior.
- The "Tama Lea" part
- Myths not well portrayed
- Physical appearance (too pretty)
- I was thinking that Maui will restore the stolen heart of Tefiti because that was his mistake.
- It only portrayed the Samoan culture most of the time. Especially with the characters
- When the girl took up the responsibility to save her people because in my culture it's the male responsibility
- is when the girl took the responsibility to save the island
- It was a cartoon. I would have liked to see it live.
- It's cartoon

- They didn't really represent Melanesia, it's just one part of the Pacific. The myth behind Maui is mainly from Polynesia, not in Melanesia. Even the songs that they sang.
 - About Maui's body all tattooed.
 - Maui has too many tattoos.
 - Most of the culture and tradition portrayed from the film is from the Polynesian and little from the Melanesian culture and tradition
 - I don't like that she doesn't listen to her father.
 - The fact that they searched the whole Pacific for Moana and picked a United States citizen for the role.
 - animals
 - The part where her dad forbid Moana from reaching out into the ocean.
 - how the fire lady crawled to Moana
 - The part where Maui stole the heart of Tefite
 - I did not want to see little MOANA disobey his parents going to the sea.
 - Everything is perfect on Moana.
 - The fact that they misinterpreted elements of our culture such as Moana making decisions on behalf of his father, which is culturally wrong and the part she just rushed in the village gathering thus disrupting the meeting despite being the chief's daughter culturally she cannot act in such a way to disrespect her father and the other elders present particularly when Moana is a girl.
 - misinterpretation of the various pacific cultures. by the way, many say that the movie is about the Polynesians but in fact majority of the items used in the film were from Melanesia and Micronesia. Family structure in majority of the Pacific island communities show that the males are the ones that lead the tribe or villages, but the movie shows that a young girl was next in line to lead the village/tribe which is wrong in so many ways. also, I know of one Pacific island country where the female is the head of the family and that is Rotuma, yet, the movies does not show that Moana's mother was the village chief, it was her father.
 - Cartoonised
 - The fact that Fiji was not acknowledged in the movie
 - I couldn't really find anything about it I disliked EXCEPT for whenever Maui did his cringy "Cheehoo." It might've been okay if I didn't know a thing about it but I do so it was disappointing that I didn't get to hear that strength in his voice that's usually present whenever I hear someone doing it in the islands. But Dwayne Johnson still deserves credit for doing it.
 - There was too much singing
- I. Is there anything about the film that you would change, if you could? (23/53)
- Learn proper enunciation or language
 - Incorporating more Pacific artists for the film soundtrack. Disney hiring Lin Manuel Miranda felt like the company was riding off the Hamilton hype. They should have got all primary Pacific musicians.
 - Change the coconuts, maybe extend the last part when the village travels and comes out with their boats.

- Kakamora.
 - The setting is always from the Polynesians. I would like the setting and dress to be from Melanesia and Micronesia. It was more Polynesian oriented. The skin was fair so it was Polynesian.
 - The grandmother, it will be great if don't let her die.
 - For Moana to get a "malu" (traditional Samoan tat for girls)
 - The chicken was dumb.
 - Everything was on the top, the acts and everything was fantastic
 - I would add a Fijian dance or a kava ceremony
 - Yes I would have like the boy to take responsibility at the first step
 - Make it longer, maybe add more to the sea voyages.
 - The sea warriors should be real and not objects
 - The stubborn chicken hey hey should be change it
 - I would make Moana find a man to marry.
 - The accent.
 - language
 - I dont think so
 - some characteristics of Mawi (proudness)
 - To have a second part of Moana...that elaborate and make a story based on tefiti.
 - The dome of monsters, its just ridiculous the way the crab is singing and it has no relevance the real monsters that are present in our myths and legends.
 - yes, everything related to culture and traditions.
 - Cartoonist to be in reality
 - Is to have the audition of Moana in all the Polynesia country and not only Hawaii
 - Haha maybe the "Choohoo." I love the music but a lot of people I know seem to hate the crab song, "Shiny." That doesn't stop me from singing it though muahaha!
 - Yes
- J. Epeli Hau'ofa, an academic scholar from the Pacific Islands, states that "The sea provided waterways that connected neighboring [Pacific] islands into regional exchange groups that tended to merge into one another, allowing the diffusion of cultural traits through most of Oceania. These common traits...have so far provided many of the elements for the construction of regional identities" (Hau'ofa, 1998, p.38). What do you think of this idea of a regional (or pan-Pacific) identity? Why?
- I agree...event though we come from different Islands we share a commonality of history and culture. However, Moana showed a pan-Polynesia rather than a pan-Pacific.
 - Without the label, that is what happened before bounded nations came about.
 - I'm not sure need to read more about intricacies of identities in relation to place, space and time!
 - I like the idea of a regional identity, but this is something that should be decided by people within the region. Disney trying to impose or to represent to a mass audience a regional identity for Pacific Islanders is wrong.

- Pacific Islands now are mixed-races, people marrying people from other islands and languages have had added new words. I'm not blaming intermarriages because we all come from the same people. Back then we migrated, some people moved for better places, land, food, and then they changed the language a little. I've never really thought about it.
- For the Pacific, they're like regional because the cultures are the same in some ways. Even our words are the same.
- I would say it's a way to describe islanders learning from one another, the uniqueness of them. When you merge multiple countries/cultures together, you get something even more unique.
- This is the identity that uniquely identifies each Pacific Islander in their own unique culture.
- It is a good thing due to the expressions of cultural aspects, such as tattoos, language dialect and traditional clothing.
- Take their culture seriously, traditions highly respected.
- Culture and tradition.
- Culture is unique, people are ethnocentric.
- Canoe - used by our ancestors to voyage.
- Well, almost everything related to my culture, the role of the chief, the parents on how to look after families, but the only difference is that we don't travel to each island for better home.
- I think it is correct because most Pacific Islanders depict similar traits in their culture and it is very evident in our dance, food, and most of our way of life
- It is true because to some extent the Pacific culture are quite same due to our ancestors who travel around the Pacific in search of island.
- Because if we talk about the region as an ocean, then it brings us somewhere close to being bigger in size compared to the developed countries. If we talk about landmass, we are smaller. When we include the ocean, we are bigger and our marine resources. The ocean makes us connected in numbers.
- Well the Pacific islands have certain things in common in terms of culture and tradition because we are all regarded as voyagers
- I think it's true. The Pacific islands, the ocean is a valuable part in their identity and we're known for it.
- It should be prioritized as we are from different regions
- The ocean connected us as Pacific Islanders
- I agree with what he said. With voyaging from one island to another, we were able to pass along cultures to others.
- I think the thought of cultures being diffused in to other Pacific islands allows the attaining of knowledge and understanding of the other cultures
- I think it's true due to the way and how the Pacific people found their homes.
- I think the idea is good, because the Pacific islands are fellow neighbors that have similar cultures and traditions although they are in different islands with different languages and so many other. It identifies us Polynesian as a Pacific Islanders.
- It really true because it show Pacific island identity

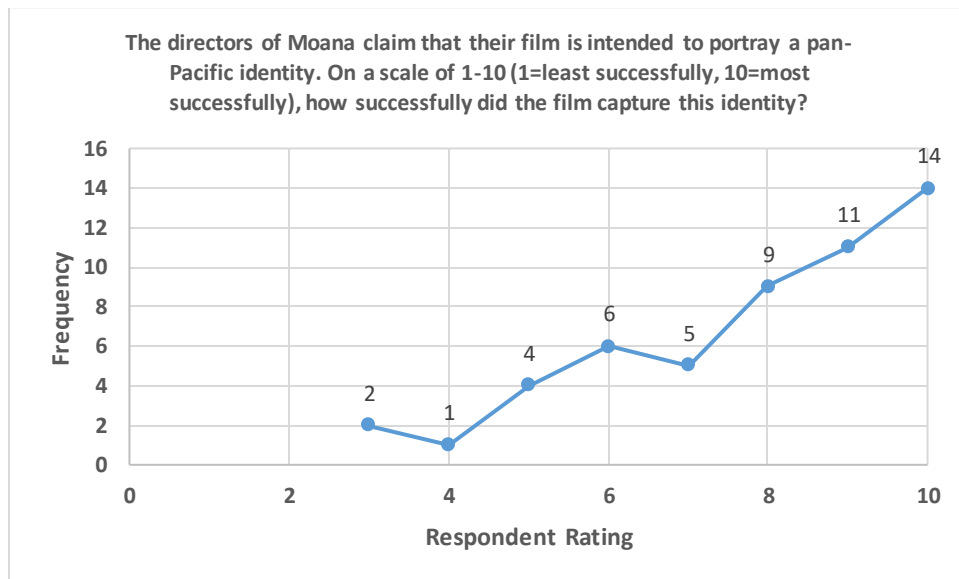
- I think he's true, like the Pacific has many culture but all are one because it connects true the ocean.
- It's very true. The missionaries came and broke that up but the Oceania people all come from the same mother - the Ocean.
- Yes because we are all connected by ocean and we used this to our advantage to trade and so much more
- If all Pacific islands are connected, understanding and respect is easily shown. People would share and love each other although they are from different countries or have different cultures
- sea is the part of life for the people in the pacific
- Pacific because it convey most of the pacific way of life
- I think it is true because the Pacific is separated into Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia where different traditions and cultures are found.
- The regional identity is common in all Pacific Islanders,
- I think about their tradition because it their identity on how they could preserve for their future generation.
- I think that its true in the whole statement being stated above as we are connected with the ocean and because of that we share a similar way of living our cultures.
- The ocean is the lifeblood of the Pacific islanders. It is not only for voyaging but also ocean contains food and also reflects our identity. Whaletooth is the most important gift for us Fijians owned by Chiefs of any village in the community and without the oceans then there will be no such gifts as a whaletooth. Also, the Davui is also one of the most important artifacts for the Fijians in which it is used to call the people together in a meeting or the coming of the chiefs in the village. As you can see, the ocean is the most important thing we value as a Pacific islander.
- We may be small in land size but it is the ocean that connects us with one another, binding us together and strengthening the bonds we share. Our regional identity as oceanians makes us unique in every way one can think off, our histories, myths and legends sets boundaries between our islands nations.
- I think it's true,
- The sea has indeed served a major role for transportation purposes in many case many of the Islanders way back in the past, the sea was used as a mean of transportation to many people especially along the coast
- It is very unique, and it is easily adapted by the next generations.
- I don't really think much of it. I'm sorry, I'm not good at answering questions like these. If it was more specific (see what I did there?) then I might be to answer.
- It is good because it shows that we are linked to one another and the Pacific is indeed a great family different and unique from the rest of the nations in the world.

K. What are 3 "common traits" (qualities, characteristics, values etc.) that you know of that are present throughout the Pacific?

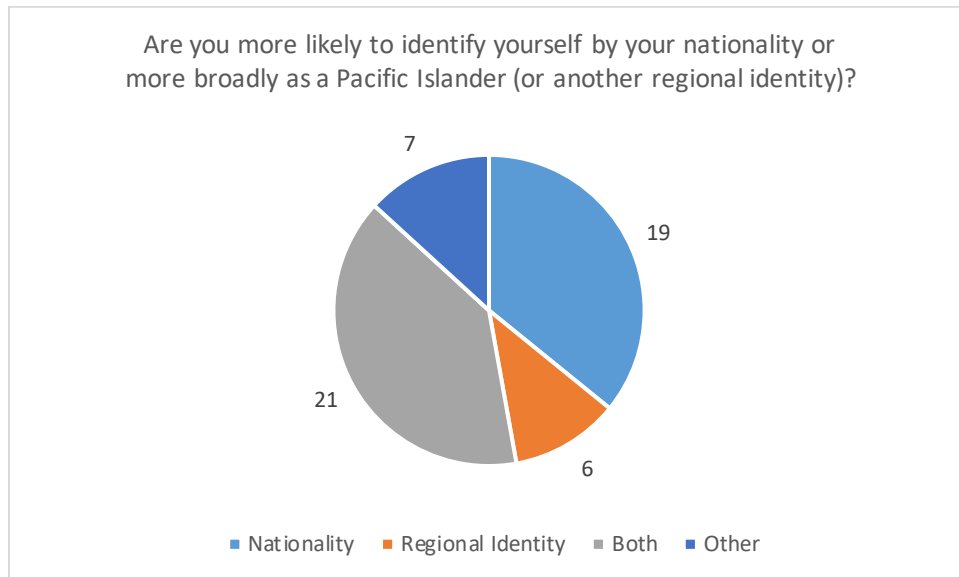
- Everybody likes coconuts; we all have navigational skills or sea-orientation; our myths and legends are related and similar.

- This question is unclear. But if you're asking about how PIs are similar, I'd say 1) collectivity; 2) kinship economics (fa'alavelave in Samoa), 3) Christian faith
- Physicality, humour, language
- Connection to land, respect for elders, and reciprocity
- Language, culture and religion.
- Respect for elders, values, cultural artifacts.
- Language, food, religion
- Tattoo, music
- Voyage
- Kava ceremony, way finding, roles
- Dark skin colors(Melanians), Hard textured of hair (Ulu maji)..Smiling face.
- "Pacific" culture, language, way of life
- In terms of culture is that boys are dominant especially for Melanesian countries
- Second is way of living
- And also the traditional values that is unique from other pacific island countries such as dancing and dressing up.
- Ocean, food, cultures somewhat resemble one another
- Culture way ,findings and customs
- Culture, religion, beliefs
- Kava, floral attire, languages used
- Language
- Their love for food
- The way they preserve and maintain culture
- The language is one of the common trait amongst the Pacific islands cause their kind of related and similar.
- Skin color, hair and family structure.
- Culture, voyaging and language(in some Pacific country).
- Clothing, culture, and food.
- Way of voyaging, food and respect from each culture
- Culture, tradition and the way of living
- 1. Dancing 2. Family and community 3.love of ocean
- Tradition, Myths and Legend, Songs about 6
- Myths, songs and tradition
- Respect, love and care
- sea, land and ocean
- Clothing, Food, Culture
- Culture, ocean, travelers or voyagers
- language, custom and society
- Actions, attitude and behaviour
- 1.Ability to Motivate Others,2.Willingness to Take Risks ,3.Focus on your work.
- Respect, Dignity and Religion
- Culture, Characteristics, Language

- Myths and legends through songs and dancing, Traditional ruling by Chiefs in villages, Strong bond with the land and ocean
 - - many of the Pacific islands show the same respect, gratitude and values within and towards their own cultures and traditions.
 - every pacific island country will have hierarchy and social status
 - our traditions and cultures intertwine something in a pacific island will be somewhat similar to another island.
 - majority of our myths and legends are similar yet, the demigods each have different names.
 - Values, the values is a unique factor that is common throughout the Pacific and is indeed a very important factor in the cultures of many Islanders as it is the identity of a person or a specific ethnic group
 - The culture, religion, and characteristic
 - Family, Respect and Hospitality
 - Friendly smiles, kind and warm heart. Strong and tough physical appearance.
- L. The directors of *Moana* claim that their film is intended to portray a pan-Pacific identity. On a scale of 1-10 (1=least successfully, 10=most successfully), how successfully did the film capture this identity?



M. Are you more likely to identify yourself by your nationality or more broadly as a Pacific Islander (or another regional identity)?



*Other:

- By my own region, identifies each individual perfectly.
- Charmorro
- Ethnicity
- If people overseas ask me, I say Pacific Islander. When I'm with people from the Pacific, I say my nationality.
- Samoan American. Nationality does not necessarily mean ethnicity.
- When it comes to the Pacific, I'm proud to present the Pacific. When it comes to real life, I have to represent my country.
- Yes, because I am an Island Guy. In my opinion, I'm proud to be a Pacific Islander, just because of the beautiful culture that I have and my role as a Samoan giu to look after my family as what was shown in the film.
- I usually identify myself as being an afakasi Samoan/Korean rather than a Pacific Islander or US National.